

Bringing Firstfruits

Leviticus 23:9-14, 22
SS Lesson for 05/13/2018

Devotional Scripture: 2 Corinthians 8:1-12

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson teaches about the principle of **Bringing Firstfruits** to God as we worship. The **study's aim** is to understand that God must come first in our thinking, not last. The **study's application** is to put God first in every activity of our lives.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Lev 23:10

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

The Levitical system incorporated both individual and national occasions of sacrifice and worship. Much of chapters 1-7 assumed the individual occasions of sacrifice. Chapter 23 is structured around the national annual festivals of Israel. Though other passages give greater detail on some of these appointed times of meeting (e.g., the Passover in Ex. 12-13 and the Day of Atonement in Lev. 16), chapter 23 is the most complete account of the feasts from the viewpoint of their interrelationships within the annual festal calendar of Israel. The regulations of this chapter are given from the viewpoint of an ordinary worshiper. Numbers 28-29 treats the same feasts (no mention is there made of the sheaf of the first grain of barley harvest as in Lev. 23:9-14) more from the viewpoint of the priests by giving a detailed schedule of these special offerings. Once Israel entered the land of Canaan, the three great feasts of the year (the Feast of Unleavened Bread accompanying Passover, the Feast of Harvest or Weeks, and the Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles, as seen in Ex. 23:14-17; 34:18-25; Deut. 16:1-16) were to be occasions of pilgrimage to the central sanctuary by "all" male Israelites. Thus the basic Hebrew word for *feast* (*hag*; e.g., Lev. 23:6, 34, 39; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chron. 8:13) includes the idea of a pilgrimage and can be aptly translated "pilgrim feast" (cf. Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 303). Another Hebrew word (*mô'ēd*, "appointed meeting, set time") occurs in the plural form four times in Leviticus 23, and each time is translated as "appointed feasts" (vv. 2, 4, 37, 44). The exact number of annual feasts listed in this chapter is a matter of debate. Assuming a distinction between Passover and Unleavened Bread, (vv. 4-8) and not counting Firstfruits (vv. 9-14) as a separate feast, there are six feasts. A more natural division of the calendar as well as the structure of the chapter groups the annual feasts into (a) the *spring (and early summer) festivals* (that of Passover and Unleavened Bread including the barley sheaf ceremony [sometimes called Firstfruits but actually not a separate feast], followed 50 days later by the Feast of Weeks), and (b) the *fall festivals* of the seventh month (Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles).

23:1-4. In this chapter **the LORD** instructed His people to reserve certain dates in their appointment books (as it were) for national public worship and sacrifice. The Hebrew word *mô'ēd*, (pl., *mô'ādm*; NIV "appointed feasts") can refer to a *place* of meeting (as in *'ōhel mô'ēd*, the Tent of Meeting) but here means an appointed *time* of meeting (vv. 2, 4, 37, 44). The reference to the **Sabbath** (v. 3) is somewhat parenthetical since all the rest of the chapter deals with annual festivals rather than the weekly Sabbath. Its mention is perhaps a reminder of the whole sabbatical system of which the weekly and annual festivals were only a part (see chap. 25). For an Israelite, the weekly Sabbath was a time of rest (Ex. 20:8-11; cf. Gen. 2:1-3) and a time to recall his redemption from Egyptian bondage (Deut. 5:15; Lev. 23:43). After the introduction, chapter 23 divides into two sections, each of which concludes with the phrase, "I am the LORD your God" (vv. 22, 43). These two divisions are each subdivided into two sections identified by the

statement of institution, “This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live” (vv. 14, 21, 31, 41).

23:5. The **LORD’S Passover** was to be sacrificed **at twilight on the 14th day of the first month** (Abib, later called Nisan) to commemorate Israel’s departure from Egypt (Deut. 16:1-7), particularly the redemption when the death angel passed over Egypt and spared the firstborn in homes where the doorposts were spattered with the blood of the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:1-13:10). The first anniversary of the Passover was observed at Sinai (Num. 9:1-5) but it was not celebrated again till Israel camped at Gilgal across the Jordan in the Promised Land (Josh. 5:10-12).

