

Over the next few weeks we'll be finding ourselves way back in the bible, in a book called Leviticus, now basically, alongside a list of do's and don'ts Leviticus has two major themes – SACRIFICES and FEASTS.

we're going to be looking just one chapter, and that's chapter 23 and

CHAPTER 23 begins a great section that deals with the FEASTS OF THE LORD

So up to this point there has been plenty on sacrifices, and there are the feasts

And the logic is this:

The SACRIFICES teach us the WAY TO GOD

But The FEASTS teach us something totally different

It's not **Reaching** out to God but **Remaining** with God...

Not the **WAY** to God but **WALKING** with Him...

I don't know if you've noticed or not, but the Lord has ALWAYS been into eating... Jesus was always inviting Himself to people's houses to FEAST with them, he still is...

Rev. 3:20's a good example: "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.

So as we'll see as we look at these feasts they're all about LIVING with Jesus

There are a couple of things it's worth pointing out at the outset:

Each feasts is about both **COMMEMORATION**

Which means they're REMINDERS of things that God has already done

And they're EXPECTATIONS

So as well as looking back there's a looking forward, something PROPHETIC to pick up each feast

This morning we're going to look at the first three: Passover, Unleavened Bread and First Fruits; so please pick up a bible and follow along as James comes to read to us from:

Leviticus 23:1-14

The Lord said to Moses, ²“Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. These are the Lord's appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as official days for holy assembly.

³“You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of complete rest, an official day for holy assembly. It is the Lord's Sabbath day, and it must be observed wherever you live.

⁴“In addition to the Sabbath, these are the Lord’s appointed festivals, the official days for holy assembly that are to be celebrated at their proper times each year.

⁵“The Lord’s Passover begins at sundown on the fourteenth day of the first month. ⁶ On the next day, the fifteenth day of the month, you must begin celebrating the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This festival to the Lord continues for seven days, and during that time the bread you eat must be made without yeast. ⁷ On the first day of the festival, all the people must stop their ordinary work and observe an official day for holy assembly. ⁸ For seven days you must present special gifts to the Lord. On the seventh day the people must again stop all their ordinary work to observe an official day for holy assembly.”

⁹ Then the Lord said to Moses, ¹⁰ “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you enter the land I am giving you and you harvest its first crops, bring the priest a bundle of grain from the first cutting of your grain harvest. ¹¹ On the day after the Sabbath, the priest will lift it up before the Lord so it may be accepted on your behalf. ¹² On that same day you must sacrifice a one-year-old male lamb with no defects as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹³ With it you must present a grain offering consisting of four quarts of choice flour moistened with olive oil. It will be a special gift, a pleasing aroma to the Lord. You must also offer one quart of wine as a liquid offering. ¹⁴ Do not eat any bread or roasted grain or fresh kernels on that day until you bring this offering to your God. This is a permanent law for you, and it must be observed from generation to generation wherever you live.

Well, as you’ll have noticed God begins with the **SABBATH** which technically’s not one of the 7 FEASTS

But It’s listed because it’s to be a WEEKLY CELEBRATION with God

And the first thing about the Sabbath to pick up on is that it WASN’T a holiday.... It was a HOLY day

It’s NOT for WORK... It’s for WORSHIP

If we were to go back to Exodus 20 we’d see that God makes it plain that the Sabbath, that is **The Importance of setting a day aside for the Lord** is non-negotiable.

And if we were then to jump to the NT, in Col. 2:16 for example we’d see that Paul says something along the lines of, don’t get your knickers in a twist about the day you chose to

have a Sabbath, it's not about which day Saturday or Sunday, No the point is that **ONE day out of SEVEN needs to be set aside**

NOT just to watch football or catch up on the Jeremy Kyle you've recorded in the week... But instead to have a day to give back to the Lord and be **revitalised, refreshed, and renewed** in Him

Yes we need to stay close to the Lord daily – but I believe the idea of one day – given to Him is really important – not only that, but it's a command...

