

## THE FEASTS OF THE LORD (Instructions in Leviticus chapter 23)

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This approach to the “feasts of the Lord” is considerably different from the time-honored explanation; but I trust that all readers of this site will at least read it and thoughtfully consider it— that they will not simply assume that because it’s different from what they’re used to, it must be wrong. In fact, I’ve found commentaries that support *certain details* of it.

The usual purpose of a feast is to rejoice. Granted, *sometimes* the word translated “feast” in our Bibles would be more accurately rendered “appointment;” but a word that means “feast” just as we understand it is also used for them.

In the Old Testament, these feasts are *always* called “feasts of *the LORD*,” or “feasts *to the LORD*.” It’s only in the *New Testament* that they’re called “feasts of the *Jews*” (John 5:1; 6:4; 7:2), when Christ had been rejected by His people and could no longer own these feasts. We may gather that they represent something that brings joy to the heart of Christ.

We also find a clue to the meaning of the feasts in *how they are numbered*. The Bible *never mentions* that there were seven; we only know that because we can count. However, the Bible mentions outright three times that the feasts were grouped into *three seasons* (Exodus 23:14, 17; Deuteronomy 16:16). Therefore, while there is certainly meaning to be found in the seven, it is reasonable to give *more attention* to the three.

The bulk of Old-Testament typology concerns our complete salvation through Christ’s work on the Cross. It is therefore reasonable to surmise that the meaning of the feasts has to do with our salvation. Christ lived His life on earth as the “Man of Sorrows,” and the Gospels record *very few* happy moments in His life. However, it was our salvation that brought Him *great joy*:—

Don't rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In that same hour Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, “I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight.” (Luke 10:20, 21).

. . . Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who, for the sake of the joy that was awaiting Him, endured the cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2).

From this information, we gather that the three feast seasons represent the three tenses of our salvation:—

1. *Past* salvation— JUSTIFICATION— salvation from the *penalty* of sin
2. *Present* salvation— SANCTIFICATION— salvation from the *power* of sin
3. *Future* salvation— GLORIFICATION— salvation from the *presence* of sin

***During the Passover season (in early spring):—***

The Passover feast proper speaks of the *ground* of our justification, which is the blood of Christ, pictured by the blood of the Passover lamb (Exodus chapter 12). Because of the shedding of the blood of

this lamb and putting spots of it on the door posts, the firstborn child in the family was spared when the angel of death passed over the house. That pictures the believer's being spared from *eternal* death by the blood of Christ, applied to him.

The feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the Passover, speaks of the *effect* of our justification. This deduction comes from my understanding of the meaning of leaven. It is not a picture of sin, as the time-honored explanation of the feasts claims, but rather a picture of ability to be at ease in a given situation. That idea comes from Deuteronomy 16:3— "You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shall you eat unleavened bread with it, the bread of affliction; ***because you came out of the land of Egypt in a hurry.***" What does unleavened bread have to do with being in a hurry? To make leavened bread requires allowing it time to rise, then punching it down and letting it rise again. It takes hours to make. If a Jew took the time to make leavened bread at the first Passover, he'd be showing that he wasn't particularly eager to leave Egypt because he felt at ease there. Egypt is a type of the world; so the unleavened bread eaten during the Passover season teaches that a believer, justified by the blood of Christ, should *not* be at ease in the world.

That meaning of leaven is supported by other requirements concerning the Passover. It was to be eaten with "bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8), which are *not* a type of the bitterness of Christ's suffering. They were only called "bitter" because they *weren't sweet* like fruit. They did not have an unpleasant taste; the Jews were very fond of them. They were vegetables that could be eaten raw in a salad. The vegetables that Jews most often cooked were dried pulse (peas, beans, lentils), which had to boil for hours before it was ready to eat. Making a salad of "bitter herbs" (raw vegetables) could be done quickly, and was fitting for a time when the Jews were eager to leave Egypt.

