

Lesson 11

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL



The people of Israel started a happy life in the land of Canaan, a land full of God's blessings. Their hardships came to an end and at the end of a long period of waiting, they had a life of joy and plenty. They were aware of the fact that it was God who granted all these blessings. **The people of Israel began to celebrate various feasts to commemorate with gratitude the great things that God had done for them, and to beg God's forgiveness for their sins.** These festivals reminded the Israelites of the important events in the history of salvation and granted grace to live on. But the Holy day in the spiritual life of the Israelites was the weekly Sabbath (Ex.20:8-10).

These celebrations involved loud shouts of joy, trumpet calls and the offering of various sacrifices to the Lord, God. The very important ones among these festivals are the following:

The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

This was celebrated to thank the Lord at the start of the harvest and it lasted seven days. During those days they used to cook and eat unleavened bread, made of flour from fresh produce. **This feast used to start on the first day after the feast of the Passover. As time passed, they started to celebrate these two feasts together** (Lev. 23:5-8).

The Feast of the Passover

For the people of Israel the most important among the annual festivals was the feast of the Passover. This feast commemorated the miraculous liberation of the people of Israel from the slavery in Egypt.

On the first month of the second year after leaving Egypt Lord told Moses in the Sinai desert: **The people of Israel must celebrate the Passover on a fixed schedule. On the fourteenth day of the month, they must celebrate the Passover according to the rules and regulations.** Moses passed this on to the people of Israel. Thus they celebrated the Pass-over in the desert (Num. 9:1-5).

The people of Israel used to have their Passover meal every year in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month which was called the month of Nissan. The lamb for the meal was chosen four days earlier. At sunset of the fourteenth day the lamb must be sacrificed. The blood of the lamb should be sprinkled on doorposts. The cooked meat should be eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The Pass-over must be eaten in a hurry.

The festival of Booths

The Lord spoke to Moses: **Speak to the people of Israel, saying: 'On the fifteenth day of this seventh month, and lasting seven days there shall be the festival of booths to the LORD... For Seven days you shall live in booths.** This is to remind your descendants that when I brought the Israelites out of Egypt they lived in tents' (Lev. 23:33-43). (The feast of Booths is sometimes called the feast of the Tabernacles).

This festival gained much popularity among the Israelites. They celebrated the feast by waving leaves of date palms and branches of trees. Foreigners, orphans and widows used to participate in this festival along with family members. This was a harvest festival as well. The produce collected at the end of the year was offered to the Lord. **They also used this occasion to confess their faith in God who protects them.** During harvest they made tents or booths; and staying in them they celebrated the festival of Booths.

The Feast of Pentecost

The feast of Pentecost was celebrated on the fiftieth day of the season of harvest. **The word Pentecost means the fiftieth day.** **The feast was also known by the following names: Festival of weeks, harvest festival and festival of the first fruits.** On this occasion the first fruits of harvest were offered to the Lord. It was a day of rest, free from all work and set apart for offering sacrifices. The poor and the alien-the downtrodden of the area-were made to participate in this festival.

The Day of Atonement

Another important day in the year for the people of Israel is the Day of Atonement celebrated as directed by God. The Hebrew word **Yom Kippur** is used to mention this feast in Israel today. The word 'Yom Kippur' reminds one

of the holiness of the Lord, God, as well as the sinfulness of Israel. The Day of Atonement is providing the people an opportunity to reconcile each other and seek God's forgiveness.

These festivals were important to the Israelites, during their journey to the Promised Land and after reaching there. They made use of those occasions to express their gratitude for all that God had done. There are various kinds of festivals being celebrated by the people of the New testament. Chief among them are the feasts of our Lord Jesus.

The Festivals of the Church

Christmas

Christmas is the feast that reminds people of the birth of Jesus. This commemorates the incarnation of Jesus the son of God who came on earth to bring salvation to mankind. Christmas is celebrated, the world over, on 25 December.

Epiphany

This commemorates the purification of Jesus. The Church celebrates this feast on 6 January.

Paschal Feast

This is a very important feast in the church. The last Supper, which Jesus had eaten with his disciples in the hall of Zion, was the Paschal meal or Passover Meal. The memory of Jesus instituting the Holy Eucharist at that meal is what we celebrate today as the Paschal feast.

Easter

Easter or the feast of Resurrection is the commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus three days after he was buried following his passion (torture) and crucifixion. This is referred to as the feast of feasts. Fifty days of fasting is observed in preparation for Easter. Easter is very important as the feast signifies the consummation of God's plan of salvation.

Ascension

This feast commemorates the ascension of Jesus into heaven, forty days after his resurrection. Jesus, who was born as a human being, after accomplishing the task of saving humanity, went back to heaven, to be seated at the right hand of the Father. The feast of ascension reminds us of Jesus who is preparing a place for us in heaven.

Pentecost

Ten days after the ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came down upon the disciples in the form of tongues of fire. This is the day when the Church started functioning as an institution. This event is commemorated by the Church as Pentecost. This comes fifty days after Easter; hence the name Pentecost. Pentecost reminds us of the Holy Spirit being sent to live in and to lead the church. This feast helps the Church and her children to be filled with the divine grace of the Holy Spirit.

The church celebrates many other feasts connected with Jesus. She celebrates several feasts of our lady and saints. Church considered these feasts as holy days. By celebrating these with pomp, we offer our thanks to God. Such feasts do help our spiritual growth only when we celebrate them reflecting on the meaning and message of each of them.

Let us Pray

O Lord! teach us to thank you for all the blessings you shower upon us, just as the Israelites recalled your blessings and thanked you.

Read the word of God and narrate

Narrate the celebration of the Pass-over feast among the Israelites (Exodus 12:21-28).



Word of God for our Guidance

“O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things” (Psalm 98:1).

My decision

I would participate with piety in the feast and celebrations of the Church.

Let us do

Pair the following

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|----------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Pass-over feast | <input type="radio"/> | - 50 th day |
| 2. Feast of the unleavened bread | <input type="radio"/> | - Yom kippur |
| 3. Feast of Booths | <input type="radio"/> | - Feast of feasts |
| 4. Feast of Pentecost | <input type="radio"/> | - December 25 |
| 5. Feast of Reparation of sins | <input type="radio"/> | - Beginning of harvest |
| 6. Christmas | <input type="radio"/> | - Living in the tents |
| 7. Easter | <input type="radio"/> | - Passover |

Let us find out the answer

1. What did the Israelites commemorate through the feast of Passover?
2. What is the meaning of the word 'Pentecost'?
3. Why is the feast of the reparation of sins celebrated?
4. Why is Easter known as the feast of feasts?
5. What is the basis of the celebration of the feast of Pentecost in the new testament period?
6. How do the celebrations of feast help us in our spiritual nourishment?