23:6-8. The **LORD’S Feast of Unleavened Bread** was to begin on the morning after the Passover lamb was sacrificed and to last **for seven days (the 15th through the 21st)**. It was so called because it commemorated the hasty flight from Egypt when God told Israel not to leaven their bread (Ex. 12:14-20). **The first** and last days of this week were to be a time of **sacred assembly** (a holy convocation) when **no regular work** (i.e., occupational work such as farming or trading) was to be done. On this occasion it seems likely that the absence of leaven signified discontinuity between Israel’s new sustenance from God and her old sustenance, the bread of Egypt. The continuity was broken because God did not allow the Israelites to continue the normal leavening process (using a lump from an old loaf as **yeast** for the new bread).

23:9-14. This paragraph is regarded by many as the third distinct appointed feast in this chapter. (Barley was no doubt the sheaf to be waved because this feast occurred in March-April, when barley was first harvested. Wheat was not ready for harvesting till later, in June-July.) It prescribes a distinct ceremony (waving a **sheaf of barley before the LORD**) on a specific day (**the day after the Sabbath** [v. 11], normally understood as the 16th, following the rest day on the 15th [but some scholars place the wave sheaf on the 21st, e.g., Wenham, *Leviticus*, p. 304]), yet it seems more natural to regard this day as a special part of the Unleavened Bread celebration which was in progress at the time. After the Israelites entered the land, this **sheaf of grain** (the **first** grain of the barley **harvest**) was to be waved by **the priest** as a dedication offering before the Lord. A special **burnt offering** of a yearling **lamb** (v. 12), along with a double-portioned **grain offering** and an **oblation of wine** (v. 13), was to be made to the Lord as a part of this dedication. The Israelites were restricted from partaking of the barley harvest in any way until **this offering** was made. The statement instituting **a lasting ordinance** (v. 14) appears to unite the eight-day celebration of Passover/Unleavened Bread/barley firstfruits.

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.

23:15-17. 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.

23:18-20. 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.

23:21. 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**.

23:22. 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).

Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

"If I have anything left over after the groceries are bought, the kids are clothed, and the bills are paid, I might think about putting something in the offering plate." While most Christians would never make such a statement out loud, it lies behind the actions of all too many. We live in a world that has a "Give God the leftovers" mentality. As with so many prevailing attitudes and practices, God's desire for us is precisely the opposite. He wants us to show our trust in His provision by giving right off the top—setting aside a portion for His use as soon as we receive our income. The main way God established this principle with His people in the Old Testament was through the tithe. The Israelites were to give a percentage of all that they received—whether crops, livestock, or goods—at the outset. They were not to wait to see how much they would actually need and then give. Their giving, though a requirement of the law, was to be an expression of faith in God's goodness and care. Another vehicle God used to establish the principle of prioritized giving was the offering of firstfruits. When the yearly harvest began, an offering was to be made from the very first gleanings of whatever crop was coming to fruition. This too represented trust that the Lord would provide a full harvest. Giving at the very beginning honored Him. This principle was not an afterthought from the Lord or something He sprang on them unexpectedly. "When ye be come into the land" looks ahead to Israel's settling in the Promised Land. "Which I give unto you" reminded them that everything they reaped from the ground was by God's gift. They would be giving Him nothing that He had not already given them. The firstfruits offering was very simple. When harvest began, people were to take a sheaf of whatever grain they were gathering in and bring it as "firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest." It was not a large offering, nor a costly one. But it was very significant, for it showed that God was uppermost in their thoughts even as they began the important task of securing sustenance for another year. They were to remember Him and His gifts to them as they worked. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people are exhorted not to neglect the bringing of firstfruits to the Lord (cf. Neh. 10:35-37; Prov. 3:9; Ezek. 20:40; 48:14). The practice of offering firstfruits thus became an ingrained part of Israelite life. In the New Testament, the concept of firstfruits takes on a symbolic dimension. In 1 Corinthians 16:15, Paul called the household of Stephanas "the firstfruits of Achaia," meaning not only that they were among the earliest believers in that region but also that they were a promise of many more to come. In Romans 8:23, Paul noted that believers possess "the firstfruits of the Spirit." His work in our lives today gives a foretaste of the glory in eternity. Most significant, Christ Himself is the firstfruits of all who will be raised to glory in Him (1 Cor. 15:20,23). How can we withhold anything from Him?

