

The Feast of Weeks

(1) Why study Old Testament feasts?

Exodus 23:14-17

¹⁴ Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD.

The Jewish calendar

Abib <i>April</i>	Sivan <i>June</i>	Tishri <i>October</i>
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Passover	Weeks	Tabernacles
Unleavened Bread	Harvest/Firstfruits	Booths/Ingathering

(2) What is the Feast of Weeks?

Leviticus 23:15-22

¹⁵ You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath [of Passover], from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. ¹⁶ You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD. ¹⁷ You shall bring from your dwelling places two loaves of bread to be waved, made of two tenths of an ephah. They shall be of fine flour, and they shall be baked with leaven, as firstfruits to the LORD. ¹⁸ And you shall present with the bread seven lambs a year old without blemish, and one bull from the herd and two rams. They shall be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their drink offerings, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. ¹⁹ And you shall offer one male goat for a sin offering, and two male lambs a year old as a sacrifice of peace offerings. ²⁰ And the priest shall wave them with the bread of the firstfruits as a wave offering before the LORD, with the two lambs. They shall be holy to the LORD for the priest. ²¹ And you shall make proclamation on the same day. You shall hold a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work. It is a statute forever in all your dwelling places throughout your generations. ²² And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

(3) The Feast of Weeks and Social Justice

Deuteronomy 16:9-12

⁹ You shall count seven weeks. Begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. ¹⁰ Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God with the tribute of a freewill offering from your hand, which you shall give as the LORD your God blesses you. ¹¹ And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there. ¹² You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt; and you shall be careful to observe these statutes.

(4) The Feast of Weeks and the New Testament

Acts 2:1-12

¹ When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. ⁵ Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. ⁶ And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. ⁷ And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ⁹ Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, ¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians – we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” ¹² And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

(5) Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God as a “harvest.” (see also Matt. 13:24-30, Luke 8:4-8)

Matthew 9:35-38

³⁵ And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

John 4:35-36

³⁵ “Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, then comes the harvest’? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. ³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.”

(6) Pentecost was the firstfruits of the great harvest God is bringing in to his Kingdom.

Isaiah 2:1-3

¹ The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ² It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³ and many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”

Acts 2:37-41

³⁷ Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” ³⁸ And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.”

⁴⁰ And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” ⁴¹ So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

(7) Each of the three major Old Testament feasts plays a prominent role in the New Testament.

Old Testament feasts	New Testament fulfillment
Passover / Feast of Unleavened Bread	The Last Supper (Matthew 26)
Feast of Weeks/Harvest	Pentecost (Acts 2)
Feast of Tabernacles/Booths	See next week (John 7)

Notes

(1) Why study Old Testament feasts?

It seems like it has no relevance for us. Part of the ceremonial laws – aren't they obsolete?

(1) **We are Israel.** This tells us something about who God is and who we are.

(2) All three feasts serve as the **backdrop** of crucial events in the **New Testament**.

We cannot fully understand what's going on in the NT without first grasping what these OT feasts meant.

(3) All three feasts tell us something about **the gospel**. Ultimately, we study these feasts because it tells us about Jesus.

What do we learn about these 3 feasts?

- (1) **Pilgrim Feasts.** These are the 3 major feasts in which all males (wives and children often joined) were supposed to travel to Jerusalem to celebrate.
- (2) **Convocation.** Means assembly or gathering of the people. The feasts were the only times when the people of God all gathered as one congregation to offer sacrifices and worship God. Corporate worship.
When the people of God gathered together in the New Testament, they were called the *ekklesia* – Greek word for “assembly.” It’s the exact same thing.
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(2) What is the Feast of Weeks?

(1) It happened **7 weeks after Passover**. Thus it was called the “Feast of Weeks.” 50 days after Passover.

(2) It was a feast to celebrate **the wheat harvest**. After harvesting all the wheat, the people were to pilgrim to Jerusalem to celebrate the bountiful harvest by presenting the “new grain” as a grain offering. Thus it was also called the “Feast of Harvest.” And they were to prepare 2 loaves of bread (with yeast) as the “firstfruits” of God’s good provision. And so another name was the “Feast of Firstfruits.”

