

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
February 14, 2016

Lesson Text: Leviticus 23:15-22
Lesson Title: The Feast of Weeks

Introduction

All the events in the Book of Leviticus takes place as the children of Israel are camped at the base of Mount Sinai. They have been redeemed from Egyptian bondage and are preparing to journey to the Promised Land. Many memorable events had already taken place at Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments had been given followed by instructions for building the tabernacle (Exodus 20-40). Through the people's obedience, the tabernacle was erected for worship and the priesthood established. Aaron and his sons began to minister as the people brought their offerings and sacrifices (Leviticus 1-22).

Leviticus 23 presents the feast calendar for the nation of Israel. "Feast" literally means "set appointed times." The "feasts" have nothing to do with eating. God used these special set times as a reminder to the Israelites they are God's chosen people (Leviticus 23: 2, 4, 37, 44). God Himself appointed the feasts for His people to meet with Him (Psalm 50:5). The feasts were holy and sacred (Leviticus 23: 2-4, 7-8, 20-21, 24, 27, 35). They were also occasions of joy (Leviticus 23:6). Only on the Day of Atonement was there to be weeping (Leviticus 26:27, 32).

Each of the feasts taught the Israelite a truth about God and each one had a practical value in their spiritual life. The basis of the feasts pertained to the Sabbath Day. The "Sabbath" is mentioned nine times in Leviticus 23: 3, 15, 24, 32, 35. By establishing the feasts around the cycle of the Sabbath, the Lord repeatedly affirms in different ways that He is Lord of our time. God wanted the Israelite to set apart personal time in recognition of His lordship and redeeming grace.

The time set apart during the feast days is called "holy convocations" (Leviticus 23:2-4, 7, 8, 21, 24, 27, 35-37). "Holy convocations" refer to God's people celebrating and worshipping Him. These "convocations" did not involve all Israel gathering together in every case. Only the feast of unleavened bread; feast of weeks; and feast of tabernacles required that all males in Jerusalem be gathered together (Exodus 23:14-17; Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

The "holy convocations" and the feast days were intentionally established by God to set the Israelites apart from the other nations. It is impossible to interact with pagan cultures and be tempted by their gods when you are busy remembering what the Lord had done for you by worshipping Him. The

Israelites had been slaves for 430 years, and now, through the Sabbath Day, and the feasts, God is establishing mandatory days of rest, worship, and reflection upon His Person and provision.

The Israelites were to observe three feasts during the year (Exodus 23:14-17). The “Feast of Weeks,” we are studying today is the second of the three annual feasts. Last week’s study, the Feast of Passover (Exodus 12:1-20) was the first one. The “Feast of Weeks” is also called “the feast of harvest” (Exodus 23:16) and “the day of the firstfruits (Numbers 28:26). “Feast of Weeks” is an unusual term for a one-day celebration but it received its name because it was celebrated seven weeks after Passover. The festival is also termed in the New Testament as “Pentecost,” which means “fiftieth” (Acts 2:1; 1 Corinthians 16:8).

The Feast and Timing (Leviticus 23:15-16a)

Verse 15-16a

“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...”

When it comes to the feasts of Israel, timing is everything! The words “count...sabbath...from the day...seven...the morrow...and fifty days” are related to the proper timing for the feast to be observed. It is also significant the “Feast of Weeks” occurred after the Passover (Leviticus 23:5) and the offering of the firstfruits (Leviticus 23:9-14). In the Passover, we have a picture of the sacrificial death of Christ, the Lamb of God. In the offering of the first fruits, we have a picture of our Lord’s resurrection and ascension back to the Father. Here, in the “Feast of Weeks,” or “Pentecost,” we have a beautiful picture of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

The Feast of Pentecost always fell on the first day of the week. The people counted “seven sabbaths,” which would be seven weeks or forty-nine days, then the fiftieth day, or “the morrow after the seventh Sabbath,” the first day of the week, was Pentecost. This was fifty days after the offering of the wave sheaf of first fruits. Once Israel arrived in the Promised Land they would sow their grain and watch for it to grow. When they would see stalks begin to grow, they would cut some down and put them together to make a “sheaf.” This “sheaf” was brought to the tabernacle, and the priest would offer it to the Lord.

The Feast and Offerings (Leviticus 23:16b-19)

Verse 16b-17

“...And ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD.”

Following the identification of the time elements in this feast, the Lord describes the offerings associated with the feast. The “new meat offering” is actually a “meal offering.” The “new meat offering” was composed of “two wave loaves” of bread. These “two wave loaves” symbolize how Jews and Gentiles would one day be made one body of believers by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). This symbolism was fulfilled in Acts 2, fifty days after Christ’s resurrection.

