Feast of Weeks
Lev 23:15-22
SS Lesson for 02/14/2016

Devotional Scripture: Ps 96:1-12

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Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reviews how God structured the life of His people to honor Him by celebrating the Feast of Weeks. The study's aim is to show that a God-honoring life will result in God's blessing and the application of His plans to our experience. The study's application is to order our lives as His people to ensure that we put Him first in our finances, materials possessions and daily living.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Lev 23:16

Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

The Feast of Weeks (cf. Num. 28:26; Deut. 16:10) was known in New Testament times as the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1; Gr. pentēkostē, “50th,” from which comes the Eng. “Pentecost”) because it was celebrated seven weeks plus 1 day (50 days) after the wave offering of the barley sheaf during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:15-16). It was also called the Feast of Harvest (Ex. 23:16; cf. 34:22) and “the day of firstfruits” (Num. 28:26). As an early summer agricultural celebration at the end of the wheat harvest (cf. Ex. 34:22), it was both distinct from and yet related to the previous firstfruits of barley. The designated time lapse of 50 days links together this firstfruits offering at the end of early summer wheat harvest with that of the preceding firstfruits offering at the beginning of the spring barley harvest. No such time sequence is specified to link these celebrations with the fall festivals which were simply introduced as occurring on designated days in the seventh month (cf. Lev. 23:23, 27, 34). Of the three major feasts (cf. Deut. 16:1, 3, 6; Lev. 23:42-43), only the Feast of Weeks is not identified in the Old Testament with some prior occasion in Israel’s history that it commemorates. Jewish tradition, however, supplied such an occasion by relating it to the day Moses was given the Law of God on Mount Sinai.

Following the identification of the time elements in this feast (vv. 15-16a), the key feature of presenting an offering of new grain to the Lord is explained as bringing two loaves of leavened bread as a wave offering of firstfruits to the Lord. This is the one time in the year when leavened bread was brought to the Lord, though none of it was burned on the altar. The bread was leavened by placing in the dough a lump of leaven (i.e., sourdough) from bread of the preceding barley harvest, thus reemphasizing the close connection between the barley and wheat harvests, and the festivals associated with them. The offerings at this feast—more elaborate than those at the Feast of Unleavened Bread (cf. v. 12)—consisted of a burnt offering of seven male lambs... one young bull, and two rams, with an appropriate amount of grain offerings and drink offerings, a sin offering of one male goat, and a fellowship offering of two lambs. Portions of these lambs along with the bread of the firstfruits (cf. v. 17) were to be a wave offering given to the officiating priest as his share for performing the ceremony. This festival day was specifically marked as a sacred assembly when no occupational work was to be done. The Feast of Weeks, along with those linked with it (vv. 4-14), was to be celebrated as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. This reminder to leave the gleanings of the harvest... for the poor at first seems to be misplaced from a more legislative context. However, the omission of reference to the vineyard and grapes (contrast 19:1-10), which were harvested later in the year before the Feast of Tabernacles, made it an appropriate harvest motto at the end of the barley and wheat harvests. As the priests’ needs were met by the sacrificial meat (cf. 23:20), so the needs of the poor were met by leaving the gleanings for them in the harvest fields (cf. Deut. 14:27-29; 16:11).
**Lesson Introduction and Background**

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The family reunion for my father’s side was always held the first Sunday of September. It was interesting to watch the interactions, especially among the different age groups. The older members of the family could immediately enter into conversations that usually turned to reminiscing. The children would gradually assess each other and then develop their games. The patriarch or matriarch of the family would be introduced to the new members of the clan. The sumptuous meals came from baskets and boxes, full of foods prepared at home. At the end of the day, the good-byes were said, and comments such as, “See you next year!” were exchanged. Whether the drive home was short or long, it had been a good day. Cultural changes of the last few decades have ended these customs for many people. Reunion-type events seem rarer, for family members are likely to live anywhere on the globe. Some children enter adulthood having never seen or known certain cousins or other relatives. Today’s lesson demonstrates how God provided an occasion for his people to meet together as a family of Israelites for the giving of thanks, fellowship, forgiveness, and spiritual dedication. This study is about the Festival of Weeks, which is an unusual term for a one-day celebration. Some of its features made it the preferred event for those who lived at great distances from Jerusalem.

