

The Feast of Firstfruits

The Specifications of the Feast

The feast of firstfruits is introduced by the phrase 'And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying' (Leviticus 23.9). This is a phrase which occurs **five** times in the chapter and is not used again until v.23. This therefore links the feasts of *Firstfruits* and *Weeks* (or Pentecost, vv.15-22) closely together. Why are they so closely related? Firstfruits speaks of the **resurrection** of the Lord Jesus; Pentecost of the coming and **residence** of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit could not be given until Christ had first been raised from the dead and glorified in heaven. The residence of the Spirit of God in true believers today is evidence that Christ is glorified (see John 16.8-11). **John 7.39:** *But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.*

It seems that Firstfruits was a **moveable** feast. It was to take place on the 'morrow after the sabbath' (v.11). This is likely the weekly Sabbath as this is the only Sabbath which has been mentioned so far in the chapter (v.3). This would mean the feast always fell on a **Sunday**. *Others* believe the reference to 'sabbath' refers to the festal Sabbath, i.e. the first day of Unleavened Bread which was a rest day (v.7). This would mean the feast always fell on the 16 Nisan. If so, it seems strange that it isn't clearly stated (like in v.5).

The feast was to take place in the **land** of Canaan (v.10) as it celebrated the first of the barley harvest. There was obviously no sowing, reaping and harvest in the wilderness. On this day, the sheaf of firstfruits (singular) was to be brought to the priest so he could **wave** it before the Lord for His attention and acceptance (vv.10-11). This was Israel's acknowledgement that the land and the harvest was the Lord's and His *right* was to the firstfruit. This sheaf was the pledge of many sheaves yet to follow. By the time of the Lord Jesus, the feast had assumed much tradition. **David Baron** notes: *At time of seed sowing, members of the Sanhedrin would mark off certain barley by going out to three of the fields within the vicinity of Jerusalem (sheltered valley across the Kidron) and laying in each field a hoop, fencing off that seed. When harvest time arrived the hoops would be found, the three sheaves cut down simultaneously and offered together as one in the temple.*

The *sheaf of firstfruits* is of great importance. In relation to the feast of Pentecost, firstfruits will be mentioned in the *plural* (v.17). Here it is in the *singular*. The word 'firstfruit' is that which is first in rank or place, that which is preeminent. It is speaking of Christ who is alone in His majesty and supremacy. Sacrifices accompanying this feast were a male lamb (*burnt* offering) and a *meal* offering (vv.12-13).



Barley

The Subject of the Feast

1 Corinthians 15.20: *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.* Christ is risen 'from among' the dead and 'the firstfruits of them that slept', thus He is the pledge of the harvest that shall follow (see v.23). **Christ** is the *barley* sheaf of firstfruits. When ripe, a barley head droops down – a picture of Christ in incarnation and humiliation, but now He is pictured as having been raised from the dead in the waving of the sheaf before the Lord.



Wheat

John Ritchie: *Christ honoured the day of the waving of the sheaf of firstfruits by presenting Himself to God as the Firstborn from among the dead. Israel's priest no doubt waved the sheaf in empty form before a rent veil in Jerusalem, but outside the city gates, God had reaped the Great Wave-sheaf from Joseph's tomb early that same morning. The Substance had come and the shadow passed away.*

In the year of the crucifixion, the feast of Firstfruits was not only on a Sunday (as always) but also on 17 Nisan, AD32. Christ fulfilled the feast by rising from the dead on this day. **Mark 16.9:** *Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.* It is most interesting to see that OT Scripture pointed to the seventeenth day of the first month as resurrection day. For example, this was the same day the ark came to rest on Mount Ararat (note the change of calendar in Exodus 12.2 which equates the *seventh* month of Genesis 8.4 with the *first* month Nisan) and the day in which Israel crossed over the Red Sea (Numbers 33.1-8), events which are both expressive of resurrection. We do well to remember the importance of Sunday, the Lord's day

(Revelation 1.10), for the Christian. Not only was it the day of our Lord's resurrection, but also the day the church was formed at Pentecost.

Christ is also the *Firstborn* from among the dead (Colossians 1.18). This does not mean He was the first to rise from the dead, but that He is the pre-eminent one among those who have risen, the *incomparable*. For example, Christ is the first to be raised from the dead never to die again. He is the first to enter into death voluntarily and at the time of His choosing. **Alfred Mace:** *Christ cannot be second anywhere. He is 'firstborn of every creature' because He has created everything (Colossians 1.15-16). He is also firstborn from the dead in connection with a redeemed and heavenly family. Thus creation and redemption hand the honours of supremacy to Him because of Who He is and of what He has done; 'that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.' He is first everywhere.*

The Significance of the Feast

1 Corinthians 15.23: *But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.* As noted in v.20, Christ is the pledge of the harvest that shall follow, but every man will experience resurrection according to their 'own order', a military expression meaning 'according to their own rank and regiment'. There is nothing haphazard about resurrection. It is a divinely ordered affair. **Revelation 20.6:** *Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the **first** resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.* The first resurrection takes place in two phases and includes 'they that are Christ's at His coming'. This is a phrase that is wider than 'in Christ' which only contemplates the church. Church saints who have died in the Lord will be raised at the coming of the Lord to the **air** (the rapture, 1 Corinthians 15.52; 1 Thessalonians 4.16); tribulation and OT saints will be raised at the coming of the Lord to **earth** (Daniel 12.2). This completes the first resurrection. The 'rest', i.e. unsaved will be raised after the millennium. **Revelation 20.5:** *But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.*

The sheaf of firstfruits was waved *before the Lord* 'that the people might be accepted' (v.11), or bring delight, pleasure and satisfaction to God. No wonder! The sheaf spoke of His own Son in resurrection glory. But there is more truth here. A risen and ascended Christ is the ground of our acceptance with God. The resurrection of Christ is *conclusive proof* of our justification in the sight of God and the acceptability of His sacrifice (Romans 4.25).

Israel were not to eat *bread* (Christ *our* life), *parched corn* (Christ *in* death) or *green ears* (Christ *in* life) until the wave sheaf had been offered (v.14). This reminds us of the challenging truth that God must have His portion **first** and suggests there could be no *realisation* or *enjoyment* of harvest blessing (our portion) until Christ had been raised from the dead (cf. Romans 5.1-11).

The resurrection of the Lord Jesus is a truth of un-paralleled significance and importance. It declares:

- **Christ's sonship:** **Romans 1.4:** *And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*
- **God's satisfaction:** **Romans 6.4:** *Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.* The sheaf of firstfruits was waved 'before the Lord' (v.11). In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus there was, first of all, something for God. As long as Christ was in the tomb, the glory of the Father was at stake. His glory demanded resurrection. *The resurrection is the seal of the great work that Christ came to earth to do ... the crowning proof that the ransom He paid for sinners was accepted.*
- **Our salvation:** **1 Corinthians 15.17:** *And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*
- **World's sentence:** **Acts 17.31:** *God has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. ESV*