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Cultures have different ways and traditions of marking time. In contemporary Western culture, January 1 is significant. It serves the official purpose of marking the beginning of the year and the unofficial purpose of reminding people that the "holiday season" is over. The months of November and December are the important months in the holiday season, especially for the retail industry. Unofficial special days such as Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving) and Cyber Monday three days later have become cultural staples for bargain hunters. But modern culture changes quickly. Recent years have seen Brown Thursday added to the unofficial calendar of retail merchandising. Cultures not only mark time differently with regard to specific calendar dates but also in terms of seasons. Some cultures have only two seasons: rainy and dry. For those of us who experience four seasons, spring is the season of new life, with Easter a fitting holiday in that regard as we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus. For the ancient Israelites, the first and seventh months were particularly important. As agrarian people, their existence was closely tied to their crops. Their major celebrations revolved around gratitude to God for what he had done for them in the past and how he was sustaining them in the present. Today's lesson focuses on one such celebration.

The beginning of the Jewish year is called Rosh Hashanah. This phrase appears in the Hebrew Bible only in Ezekiel 40:1, and scholars debate what exactly it is referring to in that passage. The Jews ultimately ended up with two calendars. The religious calendar began with the month of Aviv (Exodus 12:2; 13:4), also called Nisan (Esther 3:7). On the civil calendar, the month called Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2), later known as Tishri, serves that purpose; that is six months after the beginning of the religious new year. Rosh Hashanah begins the civil new year. Most important on either calendar were the three annual pilgrimage events: the Festival of Unleavened Bread (combined with Passover), celebrated in March or April; the Festival of Harvest, celebrated in May or June; and the Festival of Ingathering (also called Tabernacles or Booths), celebrated in September or October (Exodus 23:14-17). The first and third of these are weeklong observances. Between them is the single-day Festival of Harvest, which is also called the Festival of Weeks or the day of firstfruits (see Exodus 23:16a; 34:22a; Leviticus 23:15-21; Numbers 28:26-31; Deuteronomy 16:9-12, 16). This is the subject of today's lesson. The Festival of Weeks designation points to seven weeks of grain harvest. On day 50, the day that is seen to conclude this harvest, the Israelites celebrate Pentecost, a later designation that reflects the number 50. The correspondence between agrarian-based holidays and God's saving acts on behalf of his people were not mere coincidence. God acted powerfully to create a people and settle them in the promised land. The Israelites were to recognize that their presence in the land was a gift. The land really belonged to God, and he allowed the people to dwell there by his gracious provision. But as today's text opens, the people were not there yet. The setting of today's text is, rather, the encampment at Mount Sinai, where the Lord gave his law to Moses for the people (see Leviticus 27:34).

Major Theme Analysis

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

Principle of the Firstfruit (Lev 23:9-11)

9 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,

10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest.

11 He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

All we have comes from God (9-10)

From God because of seeking His kingdom (Matt 6:25-33)

25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

From God generously (1 Chron 29:14)

14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.

From God's hand (1 Chron 29:16)

16 O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.

From God so no one can boast (1 Cor 4:7)

7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

From God using 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,

From God supplying directly (2 Cor 9:10)

10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.