It was a feast to celebrate and thank God as the provider of all crops. By giving God the first loaves of bread with the new grain, the people acknowledged that God owns all of it and it is only by his bountiful grace that the people prosper. It was a feast to remember God’s good provision and abundant generosity in the promised land.

(3) It was a **worship service**. The people were to bring sacrifices. It was a “holy convocation,” meaning an assembly of God’s people at the Temple. It was also a day of rest – so it was a Sabbath day.

(4) Finally, the people were **not to reap their fields right up to the edge**. Why? Because the edges were reserved for the poor and immigrants. And this leads us to realize that the Feast of Weeks had a strong social justice component.

(3) The Feast of Weeks and Social Justice

A very important component of the Feast of Weeks is God’s concern for the poor. This was a feast celebrating God’s provisions – but the people were also to remember that not everyone had such wealth. It was not to be that only the wealthy and well-to-do could feast on good food, but all God’s people were included.

The passage lists four classes of people that were to be included:

- (a) sojourner – the foreign immigrant
- (b) fatherless – orphans who did not have a father to provide for them
- (c) widows – women without a husband to protect them
- (d) Levites – ministers of God who were not given land. They were not necessarily poor, but depended on the people providing for their needs.

What’s interesting is that God grounds this concern for social justice in the gospel. In verse 12, the people were to remember the poor because they were once poor and slaves in Egypt, but God rescued them. God loves and identifies with the poor.

We continue this practice in every Sunday worship. We collect tithes and offerings during our worship service to support ministry workers and to help the poor.

(4) The Feast of Weeks and the New Testament

By the time of the NT, Greek speaking Jews (Hellenistic Jews) and converts referred to the Feast of Weeks as “Pentecost.” Pentecost means “50 days,” which is the length of time after Passover the Feast of Weeks occurs.

Now Luke says something very interesting in Acts 2:1. In our English translation, it says, “when the day of Pentecost arrived.” The Greek word there is *sumplayrao* (sumplhro,w), which literally means, “to be filled up completely,” as in a jar being filled with water to the brim. It can be taken to simply mean that Pentecost had finally arrived – the time had finally come. But Luke could have used other simpler words to convey that meaning. Instead, Luke uses a very unusual word, this idea of filling up. Many commentators believe that Luke has a deeper meaning in mind – that the Pentecost feast of the OT had finally been fulfilled in the events of Acts 2.

That is a profound insight into the Feast of Weeks. Luke is saying that the Feast of Weeks had an implicit promise embedded in it. This is a distinctive way New Testament writers interpret the Old Testament. In other words, the feasts were not simply memorials of God’s salvation in Exodus. They were signposts to the future and contained a promise of a greater fulfillment. So what is the promise implicit in the Feast of Weeks?

(5) Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God as a “harvest.” *(see also Matt. 13:24-30, Luke 8:4-8)*

The land of Israel was always more than just about land. It was a signpost of salvation.

Hebrews 11:9-10

⁹By faith Abraham went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Likewise, the bountiful harvest of the land was a picture of God’s salvation of his people. Jesus gives us this interpretation when he spoke frequently of his work in gathering people as a “harvest.”

(6) Pentecost was the firstfruits of the great harvest God is bringing in to his Kingdom.

Therefore, Pentecost in Acts 2 was the firstfruits of the true and ultimate harvest that the Feast of Weeks was pointing to. So that all the promises in the Old Testament about the nations coming into the Kingdom of God (Isaiah 2) were initially fulfilled when the diaspora Jews speaking numerous languages and Gentile converts had gathered at Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks heard Peter preach and believed.

Three thousand people from all over the world, speaking a dozen different languages, became believers on the Feast of Weeks. This was the beginning of the church and the great ingathering of God’s scattered people. The harvest was beginning to be gathered.

(7) Each of the three major Old Testament feasts plays a prominent role in the New Testament.

The paradigm we are assuming is that the OT feasts are not these obsolete relics of the past, relevant only for OT Jews. But rather that they are signposts of the gospel and fill out the picture of Christ. In many ways, our understanding of Jesus’ mission is incomplete until we understand the OT feasts.