

XIII. Sacred Time: Festivals

August 27, 2017

Chapters 17-19

Purpose: To see in Israel's sacred festivals the celebration of redemption that we experience through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Key Verses: ³⁷**On the last day of the feast, the great day,** Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, "Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified (John 7:37-39).

A. The *Haggim* (Pilgrimage Festivals)

Longman: The three *Haggim*, that is, pilgrimage festivals ... were the three times each year that every Israelite male was to travel to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices. This pilgrimage is what binds these three festivals together.... These three festivals are also united in that they commemorated both agricultural and redemptive historic milestones (p. 185).

1. The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread

a) Passover and Exodus

- (1) The Exodus was a pivotal event in the history of the OT people of God
- (2) The Exodus was a time of liberation as well as an awesome display of God's power
- (3) The biblical plagues are a context between the true God, Yahweh, and the false Egyptian gods
- (4) The last plague (death of the firstborn) is relevant to the Passover celebration (Ex. 12:12)
- (5) Israel was told to celebrate a festival annually to commemorate the Exodus

Longman: Indeed, it is interesting to note how the historic, first-occasion Passover is narrated in Exodus 12-13. It is not told merely as a historical memorial, but rather it comes to us in the form of instructions for how to observe the meal and the broader festival, not only that special first night, but for years and years to come (p. 187).

b) Ritual Instructions

- (1) Hebrew *pesah*
- (2) Ex. 12:23 – the Lord would “pass over” the doors of the Israelites
- (3) Tenth day of first month Nisan – select a 1-year old lamb without defect
- (4) Selected by heads of households, who were to perform the sacrifice
- (5) Fourteenth day of Nisan – animal was to be sacrificed
- (6) Blood drained and smeared on doorframes of houses
- (7) Meal eaten on the night of sacrifice

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- (8) Accompanied by a vegetable (bitter herbs) and a grain (bread without yeast)
- (9) Further cooking instructions were given
- (10) Uneaten meat must be burned
- (11) Bones of sacrificial animal could not be broken
- (12) Celebration limited to Israelites and household slaves, not to hired slaves and foreigners

Longman: It is an error to think of this blood as magical. It was rather symbolic of death, and this sacrifice ... was an atoning sacrifice. The animal stood in the place of the occupants, particularly the firstborn occupants of the house.... The sacrifice of the animal atones for the sin of the people, the blood smeared on the doorposts purifies those within, and the eating of the sacrificial meat consecrates those who consume it. By participating in the Passover ritual the people sanctify themselves as a nation holy to God (cp. Ex. 19:6) (p. 188).

- c) The Relationship between the Passover and Unleavened Bread
 - (1) The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a springtime agricultural festival
 - (2) Passover and Unleavened Bread are united in every Biblical text
 - (3) The Festival of Unleavened Bread lasted seven days, beginning with the Passover meal
 - (4) Passover began on the fourteenth of Nisan and Unleavened Bread ended the twenty-first of Nisan

Longman: The Passover and the accompanying Festival of Unleavened Bread were accordingly celebrations of redemption marked with hope. These characteristics make it amenable to association with a later climactic redemption that has brought hope to the world (p. 190).

d) New Testament Connections

Longman: We have already anticipated the deep connections between the Passover and Jesus Christ when we explored the connection between the Passover sacrifice and Christ's sacrifice. According to 1 Corinthians 5:7, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed for us." In the verse that follows, Paul plays with the connection between the Passover and bread without yeast: "so let us celebrate the festival, not by eating the old bread of wickedness and evil, but by eating the old bread of purity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8).... The first bread, the symbol of wickedness, is bread with yeast, according to the Greek, and the bread that represents purity and truth is the bread without yeast.... Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover lamb. He was crucified on the eve of the Passover, and the gospel of John adds the significant note that the soldiers did not break his legs—though that was the usual practice in a Roman crucifixion—in keeping with the practice of leaving the Passover sacrifice's legs intact (see John 19:31-37) (pp. 190-191).

2. The Festival of Weeks (Pentecost)

a) Old Testament Celebration

Longman: The Festival of Weeks was the second *hag* or pilgrimage festival of the year where all Israelite men were required to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem (Dt. 16:16). These pilgrims were to bring gifts to the Lord at this time (p. 191).

