

## **Study 32: Leviticus, Part 5 Leviticus 23 Firstfruits; Pentecost, Part 1**

We've been learning about the Feasts of the Lord. Lev 23:1 says, "These are **my** appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of **the Lord**." Notice, it doesn't say, they are the festivals "of Israel." Last week, we looked at the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. This week, we're going to take a look at the feast of:

[**Firstfruits**] 9 The Lord said to Moses, 10 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf [Hebrew: *omer*] of the first grain you harvest. 11 He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on **the day after the Sabbath** [this will always be a Sunday, "the first day of the week"]. 12 On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the Lord a lamb a year old without defect, 13 together with its grain...mixed with olive oil...and its drink offering...of wine. 14 **You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God.**

[The sheaf was a representative portion of the harvest. According to Josephus, at sundown on the weekly Sabbath (the beginning of the first day of the week), the 70 members of the Sanhedrin would go throughout the territory and each one would collect a stalk from a field. If you recall, seventy is the number of nations mentioned in the book of Genesis (chapters 10-11). This sheaf of stalks gathered by the elders of Israel was then given to the High Priest, who placed it in the temple until the time of the morning sacrifice, at which time he waved it before the Lord as a thank offering for the harvest.

[The Feast of Firstfruits signaled the beginning of the harvest season. The imagery of the harvest was often used by Jesus as a symbol of bringing people into the kingdom of God (i.e. **salvation**). For example, in Matt 9:37-38, Jesus told His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest...to send out workers into his harvest field." Note that no one could partake of the harvest until the firstfruit was offered. This means that salvation was not available until Jesus had been sacrificed and had resurrected from the dead.

[Harvesting speaks not only of death (being cut down), but also of life (food). From the death of Jesus came life, not only for Himself, but for all who believed in Him, as well as for those who believe in Him today! God promised Abraham that all nations would be blessed through Him (that is, Abraham's *seed*, Jesus Christ. It is He whom you must bless, and if you curse Him, you will be cursed – Gen 12:3).

[**Jesus was the first one ever to be resurrected.** In 1 Cor 15:23, Paul calls Him "the firstfruits" of the resurrection. In Col 1:18 and Rev 1:5, He is called the "firstborn from the dead." Now, if you're familiar with your Bible, you may be saying, "Wait a minute! Jesus *wasn't* the *first* one to be raised from the dead! What about that dead guy who was thrown into the tomb of Elisha, who came back to life as soon as his body touched Elisha's bones? What about the people that Jesus raised from the dead, like the widow's only son, and Lazarus?" And, you know what? You'd be right! Jesus *wasn't* the first one to have His body revived. So, in what sense can He be called "the *firstborn* from the dead"? In all the cases cited (besides Jesus), those who were revived died again later. The definition of "resurrection" must, therefore, be more than the mere revival of a physical body from death. I would suggest that the biblical definition of resurrection would be, "the escape from Hades on a *permanent* basis." According to this definition, Jesus really *was* the very first to be **resurrected** (though certainly not the *last*)!]

[Coming in between the Spring and Fall festivals is the:

[**Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)**] 15 From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. 16 ...fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord. 17 ...bring two loaves...of the finest flour, **baked with yeast**, as a wave offering of firstfruits to the Lord. 18 Present with this bread **seven male lambs**, each a year old and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the Lord, together with their grain offerings and drink offerings.... 19 Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year old, for a fellowship offering. 20 The priest is to wave the two lambs before the Lord as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits. .... 21 On that same day you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work.

[Whereas the Feast of Firstfruits was the very beginning of the harvest, Pentecost is the harvest itself. According to tradition, this is when Moses received the Old Covenant (Torah) from God on Mt. Sinai. It was the receiving of this covenant from the Lord that made Israel God's church. It may surprise you to hear that Israel is called a "church." Stephen, in Acts 7:38, says that Moses "was in the church in the wilderness". The Septuagint (abbreviated LXX – the Greek translation of the Old Testament) uses the term *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία) when referring to the people of Israel. This is the same word used of the Christian Church in the New Testament. Of course, Pentecost is also when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 1<sup>st</sup> century believers in Jesus, making them the Christian Church. The giving of the covenant to Israel was like a marriage contract being delivered to a bride.]

[Note the language of Acts 2:5 "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews **from every nation under heaven.**"]

## Spring

## Summer

<i>Nisan</i> 1	<i>Iyyar</i> 2	<i>Sivan</i> 3	<i>Tammuz</i> 4	<i>Av</i> 5	<i>Elul</i> 6
ניסן	אייר	סיון	תמוז	אב	אלול
Mar/Apr	Apr/May	May/Jun	Jun/Jul	Jul/Aug	Aug/Sept
<b>Pesach (15)</b> Matzah (16-22) Bikurim (18) HaShoah (27)	Ha'atsmaut (5) HaZikaron (14) Lag B'Omer (18) Yerushalayim (28)	<b>Shavu'ot (6)</b>	Fast of Tammuz (17)	Three weeks of Sorrow Tish'a B'Av (9) Tu B'Av (15)	Selichot repentance

## Fall

## Winter

<i>Tishri</i> 7	<i>Cheshvan</i> 8	<i>Kislev</i> 9	<i>Tevet</i> 10	<i>Shevat</i> 11	<i>Adar</i> 12/13
תשרי	חשוון	כסלו	טבת	שבט	אדר
Sept/Oct	Oct/Nov	Nov/Dec	Dec/Jan	Jan/Feb	Feb/Mar
Rosh Hashanah (1) Fast Gedaliah (3) Yom Kippur (10) <b>Sukkot (15-22)</b> Simchat Torah (22)		Chanukah (25) to Tevet (4)	Asarah B'Tevet (10)	Tu B'Shevat (15)	Fast Ester (13) Purim (14) Adar II leap year