The “two wave loaves” consisted of “two tenth deals” or about four quarts “of fine flour” baked with “leaven.” “Leaven” is a symbol of sin and was not to be a part of the offerings (Leviticus 2:11). The “new meat offering” was an exception. “Leaven” was included in the “new meat offerings” and serves as a reminder saved sinners are still sinners. As long as God’s children are in the world there will be sin in the church. This truth does not encourage or excuse sin. It explains the reality of it (1 John 1:8).

The “two wave loaves” were to be kneaded and rolled separately and then they were “baked” separately. Each loaf was approximately two feet long and one foot wide. The moment the “two wave loaves” were finished baking in the oven they were dedicated to God. The loaves were brought to the priest and he waved them upward, backward, forward and downward before the Lord. The loaves were then given to the priest for consumption.

Verse 18-20

“And ye shall offer with the bread seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams: they shall be for a burnt offering unto the LORD, with their meat offering, and their drink offerings, even an offering made by fire, of sweet savour unto the LORD. Then ye shall sacrifice one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings. And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits for a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs: they shall be holy to the LORD for the priest.”

The offerings at the “Feast of Weeks” also included a burnt offering of “seven lambs...one bullock...and two rams.” That is a total of 10 animals to be offered as a burnt offering unto the Lord in verse 18. These “burnt offerings” were to be accompanied by drink offering described in Numbers 15:4-9. The “burnt offering” was completely burned up to show it was totally dedicated to the Lord. It was a “sweet savour” or sweet aroma to the Lord.

A “sin offering” of “one kid of the goats was to be offered unto the Lord during the feast. Atonement is the message in a “sin offering.” The offering “kid of the goats” suggests there was an estrangement from God which needed to be renewed. According to Leviticus 4:1-35, a “sin offering” was given to confess and seek purification from sins of commission and omission.

Note: As believers we must deal with the sin issues in our lives. Confession of sin is needed if we are to enjoy a right relationship with the Lord (Psalm 38:4). Of course we do not bring goats as an offering. Our forgiveness is in the finished work of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:9).

A “peace offering” of “two lambs of the first year” was to be offered unto the Lord. The “peace offering” was a voluntary offering to bring about peace, or fellowship, with God.

The “priest” would take the “two lambs” offered for the “peace offering” together with the “bread of the firstfruits,” and “wave them” before the Lord. Waving the bread backward and forward is not difficult to imagine. The bread possibly weighed less than 10 pounds. But waving the “two lambs” can present a problem. Some commentators suggest the lambs were lifted up while still alive. Others suggest the breast or other parts of the lamb were waved after they were sacrificed. Either way, the waving symbolized their being given to the Lord.

The “bread” and the “lambs” were “holy to the LORD for the priest.” This means it was sacred and offered to the priest.

The Feast and Resting (Leviticus 23:21)

Verse 21

“And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.”

This special day in Israel was to be proclaimed as a sacred assembly. It was a day in which God’s people were to meet with the Lord and with each other. No “servile work” or occupational duty was to be performed.

The “Feast of Weeks” was to be celebrated forever in every house in Israel for all generations to come. If the Israelite needed this “day” of rest and worship, believers need to meet with the Lord and our brother’s and sister’s in Christ. There is a rest in Christ and a refreshment through remembrance and worship. God help us not to forsake meeting together (Hebrews 10:25).

The Feast and Sharing (Leviticus 23:22)

Verse 22

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the LORD your God.”

The special feast days God gave to Israel were not for show. When Israel arrived in the land of Canaan there would be many unbelieving onlookers who would see them reap the benefits of the land and the blessing of the Lord. God gave Israel the land of Canaan and shared his blessings with them. They, in turn, were to compassionately share their bounty with “the poor” and the “stranger.”

By commanding the Israelites to “not make clean riddance of the corners of their fields,” God is teaching them their harvest actually belonged to Him. Sometimes we become stingy as God’s people and think we are somehow responsible for the blessings we have. The Apostle James said, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...”* (James 1:17). By leaving the “corners of the field,” the “poor” could gather enough grain to make bread to provide for themselves and their families.

God has blessed His children abundantly and there is no excuse for not sharing His riches with the poor. This is true not only physically but also spiritually. The Apostle Paul said, *“Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God”* (2 Corinthians 9:11).

Conclusion

The “Feast of Weeks,” or Pentecost, was fulfilled with the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. For the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, it was a day to acknowledge everything they possessed came from the hand of the Lord.

The “Feast of Weeks” reminds us of our need to give the Lord our time, rest in Him through worship, and fellowship with fellow believers. As we live and minister in the fullness of the Holy Spirit we must not forget the poor and the stranger. May the Lord help us to share with others what our Lord has shared with us. We are so blessed!

Amen.