The first Passover in Egypt demonstrated to the Israelites that God was on their side. This made it easier to leave all that was familiar when it was time to make the exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12). The Israelites did not know what the future held, but they had confidence—at least temporarily—in the one who held the future. The GPS (God’s Positioning System) used by Moses led the Israelites in an unusual direction—not by the way of the Mediterranean seacoast to the land of Canaan, but into the wilderness of the Red Sea area (Exodus 13:17, 18). The Lord used a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to guide, protect, and assure the people that they were going where he wanted them to be (13:21, 22). The Israelites experienced at the Red Sea yet another mighty deliverance after Pharaoh changed his mind about the departure of his labor force. He sent hundreds of chariots to bring them back (Exodus 14:5-9), but God had different plans. The dividing of sea waters so as to have a wall of water on each side is an impossibility for humans, but not for God (14:21, 22). The God who created the universe can easily divide a small sea on this tiny planet! As the journey continued, God met the needs of his people. These needs included provisions of water (Exodus 15:22-27; 17:1-7), food (chap. 16), and a victory over the Amalekites (17:8-16). The interim destination was Sinai, and this new nation arrived in the third month (19:1). The Israelites knew that the Lord was God, but what did he expect from them? God was ready to tell them, and that was the purpose of their stay at Mount Sinai, which lasted almost a year (Numbers 10:11, 12). When God gave the people manna on the way to Sinai, they learned that God expected them to rest on the seventh day (Exodus 16:23-30), and that expectation was reinforced as part of the Ten Commandments (chap. 20). This was followed by his giving laws (chaps. 21-23) that collectively are called “the Book of the Covenant” (24:7). It contained upwards of 70 rules that the people needed immediately for the governing of social relationships. It could be called their bill of rights, but perhaps bill of responsibilities for producing a just society is better.

**Major Theme Analysis**

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

**Time of the Feast (Lev 23:15-16)**

15 ‘And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed.

16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the Lord.
Plan the time (15)

*Plan time so that we may use it wisely (Eph 5:15-16)*

15 Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

*Plan time because the end is near (1 Cor 7:29-31)*

29 What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; 30 those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; 31 those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

*Plan time to number our days (Ps 90:12)*

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

*Plan time to remember the Creator (Eccl 12:1)*

12 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"—

*Plan time to count the cost (Luke 14:28-29)*

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him,

Time to Count (16)

*Beware of Satan's influence to count (1 Chron 21:1-7)*

21 Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. 2 So David said to Joab and the commanders of the troops, "Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so that I may know how many there are." 3 But Joab replied, "May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?" 4 The king's word, however, overruled Joab; so Joab left and went throughout Israel and then came back to Jerusalem. 5 Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David: In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who could handle a sword, including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah. 6 But Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the numbering, because the king's command was repulsive to him. 7 This command was also evil in the sight of God; so he punished Israel.

*Don't worry about counting forgiveness (Matt 18:21-22)*

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

*Counting the cost (Luke 14:31-33)*

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.
Nature of the Feast (Lev 23:17-21)

17 You shall bring from your dwellings two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven. They are the firstfruits to the Lord.
18 And you shall offer with the bread seven lambs of the first year, without blemish, one young bull, and two rams. They shall be as a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering made by fire for a sweet aroma to the Lord.
19 Then you shall sacrifice one kid of the goats as a sin offering, and two male lambs of the first year as a sacrifice of a peace offering.
20 The priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the Lord, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.
21 And you shall proclaim on the same day that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it. It shall be a statute forever in all your dwellings throughout your generations.

