



The Law given through Moses*

15. The Feast of Weeks

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THE SECOND of the three great celebrations ordered by the Law was the Feast of Weeks. This was really the harvest festival, not a prolonged break from work but a sustained recognition of God as the Giver of all good. Again we feel compelled to recognise that there was a hidden meaning, a ritual prophecy of things to come, in the single sheaf of the first-fruits and the two loaves presented at the end of harvest.

Pentecost was supposed to be the beginning of the Feast of Weeks, but any attentive student will perceive that there is a difficulty in this. Certainly the present writer has found a difficulty, arising in the first instance from a consideration of agricultural realities and rendered greater by every effort to get help from commentators. We should naturally feel diffident in making any suggestion that learned men of the past had made a mistake in such a matter, but there have been many errors of interpretation, many changes of ceremonies to suit human convenience, and so many conflicting opinions of learned men cancelling out against each other, that an earnest student of the Bible may venture to read for himself and form his own conclusions.

The Jews, even in ancient days, undoubtedly perpetuated some blunders in the interpretation and application of their Law. They pushed the scapegoat over a cliff to kill it, instead of letting it go free, and some of them waved the sheaf at Passover instead of the harvest, needing to use either an imported sheaf or one saved from the previous year. In each of these matters they spoil the type. Such errors do not inspire confidence.

Modern Gentiles are surely no better, for the men who are recognised as authorities are often unbelievers. It seems quite unreasonable for anyone to object to the use of this word, for an unbeliever is clearly one who does not believe, and if a man repudiates the claim so continually

repeated in the words, "The LORD said unto Moses", obviously in relation to this matter he is an unbeliever. The higher critics regard Exodus as the more ancient writing. Leviticus and Numbers are treated as post-exilic! Rabbinical tradition is apparently regarded as of equal authority. We cannot expect any light to come from this confusion.

HERE, then, is the initial difficulty in understanding the Feast of Weeks, as it was observed at least in the later days of Israel's history. It began with the Day of Pentecost, which came seven weeks after Passover. The paschal lamb was slain on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Hebrew year was based on the moon and only extended 354 days—twelve lunations. It was kept in line with the sun by the rule that it must begin in the spring, and so, when the elders observed that the signs of spring were late, they inserted an extra month. Obviously this would be needed usually, but not always, in the third year. The eleven days in which the lunar year fell short of sun time would amount to more than a month in three years but rather less than a month in two. By noting the signs of spring, the elders were able to keep their year according to the seasons, never quite in step with the sun but never far out. It was not an ideal way, but it was practical, and it worked better than the early efforts of Gentile authorities to determine the exact duration of the solar year.

It is obvious, however, that a year which was not quite in step with the sun would be even less certain in its weather conditions than the year to which we are accustomed. There would often be a difference of three weeks in relation to sun time between the beginning of the lunar year at its earliest and its latest. How then would it be

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possible that a certain date should be fixed for the presentation of a perfect sheaf of ripened grain, seeing that the date would be according to the variable lunar year, whilst the ripening of wheat would be determined by the sun? Furthermore, how could it ever be possible, even in Palestine, to present such a sheaf as early in the year as Pentecost, seven weeks after the Passover, only nine weeks from the beginning of spring?

We are told that barley ripened in the district of Jericho even at Passover time, but that was not the land in which the harvest was to be celebrated. Jericho is a thousand feet below sea level. It is in the greatest natural suntrap in the world, and with a climate utterly different from the uplands of Judah. Seven weeks later, barley in certain years might be ready in Palestine, but assuredly barley was not the corn contemplated for the sheaf to be waved before the Lord. It has always been recognised as inferior to wheat. Indeed, it was quite definitely specified that wheat was the grain to be used for this solemn ceremony (Ex. 34:22).

In the 'Students' Helps' printed at the end of many Bibles, it is mentioned that there was a Passover in the second month for those who were unable to observe the appointed day, and seven weeks from the fourteenth day of the second month might reach to wheat harvest. Perhaps this measurement might so stretch to the time when wheat would be ripe if a recent introduction of the extra month had put the lunar year behind the sun, but not when it was in front. In any event, however, this suggested explanation is surely too feeble to be accepted for a moment. The Passover sometimes observed in the second month was only a concession to human weakness. The true Passover was that specified in Exodus, beginning on the fourteenth day of the first month.

IT IS strange that there should have been so much straining over this matter, for, if we ignore all later tradition and turn to the Law, we find no authority for this idea of waving the sheaf seven weeks after the Passover. In the Law we have the Feast of Weeks clearly defined: "Seven weeks shalt thou number unto thee: begin to number the seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn" (Deut. 16:9). In Exodus we read: "thou shalt observe the feast of weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest" (34:22).

