



# The Feasts of Israel

## 6. The Feast of First Fruits



The feast of First Fruits takes place on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, 2 days after Passover begins on the twilight of the 14<sup>th</sup>. The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and ends on the 21<sup>st</sup>, seven days later. Therefore, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, both First Fruits and Unleavened Bread are celebrated.

The Feasts of the Lord reveal pictures of God's redemptive plan. The first four feasts deal with the First Coming of God's Lamb the Messiah and the last three feasts focus on the Second Coming, when the Lamb returns in Glory and Power as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5).

The Feast of First Fruits reveals aspects of the First Coming, the Messiah, would be the *First Fruit* of God's redemption. On this feast Israel was to bring before the Lord the "First" of the harvest, by doing this Israel was acknowledging the source of their blessing. Jesus is the first one resurrected from death on the cross, he is the First Fruit of the resurrection, the harvest of God.

### The Biblical Observance

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. 14 You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. **Leviticus 23:9-14**

### *The Meaning of First Fruits*

This feast corresponds with the harvest of Barley in the land of Israel. Barley was the first crop reaped from the winter sowing. The priests of the Temple would harvest the first sheaf and bring it into the Temple as an offering before the Lord; the nation was thanking the Lord for the coming harvest.

The first time we see a "First Fruit" offering goes to the time of Cain and Abel, when both sons of Adam appeared before the Lord. The difference between their offers is; Abel's offer was accepted and Cain's rejected. Abel gives the "First" and the "Fat", while Cain gave "an offering" not the first nor the best. Cain's offering was farmed from the ground, while Abel's was from livestock.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. <sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?" <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Genesis 4:2-7

### The Time of First Fruits

N I S A N						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28

(Note: In the original image, day 14 is labeled 'PASSOVER', day 16 is labeled 'FIRSTFRUITS', and days 17-21 are labeled 'FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD'. Arrows indicate the duration of these events.)

Leviticus does not exactly tell us when “First Fruits” was to be celebrated. Leviticus 23:11 states on the “day after the Sabbath” he shall wave it. The Sabbath did not only occur on Saturday the seventh day, but Sabbath also occurred on the Nisan 15, the Feast of Unleavened, when Israel was to do no work (Leviticus 23:7). The day Nisan 15 would have been a “Sabbath” since Israel was to do no work, this day Israel was to hold a “Holy Convocation” (Sacred Assembly) to the Lord.

The Jewish historian Josephus who lived in the first century wrote. There was a difference in interpretation when the Sabbath occurred, the Sadducees and the Karaite Jews saw the Sabbath as Saturday, while the Pharisees saw it as the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan.

“But on the second day of unleavened bread, which is the sixteenth day of the month, they first partake of the fruits of the earth, for before that day they do not touch them” (Antiquities of the Jews 3.10.15)

### How was First Fruits Celebrated?

<sup>1</sup> “And it shall be, when you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and you possess it and dwell in it, <sup>2</sup> that you shall take some of the first of all the produce of the ground, which you shall bring from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. <sup>3</sup> And you shall go to the one who is priest in those days, and say to him, ‘I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the country which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’

<sup>4</sup> “Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> And you shall answer and say before the LORD your God: ‘My father was a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. <sup>6</sup> But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, “a land flowing with milk and honey”; and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O LORD, have given me.’

“Then you shall set it before the LORD your God, and worship before the LORD your God.

**Deuteronomy 26:1-10**



The people were to take a sheaf (Omer)<sup>1</sup> of their crops and bring it to the priest at the Temple who would wave it before the Lord for acceptance. The nation was acknowledging the Lord’s blessing with this action. They were also to bring a lamb of the first year without blemish, a grain offering with oil and drink offering of wine. The people were forbidden to eat of the crops until the “First Fruits” were celebrated. They were to eat from their stores saved from the previous years.

### The Importance of First Fruits

First Fruits marked the start of Israel’s grain harvest and the beginning of the count for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Israel’s fourth feast. The Feast of Weeks took place forty-nine days after *First Fruits* on the *Fiftieth Day*.

15 ‘And you shall count for yourselves from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering: seven Sabbaths shall be completed. 16 Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD. **Leviticus 23:15-16**

<sup>1</sup> Omer/Sheaf: In traditional Jewish standards of measurement, the omer was **equivalent to the volume of 43.2 chicken’s eggs**, or what is also known as one-tenth of an ephah (three seahs). In dry weight, the omer weighed between 1.56–1.77 kg (3.4–3.9 lb), being the quantity of flour required to separate therefrom the dough offering.

Since this marked the beginning of the counting of Weeks, is known as the *Sefirat Ha-Omer* (Counting of the Measure).

### *The Service of First Fruits*

Firstfruits require the Temple and since the Temple is no longer available, Firstfruits is not celebrated in the same sense as it was in the past. In the Temple days, both the people and the priest would celebrate First Fruits. The priests would mark set aside a portion of their barley field to be the sheaves used for the harvest on Nisan 16. This barley field was cultivated solely to be used for the first fruits harvest. The Sanhedrin, the ruling council of seventy, who headed the nation, would have been responsible for the field.



