**Seasons and Festivals**

Michele once asked me “If you’re such a big advocate of saving money, why were you broke when we got married?” That was a fair question as I was a man of limited means when I met Michele. I did have an excuse, just 4 years earlier I was in the Air Force which was not known for lavish compensation and when I got out of the service, I spent what I had managed to save on college. The truth is that I was not a disciplined saver in my younger years. It seems to me that saving involves 2 components: 1. Forgoing current gratification and 2. Accumulating for the future. In our study of Leviticus chapters 23 and 24 we see those dynamics involved in the Feast of Firstfruits.

Chapter 23 is devoted to God’s appointed feasts that the Israelites were to observe as sacred assemblies (convocations KJV). God had previously dictated some of these but here they are listed together and I have included the dates they are celebrated in 2022. Much of the Old Testament is prophecy pointing to Jesus and each of the feasts has symbolism about Him. God begins with the Sabbath, referring to it as a day of sacred assembly. This is one of many times that God had required they keep His Sabbath holy.

The Feast of Passover (4/15/22) and Unleavened Bread (4/17-23/22) was first required of Israel as they prepared to leave Egypt (Ex. Chapter 12). This feast began on the 14th day of Abib later known as Nisan, the first month of the Hebrew calendar corresponding with March-April of our modern calendar. Bob Deffinbaugh had a lengthy explanation of the differences between the 2 calendars. The Passover meal was followed by 7 days of meals with unleavened bread. This was to be done annually in observance of God bringing them out of Egypt. During the Passover a lamb was sacrificed which represented Jesus dying for our sins and the unleavened bread represented His sinless life (see 1st Cor. 5:7).

The Feast of Firstfruits was celebrated during the Feast of Unleavened bread on the Day following the Sabbath observed during that week. This feast was to begin after the Israelites entered into Canaan. A sheaf of the first grain harvested was to be brought to the priest who would use it as a wave offering to God along with animal, grain and drink offerings. Note that God required that this offering be made before they consumed and food from the grain until the offering was given to God. Jesus was resurrected on the day of First Fruits and He is recognized as the first fruits of the dead (1st Cor. 15:20)

The Feast of Weeks (6/5/22) also known as Day of Pentecost. This was observed 7 weeks from the Sabbath observed during the Feast of Unleavened Bread and marked the end of the grain harvest. Animal sacrifices included 7 lambs, a bull and 2 rams. Jesus was the first fruit and this feast recognizes the church as the following full harvest. The Day of Pentecost after His resurrection marks the birth of the church.

The Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah (9/27/22) was to be celebrated on the first day of the seventh month (Ethanim or Tishri). This was a day of rest and is considered to be the celebration of the Hebrew new year. This symbolizes the rapture when Jesus returns to take the church home (see 1st Thess. 4:16, 1st Cor. 15:52).

The Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur (10/6/22) celebrated on the 10th day of the 7th month was covered in detail in chapter 16. This was a day set aside for the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to cover the sins of the people. This day recognizes Jesus as the propitiation for our sins.

Feast of Tabernacles or Sukkot (10/11-17) celebrated for 7 days beginning on the 15th day of the 7th month. This was a pilgrimage feast where Israelites would return to Jerusalem to dwell in booths to observe God’s protection and provisions for the people during their 40 years in the desert. It is thought to symbolize the millennial rest of the church (see Zech. 14:16). The eight day of this feast was a day of rest and is celebrated as Hoshana Rabbah, the last great day.

Chapter 24 set forth God’s requirements for bread and oil to be furnished for the tabernacle. The priests were to use the oil to keep the lamps burning continually from evening until morning. The 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes were to be placed before God each Sabbath. The lamps and bread were symbolic of Jesus who is the light of the world and the bread of life. The second part of chapter 24 tells the story of the son of an Israelite woman and Egyptian man who was guilty of blaspheming God’s name. Note that the name of the mother is mentioned but not the name of the father. The fact that the man blasphemed God indicates a rejection of a Holy God so the punishment was death by stoning. God then repeated his earlier instructions about punishment and restitution.

The feasts that God set forth were to honor God and to observe all He had done for the Israelites as well as pointing to the future coming of the Messiah. All the feasts as well as the weekly Sabbath involved sacrifices which had to represent the best the people had whether it was a first born animal without defect of firstfruits of the field. This was a test of obedience to God and I think the feast of firstfruits best represents this since the people could not partake of the grains until God had received His portion. David Guzik wrote that the Israelites set aside God’s portion in anticipation of a greater harvest later in the year (see Mal. 3:10). We should see this not as a promise of material blessing but rather observing that we are to store up treasures in heaven.