

God's Holidays!

by Joelee Chamberlain

At other times I've talked with you about Christmas and Easter, haven't I? These are world wide celebrations from things that happened in the Bible, aren't they? Now, the Bible doesn't tell us that we have to celebrate the birth of Jesus at Christmas time nor His resurrection at Easter, though we can if we want to. But we can always remember what God has done for us and worship him at any time or in any of our celebrations, can't we? But did you know that there are some celebrations that the Lord God actually told His special people the Jews to have? Times of feasting and of great joy?

Yes, there are. God told Moses to tell the children of Israel, the Jews, about some special times of celebration that they were to have, some special holidays. Imagine being told to have a good time!! What fun! Some of these holidays are for the Jews to remember things that happened to them and then the Lord protected them, and other holidays are times for them to remember other things like when their crops were all grown and harvested and they had lots of food, remembering God's care of them. Sort of like our Thanksgiving time.

And the Lord gave the Jews 7 of these special times. They were actually called "appointed times", special times that the Lord said were to be kept. And the Lord carefully told Moses just when these celebrations were to be each year. Which month and even which day of the month. So they didn't have to wonder what days to have them on.

The Lord God first told Moses about these holidays way back as they were leaving Egypt, and they were to celebrate them wherever the tabernacle was. You see, the tabernacle was the special beautiful tent that was to be the center of their worship until the temple was built in Jerusalem in the promised land of Canaan. Then after that, the Jews would gather from all over the country at the temple in Jerusalem for the holidays. Yes, they were to get together at these special appointed times, at these holidays, and have a wonderful time of visiting each other and feasting and worshipping. (Of course, to feast means to have lots of good food to eat.)

I think these holidays, these appointed times, are very interesting, so I thought it would be fun today to talk about God's celebrations for His special people, the Jews. Would you like that? All right.

So. The first big celebration God gave them was Passover. It was to be in the Spring time. They were to start their year then, and Passover was to be on the 14th day of that first month. (The Jews have a somewhat different calendar than ours.) And Passover was to remember something that had happened to them and to celebrate how the Lord had taken care of them then.

But what was it that had happened to them, and how had the Lord taken care of them?

Well, we've talked about Passover before, haven't we? But let's review it; it's such a good story, and it's true -- it really happened! And we can read about it in the book of Exodus in

the Bible.

Okay. Remember that the children of Israel had been made to be slaves in Egypt, and the Lord had sent Moses and Aaron to take them out of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, hadn't He? But Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, didn't want to let them go, so the Lord had sent 10 plagues onto Egypt. The last plague was that the firstborn of each house would die that night unless a lamb was killed and its blood was put around the doorway and the people went inside the house and stayed there. If the blood was there, then the angel of the Lord would just pass over that house and not kill anyone in it. So the children of Israel and any believing Egyptians did as God had said. They killed a lamb and put the blood around the doorway and went inside and ate their dinner -- all dressed and ready to leave when they would be told to go. And that night the angel of the Lord passed over those homes.

But the people who had not believed what the Lord had said and so had not put a lamb's blood on their doorways, then their firstborn was killed that night. And it was their own fault, too, for not believing and not doing what they had been told by God, wasn't it? And that included Pharaoh's household. So in the middle of the night there was lots of crying. And the king of Egypt called Moses and Aaron and told them, "Take the children of Israel and everything you have, and get out of Egypt!" And the Egyptians told them, "Hurry!"

And they did. The children of Israel just grabbed their stuff and left and headed out toward the wilderness with Moses. And the Lord was leading them with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. And they hadn't even had time to let their bread rise for baking the next day, either; they just took the bread dough without its rising. So for the next few days their bread was just plain, flat bread.

Well, God wanted the children of Israel to remember how good He had been to them and how He had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt. So, as I just said, God told Moses to have the children of Israel to have a special celebration each year in the Spring time and to start their year then. And this celebration was to be at that very same time that God had delivered them from their slavery in Egypt, to remember this. It would be on the 14th day of the first month of their year, the day they had left Egypt. And they would call this holiday time Passover, remembering that the angel of the Lord had passed over them. And they would kill a lamb and have it for dinner to remember the Passover lamb whose blood had saved the lives of their firstborn back in Egypt. And then during that whole next week they would have the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That is, though they would have other food, the only bread they would eat would be a flat bread, an unleavened bread, to remember how quickly God had delivered them -- so quickly that their bread hadn't even had time to rise.

And those are the first two of God's great holidays, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. They are connected with each other, aren't they? They go together. So each year during that time the people would all get together with their family and friends and there would be 8 days of feasting and good times. What fun! And, of course, since they were remembering what the Lord had done for them, it was also a time of worship. It's so good to think about God and to thank Him for taking such good care of us, isn't it? And that's worship when we do that.

