

Three Feasts that Matter (Exodus 23:10-19)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

I. Review from the Previous Lessons

- a. The Lord has just spoken the Ten Commandments to the Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, about two months after departing Egypt.
- b. Now the Lord gives additional laws to Moses, which the Israelites are to follow when they reach the land of Canaan.
- c. In the previous lesson, we discussed how Eusebius, writing c. 320 AD in *Proof of the Gospel*, book 1, had explained the spiritual landscape in terms of three levels:
 - i. The *lowest level* was the way of life of the pagan Gentiles.
 - ii. The *second level* was the life of the Jews, embodied in the Law of Moses. Eusebius referred to this as a “first step” of spiritual progress.
 - iii. The *third and highest level* was the way of life that Jesus calls his followers to embrace. This is found in his gospel teachings.
- d. As Paul said, “For *whatever things were written before* were written *for our learning*, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (**Romans 15:4**, NKJV)
- e. If we dig deeper, we may be able to see some of the “shadows” that foreshadowed the “substance” or “realities” that Christ would bring later through His life, His redemption and His teaching.

II. More Laws on the Sabbath

- a. Read **Exodus 23:10-12**.
- b. Sabbath observances were more than just resting on the seventh day of every week. There is also a rest that was to take place *every seventh year*.
 - i. Recall that in the seventh year, the Jewish slaves would be set free (**Exodus 21:1-6**).
 - ii. In the Ten Commandments, the command to rest on the Sabbath was tied back to the Lord “resting” on the seventh day of creation (**Exodus 20:11**, pointing back to **Genesis 2:1-3**).

- iii. In the **Deuteronomy 5** version of the 10 Commandments, the 4th Commandment (Sabbath observance) also tied back to the fact that the Lord *delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt*.
- c. The sabbath requirements of resting on the seventh year include:
- i. No planting fields nor harvesting. The same for vineyards and olive groves. The land is to lie fallow.
 - ii. Whatever crops (or fruits) come up that year are for the poor to eat.
 - iii. Whatever the poor leave behind is to remain for the wild animals of the field.
- d. **Questions:** Why would the Lord require this, and does this reveal anything about the nature of God?
- i. Some have attributed this to agricultural benefits of crop rotation. If you plant the same crop (such as wheat or corn) year after year, it will deplete the soil. Taking a year off periodically, or rotating crops (for example to soybeans or clover, something that brings nitrogen into the soil) will replenish the soil. This also can help disrupt the crop insects' breeding cycle.
 - 1. However, that does not explain why you would stop harvesting from the *grapevines and olive trees* (perennial crops).
 - ii. This pattern would require the people to save up food, wine, olive oil, etc. in anticipation of the seventh year. It also would require more faith and self-control (to not pick the grapes or olives, for example). Obeying this command requires God's people to go directly against their personal financial interests!
 - iii. God is showing concern for the poor and wants his people to do likewise.
 - iv. The Lord cares even for the wild animals. The donkeys and oxen get every seventh day off; and every seventh year the wild animals are left the crops that the poor people don't use.
 - 1. In the **Proverbs**, it says that a righteous man will be kind to animals.
 - a. "A righteous man regards the life of his animal, But the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." (**Proverbs 12:10, NKJV**)

- b. “A righteous man has compassion on the lives of his cattle, but the affections of the ungodly are without mercy.” (**Proverbs 12:10**, LXX, OSB)
- 2. Personal stories about Christians who have shown unusual kindness toward animals:
 - a. I think of Adam T., a special member of our house church, who wanted to put out food for the *squirrels* (which almost everyone else would consider pests) in his yard. He even gives them names!
 - b. A friend in Turkey who shocked me when we were eating in an outdoor restaurant in that country. As we ate, he snuck food under the table to feed the *wild cats* who lived near the restaurant!

III. All Men to Appear Three Times Each Year

- a. Read **Exodus 23:13-19**.
- b. All the Israelite men were to “appear before the Lord” three times each year, at the time of three annual feasts.
 - i. The three feasts (also discussed in **Exodus 34:22-24**) were:
 - 1. Feast of the Unleavened Bread. This encompassed the Passover, plus the seven days immediately after that, when all yeast was to be removed from the community. There was a special feast on the last day. See **Exodus 13:3-10**.
 - a. This feast began at twilight on the 14th day of Nisan, the first month of the year. See **Leviticus 23:4-8**.
 - b. Typically, this would occur in March or April based on our modern calendars.
 - 2. Feast of Harvest (also called the Feast of the Firstfruits, **Numbers 28:26**; the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost.)
 - a. This feast was associated with the start of the harvest.
 - b. This was held on the 6th day of the third month, at the start of the wheat harvest (**Exodus 34:22**).
 - c. It was called the feast of weeks (sevens) because you counted off seven weeks after the Passover, and the feast began on the following day (the 50th day after

Passover). “Pente” is from the Greek word for fifty (πεντήκοντα, or pentekonta).