In the evening of Nisan 15, at the start of Nisan 16, three Sanhedrin members came from the Temple to cut the First Fruit Barley harvest. With three sickles and three baskets the men would prepare to cut down the harvest to be presented in the Temple. The bundles of barley had already been prepared for the Sanhedrin members chosen to harvest the crop. As the Sun was setting and the new day began (Nisan 16) the men ask questions to those present.

Has the sun set?  
With this sickle?

Into this basket?  
On this Sabbath?  
Shall I reap (now)?

On the positive response from the crowd, the men would repeat the harvesting two more times as a safeguard. The reaping would continue until 2/3 of a bushel was reaped.

### *The Presentation of Firstfruits*

The three baskets of Barley were then taken to the Temple to be threshed with rods as opposed to ox powered sledges to preserve the barley heads. The barley was then parched in a flame and winnowed in the wind to remove the chaff. The barley was then milled and sifted until it was very fine. According to the Talmud the inspectors should be able to stick their hands into the barley flour without any flour sticking to the hands when they were removed (Menahot 8:2).

The morning of Nisan 16, the work of the barley harvest firstfruits were presented to the Lord in the Temple. One "Omer" (5 pints) of barley was mixed with  $\frac{3}{4}$  pint of olive oil, along with some frankincense, this was the firstfruits offering. The priest would wave this before the Lord, burning some and giving the rest to the Levites.

### *For the Family*

The priest would celebrate the feast of first fruits for the whole nation, and each individual family would also celebrate since Israel was a farming community dependent on the land to produce its wealth. Israel's farming families would prepare for the yearly Firstfruits celebration at the same time they were preparing for Passover. So, when families came to Jerusalem, they were prepared to celebrate three festival days,





Passover, Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits since they were celebrated in the one week period, 14<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> of Nisan. First the family would set aside a portion of the crop to be marked for firstfruits, by tying a cord around the area to be harvested for the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. When the crop was harvested, the family would take it along with their lambs to Jerusalem to celebrate the feasts.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, people in Jerusalem would have just finished celebrating Passover and would now begin to celebrate Firstfruits. The Israelite male was called to Jerusalem to celebrate these feasts, so he would have come to the Temple with his lamb a second lamb after the Passover lamb and the “first fruits” of his field. As he approached the Temple, he would have heard the Levitical

choirs lead worship with Psalm 30: “I will extol You, O’ Lord, for you have lifted me up and have not let my foes rejoice over me...” As the masses poured into Jerusalem and the Temple the scene would have continued throughout the day.

The lamb would have been brought into the Temple by the Israelite, and the priest would slay the lamb as the Israelite watched the preparation of his sacrifice. If he was poor, he could offer two turtledoves (Lev. 5:7;12:8, 14:22).

<sup>10</sup> " If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect. <sup>11</sup> He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. <sup>12</sup> He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. <sup>13</sup> He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of it and burn it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. <sup>14</sup> " If the offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, he is to offer a dove or a young pigeon. <sup>15</sup> The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup> He is to remove the crop with its contents <sup>[b]</sup> and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are. <sup>17</sup> He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. Leviticus 1:14-17



After the priest returned from the sacrifice of the man’s lamb, the man would have presented to the priest his offering of barley the measure of an omer (5 pints). He would then say,  
*‘I declare today to the LORD your<sup>[b]</sup> God that I have come to the country which the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’*

As the priest received the basket of grain, he would then begin to wave it before the Lord and the Israelite would now say

*‘My father was a Syrian,<sup>[b]</sup> about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. <sup>6</sup> But the Egyptians mistreated us, afflicted us, and laid hard bondage on us. <sup>7</sup> Then we cried out to the LORD God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and looked on our affliction and our labor and our oppression. <sup>8</sup> So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. <sup>9</sup> He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, “a land flowing with milk and honey”;<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>10</sup> and now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land which you, O LORD, have given me.’*

The priest would then set the basket down in front of the altar and cast a handful of grain into the fire. The Israelite would then worship the Lord as prescribed in Deuteronomy 26. The Israelite would then have left courts and returned to his waiting family.

### *The Modern Observance*

Today since there is no Temple, the feast of Firstfruits is no longer celebrated. What is celebrated now is only the counting of the Omer. From the Firstfruits Israel was commanded to count off seven weeks until the feast of Shavuot (Feast of Weeks).

What has survived is the non-biblical holiday known in Israel as *Lag B'Omer* meaning 33 based on the letters of Lamed and Gimmel since the holiday occurs on the 33<sup>rd</sup> day between Firstfruits and Weeks.

According to Jewish tradition, it was during this time a plague was stopped in the days of Rabbi Akiba a plague was averted on his students.

Lag BaOmer, the 33rd day of the [Omer Count](#) – this year, May 22, 2011 – is a festive day on the Jewish calendar, celebrated with outings (on which the children traditionally play with bow and arrows), bonfires, and other joyous events. Many visit the resting place (in Meron in Northern Israel) of the great sage and mystic Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, whose *yahrtzeit* (anniversary of his passing) the day marks.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who lived in the 2nd century of the Common Era, was the first to publicly teach the mystical dimension of the Torah known as the "Kabbalah," and is the author of the basic work of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*. On the day of his passing, Rabbi Shimon instructed his disciples to mark the date as "the day of my joy."

