*Introduction*

So far we have briefly looked at the Passover and seen that it speaks of God’s redemption, not only of the Jews from their slavery in Egypt but for us to through the shedding of the blood of our Messiah Yeshuah, The Christ of God. His blood washes away our sin. The four cups of wine that are now traditionally drunk at the Passover remind us of Gods promises to the Jewish people – I will bring you out, I will rescue you from bondage, I will redeem you, I will take you as my people.

These promises also apply to us through Jesus. When we ask Christ into our lives to save us from our sins, He does indeed, bring us out of our old way of life, out of our bondage to sin, He redeems us and He makes us his own.

In the feast of unleavened bread, which was instituted at the same time as the Passover, the Jewish males had to present themselves before the Lord at the Temple. There is a Sabbath at its start and at its finish.

Unleavened bread is all about getting rid of the leaven – the sin, in every area of our lives. It was more than just not eating leaven, it was a total purging from every part.

We saw that this was a picture of burial. Leaven causes decay. When we die in our sin, we decay. Jesus did not see decay, we in Christ will not see decay.

Firstfruits

Now we come to the third spring feast, it speaks of resurrection, as we shall see.

In this day and age we often are consumed with ‘last things’ or eschatology. We look forward to the Second Coming of our Saviour, for the trumpet to sound and the dead in Christ to be raised and for ourselves to be raptured to the clouds to be with the Saviour and all the long departed saints.

But we do not hear much about ‘first things’. This feast is all about ‘first things’, the firstfruits.

***LEV 23:10-14 then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And ye shall offer that day when ye wave the sheaf an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the LORD. And the meat offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil, an offering made by fire unto the LORD for a sweet savour: and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine, the fourth part of an hin. And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.***

This feast, although given with all the others in Leviticus 23, only came into play, as it were, when the Children of Israel entered into the Promised land and had harvested their first harvest.

Firstfruits marked the beginning of the cereal harvest and barley was the first to be harvested. When they were ready to harvest, they were to bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of the harvest to the Priest who would wave it before the Lord, as he waves the sheaf a lamb was also to be offered as a burnt offering along with flour, oil and wine.

This offering covered all parts of the harvest.

Notice also that the Jewish people were not to eat of any bread, parched corn, green ears until they had offered their offering.

If they did it was considered as robbery of God, Malachi clearly states this:

***MAL 3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.***

While we are at this point, it raises something for us as Christians regarding tithes.

There is an argument that we as Christians now have no need to offer a tithe of what we have, that the 10% no longer applies because we are under the New Covenant through Jesus Christ.

Whether we agree on the 10% issue or not, it does seem to me that we as Christians should, offer what we have been given to God at the beginning of each year, as a thanks for what we have been given and to ‘give it back’ to Him, and in the same way we should offer ourselves totally to him.

God wanted the Israelites to put Him first and to offer him the firstfruits of the harvest in thanksgiving of the harvest to come.

But this offering has to be complete, this offering had to come with a sacrifice of a lamb.

In other words, for anyone who wants to come to God, they have to come through Jesus, our sacrificial lamb.

This also shows us why Abel’s offering was accepted and Cain’s was not. We read

***GEN 4:3-5 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.***

Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, ground that had been cursed, on its own God could not accept it. The Lamb that Abel brought was accepted for it was a reminder of the shedding of blood for sin, and its blood would have been shed as an offering for sin.

If Cain had also brought a Lamb with his offering, it would have been accepted.

*Back to the feast of firstfruits*

This feast is the third in as many days, if we look at the wording from God we see that Passover was to be on the 14th day of the first month, then the feast of unleavened bread, beginning with a Sabbath, starts on the 15th day of the first month and then we read

***LEV 23:11 And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.***

The day after the Sabbath, making this the 16th day of the first month.

The actual ritual of this feast can be found in Dueteronomy 26

***DT 26:1-11 And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and possessest it, and dwellest therein; That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there. And thou shalt go unto the priest that shall be in those days, and say unto him, I profess this day unto the LORD thy God, that I am come unto the country which the LORD sware unto our fathers for to give us. And the priest shall take the basket out of thine hand, and set it down before the altar of the LORD thy God. And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous: And the Egyptians evil entreated us, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage: And when we cried unto the LORD God of our fathers, the LORD heard our voice, and looked on our affliction, and our labour, and our oppression: And the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with great terribleness, and with signs, and with wonders: And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and worship before the LORD thy God: And thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the LORD thy God hath given unto thee, and unto thine house, thou, and the Levite, and the stranger that is among you.***

This is an important feast day in that it is thanksgiving to God for his amazing provision and for the harvest to come. It was a time of giving of all that was first to God.

It is also important for another reason. That is that this day is a ‘time marker’. It firstly marked the beginning of the grain harvest in Israel, but more importantly it marked the countdown to the feast of weeks. The fourth of the annual feasts of the Lord.