If we really took God at His word here, there would be a lot fewer cases of stress.... fatigue.... and burnout.

So anyway, let's get onto these first three feasts:

Feast #1 Passover

One of the great days in the history of Israel was the day that God freed them from their captivity in Egypt. On that day they saw the awesome power of God as He killed all of the firstborn males in the land of Egypt who were not protected by the blood on the doorpost. Do you remember that we're told again back in Exodus that God sent Moses visit Pharaoh and demand the release of His people from Egypt.

Well it didn't go well because Pharaoh said No to God, and so God began to destroy Egypt with a series of plagues.

1. The waters of the river were turned to blood and the fish died
2. The land was covered with frogs.
3. The plague of lice.
4. The swarms of flies.
5. An epidemic that destroyed their livestock.
6. A nice plague of boils.
7. A devastating hail storm.
8. The plague of locusts.
9. The darkness throughout the land.
10. And the death of the firstborn.

So that was the Egyptians lot... but God had told the Jews His plan and so they knew that if they did certain things they and their household would be saved.

These were the certain things:

1. On the tenth day of the month they were to choose the best lamb from their flock.
2. On the fourteenth of the month they were to kill it and put the blood in a basin and with a hyssop bush they were to paint it on the lintel and the doorposts of their homes.
3. God told them that He would pass through Egypt that night and would strike the firstborn in all the land of Egypt, but He promised "When I see the blood, I'll pass over you and not destroy you."

So that was the basis of the feast and it was to happen each year on the 14th day of the first month which is called Nisan which equates roughly to March/April.

So at the beginning of every year they were reminded of their rescue by their awesome, loving and all powerful God.

The Passover meal is full of symbolism.

There are four cups of wine:

One drunk at beginning of the meal, known as the cup of sanctification

The second is drunk during the telling of the story of the Exodus, and that's the cup of Judgment, and to symbolise that, each time a plague is mentioned a finger is dipped in the wine and tasted.

The third cup is the cup of redemption. It's drunk when the bread is broken.

And the last and fourth cup comes at the end of the meal and it's the cup of praise.

And if you were to turn back to Exodus chapter 6 you'd see that these four cups represent what's known as the four "I wills" of God:

I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, (sanctification).

I will rescue you from their bondage, (Judgment).

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, (Redemption).

I will take you as my people, (Praise).

Then there's the Unleavened bread. It's called the matzah, and is striped and pierced for fast baking and to ensure that it doesn't rise.

There were three of these flat loaves wrapped in a white cloth.

The top piece represented God the creator.

The bottom piece represented man here on earth. The middle piece represented the priest that represented man's access to God.

The middle piece is broken and placed in a white cloth and hidden until the end of the meal. After the meal the children search for the hidden matzah. The one who finds it brings it to their father who redeems it from them with a coin. Then it's blessed and eaten whilst drinking the cup of redemption.

But as I said earlier – it’s great to see the symbolism looking back – commemorating what God did in the Exodus, **but the power kicks in when God’s people look forward** and see that the broken matzah represents the sinless life of our Lord. Being striped and pierced it reminds us of the stripes whipped across His back and His side pierced.

He was wrapped in white linen and hidden in the grave for three days.

Through His death and resurrection we are redeemed.

But there’s more, looking back, they also have bitter herbs to remind them of the bitter slavery.

And a sweet paste made of chopped apples, nuts, raisins cinnamon, and grape juice to represent the clay they used to make bricks in Egypt.

And greens dipped in salt water. The greens were to represent the hyssop used to sprinkle the blood on the door posts, and the salt water their tears and the passing through the Red Sea.

The Lamb of course was to remind them of the lamb that was killed...

What’s interesting is that the lamb for Passover was to be chosen on the 10th day of the month. **And you know what?** Jesus presented Himself to the Jews as Messiah on the day we now call Palm Sunday which was the 10th day of Nisan, the day the sacrifice was to be chosen.