The Chassidic masters explain that the final day of a righteous person's earthly life marks the point at which "all his deeds, teachings and work" achieve their culminating perfection and the zenith of their impact upon our lives. So each Lag BaOmer we celebrate Rabbi Shimon's life and the revelation of the esoteric soul of Torah.

Lag BaOmer also commemorates another joyous event. The Talmud relates that in the weeks between Passover and Shavuot a plague raged amongst the disciples of the great sage Rabbi Akiva "because they did not act respectfully towards each other"; these weeks are therefore observed as a period of mourning, with various joyous activities proscribed by law and custom. On Lag BaOmer the dying ceased. Thus Lag BaOmer also carries the theme of *Ahavat Yisrael*, the imperative to love and respect one's fellow.<sup>2</sup>

### *Application*

The purpose of Firstfruits is to demonstrate to man that God is owner of all our wealth. He gives us the ability to attain success, by returning to the Lord the "first" of our produce, we are acknowledging the source. God declared the Firstfruits on the land was His, including the firstborn of livestock. Even the Donkey was required to be redeemed. (Ex. 22:29, 23:19, 34:26, Dt. 18:4, 26:2).

The firstborn son was also to be redeemed according to the law.

<sup>14</sup> "Everything in Israel that is devoted <sup>[a]</sup> to the LORD is yours. <sup>15</sup> The first offspring of every womb, both man and animal, that is offered to the LORD is yours. But you must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. <sup>16</sup> When they are a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels <sup>[b]</sup> of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. <sup>17</sup> "But you must not redeem the firstborn of an ox, a sheep or a goat; they are holy. Sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn their fat as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. <sup>18</sup> Their meat is to be yours, just as the breast of the wave offering and the right thigh are yours. <sup>19</sup> Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD for both you and your offspring."  
**Numbers 18:14-19**

Jesus was also presented in the Temple to fulfill this verse.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/679300/jewish/What-is-Lag-BaOmer.htm](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/679300/jewish/What-is-Lag-BaOmer.htm)

<sup>21</sup>On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.

<sup>22</sup>When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"<sup>[a]</sup>), <sup>24</sup>and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."<sup>[a]</sup> Luke 2:21-23

This ceremony was known as *Pidyon Haben* (Redemption of the Son), all first born son were to be redeemed with 5-Sheckles. Only the Levites and priests were exempt, because they belonged to the Lord. Its at this occasion that baby Jesus meets Simeon (Luke 2:30) and is blessed. Anna, the elderly widow lady also blesses the baby Jesus (Luke 2:38). This is to remind Israel, all the firstborn children belong to the Lord, because the Firstborn was struck in in the land of Egypt. (Num 3:13). The lamb's blood paid for the firstborn (Exodus 12:12-13)

### *Firstfruits in the New Testament*

#### [Romans 8:23](#)

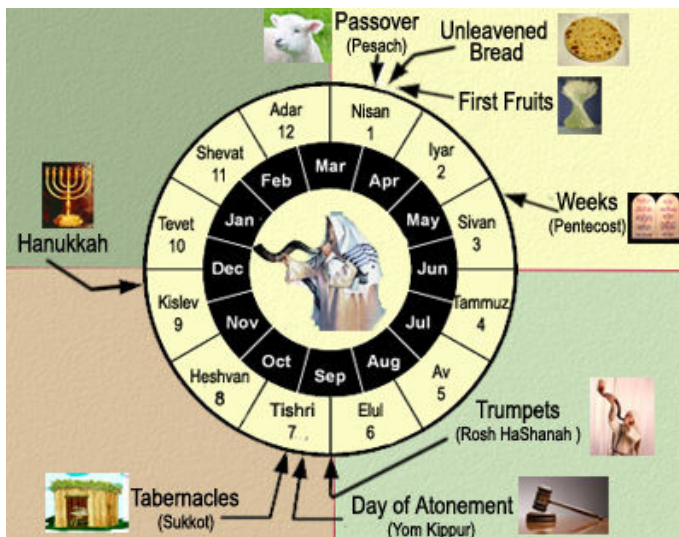
Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the **firstfruits** of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

The fruits of the Spirit are defined by Paul in Galatians

<sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

#### 1. [Romans 11:16](#)

If the part of the dough offered as **firstfruits** is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.



#### 2. [1 Corinthians 15:20](#)

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the **firstfruits** of those who have fallen asleep.

[1 Corinthians 15:19-21](#) (in Context) [1 Corinthians 15](#) (Whole Chapter)

#### 3. [1 Corinthians 15:23](#)

But each in his own turn: Christ, the **firstfruits**; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.

#### 4. [James 1:18](#)

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of **firstfruits** of all he created.

#### 5. [Revelation 14:4](#)

These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as **firstfruits** to God and the Lamb.