- (1) Festival of Harvest – date corresponded to the first grain harvest in the year

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- (2) Firstfruit offering waved before the Lord on the day after the Sabbath (associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread) on which it was brought – symbolically acknowledged that the harvest comes from God
- (3) Seven weeks then counted off – also called the Feast of Weeks

Longman: Specifically, on the day after the seventh Sabbath, the fiftieth day, the people were to offer up an offering that commemorated the grain harvest. Thus, this festival was also known as the Feast of Weeks, described in Leviticus 23:15-22.... Pentecost with its association with the grain harvest, was a day of great joy and celebration. Work ceased for the occasion, and a sacred assembly was held, presumably to offer thanks for the harvest before God. The offerings were large for this festival, probably because of the abundance that the people enjoyed in connection with the harvest. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the special concern expressed toward the poor and foreigners (Lev. 23:22) (pp. 192-193).

b) New Testament Connections

Longman: Unlike Passover and Tabernacles (below), this festival is not connected in the Old Testament to a redemptive even like the Exodus. It is connected exclusively to the agricultural cycle. It is in the New Testament that we have an association between this Israelite/Jewish festival and an act of God's redemption in history. We immediately recognize this when we realize that the festival goes by yet another name in the New Testament.... Jewish people in the first century referred to this festival as Pentecost, formed from the Greek word "fifty," which refers to the fifty-day period after the offering of the first bit of grain. And Pentecost is immediately recognized as the day when, in a very important sense, the church was founded (p. 193).

- (1) The church established on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2)
- (2) Jews from all over the world were gathered in Jerusalem (Acts 2:9-11)
- (3) The Spirit of God descends on Christians with a rushing wind and flaming tongues of fire (cp. Job 38:1; Ex. 3)
- (4) A reversal of Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel episode
- (5) Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-32 (cp. Acts 2:17-21)
- (6) Spirit poured out on both genders, all social classes, and all ages (cp. Num. 11:29)

Longman: Is it coincidental that the church was founded on Pentecost? Hardly. Remember that this festival was a harvest festival. Many places in the New Testament speak of the fruits of preaching the gospel as a harvest. The many converts on Pentecost, thus, were the firstfruits of the harvest of people who would turn to Christ, thanks to the power of the Holy Spirit (p. 196).

3. The Festival of Tabernacles

a) Old Testament Celebration

- (1) Feast of Ingathering or Festival of Tabernacles / Booths (*sukkot*)
- (2) Five days after Day of Atonement, on fifteenth day of the seventh month (Tisri)
- (3) Mid-October – final efforts at harvesting the crops

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- (4) The act of final harvest was a time of great rejoicing and celebration (cp. Dt. 16:14)
- (5) Instructed to live in makeshift booths made out of branches and leaves (cp. Lev. 23:42-43) – connection with the Exodus-wilderness-wanderings complex of God’s redemption
- (6) The festival lasted seven days, with a concluding ceremony on the eighth day
- (7) The seven days of the festival involved an astonishing number of sacrifices (cp. Num. 29:12-40)

Longman: The total number of sacrifices offered at this festival was more than any other, and for this reason Tabernacles is sometimes simply called “the Feast” or “the Festival.” Numbers 29 supplies some figures.... The total number of animal sacrifices on these eight days was 192, and this excludes the regular daily sacrifices and the non-animal sacrifices (p. 198).

b) New Testament Connections

- (1) Feast reinstated in time of Nehemiah (Neh. 8:13-18)
- (2) Feast observed during New Testament (see John 7)

Longman: In John 7, Jesus’ brothers wanted Him to go to the Festival of Shelters in order to publicly display His miracles. He told them He would not go, but He did go anyway without their knowledge. By the first century, we know that a ritual visit to the Pool of Siloam was included in the festivities. Water was taken from the pool and poured out as an offering to the Lord. Many biblical scholars believe that this ritual was behind Jesus’ comments about living water on the last day of the festival (John 7:37-39) (p. 199).

B. Very Special Sacred Times

1. The Festival of Trumpets

Longman: The Festival of Trumpets announced the onset of the seventh month of the year, the month with the largest concentration of festivals. It is mentioned in Leviticus 23:23-25 and Numbers 29:1-6.... In the first place, it was a day of rest from work and a day on which there was to be a sacred assembly to worship God. But what was the significance of the day, and what was the purpose of the trumpets? ... The timing of this festival is likely significant. It was the first day of the seventh month. This month was the most holy month in that, besides Trumpets, there were two other important festivals in the seventh month: The Day of Atonement and the Festival of Tabernacles. Thus, the first day announced the onset of a particularly consecrated month (pp. 201-202).

- a) The Hebrew word for trumpets is *teru’a*, which means “blaring”
- b) Trumpet could either be a *shopar* (ram’s horn) or *hatsosera* (a metallic instrument)
- c) In Scripture, trumpets often announce the presence of God (cp. Ex. 19, Jos. 6:5, 16)

2. The Day of Atonement

- a) Old Testament Celebration

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Longman: Sadly, the tenth chapter [of Leviticus] describes the sin of two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu... Leviticus 16, which contains God instruction for this ritual, roots the origin of this ritual in that sin. The sin of Nadab and Abihu elicits another warning to Aaron to be particularly careful in God’s presence. He is reminded that if he is negligent and goes into God’s presence at the wrong time, he will die (Lev. 16:2). He is told that he may enter the Holy of Holies, the back third of the tabernacle, only once a year and for a special purpose—the annual purgation of the sanctuary, which involves sacrifices for the atonement of the priests’ sins, as well as the transgressions of the people. The bulk of Leviticus 16 describes the ritual, and it is both interesting and symbolically rich (p. 203).