If less detailed references are read in the light of these plain statements, the whole matter becomes clear. It was the first sheaf of wheat that was to be waved before the Lord, and the seven weeks were to be numbered from that day onward. There was no fixed date for the opening ceremony of harvest, just as there can be no fixed date for the grain to be ready.

Certainly no fixed day was possible in the lunar year, which might be either a week or two in front of the sun or behind it. In a country where at that time of the year fine weather was almost certain, experienced farmers, as they observed the crops from day to day, could determine the exact time for cutting the earliest of the wheat to secure the best results. There was a period of semi-fasting before the opening ceremony, for nothing of the new crop, dry or green, was to be eaten. Then would come the day of decision. The wheat is ripe. Not yesterday, nor tomorrow, but today, the first perfect sheaf of wheat can be taken to be solemnly waved before the Lord.

ALL country people know that at the end of summer yeast is far more abundant than at the beginning. It is one of the main active principles by which Nature begins to break down the various organisms she has made in order that the substance may be transformed and worked up into other organic forms. If we leave fruit exposed only for a few days, it begins to ferment, and in a very short time it becomes repulsively corrupt. Yet it is possible to establish such conditions that, as a result of this fermentation, a clear liquid can be formed, not only with the qualities of the fruit from which it is derived, but also with a pervading spirit which makes it keep indefinitely.

This is one of the many wonders of Nature which men use without understanding. There are other agents of decay in Nature, several different kinds of fermentation, many and various moulds, and continuous process of change. Human life is often menaced by such organisms, but human life would be impossible without them.

There are some products of Nature which can be kept through the year until the next crop is ready, and there are a few which are so resistant to change that they may be kept for many years. In this, as in many other ways, wheat is pre-eminent. It will last far longer than other cereals; it is the grain from which we get the staff of life.

It is a natural loaf containing all the elements that we need in our food, and so well-balanced that, if men will refrain from tampering with it, it will give us complete sustenance. A selected sheaf of wheat cut at the beginning of harvest is a perfect type of a Divine gift, free from corruption and able to give us life. It was fitting that such a sheaf as the firstfruits of harvest should be waved before the Lord in thankfulness to the Giver before men should eat anything from the new crop.

THE harvest in which men are so vitally interested is often used in Scripture as a type of that great harvest of souls which is being prepared by God. Readers will remember too that Christ is spoken of as "the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). They will also remember that James speaks of himself and his brethren as "a kind of firstfruits of [God's] creatures" (Jas. 1:18). As we

mentioned [last month](#) in dealing with the feast of Passover, all who believe the New Testament will realise that Christ could be appropriately symbolised either by something perfect or by something with the principle of corruption in it, according to whether we contemplate his perfect character or the corruptible nature which he bore, and from which he effected a deliverance. Such perfection could never be used as a symbol for ordinary men, for they are imperfect in both nature and character.

So, under the Law, the absolute firstfruits of the natural wheat harvest were presented as a single sheaf, free from defilement and able to give life. Seven weeks later the firstfruits of prepared bread were presented as two loaves baked with leaven. Surely the number two indicates plurality, and the leaven symbolises faulty men and women who will be presented before God at the gathering of the great harvest of humanity.



Watchman

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Anti-Turkish lobbies in Russia

Nigel Bernard

DANIEL 11:40 states: "And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over".

In this verse there is a third party, "him", which finds itself under pressure first from the king of the south and then from the king of the north. This third power which developed between the king of the south and the king of the north came to be centred in the area of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). Originally it was the eastern part of the Roman Empire, but, following the capture of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453, the mantle of power in this region was taken over by the Ottoman Empire.

The Ottoman Empire received a major blow from the south at the time of the end when the

Turkish forces were defeated and ousted from Palestine by the British under General Allenby in 1917. Today all that is left of the original Ottoman Empire is the country of Turkey, but even this will eventually disappear as when a river dries up (Rev. 16:12). This will happen when the overwhelming invasion of the "king of the north" takes place.

We expect Russia, therefore, as the latter-day king of the north, to invade Turkey, thus wiping away the final remnants of the Euphrates power that originally asserted itself in the years leading up to 1453 (Rev. 9:14). The relationship between Russia and Turkey at the time of the end will thus be very different from, for example, its relations with allies such as Persia and Libya (Ezek. 38:5). Can we see signs of this at the present time?

In the recent past the perception of the Russians towards Turkey appears to have been that