Well, later a special harvest celebration became connected with Passover. (To harvest means that when the grain or food is all grown, you cut it down and gather it in; you harvest the food.) And this harvest celebration was to be celebrated on the first day of the week (what we call a Sunday), the first Sunday after the Passover Day itself. This harvest was to celebrate the very first harvest of grain, that of barley, in the Spring time.

You see, different grains grow at different times of the year. And after the Jews reached the promised land of Canaan, they planted crops. In the Winter they would plant barley seeds which would then start growing. Then in the Spring when the barley was ripe, they would harvest that barley, and the people would remember that the Lord had made the barley to grow, their very first grain crop of the year. This feast time was called the Feast of Firstfruits, the first grain of the year to be harvested.

Well then, later, the day after 7 weeks, that is, 50 days after the Feast of Firstfruits, they would harvest another crop of a different type of grain, their summer wheat. So they would have yet another harvest celebration. Sort of a Thanksgiving time. And they would all gather together with their family and friends and have a time of worship and feasting and a good time. (I like feasting, don't you?!) This was called the Feast of Weeks, because it was 7 weeks after the Passover time. And the Lord gave the instructions for these feast times.

So the first four of these special celebration times, these holidays that the Lord gave to His people, were all in the Spring time each year, weren't they? Passover Day, the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Firstfruits were all 3 within one week. And then 7 weeks later, there was the Feast of Weeks.

But then came several months when God gave no special feasts at all. Why not? Well, the men would all be busy in the fields with new crops all summer, wouldn't they? They couldn't just leave their fields and vineyards and gardens and go get together and have celebrations; they had to work. Remember, they were just about all of them farmers, and they had to raise their own food.

But finally when the summer was over, about 4 months later in the Autumn, in the 7th month of the Jewish calendar, it was time to harvest the last crops of the year. And then there were 3 special times all in the same month. On the first day of that 7th month, there would be a day called the Feast of Trumpets. And trumpets would be blown, and after all of their hard work of working in their fields and then harvesting, the people rested that day.

Then a few days later on the 10th day of this same 7th month would be a very solemn day called the Day of Atonement. This was not a day of feasting; it was a day when the people would fast; that is, they wouldn't eat. This is the only special day that the Lord told His people to fast. The others were all times of feasting. But on the Day of Atonement they were to fast, and they were to remember that they were all sinners, and they were to be sorry and to ask the Lord to forgive them. And there were special sacrifices to the Lord on that day, the Day of Atonement.

But then 5 days after the Day of Atonement, starting on the 15th day of their 7th month, would come a whole week of good times! It would be at the time in the Fall when the winter wheat and the grapes and all their other crops were harvested. It was called the Feast of Tabernacles or the Feast of Booths. (Tabernacles means tents.) And this was a time where they would remember how very well the Lord had taken care of them during the whole 40 years that He had been leading them in the wilderness after they had left Egypt. Why, during that whole time the Lord had given them special food called manna and water, and even their clothes and shoes hadn't worn out! And they had camped out in tents or built booths, shelters, with branches during that time. So now for a whole week at the end of every year the Lord told the children of Israel were to have a big campout!! Wouldn't that be fun?! People would get together with their families and friends and build booths to sleep in and have feasting and good times. And they would remember how the Lord had taken care of their ancestors in the wilderness many years before and also how the Lord had made their crops grow well that year. It was like a week long Thanksgiving time with a campout! What fun!!

Yes, these special times that the Lord gave them would be wonderful times. On each of them there would be special ceremonies at the temple. And the people would all get together from all over the country in Jerusalem and worship the Lord and visit each other and have feasts. First they would do this for the week of Passover at the beginning of the year, than again almost 2 months later at the Feast of Weeks, and then finally for the whole week of the Feast of Tabernacles near the end of their year! Wouldn't those have been great times! Imagine being able to play for a whole week with friends who lived far away from you! And to eat all of that good food, too!

And these were all special fun times that the Lord wanted His special people to have in order to remember how much God loves them and how God had taken care of them and to remember that He is the One who makes their food to grow. They were times of great happiness and worship. And the Lord told His special people, the Jews, to have these wonderful celebrations every year throughout history.

And do you want to know something? They still have them! Yes, the Jews still have special holidays on Passover and eat unleavened bread then (and lots of other good food as well!). And they celebrate the Feast of Weeks. And they have special services on the Feast of Trumpets. Then on the Day of Atonement, many of them still fast, don't eat. And during the Feast of Tabernacles they still build little booths and even sleep in them. But they don't go to Jerusalem for these now (there is no temple there now), and they don't sacrifice lambs anymore, but all over the world the Jews still have these celebrations.