Beginning with firstfruits they were to count 49 days (or seven sevens), and on the 50th day the Feast of Weeks was to be celebrated

***LEV 23:15-16 And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD.***

As a result, this period became known and still is known as *Sefirat Ha-Omer* (the counting of the Omer). The counting of the days from firstfruits to the feast of weeks.

Modern observance

Due to the fact that there is no Temple in Israel, the firstfruit sacrifices are no longer offered. In fact the only ritual to have survived is that of the counting of the Omer.

On the 33rd day of the count there is a minor holiday held by some called  *Lag B’Homer*.

The meaning of this minor holiday is somewhat obscure but the Talmud suggests that it was on this day that a plague ended amongst the students of a second century Rabbi called Akiba, when 24,000 of them died.

Apart from the counting of the omer, there is no modern celebration of firstfruits today.

**What is the application of this feast for us?**

Well, first things are very important theme, often repeated in the Scriptures.

God declared that, in general, the firstfruits of all agricultural produce belonged to Him, from grain, to wine, to oil, to fleece and this included the seven major crops of the land of Israel – barley, wheat, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.

***EX 22:29-30 Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me.***

***Ex 23:19 The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the LORD thy God.***

***DEUT 18:4 The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep, shalt thou give him.***

***DEUT 26:2 That thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the earth, which thou shalt bring of thy land that the LORD thy God giveth thee, and shalt put it in a basket, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose to place his name there.***

In the Mosaic law the firstborn male was to be presented to the priest at one month old. He could be redeemed from full-time service to God on the payment of 5 shekels. This ceremony was called *Pidyon Haben* (means Redemption of the son)

Redemption was for all firstborn males in Israel with the exception of the priests and Levites.

Jesus was taken to the temple at one month to be presented. It was at this time that he was first announced to ne the Messiah. Simeon states:

***Luke 2:27-39….he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.***

The meaning of the Pidyon Haben comes from

***Num 3:13 Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD.***

When God redeemed Israel out of Egyptian bondage, he did it through the blood of the Passover lamb. All firstborn in the land were under judgment and the angel of death and they would only live if they placed the blood on the doorpost and lintel of the house.

In the same way, spiritually we are all firstborn, we have all sinned and deserve judgment and death. We are in need of redemption

***Rom 5:17-21 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.***

In the New Testament this feast is mentioned in no less than 7 places. It is not strongly emphasized but it does form a sort of backdrop to New Testament teaching.

***Rom 16:5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my wellbeloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.***

***Rom 11:16 For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.***

***James 1:18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.***

Paul also uses the imagery of this feast in Romans 8:23 when he says:

***And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.***

By this Paul is talking of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is our guarantee, or pledge, that there will be a redemption, a future promise of heaven.

In the book of Revelation we see described a group of 144,000 who are clearly of the Jews for we are told that there are 12000 from each tribe. They are sealed and protected from the wrath of God and about them we read:

***REV 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.***

How are these firstfruits?

Well, after the rapture of the Church, these 144,000 will be God’s first working with the nation of Israel. These will be the proof or guarantee to the Israelite nation of a future harvest of Israel. They are God’s pledge that He has not cast off his people, but will bring from them a remnant who will repent and turn at the end of what we call Daniel’s 70th week, the week of tribulation.

**The fulfillment of the feast.**

Just like the other feasts that we have looked at so far, the feast of firstfruits has a prophetic fulfillment in the work of the Messiah’s first coming.

Paul declares this in 1 Cor 15:20-23

***But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.***

When Jesus rose from the dead after 3 days, it was on the feast of firstfruits! Jesus is the guarantee and the beginning (firstfruits) of the final harvest, or resurrection of all mankind. He fulfilled the prophetic meaning of this Holy day by rising from the dead to become the firstfruits of the resurrection. And he did it on the very day of firstfruits.

The bible clearly teaches that there is life after death. The human spirit does not cease to exist when we physically die, nor does it wander about, or is reincarnated into something else. ALL will be resurrected.

Daniel states:

***DAN 12:2 And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.***

Jesus himself said

***JOHN 5:25-29 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.***

At the harvest, the farmer separates the wheat from the chaff, he gets rid of what he does not want, what is of no use. So at the final harvest of souls there will be two parts.

John the Baptist spoke

***MATT 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.***

Later on Jesus again speaks

***MATT 13:37-43 He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.***

If we know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, if we have come to him in repentance and asked for forgiveness and asked him into our lives, he has come in, he has given us of his Spirit as a guarantee of that great and coming day when we will be called up to meet him in the air “and so be with him forever”.

Jesus is our firstfruits and he did it by rising from the dead. Those who have fallen asleep (died) in Him, will not miss out.

***1 THESS 4:14-18 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.***

You can go to sleep, encouraged by these words, that if you know Jesus as your Saviour, you will, whether dead or alive, one day be resurrected to be with Him forever – amen!