It should be acceptable to God (11)

Accepted 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.

Accepted because it is 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.

Accepted because of giving out of love (Eph 5:1-2)

1 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.

Accepted because of sacrificial giving (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.

Accepted because of steadfast faith (2 Tim 4:6-8)

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Accepted because of being in the household of God (1 Peter 2:5)

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Details of the Firstfruit (Lev 23:12-14)

12 And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the Lord.

13 Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the Lord, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin.

14 You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Firstfruit should be sacrificial (12)

Give sacrificially regardless of resources (1 Kings 17:12-16)

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. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" 15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Give sacrificially by giving of oneself first (2 Cor 8:2-5)

2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

Give sacrificially according to ability (Acts 11:29)

29 The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea.

Give sacrificially because it is better than receiving (Acts 20:35)

35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Give sacrificially because of the promises of God (Matt 19:29)

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Firstfruit pleasing to God (13)

Pleasing to God because of honoring God (Prov 3:9)

9 Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;

Pleasing to God because of being 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.

Pleasing to God because they came from what God has given (Deut 26:1-2)

1 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

Pleasing to God because they are 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.

Pleasing to God because they are 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,

Firstfruit should be given before we use it (14)

Before we use to support the common need (Acts 2:44-45)

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

Before we use to meet other's needs (Acts 4:34-35)

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.

Before we use to be merciful (Luke 6:34-36)

34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Before we use as giving to Jesus (Matt 10:42)

42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Sharing of the Firstfruit (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 gleanings from your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger: I am the Lord your God.' "

Do not use all of our firstfruit for ourselves (22)

Use to help the poor, especially other believers (Rom 15:26-27)

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.

Use to be obedient to God regardless of situation (1 Kings 17:10-16)

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. 14 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord gives rain on the land.'" 15 She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah.

Use to have a pure and faultless religion (James 1:27)

27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Use to provide for family (1 Tim 5:8)

8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Share our firstfruit with the needy (22)

Sharing by feeding, clothing, visiting and entertaining the needy (Matt 25:34-40)

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

Sharing at every opportunity by doing good (Gal 6:10)

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Sharing by providing to those in need when we have it (1 John 3:17-18)

17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? 18 Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Sharing with others is considered a pleasing offering 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.

Sharing using what we produced with our hands (Ephes. 4:28)

28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Concluding Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

Wave Offering of First Fruits

Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the Lord. Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the Lord for a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine. Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places'" (Leviticus 23:9-14).

One of the days during the Feast of Unleavened Bread will be a Sabbath. The day following this Sabbath is the celebration of First Fruits. On this day, the first sheaf of harvested barley is brought to the Lord and waved before Him. The grain is then left for the priest and for the poor. This is an act of thanksgiving for the Lord's provision and bounty. No one is to eat from the new harvest until the wave offering is made.

There is no direct Jewish Celebration of this today. However, given its placement between Passover and Pentecost and its emphasis on the Lord's provision, I see it as a reminder of the manna in the desert, which began shortly after the crossing of the Red Sea.

In terms of Christianity, it is worth noting that the resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred the day following the Sabbath. His resurrection corresponds to this wave offering. He is, Himself, a first fruits offering. As Paul says,

But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man *came* death, by a man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, then *comes* the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death (1 Corinthians 15:20-26).

Jesus' resurrection is the assurance of our resurrection. It is the promise that we will not see eternal death, but share in eternal life. When He rose from the dead, we became able to share in the new harvest, which I believe is the Holy Spirit.

First Fruits is such a simple holiday, and, yet, it has such significant meaning to us in the Church. Passover is our redemption, Unleavened Bread is our sanctification, First Fruits is our promise of eternal life and resurrection.