3. Feast of Ingathering, also called Feast of the Tabernacles. This was toward the end of their year, after bringing in the harvest.
 - a. This was a seven-day festival that started on the 15th day of the seventh month. See **Leviticus 23:33-44**. This would occur in the fall, perhaps in October based on our modern calendar.
 - b. The people were to live in temporary booths made of branches for seven days, to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt and their time in the Wilderness.
- ii. These feasts provide the backdrop for several events recorded in the New Testament.
 1. Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem every year at the time of the Passover. It was on one of these occasions, when he was 12 years old, that they lost track of him.
 - a. “His parents *went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover*. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it....” (**Luke 2:41-43**, NKJV)
 2. In **John 7**, Jesus is going to Jerusalem at the time of the *Feast of Tabernacles*.
 - a. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” (**John 7:37-38**, NKJV)
 3. The *Passover* (also called *Feast of the Unleavened Bread*) is the backdrop for several events in the New Testament during the life of Jesus and later in the ministry of Paul. Most famously, the Last Supper and the time of the crucifixion of Jesus are directly associated with the Passover observance.
 4. *Pentecost* is when the gospel message is first proclaimed openly, and the church begins, in **Acts 2**.

- a. Read **Acts 2:1-12**.
 - b. On the Day of Pentecost, Jewish men were gathered in Jerusalem *from all over the world* (Asia/Turkey, Mesopotamia, Roman empire, Parthian/Persian empire, Egypt, Africa, etc.).
- iii. The spiritual significance of these three events: they were significant shadows of things that would later be realized in Christ.
1. Obviously, the Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ, *our Passover Lamb*. Now that the lamb has been slain, we remove all the yeast (get rid of the sin), as Paul said in **1 Corinthians 5**.
 - a. “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (**1 Corinthians 5:6-8**, NKJV)
 - b. Christians are to “keep the feast” (not literally, but figuratively) by getting rid of the sin (represented by yeast) in our lives, now that our Jesus our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed!
 2. God used Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover and the celebration of the start of the harvest, as the chosen time for the apostles to proclaim the gospel to men from all over the world, for the first time.
 - a. This was the feast of the beginning of the (spiritual) harvest.
 - b. Peter preaches the gospel in **Acts 2**. Many Jews turn to God, repent are baptized; and the church begins!
 - c. God had planned this out to foreshadow something that would happen 1400 years later!
 3. What about those huts and the *Feast of Tabernacles*?
 - a. God used the contrast of the tabernacle (tent) versus the permanent structure (building) several places in Scripture to foreshadow how our bodies (this tent we

are in) are destined to be replaced by a permanent structure (our risen and transformed bodies) on the Last Day.

- i. The tabernacle/tent of the Jews under Moses was replaced by the stone temple under Solomon and those who followed.
- ii. In **Acts 15**, at the council in Jerusalem to decide what to do about the Gentile converts to the faith, James points back to a prophecy of Amos:
 1. “And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return And will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who does all these things.’” (**Acts 15:15-17**, NKJV; where James is quoting from **Amos 9:11-12**)
 2. Here, James equates “rebuilding the tabernacle of David” with the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
 3. James then uses the rest of this prophecy to say that this also pointed to the conversion of the Gentiles.
- iii. Peter speaks of his coming death as putting off his tent.
 1. “Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.” (**2 Peter 1:13-15**, NKJV)
- iv. Paul also speaks of the tent we must be prepared to lay aside, which will be replaced by a solid building provided by God.

1. “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (**2 Corinthians 5:1-8**, NKJV)

4. In summary, the three festivals (when all men must appear before the Lord) foreshadowed three significant events for Christians.
 - a. Passover/Unleavened Bread foreshadowed the crucifixion of Jesus, our Passover Lamb, and the time following, when we must get rid of all the sin.
 - b. Harvest/Weeks/Ingathering/Pentecost foreshadowed the start of the harvest of souls, at Pentecost in Acts 2. This was the founding of the church.
 - c. Tabernacles/Ingathering (I believe) foreshadowed what is yet to come: at the end, bringing in the final harvest when we our old bodies (tents) will be made replaced with new structures (temples/buildings). This will happen at “the end of the age”, as Jesus explained in the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, in **Matthew 13**.
 - i. At that time our bodily tents that we have been “camping out” in will be transformed and replaced by permanent bodies, which will never decay nor wear out (see **1 Corinthians 15**).

