

OT Feasts: Part 4 of 8; Lev. 23:9-14; 1 Cor. 15:20-23

# How Did the 3<sup>rd</sup> OT Feast of Firstfruits Point Ahead to Jesus' First Coming?

Fourth Wednesday of Lent, April 2, 2014 at 11 AM & 7 PM

Wednesday Services during Lent at 11 & 7; Meals at 12 & 6

**Introduction:** Dear friends in Christ: Our focus today is on the **third** of the spring feasts which is called **Firstfruits**:

- It was a one-day feast, just like Passover (Unleavened Bread, the second feast, was a seven-day feast).
- It began *at sundown* on Saturday, thus from a Jewish perspective, it began on the day after the Sabbath, which is Sunday, *the day Jesus' was raised!*
- It began the 50-day countdown to the Feast of Pentecost, *which was the fourth and final spring feast.*
- It looked back to **God's temporal provision** through the barley harvest – *God provides physical needs, like food for our bodies!*
- It pointed ahead to **God's eternal provision** through Jesus – *God provides eternal needs, like resurrection from the dead!*

1. **Recognize and Give Thanks for God's Temporal Blessings:** Firstfruits, also known by its Hebrew name *Reishit (Re-SHEET)*, was an offering of **"the first ripe sheaf (firstfruits) of barley to the Lord as an act of dedicating the harvest to him."**<sup>1</sup> In a similar way, we should always recognize God's blessing of food, then, *before consuming it*, let us give Him thanks! In Leviticus 23, following the instructions for ♦Sabbath days, ♦the Passover, and ♦Unleavened Bread, we come to this instruction about Firstfruits: <sup>9</sup> The LORD said

<sup>1</sup> Feasts of the Bible (Torrance, CA: Rose Publishing, 2004, 2011).

to Moses, <sup>10</sup> “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 [*the firstfruits*] of the first grain you harvest. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb a year old without defect, <sup>13</sup> together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil--an offering made to the LORD by fire, a pleasing aroma--and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. <sup>14</sup> You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.” (Lev 23 NIV)

- a. Why “wave the sheaf before the LORD”? It was a way to *acknowledge* and *thank* the LORD for the barley He had provided. Do you pray before you eat? Our bodies need food and the LORD generously provides, *so we should consistently give Him thanks!*
- b. What is “the day after the Sabbath”? Sunday, *the day Jesus rose from the dead!* Thus the connection between Firstfruits and Easter!
- c. Why “a lamb a year old without defect”? I can’t say for sure, but such a description definitely reminds us of the Passover lambs, which pointed ahead to the Ultimate Lamb of God – *our Savior!*
- d. Why “bring this offering” before eating? *Again, to acknowledge and thank the Giver!* Maybe we could say: *As giving the tithe FIRST* frees us to use the remaining 90%, *so waving the sheaf FIRST* freed the people to gladly consume God’s blessing!
- e. Do we celebrate Firstfruits as “a lasting ordinance”? Yes! *Easter Sunday is our Firstfruits celebration!*

Even more than that, *on Easter*, which includes our celebration of the Lord's Supper, we are actually celebrating *Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits!*

2. **Believe and Receive God's Eternal Blessings**: These are some connections between the ♦barley harvest, ♦Jesus, and ♦us being raised back to life:
  - a. Firstfruits had three phases of activity: Marking, gathering, and presenting. Marking identified the first mature barley; gathering was the binding of the sheaf; and presenting was waving the sheaf before the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Now, *think about Jesus*: †He was marked by the religious leaders – *they decided to kill Him (John 11:53)*; †He was gathered by the religious leaders – *they arrested Him (Mark 14:44)*; †He was presented by Pilate – *he handed Jesus over to be crucified (Mark 15:15)*.
  - b. Physical death is NOT the end:
    - i. Jesus: <sup>20</sup> “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep [*died*].” <sup>21</sup> For since death came through a man [*Adam*], the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [*Jesus, the God-Man*]. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes [*Jesus' second coming*], those who belong to him.” (1Co 15:20-23 NIV)
    - ii. Us: God “chose to give us [*spiritual*] birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.” (James

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Norten, Unlocking the Secrets of the Feasts (Bloomington, IN: West Bow Press, 2012), 39.

1:18 NIV) Firstfruits points *especially* to our physical resurrection, but we are a “*kind of firstfruits*” in connection with our *spiritual resurrection* – from dead in sin to alive in Christ. Also, as the offering of the firstfruits made the rest of the barley crop kosher or acceptable, *so Jesus, the Ultimate Firstfruit, makes us acceptable in God’s sight!*

3. **Jesus and Holy Week:** *A probable scenario* (see the handout):
- a. Thursday: The Passover lambs were killed at 3:00 in the afternoon!
  - b. Friday—Passover (*which began at sundown on Thursday*): Jesus ate the Passover meal with His disciples and instituted the Lord’s Supper; then He was arrested, tried, condemned, and crucified; then, after receiving all sins and all punishment, He laid down His life and was buried!
  - c. Saturday—Unleavened Bread: Jesus rested!
  - d. Sunday—Firstfruits: Jesus was raised!

**Conclusion:** *So, even though we don’t identify our festivals as Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits, we do celebrate those festivals. In the OT those festivals pointed to Jesus’ first coming; now, in the NT, we rejoice in our Savior who ♦has come, ♦finished His saving work, and ♦set us free from sin and death!*  
And all God’s people said: **Amen!**

**The sermon dates for the balance of this sermon series – God willing:**

- Final Spring Feast – Pentecost: June 8 & 9
- First Fall Feast – Trumpets: September 21 & 22
- Second Fall Feast – Atonement: September 28 & 29
- Final Fall Feast – Tabernacles / Booths: October 5 & 6

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