But we find out that these feasts were more than just fun times. We find out from the Bible that these special celebrations were also picture-prophecies! Yes! Not only were these holidays a time to remember things that had happened a long time ago, but they were also like little stories and ceremonies to show something very important that was going to happen someday!

Now, why do I say that? Because the Bible tells us so. Yes, the Bible tells about some of these prophesies that have already been fulfilled and about others that will be fulfilled someday

later. These holiday times are sort of like being able to see a little into the future! Let's just think about that for a minute.

You see, at that first Passover in Egypt, lambs had been killed to save the lives of their firstborn and to save them from slavery in Egypt. Right? And then each year after that lambs would be killed at Passover to remember those lambs that had died for them in Egypt. (Details were given as to how the lamb was to be chosen and dealt with, but we aren't going to go into that.) But then remember that John the Baptist in the New Testament calls Jesus the Lamb of God. And Jesus, the Lamb of God, died on the cross on an actual Passover Day about 1,500 years after that first Passover in Egypt. Jesus was killed and His blood was spilled to save us from our sins. In fact, the apostle Paul actually calls Jesus our Passover, the special Lamb of God that saves us from our sins. And the details given about how to deal with the little Passover lambs matched things that had to do with Jesus. So Passover really is a picture of Jesus and when He would die for our sins, isn't it? And the lambs were a picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God. The Bible is very clear on that.

But what about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the days following the actual Passover day? Well, this is a little harder for us to understand what it is a picture of. But first, just what is leaven? Leaven is the yeast that makes bread and dinner rolls rise and be all light and fluffy. Have you ever watched anyone make bread? They take just a little yeast and dissolve it in warm water and then add lots of flour and any other ingredients, and then they mix it all up together well to make the bread dough. After that they cover the bread dough and leave it in a warm place for an hour or so or even sometimes overnight. And then what happens? Well, the yeast is a tiny plant, and it starts growing inside of the bread dough. And as it grows, the yeast makes little bubbles of gas. And the bubbles make the bread dough start rising, start getting bigger and softer. After it is about twice as big as when it started out, eventually the bread can be formed into loaves or rolls and baked, and it will be all light and fluffy. And this softness was all caused by just a little bit of yeast at the beginning.

Well, the Bible tells us that sin is like leaven, like yeast. If we keep little sins in our lives, then those sins sort of grow like the yeast. That means that then it becomes easier and easier for us to sin. In fact, the Bible says that before we are saved, before we believe in Jesus, that we are actually slaves to sin! Ugh! But after we are saved, we aren't slaves to sin anymore, and we should stop our sinning. Of course, we can't stop doing all sins, because we're only humans. But we can try to live for the Lord and do what He wants. We can become more like the unleavened bread that doesn't have any yeast. And that is what the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a picture of, of our turning from sin. To obey God instead. Jesus died on Passover for our sins, and we should then believe that and follow Him. I know that may be a little hard to understand.

Okay, let's go on. So next, remember the Feast of Firstfruits that was to be held on the first Sunday after Passover? A feast connected with the first harvest of crops? Well, the first Sunday after the Passover on which Jesus died for us, 3 days later, on that Sunday, Jesus rose from the dead, He was resurrected -- on the Feast of Firstfruits, on what we call Easter Sunday! And the Bible clearly calls Jesus the Firstfruits of the Resurrection. He is the first one to be resurrected and stay alive after having been dead. And then the Bible goes on to tell us that yes,

Jesus was the firstfruits of the resurrection, but there are more who will be resurrected, and these will be like second fruits. But who else could be resurrected? Why, remember that the Lord Jesus will come back someday to be King over everyone and everything forever, won't He? And at that time He will resurrect everyone who has ever believed on Him, and they will be able to live with Him forever. So when the Lord Jesus Christ returns someday, Christians will be resurrected, be like a resurrection "harvest of souls", second fruits! Of course, that hasn't happened yet, but we know that it will someday because the Bible says so.

But let's go on and look at the next feast that the Lord gave to His people, the Feast of Weeks, to be held 7 weeks (50 days) after the Feast of Firstfruits. (It's later called Pentecost in the New Testament, pente meaning 50.) Remember, it was another feast about harvesting crops. Well, in the book of Acts in the New Testament it tells us that 7 weeks after Jesus rose from the dead, during the Feast of Weeks, on the day of Pentecost itself, that the Holy Spirit came with great power onto Peter and James and John and the other apostles. And they all began being able to speak in other languages, languages they hadn't known before! Wow! That was a miracle, wasn't it?! And a great big crowd of people, thousands of people who were in Jerusalem for this feast, heard them speaking these other languages, and they gathered and listened to the apostles. And Peter got up and gave a speech about Jesus, about how Jesus had died for our sins but then had been resurrected. And many, many of the people who were listening realized that they were sinners, and they shouted out to Peter, "Oh, what should we do about this?!"