Firstfruit offerings (17)

Giving of firstfruits that honors God (Prov 3:9)
9 Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;

Giving of firstfruits that are offered to God (Lev 2:12)
12 You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma.

Giving of firstfruits that come from what God has given (Deut 26:1-2)
26 When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, 2 take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name

Giving of firstfruits as tithes to the Church (Mal 3:10)
10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

Giving of firstfruits that come from abundance to supply the lacking of others (2 Cor 8:14)
14 At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality.

Sacrificial offerings (18-19)

An offering beyond ability (2 Cor 8:3)
3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own,

An offering that is all one has (Mark 12:43-44)
43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything — all she had to live on.”
An offering that is given, even though it is the last (1 Kings 17:8-13)

8 Then the word of the Lord came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food." 10 So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, "Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" 11 As she was going to get it, he called, "And bring me, please, a piece of bread." 12 "As surely as the Lord your God lives," she replied, "I don't have any bread — only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it — and die." 13 Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.

An offering of a life of service that is almost to death (Phil 2:29-30)

29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Holy offerings (20-21)

A holy offering that is considered pleasing to God (Heb 13:16)

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

A holy offering because it is done willingly (2 Cor 8:12)

12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

A holy offering because it offered right (Gen 4:2-7)

2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

A holy offering because of giving out of love (Eph 5:1-2)

5 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

A holy offering because it is sacrificial (Phil 4:16-18)

16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need. 17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account. 18 I have received full payment and even more; I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Attitude For the Feast (Lev 23:22)

22 'When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field when you reap, nor shall you gather any gleaning from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God.' “
Don't be greedy (22)

Don't be greedy because it arouses God's anger (Num 11:32-34)

32 All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. 33 But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the Lord burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague. 34 Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.

Don't be greedy by trying to devour the needy (Prov 30:13-14)

13 those whose eyes are ever so haughty, whose glances are so disdainful; 14 those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind.

Don't be greedy through illegal possessions (1 Kings 21:16-19)

16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. 17 Then the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite: 18 "Go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who rules in Samaria. He is now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to take possession of it. 19 Say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Have you not murdered a man and seized his property?' Then say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: In the place where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your blood — yes, yours!'"

Don't be greedy through trying to get rich the wrong way (1 Tim 6:9)

9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

Sharing with the needy (22)

By sharing possessions (Acts 4:32-35)

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

By sharing through contributions to the poor (Rom 15:25-27)

25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

By sharing to supply their needs (2 Cor 9:12-13)

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

By sharing continually and being consistent in help (Heb 6:10)

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.
By sharing with them (Heb 13:16)

16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain (Exodus 19:1, 2).

Pentecost gets its name from the counting of fifty days from the Sabbath following Passover. This places the holiday in the third month (Sivan) of the Jewish Calendar. It coincides with the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, which is what the holiday celebrates. The most unique aspect of this celebration in the temple was the waving of two leavened loaves of bread before the Lord. This was the only leavened offering made in the temple! These loaves, like the earlier wave offering, are also declared to be a First Fruits offering. Perhaps the loaves were to look like the two tablets of the Law.

The Jewish celebration of Pentecost often begins by staying up all night to read Torah. They emphasize the Ten Commandments. In this way they remember the events that took place at Mount Sinai. Also, because of its association with the spring harvest, the Jews will read the Book of Ruth. And because Mount Sinai also looks forward to the time when Israel would enter the “land flowing with milk and honey,” the foods of Pentecost are rich with milk, cream, and honey. This is the season for the cheese blintzes and apples dipped in honey. I should add that the honey also speaks of the sweetness of God’s word.

Pentecost completes the Exodus story. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread tell of the escape from Egypt. The First Fruits speaks of manna and God’s provision in the desert. Pentecost speaks of the giving of the Law, which is some respects became the Constitution for Israel, the nation.

