

Jewish Festivals (Part One)

We live in a world of religious confusion. This is nothing new due to man's desire to worship by his own devices.

Listen to the words of Jesus, "Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, 'Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.' He answered and said to them, 'Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother' and 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God.' Then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus, you have made the command of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (Matthew 15.1-9 NKJV)

God gave His commandments through Moses and the prophets. They included special occasions of remembrance. In this article, we want to look at those feasts and what they represented.

Passover

Probably the best known of the Jewish feasts, Passover commemorates the 10 plagues sent on Egypt. Exodus 12.29-30 speaks of God killing all of the firstborn in Egypt. The Israelites were instructed to kill a one-year old lamb, having neither spot nor blemish. Its blood was to be sprinkled on the doorposts of their houses. Inside they were to roast the whole lamb and eat it with bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

The lamb is referred to as, "the Passover lamb" in verse 21. Passover means to "spring over" or "to spare." As God saw the blood on the doorpost of the house, He passed over them. This feast was to remind Israel of coming out of Egypt.

Its connection to the New Testament is associated with Jesus' last week. Six days before the Passover, He entered Jerusalem with a great multitude of people proclaiming Him the King of Israel, John 12.13.

Feast of Unleavened Bread

Closely connected was the "Feast of Unleavened Bread" in Leviticus 23.5-8, Deuteronomy 16.1-8 and Mark 14.1. Starting on the fourteenth day of the month of Nissan, also called Abib, the Jews were to eat the Passover meal and remove all leaven from their houses, Exodus 12.15, and fast for six days. On the seventh day, they were to have a sacred assembly. Therefore, the "Passover" was observed on the 14th day of Nissan, roughly our April, and the 15th was the "Feast of the Unleavened Bread." According to Luke 22.7, it was on the day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was killed" when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper. He would become the Lamb of God and die so God would pass over our sins. Jesus used the fruit of the vine and unleavened bread as emblems of His body and blood.

Pentecost

First mentioned in Leviticus 23.9-21, Deuteronomy 16.9-12, and Numbers 28.16-21, it is also called the "Feast of Weeks" in Numbers 28.26 and the "Feast of Harvest" in Exodus 23.16. The Passover was always to occur on a new moon. Seven Sabbaths later would be 49 days; on the 50th day, they were to observe this feast. Therefore, Pentecost was always on the first day of the week, Sunday.

It was to celebrate the wheat harvest, Exodus 23.19. They were to bring the first fruits of their harvest and offer it to the Lord. Specifically, the offering was two loaves of two-tenths of an ephah. They were to be baked with leaven, Leviticus 23.17. Like the Passover, the Jews traveled to Jerusalem for its observance.

It was on the Day of Pentecost, Sunday, the Holy Spirit came on the Apostles in Acts 2. The first gospel sermon was preached and Christ's church was established. (to be continued) - - Dennis Tucker