And Peter told them, "Turn from your sins and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." And that very day about 3000 people believed on Jesus and were baptized! How wonderful! These people had been ready to hear the Gospel and had then believed it, so that was like a big harvest of souls, wasn't it?! And this happened on that special harvest feast, the Feast of Weeks.

So I think we can see very clearly from the Bible that those first 4 holidays that the Lord gave to His people for the beginning of their year were really picture-prophecies, can't we? They were picture-prophecies of when the Lord Jesus would come the first time and die for our sins and then be alive again 3 days later and then when Peter and the apostles would start preaching about this and thousands would be saved, would believe in Jesus.

But what about the other 3 special times that the Lord gave to His special people the Jews for the end of their year? What about the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement and the week-long happy Feast of Tabernacles? Might they not also be picture-prophecies that haven't happened yet? Many people who have studied this in the Bible believe that they are, and they certainly seem that way to me.

You see, it has been a long time, 2000 years so far, since the Lord Jesus went back to heaven. And the long summer without holidays seems to me like a picture of that time, the time between when Jesus went back to heaven and then when someday He will come back to earth again. It is the time right now, a time when the Gospel is going out to all the world sort of like a crop being planted for the Lord. But we know from the Bible that some day the Lord Jesus will come back to earth and be King of everything and everyone forever, don't we? And the Bible tells us that at that time when the Lord Jesus comes back and resurrects Christians, that the trumpet of God will be sounded at that time. And then many people will be sorry that they have

been sinners. And then the Bible says that the Lord will "tabernacle" with us; that is, that Jesus will live with us and be with us forever. Won't that be wonderful?! We don't know when that will happen, of course, but all through the Bible it tells that the Lord Jesus will come back and that if we have believed in Him, trusted Him, we can be with Him forever. And these last 3 special times that the Lord gave to His people are like pictures, prophesies of that wonderful time.

So I think we can see that these holidays that God gave are not only good times, they also, when taken all together, tell a story! Yes, they tell us the story of Jesus, both of His first coming and of His second coming. The first holidays in the Spring time tell the story of when Jesus came to earth the first time and died on Passover to save us from our sins and was resurrected on the Feast of Firstfruits, and then how the apostles told the big crowd about it during the Feast of Weeks, and thousands were saved. And then, remember, there is the whole summer where there are no feasts, where people were working in their fields. And that is like the part of the story where there will be the time after Jesus went back to heaven (where He is now). And that's the time we're living in now. And during this time we're working to tell people of the good news, the Gospel, that God loves them and that Jesus Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead, and if they trust in Him, they will be saved. It's sort of like we're "planting the seeds" of the Gospel in people, isn't it?. But then, though it hasn't happened yet, Jesus will someday come back to earth the second time. And the heavenly trumpet will be blown (remember the trumpets on the Feast of Trumpets?). And many people will be sorry for their sins (remember the Day of Atonement), and then the Lord Jesus will "tabernacle" with us and will live with us forever (remember the Feast of Tabernacles?)

So we can just look at the Jewish calendar and their holidays and then be able to tell the story of Jesus, both of the first time He came and when He will come again, can't we? Isn't that interesting?! I'm glad God gave us the story of our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, this way, aren't you?! I don't know if the people at the time of Moses could see this story, but we can easily see it now, can't we?

And I think it is so good and kind of God to have given special times of celebration to His special people the Jews so many hundreds, even thousands of years ago, don't you? God wants people to remember how He takes care of them and to remember that He has plans for them. But He also likes for us to have good times with our families and friends and to have celebrations and holidays and lots of good food and to use these as a kind of worship time to Him. We don't have to celebrate the special holidays that God gave to His special people the Jews, but we can read about those times in the Bible and understand more about God. And we can have our own times of celebrating and worship, too, can't we? (He takes such good care of us, doesn't He?!)

By the way, there are other names for those holidays that the Lord gave the Jews. As I said earlier, often the Feast of Weeks is called Pentecost. Pente means 50, and it was 50 days (that is, 7 weeks and 1 day after the Feast of Firstfruits) on Pentecost, that Peter gave his speech and so many people were saved. Also, the Jews call most of the holidays by a name in their Hebrew language, like Yom Kippur and Succoth. But we're all talking about the same things.

I hope you've enjoyed hearing about the special, happy holidays that the Lord gave to His people. I enjoyed talking about them with you.