- (1) The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month
- (2) The high priest had to be ritually prepared to enter the Holy of Holy and make sacrifices for himself and his family
- (3) The emphasis of the ritual was on purgation of sin, and the sin offering (*hattat*) was the most appropriate sacrifice for this purpose
- (4) Two goats would be selected for the people of Israel, one to be sacrifices and one to be driven into the wilderness
- (5) The high priest would begin his journey into the heart of the tabernacle carrying the blood of sacrifice

Longman: We need to remember that to penetrate this far into sacred space was not taken lightly. Only the high priest could do it, and only once a year. Later rabbinic prescriptions say that they high priest could only go with a rope tied around his waist. Another priest in the courtyard would hold on to the other end of the rope. As long as the people outside heard the tinkling of the bells worn on the fringe of the priest’s robe, everything was fine. However, if the bells stopped for an appreciable length of time, then they knew that the priest had met his end in the tent, and they were to drag the body out by the rope. There is no record of this actually happening, but the story reminds us of the great seriousness of this ritual (p. 204).

Longman: The high priest’s journey into and through the tabernacle complex had three stops, and at each location he would perform a purgative ritual. He would start with the most holy spot, namely the Holy of Holies. Once there the priest would take the incense that he had brought into this innermost shrine and burn it on coals so that it created a large cloud. He then would take the bulls’ blood and sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover atop the ark of the covenant. He would put more of the bull’s blood on his finger and sprinkle the blood seven times on the ark. ... The blood of the bull was to cover his sin and the sin of his family. Next, he would take the blood of the slaughtered goat of the people and perform the same ritual acts in the Holy of Holies. Thus, there were two sacrifices at this first stop, one for his priestly sins and one for the sins of the people (pp. 204-205).

- (6) The first stop was in the Holy of Holies, where the mercy seat was sprinkled with blood
- (7) The second stop was in the Holy Place, where the incense altar was sprinkled with blood

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- (8) The third stop was at the bronze alter of sacrifice where the blood sprinkling was performed yet again
- (9) The scapegoat “for Azazel” (Lev. 16:8) was released into the wilderness – it was clearly an act of substitution for the purpose of cleansing and atonement

Longman: The ritual was extremely important for Israel. Leviticus 16:30 summarizes its effect: “On this day, atonement will be made for you, and you will be cleansed from all your sins in the LORD’s presence” (p. 206).

b) New Testament Connections

- (1) The Day of Atonement is mentioned at “the Fast” (Acts 27:9)
- (2) The Day of Atonement provides the background to Hebrews 6-9
 - (a) Christ’s act of atonement is seen as a final, once-and-for-all entering of the real Holy of Holies, namely heaven itself
 - (b) By doing this, Christ fulfilled the Day of Atonement; no other atoning act is necessary, and so the rituals surrounding this Day are no longer observed

C. Purim: Latecomer to Sacred Time

1. Historical Providence and Purim

- a) The festival of Purim is established by the events in the book of Esther
- b) Haman attempted to destroy all the Jews in the Persian empire, setting the date of the massacre—March 7—by the throwing of lots (*purim*)
- c) God providentially used Esther and Mordecai to thwart Haman’s scheme and save the Jews
- d) The Battle between Amalek and Israel
 - (1) Amalek attacked Israel in the Exodus (Ex. 17:8-16)
 - (2) Amalek was to be destroyed (Ex. 17:14; cp. Dt. 25:17-19)
 - (3) King Saul had a chance to destroy Amalek and failed (1 Sam. 15)
 - (4) Haman was a descendent of Agag, king of Amalek
 - (5) Mordecai was a descendent of Kish, the father of Saul
 - (6) In the book of Esther, the divine command of Exodus 17 and Deuteronomy 25 is finally carried out

Longman: Esther 9:20-32 establishes the celebration of Purim. It is named “lots” after the word used for the device that Haman and Ahasuerus used to determine the date for the slaughter of the Jewish people. Purim was a remind that though God’s people seemed to be in the hands of fate, they were really in the hands of God. Purim was an annual festival of joy and celebration

2. The Trajectory to Christ

- a) There is no direct connection between Purim and Christ

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- b) Similar principle at work – evil men and women, and behind them Satan, wanted to see Jesus dead
- c) God overrules evil for our salvation – it is this great act that we celebrate, not on Purim, but throughout our lives

D. Selected Questions for Further Reflection

1. Why don't we observe these festivals today?
2. Even if we do not observe these festivals today, are there any principles in them that inform our present worship?
3. How do we find and express atonement today?
4. What is the significance of Christ's performing the ritual "once and for all" in heaven?
5. Purim celebrated God's providence in the lives of the Jewish people living in Persia. Where do you see God's providential hand working in your life?

Next Week: Begin Fall Quarter (don't forget Area Bible Studies on Hebrews!)