

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

Note: I have used the King James rendering *firstfruits* when referring to the specific feast and the modern rendering of *first fruits* when referring to the general practice.

LEVITICUS 23:9-14

This feast would not be something that the children of Israel would do for at least 40 years. It was to be done **When ye come into the land...and shall reap the harvest thereof** (v. 10). Like the tithe, many of the commands of Israel were related to the land itself and can only be fulfilled when the people are in the land.

They were to bring a national offering (not individually) of a **sheaf of the firstfruits** (v. 10). The English word **sheaf** is normally understood as large bundle of grain but was used even of a “tuft” of hair (the word *tuft* having the same root). The Hebrew word is *omer* (often translated as such), which was a measurement for which we have uncertain understanding.

This harvest was to be taken **unto the priest** (v. 10., a reference to the high priest), who would **wave the sheaf before the Lord** (v. 11) on the day after the weekly Sabbath. The timing makes this the only feast outside the Sabbath that is always on the same day of the week, always on Sunday.

The waving of the offering was so that the grain would **be accepted for you** (v. 11). That is, the proper presentation of the grain would cause the offering to be accepted. This is *not* “so that you may be accepted,” as in the English Standard Version.

Additionally, they were to offer **an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering** (v. 12), with further instructions in verse 13.

Verse 14 required that nothing of the harvest be consumed until this offering had been brought before the Lord.

The instruction was that the feast should be **a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings** (v. 14). The Jewish people have debated whether **all your dwellings** means that they should do this if they live outside the land, or only if they live within the land.

OTHER FIRST FRUIT OFFERINGS

The feast is mentioned in passing in Exodus 23:16 and Exodus 34:22. But in Exodus 23:19 a more general presentation of **the first of the firstfruits** is instructed. The word is used 25 times in the Hebrew Scriptures but is almost always a reference to the *general* offering of first fruits rather than the *feast of firstfruits*.

A MODERN JEWISH INTERPRETATION OF THE FEAST

The feast of firstfruits was likely observed nationally, but its observance was not mentioned in Scripture. The general practice of giving first fruits to God was mentioned many more times in Scripture, in both Hebrew and Greek portions. After the destruction of the Temple (A.D. 70) it became impossible to perform either the specific or the general presentation of first fruits. Some traditions teach that the practice is no longer required, while others continue to teach the giving of *Bikkurim* (first fruits) in the form of gifts to rabbi's or to the poor.

Ancient literature suggests that the Jewish people would bring their first fruits to the Temple to present to the priest in grand celebratory parades, and that the time of *Shavuot* (the period between Passover and Pentecost) was a tremendously celebratory time in Jerusalem. During this time, the seven traditional crops that were native to Israel would

be presented by each farmer (the *shiv'at HaMinim*). These were wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and grapes. The list of seven comes from Deuteronomy 8:8 (and from observation of the agriculture of the land).

It is *possible* that some of our modern observances of Easter came from this ancient practice, especially the practice of a “new dress” and the bright, cheerful, “parading” atmosphere of Easter Sunday services (this *possible* connection would be *impossible* to prove but has more credibility than the *Ishtar* Babylonian concept of Easter.

The general presentation of first fruits is described as follows:

The pilgrims that brought the *Bikkurim* to the Temple were obligated to recite a declaration, also known as the Avowal, set forth in Deuteronomy 26:3-10 (cf. [Mishnah, Bikkurim 3:6](#)). Native-born Israelites and [proselytes](#) would bring the *Bikkurim* and would say the Avowal, but women who brought the *Bikkurim* were not permitted to say the Avowal, since they were unable to claim inheritance in the Land bequeathed unto the tribes by their male lineage.^[a] This Avowal was incorporated into a beautiful and grand festive celebration with a procession of pilgrims marching up to Jerusalem and then the Temple with gold, silver or willow baskets to which live birds were tied. (*Bikkurim* 3:3,5 and 8). The pilgrims were led by flutists to the city of Jerusalem where they were greeted by dignitaries (*Bikkurim* 3:3). The procession would then resume with the flutist in lead until the [Temple Mount](#) where the Levites would break out in song (*Bikkurim* 3:4). The birds were given as sacrificial offerings and the declaration would be made before a [priest](#) while the basket was still on the pilgrim's shoulder (*Bikkurim* 3:5-6). After the basket was presented to the priest, it was placed by the Altar and the pilgrim would bow and leave (*Bikkurim* 3:6)¹

THE FEAST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The term *firstfruits* is used in a general manner in the New Testament.

- Romans 8:23 – **we have the firstfruits of the Spirit**
- Romans 16:5 – Epaphroditus is **the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ**
- 1 Corinthians 16:15 – Stephanus is **the firstfruits of Achaia**
- James 1:18 – the Jewish people are **a kind of firstfruits of his creatures**
- Revelation 14:4 – the 144,000 are **the firstfruits unto God**.

The most striking use of the term concerns Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:20 describes Christ as **the firstfruits of them that slept**. In 1 Corinthians 15:23 He is the **firstfruits** of the resurrection. And, most importantly, Jesus was raised from the dead at the ancient Feast of Firstfruits as described in Leviticus 23.

THE FEAST IN MODERN CHRISTIANITY

Much of the Christian teaching on tithing is built on a *first fruits* concept. In the

In both Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Eastern Orthodoxy, various times are scheduled for *blessing the first fruits*, and farmers bring a portion of their crops to be blessed by the priests.

In the days of feudalism, the first fruits of crops were given to the church for support. In most localities “first fruits” was made to be “every tenth offspring” of the livestock.

All of the above are examples of the manner in which the church has tended to adopt Jewish feasts and pervert them for their own use.

¹ *First Fruits* from Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Fruits#Hebrew_perspective. Accessed June 22, 2022
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