In Christianity, Pentecost marks the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1). Perhaps Paul was even thinking of the wave offering of the two loaves when he wrote,

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Romans 8:19-23).

Today’s Messianic Jews have an interesting view of the two leavened loaves of bread offered in the temple during Pentecost. Since leaven is a symbol for sin, why is this offering different from all other grain offerings by specifying the inclusion of leaven? It is this: Because of the atonement brought about by Jesus, the Holy Spirit can indwell us and we are able to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace.” Though we still contain leaven, we can get help in time of need. They see in the loaves the Jewish and Gentile believers offered before the Lord as first fruits of what is to come. The Church is not complete without the Jews and the Gentiles. I find the argument compelling. To me, it is just one more example of the prophetic core in the appointed times. In this light, the practice of reading Ruth also foreshadowed the unity of the Jewish and Gentile believers.

Conclusion

Should the Church of Jesus Christ celebrate these things? Four times in Leviticus 23 we are told, “It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places.” Of course, the command is addressed to the Jews. On the other hand, these appointed times testify over and over again about the past and future work of our Lord. Should we not make room for the principal ones like Passover, the Day of Atonement,
and the Feast of Tabernacles? These speak of three major doctrines of our faith: the Death of Jesus for our sins, His return, and His coming Kingdom. Think how clearly these holidays speak of these truths, because they are free from the secular clamor that surrounds Christmas and Easter. Besides, as I said above, the Feast of Tabernacles appears to be the big international holiday of the Millennial Kingdom.

Then it will come about that any who are left of all the nations that went against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths (Zechariah 14:16).

We can share the Passover meal with family and friends and celebrate Jesus Christ as our Passover Lamb. We can fast for the Day of Atonement to humble ourselves before God and reflect on His return, and pray that we be found at our posts. We can build our huts during the Feast of Tabernacles and look ahead to the coming Kingdom. In this way, our children can begin learning important truths at very early ages, free from the confusing signals of secular culture.

With the tastes of Passover, the waving of the sheaf during First Fruits, the waving of two leaven loaves on Pentecost, the sound of trumpets, the fasting on the Day of Atonement, and the huts of the Feast of Tabernacles, the story of God’s deliverance and salvation is told without words. The events stimulate the questions of the very young and provide mental pictures of sublime concepts. These days speak of past and future deliverance. They are historical and prophetical at the same time. How great is our God who can so engineer time and history to use the same holidays twice!

(Adapted from URL:https://bible.org/seriespage/lord%E2%80%99s-appointed-times-leviticus-23)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Day of Pentecost—the later designation for the Festival of Weeks—is the birthday of the church (Acts 2). The Bible does not say why God chose this occasion for the church to begin. But the way that it was celebrated made it the perfect tool to fulfill God’s plan to spread the gospel from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Pentecost drew many Jews from distant parts of the Roman Empire (compare Acts 2:5-11). The rainy season was over, and the weather was warm and delightful for travel. Some who made a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Jerusalem for Passover perhaps remained “on vacation” through Pentecost. In any case, it is fascinating that the death and resurrection of Jesus occurred during the time of Passover and Unleavened Bread and that seven weeks later the church began on Pentecost. The people who were in Jerusalem at these times had the privilege of being among the first to be introduced to the gospel, which they could take with them on their return home. About 3,000 people were convinced, and they responded to Peter’s instructions to repent and to be baptized for the remission of sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, 41). As they returned to all parts of the Roman Empire and elsewhere, they became the vanguard for the spreading message of redemption.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator

1. Christians should praise God with giving when they experience His goodness (Lev. 23:15-17)
2. God is pleased when we give back to Him from the blessings we have received from Him (vs. 18)
3. Our gifts to God come from the things that we use in our everyday lives (vs. 19)
4. What is given to God as an offering is consecrated for His use (vs. 20)
5. There are days of rest that Christians need to honor (vs. 21)
6. Christians can help end starvation and other ills by following God's plan for providing for those who are poor (vs. 22)