Furthermore, even though the Passover would be eaten at home, the Jews were to be dressed for travelling when they ate the Passover— their belts done up (to tuck their clothes in so as to make them more "trim" and give more freedom of movement), their sandals on, and their walking sticks in one hand (Exodus 12:11). Usually when a Jew was going to relax at home, he'd take his shoes off, put his walking stick away, and undo his belt so as to be as comfortable as possible. It was like when *we* get home after a formal outing— the ladies take off their high heels, the gentlemen take off their neckties, and everyone puts slippers on. But God wanted the Jews to be *already* dressed for travelling when they ate the Passover so that when someone arrived at their door and announced that it was time to leave Egypt, they wouldn't lose a moment getting ready. That, again, would show their eagerness to leave Egypt, which is a type of the world. This type of not being at ease in the world was continued in the feast of unleavened bread.

The feast of firstfruits, still in the Passover season, speaks of the *proof* of our justification, as it speaks of Christ's resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:22, 23). While Christ's atonement for our sin was complete in His death, as He indicated by saying "it is finished" (John 19:30), His resurrection *proved* that God was satisfied with it. His *not staying* dead, proved that He had *finished* the atonement. That's why we read that Christ was "delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25), and that "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Nor could we have new life without Christ's resurrection; He said, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

The feast of Pentecost, celebrated by itself in *late* spring, fifty days after the feast of Firstfruits, speaks of the power we have to overcome sin, given by the Holy Spirit, who came at Pentecost. And, though the believer is sanctified as to his *position* the moment he is saved, his sanctification is a *life-long process* in which he makes progress in overcoming sin. The Holy Spirit gives him power (Romans 8:11-13) that's known as "the power of Christ's resurrection" (Philippians 3:9) because it's the same power that it took to raise Christ from the dead (Ephesians 1:19, 20).

There are, however, some requirements for access to this power. The believer must **put Christ first in everything**. When a farmer's crop ripened, he'd be eager to taste the reward of his hard work; but God required that the *very first* part of the crop to ripen be presented as an offering to Him at the feast of Pentecost. In addition, Jews were expected to present free-will offerings at the feast of Pentecost (Deuteronomy 16:10), the content of which would show how devoted (or otherwise) they were. And they were to offer drink offerings (Numbers 28:31), which speak of the *ultimate* in devotion. Paul spoke of his up-coming martyrdom as a drink offering (2 Timothy 4:6).

Another requirement is **happy fellowship in the Church**, which was born at Pentecost. The Church is never mentioned before Pentecost except in the *future tense* (Matthew 16:18; 18:17). Even under the Levitical law, the requirement of "holy convocations" (e.g. Numbers 28:26) showed the need for believers to gather together (Hebrews 10:25).

The Jews were told specifically to eat *leavened* bread at the feast of Pentecost— a requirement that people who take leaven as a type of sin, have difficulty to explain satisfactorily. Some say it was required at Pentecost to show that there's sin in the Church because it hasn't yet reached perfection. However, in all biblical typology, we *never* find God telling the Jews to *do* something to represent sin. To do so would have implied that He was the *author* of sin. Rather, God made things that *already* existed, such as lack of sanitation, or leprosy, represent sin. Some say that the leaven used in the bread at Pentecost didn't matter because it was baked, and that leaven ceases to spread when it's baked. That's absurd reasoning, as if a Jew had made leavened bread at the Passover feast, *that leaven also* would have been baked— and yet it wouldn't have been allowed. But if we take leaven as a type of ability to be at ease in a given situation, it all becomes easy to explain. The Jews were to eat *unleavened* bread at the Passover to show that a believer *shouldn't* be at ease *in the world*. But they were to eat *leavened* bread at Pentecost to show that a believer *should* be at ease *in the Church*, where he's with fellow-believers gathered around his Lord and Saviour. If a Jew had eaten *unleavened* bread at the feast of Pentecost, he'd thereby have represented the attitude that Amos denounced, which was expressed by saying, "When will the new moon be gone, so that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, so that we may market wheat?" (Amos 8:5). Is it a *delight* to us to spend time with God, both alone and in the company of His people?

***During the season of the Feast of Tabernacles (in the fall):—***

The typology is concerned with future glorification. But *ultimately* it will be Christ who will receive all the glory, as it is He alone who accomplished the work to save us. That's indicated by the twenty-four elders' throwing their crowns down at Christ's feet and acknowledging His worthiness (Revelation 4:10, 11).