I have a personal First Fruits story to tell. I have for years looked upon the Old Testament as containing principles of righteousness living. This is not to be confused with legalism. It should rather be viewed as an attempt to view the Law as Paul did (see 1 Corinthians 9:9, 1 Timothy 5:18, and 1 Timothy 1:8). Anyway, I began meditating about the First Fruits offering and how someone who is not a farmer might participate. In my heart, I committed to a special practice to celebrate the event whenever I got a raise. The gross net increase of the first paycheck containing the raise would be a First Fruits offering to the Lord. This was not to gain approval or special status. It was simply to say thanks and acknowledge that He provides for me every day.

Following this heart commitment, not a month went by before my manager at IBM came to me and said, "I am giving you a raise. It is early and out of grid." The translation of these words are, "IBM policy says it's too early to give you a raise, but I am giving you one anyway. IBM says that your next raise should not be more than such-and-such, but I am giving you more than that." At the time this occurred, my wife and I had custody of my three nieces. IBM benefits did not cover them. My manager had worked out the raise to help our situation.

Pentecost (Shavuot)

'You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete Sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two *loaves* of bread for a wave offering made of two-tenths of an *ephah*; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord. Along with the bread you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the Lord, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord. You shall also offer one male goat for a sin offering and two male lambs one-year-old for a sacrifice of peace offerings. The priest shall then wave them with the bread of the first fruits for a wave offering with two lambs before the Lord; they are to be holy to the Lord for the priest. On this same day you shall make a proclamation as well; you are to have a holy convocation. You shall do no laborious work. It is to be a perpetual statute in all your dwelling places throughout your generations. When you reap the harvest of your land, moreover, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field nor gather the gleaning of your harvest; you are to leave them for the needy and the alien. I am the Lord your God' (Leviticus 23:15-22).

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 in 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.

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

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

The Jewish people were under the boot of the Roman Empire when Christ came. Many Jews were living in the promised land, although it didn't feel like it (Acts 1:6). Many other Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire (James 1:1). Since taxes were paid to a pagan government in both cases, the Jews undoubtedly felt as if they were paying rent to Rome wherever they lived. How can one pay firstfruits to God when that which would constitute such an offering goes to Rome? Jesus did not reverse this. He did nothing to regain control of Canaan for his people. Instead, he died for their sins and sent them to live among all nations as witnesses to his kingdom. Wherever Christians live, we are resident aliens or exiles on foreign soil (1 Peter 1:1). That is indeed God's will as it lines up with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20), but firstfruits giving can be difficult when secular governments take so much in taxes right off the top. Monetary giving is important, and the New Testament has principles for so doing (Matthew 6:1-4; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7; etc.). There are indeed certain parallels between old covenant and new covenant expectations for giving, but we should not press these too far since the old law is nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Still, the firstfruits concept should be deeply meaningful to Christians. Christ is designated as "firstfruits" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). As a result of Christ's redeeming work, we "have the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Romans 8:23). The result is that we ourselves have become "a kind of firstfruits" (James 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:103; compare Revelation 14:4).

But what does it mean to be "a kind of firstfruits"? Linking together the New Testament passages just mentioned leads to the conclusion that our witness is to center on representing the newness of life we have in Christ. Do others see the good result of Christ's redemptive work in us, or do they see something else? Are we being salty salt, bright light, a city on a hill, and stars shining in the universe? When people look at us, do they catch a glimpse of the good news of God's salvation? Usually we think of the firstfruits of the Israelites' flocks and crops being offered to God. But reversing the direction of the offering is Jeremiah 2:3: "Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest." The significance of this is in the very next line: "all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them." If such could be said about God's old covenant people, is his love and protection for us any less?

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. God is our provider, and He deserves the firstfruits of our harvest (Lev. 23:9-10)
2. God appoints stewards over His offering
3. It is important to follow God's instructions concerning His offerings (vss. 11-13)
4. We should give God the best that we have to offer
5. God's offering comes before our own expenses (vs. 14)
6. We cannot merely consume everything we earn. God commands us to share with the needy (vs. 22)