- c. Eusebius saw something significant in this requirement from the Law.
- i. In *Proof of the Gospel*, Book 1, Eusebius addressed the question of why the Christians accept the Jewish prophets, yet do not live like the Jews (they do not follow the Law of Moses). The answer given by Eusebius emphasized two main points.
 1. The Law of Moses was *just the first step*. The Christians have gone beyond that and *ascended the entire stairway* (of the superior law of the gospel of Jesus).
 2. God's plan from the beginning was to bless *all the families and nations of the world*, not just the Jews (**Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 22:18, 26:4 and 28:14**).
 - ii. Eusebius explained while God's plan was always to bless *all nations* through Abraham's seed, there was NO WAY that all nations could follow this particular command from the Law of Moses (all men to meet three times of the year in one place). Therefore, the Law of Moses could never accomplish the mission. It had to be replaced by a better law, one that could be followed by all people, anywhere on earth, for all time.
 - iii. Try to imagine every Christian male trying to go to Jerusalem where the temple was (or all going to *any single place* on this earth), three times each year!
 1. The current world population is 7.8 billion people (June 2020).
 2. About 2.3 billion identify as Christians.
 3. Let's say that taking out women and children, we have about 1 billion Christian men. Or even half of that, which would be 500 million. Can you imagine *all of them, from all over the world, descending on one city three times per year*, or even once? And how could they ever do that in the earlier centuries, where there were still millions of Christians who would have to travel such great distances? How could all of them travel to Jerusalem from the far ends of the world (think of India, China, Southern Africa, polar regions, South America, Southeast Asia, Australia, etc.)?
 4. Clearly, it would be *impossible* for believers throughout the whole world to try to follow *this part* of the Law of Moses!
 - a. Eusebius made a great point regarding the inadequacy of the Law of Moses for application to *all nations*.

- b. The Lord knew that the Law of Moses would have to be replaced by a better law, one that *could be followed by all nations*.
 - i. The Lord told Moses that He would send another prophet in the future who would be “like Moses” (**Deuteronomy 18:15-19**).
 - ii. In order to be “like Moses”, this prophet must be bringing new laws. The distinctive mark of Moses, in contrast to all the Jewish prophets who followed (up until the time of Jesus), was that he was the only one to bring new laws. All the other prophets just said, “Follow the Law given by Moses.”
 - iii. The new law (of the gospel) brought by Jesus replaced the requirement that all people must go to one place to worship God. (**Question:** Where did Jesus indicate that, in the gospels?)
- iv. Recall the question asked of Jesus by the Samaritan woman at the well, in **John 4**.
 1. Read **John 4:19-26**.
 2. When the Samaritan woman realized that Jesus was a true prophet of God (after He told her all about her life and her former husbands), she asked him an important spiritual/religious question that she had.
 3. The Jews worshiped *in Jerusalem*; while the Samaritans worshiped *on Mount Gerazim*, in Samaria.
 4. Jesus speaks of a time to come (when the Law would have to be replaced), when there would be no specific place to worship God.
 5. God seeks those who will worship Him in Spirit and truth, not based on a specific location.
 - a. The Law of Moses would have to be replaced; and the new Law would not have requirements that were impossible for the whole world to follow.
 - b. There would no longer be any specific location where people would be required to go in order to worship God.

- c. Only the “prophet like Moses” would have the authority to bring in this *new law*.
- d. Summary and Conclusion
 - i. God’s plan from the beginning was always to save people *from all nations*, not just from among the Jews.
 - ii. In the three festivals God reveals. 1400 years in advance, how He plans to redeem the human race from sin and death!
 1. The Passover and Feast of the Unleavened Bread foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus, our Passover Lamb and the fact that his followers must get rid of their sin (yeast) after the sacrifice of the Lamb.
 2. The Feast of Ingathering or Weeks (Pentecost) foreshadowed the beginning of the church, the *beginning of the spiritual harvest*, in **Acts 2**.
 3. The Feast of the Tabernacles, which foreshadowed what we are still looking for: the end of the spiritual harvest, when our own earthly tabernacles (our bodies) are transformed and replaced with permanent ones, on the Last Day.