And here’s an amazing thing, if you check out Daniel you’ll see that he gives a specific prophesy about this to the exact day: Daniel 9:25: tells us “Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven (or 173,880 days) will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler—the Anointed One—comes.

This is the day that David wrote about when he said in Psalm 118:

The stone that the builders rejected
has now become the cornerstone.

²³ This is the LORD’s doing,
and it is wonderful to see.

²⁴ This is the day the LORD has made.
We will rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵ Please, LORD, please save us.
Please, LORD, please give us success.

²⁶ Bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD.
We bless you from the house of the LORD.

²⁷ The LORD is God, shining upon us.

Take the sacrifice and bind it with cords on the altar.

This is the day that the prophet Zechariah wrote about when he said:

ZEC 9:9 Rejoice, O people of Zion!

Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem!

Look, your king is coming to you.

He is righteous and victorious,
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—
riding on a donkey's colt..

This also clears up an interesting problem. Jesus said in Luke 11:29 that the sign the Jews should look out for was the sign of the prophet Jonah, because as Jonah was three days and three nights buried in the whale, so the Son of Man, would be three days and three nights buried in the earth.

If Jesus was crucified on Friday, even with my maths I'd struggle to get three nights in the grave, but as Sunday was the 10th, the day Jesus presented Himself, then Passover, the day Jesus was crucified would have been on Thursday, because you see the Jewish day starts at sundown. This means that Jesus had eaten the Passover meal with His disciples on Wednesday evening and the next morning He was hanging on the cross, which would be Thursday. Is this controversial, is it heretical – well no it's not, but it is a bit shocking if you've never worked it out biblically before... but please do check it out in your bibles...

But where did we get the idea that He was crucified on Friday from? Probably, because the Jews wanted to get the bodies off of the crosses before the Sabbath, and we know that the usual Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday.

But the first day after the Passover the 15th day of the month was to be the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which verse 7 in our text tells us was to be an additional holy day, another Sabbath.

If we were to turn to John 19:31. We'd see that John tells us that it was a very special Sabbath; and that's the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

You see it's an interesting situation when there are two holy days in a row. Friday, the 15th was a Special Sabbath as well as Saturday, the weekly Sabbath.

Jesus was taken from the cross and buried on Thursday before sunset. He was in the grave Thursday, Friday, and Saturday night. When they came to the tomb on Sunday morning, He'd already risen.

Now in Egypt the Jews were told to sprinkle blood on the door posts and lintels – if you're going to do that I reckon you'd shut the door and probably end up with a cross of blood. That's just my thoughts, it's not gospel, but maybe God was trying to show them something?

When Jesus gave the cup to the disciples He said, "this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many."

The first Passover lambs were slaughtered and the blood applied to save each firstborn from death. **Jesus our Passover lamb was slaughtered to spare you from death.**

But the blood had to be applied to each individual the door of each house, it was an individual thing, and so it still is, to you must personally be protected from death by the blood of Jesus Christ, because it is by the shedding of His blood that our sins are wiped out.

You see **Sin is the killer.** We have all sinned, and so, our default position is that we're under the penalty of death, and the only escape from death is through the forgiveness of your sins which can only be found by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And of course – Jesus life didn't end at the cross – on the third day He rose again – on which day, the day of our third feast, the **Feast of First Fruits**

It was a feast that looked back to God's incredible blessings, but more than that it looked forward to what would happen when Jesus demonstrated the most amazing undeserved pouring out of love that there has ever been – yes He would die but on the feast of first fruits He rose again.

1Cor. 15:20 tells us Christ is the first of a great harvest of all who have died.

What about you – do you have the certainty that you will be included with Him?

And what about our friends, our family, our neighbours – are we praying for them? Are we showing them through the way we live our lives? Maybe it's time we spoke with them and told them the truth of eternity?