

THE FEAST OF FIRSTFRUITS

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

A few weeks ago, as we began this series of studies on the Jewish feasts or holidays, I read a quote from Martin De Haan that is found in a study booklet on the Holidays of God. I would like to repeat that quote as it is so expressive when considering the significance of the Jewish feasts. He said:

“If observant Jewish people are right, the ancient festival cycle of Israel is of timeless importance in remembering God’s provisions for the past, present, and future of His people.

If those who believe in Jesus are right, this same festival cycle is more than a timeless treasure of Israel. The biblical holidays of God are also a pattern of shadows fulfilled in a Messiah who has already come in the first phase of a two-part plan to save His people and rule the world.”

Each of the feasts on the Jewish calendar have great significance to the Jewish people as they are designed to be a reminder of God’s provision and protection. They are times to commemorate the way in which God has preserved his people throughout the centuries and brought them through times of great distress.

For us, as believers, these feasts carry a deeper significance. While we are not looking back to times of deliverance and protection as a people, we can see in the feasts tremendous spiritual truth. Each of these feasts is more than a reminder of past provision. They are celebrations that foreshadow the work and ministry of the Messiah. Each of these holidays is really the shadow of a reality that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

We have already looked at the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the first two of four special holidays which occurred in the spring of the year. Today we come to the third holiday—the Feast of Firstfruits. These first three are all overlapping in an eight-day period.

The Hebrew word for this firstfruits is “Reishit”. We are going to look at the feast of Reishit in two parts. First, the biblical description of this feast and how it was and is practiced by the Jewish people. Then we will look at how it is fulfilled in Christ and is significant for us.

The Feast of Firstfruits Described

There are only two places in the OT where the feast of firstfruits is mentioned. The first is in Lev. 23—the passage we read a few minutes ago. The other is in Numbers 28.

The Leviticus passage gives us a few things to note regarding the observance of this feast. First of all, it was to be observed after they had settled into the land, because only then did they begin planting and harvesting crops, and this celebration was related to the harvesting of their crops. This feast came in the spring of the year at the time of the spring harvest.

Second, it was to be observed “...on the day after the Sabbath.” It overlaps with and is closely connected to the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. I don’t want to get bogged down in details, but this was a point of contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in Bible times. Arnold Fruchtenbaum gives us this information:

The Pharisees claimed that this referred to the day after the Passover meal regardless on which day of the week it might fall. The Sadducees taught that the Sabbath was always Saturday. Here, the Sadducees were biblically correct. The sheaf of grain was to be offered on the first Sunday after the Feast of Passover. If the Passover fell on a Friday, two days later would be the Feast of First-fruits. But if the Feast of Passover fell on a Monday, then almost a full week could go by before the Feast of Firstfruits was observed.

Third, the celebration itself involved the waving of a sheaf of grain before the Lord, then offering it along with other sacrifices to the Lord. The people were forbidden to eat any grain or bread made from the grain of the harvest until this oblation had been offered to God. It was the “firstfruits” of the harvest.

Regarding the observance of the feast itself, I would just mention a couple of things about how the observance changed over the years.

There is a lot of detail and ritual regarding the observance of this event during the time of Jesus, which we don't have time to go into. But all of that changed after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Of course the sacrifices could no longer be offered. But also, with the destruction of the Temple came the dispersion of the Jews. During the long period of the Dispersion, Gentile law forbade Jews to own land. Since they could no longer be farmers, and did not harvest crops, this feast was largely ignored.

The Jewish observance changed again with the reestablishment of the Jewish State, when Jews once again became farmers. With the establishing of collective farming settlements, known as *kibbutzim*, there has been some resurgence of the celebration of firstfruits.

The Feast of Firstfruits Explained

So with this historical and practical information in mind let's consider the Messianic implications of this feast. (*taken from Arnold Fruchtenbaum's study on the Feast of Firstfruits.*)

The fulfillment of the Feast of First-fruits is spelled out in I Corinthians 15:20-23. The fulfillment of the Feast of First-fruits by the Resurrection of the Messiah is pointed out that in verse 20: *But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the first, fruits of them that are asleep.* The Passover was fulfilled by the death of the Messiah; the Feast of Unleavened Bread by the sinlessness of His blood sacrifice; and, the Feast of First-fruits was fulfilled by the Resurrection of Yeshua (Jesus).

The question this verse raises is, "Since other people were resurrected before Yeshua, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, how is He the first-fruits?" The answer is that there are two types of resurrections. The first type is merely a restoration back to natural life. This means that one would die again later; those who were raised before the Resurrection of Jesus all died again. The second type of resurrection is true resurrection life when *"...mortality puts on immortality and corruption puts on incorruption..."* and one is no longer subject to death (I Cor. 15:53-54). While others have undergone the first type of resurrection in which they were restored back to natural life, the second type of resurrection has only been experienced by Yeshua. Therefore,

He is the first-fruits of that second type of resurrection. The term the first-fruits means "the first of more to come." Since He was the first-fruits, this means there will be "more to come" later. Believers, should they die before the Rapture, will also be resurrected as He was; they are "the more to come."

Paul presented the logical argument in verse 21: *"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead."*

The expression *"by man came death"* refers to Adam; *"by man came also the resurrection of the dead"* refers to Jesus, the last Adam. This verse gives one reason for the Incarnation: in order to provide life for all, He had to be able to die and then be resurrected after death.

Verse 22 gives a comparison: *"For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."* This is why He is the first-fruits. The word **all** includes both believers and unbelievers who will some day be resurrected, although not for the same destiny.

In verse 23, he points out the order: *"But each in his own order Christ the first-fruits; then they that are Christ's, at his coming."*

The Greek word used here for order is *tagma*, which refers to a military procession. In a military procession there is order: the infantry, the cavalry, the battering rams. Each of these things has a certain place in the procession.

Likewise, not all believers are resurrected at the same time, but in stages. The first stage of the Resurrection was Jesus, who was the first-fruits of the First Resurrection. The second stage will be the Church saints, who will be resurrected at the Rapture before the Tribulation. The final stage is Old Testament saints and Tribulation saints, who will be resurrected after the Second Coming at the end of the Tribulation. So, the Feast of First-fruits was fulfilled by the Resurrection of Yeshua.

Conclusion

Jesus' resurrection is the promise of our future resurrection. Even though most believers have never heard of Reishit, we celebrate this event every year. We call it Easter the day of resurrection. Because He lives we can face tomorrow with hope and anticipation.