The feast of trumpets shows Christ glorified by **His reign**. In antiquity, the trumpet was mainly a military instrument, used to announce many different messages to the army, including the call to battle and every military operation performed during the war. But the *last* trumpet call a soldier would hear would be the call to announce that the war was over, and that he was free to go home. The "last trumpet call" in 1 Corinthians 15:52, heard just before the Rapture, will tell us Christians that our warfare on earth is over and that we are going to our *heavenly* home. Our warfare will have ended because Christ will reign over all creation, and will soon "put His enemies under His feet" (1 Corinthians 15:25).

The Day of Atonement shows Christ glorified by **our remembrance**. This one-day annual appointment was the only time the high priest entered the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. He sprinkled the ark of the covenant with blood from a goat that had been killed. A second goat, also sprinkled with the blood of the first one, was taken to the desert and lost— which seems plausibly to be a picture of God's removing our sins from us "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). However, the *basic purpose* of the Day of Atonement is *not* to represent the *fact* of Christ's death to atone for our sin; for if it

were, it would have been celebrated in the Passover season. It is rather a reminder that we will maintain an *eternal memorial* of His death for our atonement. The Lord's Supper is our *present* memorial; but there will be a different and more sublime memorial in heaven. That's indicated by the "new song" in Revelation chapter 5, and the "song of Moses" and the "song of the Lamb" in Revelation chapter 15.

The Feast of Tabernacles, the final feast of the year, shows Christ glorified by **our recognition**—of how much we *owe* Him. The feast gets its name from the "tabernacles," or *huts* that the Israelites were required to make with tree branches, and live in them during the week when this feast was being celebrated. God said that this would remind them that they had "lived in (or *at*) "huts" when He had brought them out of Egypt. This is not, as is often supposed, a reference to the *tents* in which the Jews lived during their journey through the desert from Egypt to Canaan, as the Hebrew word for *those* "tents" is *ohel*, whereas the huts they were to make for the Feast of Tabernacles is *sucloth*. Rather, the name of the feast is a word play on the name of the town near which they made their *first stop* after leaving Egypt. Remember, the original text of the Bible had no distinction between capital and lower-case characters; so we can't tell that way whether a word is a proper name, or a common noun. God said, "you shall live (or stay, or take shelter) in huts (the shelter), to remind you that you stayed at Huts (name of the town) when you had just left Egypt.

What had happened when Israel camped at Succoth (name meaning "huts")? God had given them what appears at first sight to be simply a review of His instructions for celebrating the Passover (Exodus chapter 12). However, a closer look shows three new additions.

1. No foreigner was to eat it (Exodus 12:43). They were God's chosen and redeemed people; but that privilege had been granted to them and not to others, by pure grace. God later reminded them: "The LORD your God isn't giving you this good land to possess it for your righteousness; for you are a stiff-necked people" (Deuteronomy 9:6). Let us never forget that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).

2. No bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken (Exodus 12:46). That quickly identifies whom the Passover lamb represents; John 19:36 applies it to Christ when He was on the Cross. It showed His perfect righteousness (Psalm 34:19, 20). It also showed His deity, as the Roman soldiers broke the legs of the men crucified with Christ to hasten their death, but didn't break His because He was *already* dead (John 19:31-34). It is totally unexplainable how He could have died so soon, apart from admitting that He lay His life down supernaturally, at the moment *He* chose (John 10:18)— something that only God could do.

3. Because the firstborn were spared from death by the blood of the Passover lamb, all the firstborn— of animals as well as of people— would belong to God in a special way (Exodus 13:2). Likewise, being redeemed by Christ's blood means that we do not belong to ourselves (Romans 14:8), and must not *live* for ourselves, but for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:15). We will eternally glorify Christ by our recognition of what we owe Him for these reasons.

*When I stand before the throne,  
Dressed in beauty not my own,  
When I see Thee as Thou art,  
Love Thee with unsinning heart,  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,  
Not till then, how much I owe.*

—R. M. M<sup>C</sup>Cheyne