

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
February 28, 2016

Lesson Text: Leviticus 23:33-43
Lesson Title: The Feast of Booths

Introduction

Referred to hundreds of times in Scripture, the holidays of Israel are described as “*the feasts of the LORD*” (Leviticus 23:2), “*holy convocation*” (Leviticus 23:4), and “*solemn feasts*” (Numbers 15:3). These “feasts” and special occasions were important to the people for several reasons. First, the feasts were important because they were “*feasts of the LORD*” (Leviticus 23:2, 4, 37, 44). God Himself appointed these occasions for His people to meet with Him (Psalm 50:5). Today, believers come together to remember the Lord, worship, preach, teach, give, and pray (1 Corinthians 11:17-18, 20, 33-34). Second, the feasts were important because they were holy (Leviticus 23:2-4, 7-8, 20-24, 35-37). The Hebrew word for “holy” is *qodesh* {ko-desh} which means “sacred, set apart, separation of places and things.” Third, the feasts were important because they were joyous occasions (Leviticus 23:6). The word “feasts” means “a festival for rejoicing.” God wanted Israel to be a rejoicing people. Salvation should lead all of God’s people to rejoice (Ephesians 5:19). Fourth, the feasts were important because they taught the Israelite a truth about God. There were truths about God the Israelite was to never forget. These “feasts” taught truths about God and helped them remember those truths.

Leviticus 23 opens with instructions pertaining to the Sabbath Day (Leviticus 23:3). The Israelites were to observe the seventh day of rest in their homes and in their public assembling together to worship God. Instructions pertaining to the Passover, or Feast of Unleavened Bread is given in verses 4-8. Passover was held in high regard by the Jewish people even in the early church. When Christ came to earth, He changed the meaning of the Passover to the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:17-29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). Instructions for the Feast of First Fruits are given in verses 9-14; the Feasts of Weeks in verses 23-25; and the Feasts of Trumpets in verses 26-32.

Instructions for the Feast of Booths are given in verses 33-43. The Feast of Booths (also called Feast of Tabernacles) is the last in the series of God-ordained festivals given to Israel. It was also the final occasion on which all Jewish adult males were required to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to appear before the Lord (Exodus 23:14-17). This feast looked *back* to the time when Israel dwelled in temporary shelters or booths as God led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. This feast looked *forward* to the day when

Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself will again dwell with Israel as He did in the wilderness.

Instructions for the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:33-36)

Verse 33-34

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the LORD.”

The Feast of Booths was to be observed on the “fifteenth day of this seventh month.” The “seventh month” is Tishri on the Jewish calendar which corresponds to September or the beginning of October on our calendar. The festival began on the “fifteenth day” of “the seventh month” which was five days after the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, Israel’s sin was removed, and her covenant relationship to God restored. Thus a cleansed and sanctified nation could keep the “Feast of Booth” as a holy feast “unto the LORD.”

The Feast of Booths is called the “feast of tabernacles” in the text. The word “tabernacles” means “hut” or “tent.” As previously mentioned in the introduction, this feast was appointed primarily to remind the Israelites of the time in history when they had no other dwellings in the wilderness. This truth is magnified in verse 43.

Verse 35-36

“On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein.”

For “seven days,” one full week, Israel was to worship and celebrate God’s goodness. On the “first day” of the festival and the “eighth day” (the beginning and ending of the feast), the Israelites were commanded to hold “an holy convocation.” We know a “holy convocation” is a set time for public assembly. But the main focus of the “holy convocation” was the “LORD,” not fellowship with one another. Fellowship with one another is important but these festivals and special occasions were first and foremost about the “LORD.”

The people were also forbidden to “do servile work” on the “first day” and the “eighth day.” “Servile work” means no occupational work or work of any kind at the beginning of the festival or on the last day of the festival. It is virtually impossible to continue daily activities of “work” and focus on the Lord in the

manner He desires and deserves. Refraining from ordinary work was essential for the Israelite to participate in the Feasts of Booths and it is also essential for the believer to worship the Lord. While there are no specific commandments in the New Testament for what the believer can or cannot do on the Lord's Day, the fact it is "The Lord's Day" should be enough. That means it is not ours to do as we ordinarily do on every other day. To recognize that truth is equivalent to doing "no servile work."

Verse 37-38

"These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD."

"These are the feast of the LORD" are not just repetitive words. If it seems like you have read these words before, you have. Aaron and his sons have much to learn about the offerings and sacrifices God requires at this feast and all the feasts. They must never forget "the feasts" belong to "the LORD." The feast days are mandated by God and their observance is not to be taken lightly.

Note: As New Testament believers we sometimes fail to receive the word of God seriously. Familiarity should never result in the assumption we know everything God wants us to know about a particular text, commandment of God, or biblical subject.

"Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD" means in addition to the weekly offerings, voluntary offerings, and special offerings, the Israelite was to present additional offerings during the Feast of Booths.

The required sacrifices for the Feast of Booths required more animals than any other feast. Each day, for seven days, there are 2 rams and 14 lambs sacrificed. A total of 70 bulls are offered during the week as "burnt offerings" totally consumed upon the altar. Eight male goats are presented for "sin offerings," one sacrificed per day during the week. Commenting on the significance of these sacrifices, Doctor Warren W. Wiersbe writes, "*During the week of celebration, the priests followed an elaborate schedule of offering sacrifices (Numbers 29), and by the eighth day, they had offered 199 animals! This was certainly a reminder that there can be no blessing apart from the grace of God and the sacrifice of His Son for us on the cross.*" (Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary - Be Holy - Leviticus).

Note: All of us have things we do regularly in our worship and service to the Lord. Then there are times and occasions when the Lord calls upon us to “go the second mile” or “give above and beyond.” The Feast of Booths is a reminder it is a joy and privilege to interrupt our normal daily routine and “give more” or change our routine a little for God’s glory.

Observance of the Feast of Booths (Leviticus 23:39-43)

Verse 39

“Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.”

The Lord now provides additional information on the actual observance of the Feast of Booths. He reviews the basic format originally given in verses 34-35 concerning the “fifteenth day of the seventh month.” In addition, He now states the feast is to be observed “when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land.”

The “Feast of Booths” was also called “the Feast of Ingathering” because it corresponded to the completion of harvest. Simply stated, the “Feast of Booths” followed harvest. Moses explains it in Deuteronomy 16:13-15, *“Thou shalt observe the feast of tabernacles seven days, after that thou hast gathered in thy corn and thy wine: And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Seven days shalt thou keep a solemn feast unto the LORD thy God in the place which the LORD shall choose: because the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thine increase, and in all the works of thine hands, therefore thou shalt surely rejoice.”*

The “Feast of Booths” followed the Day of Atonement and harvest time. In America we have a holiday centered around harvest called Thanksgiving. It is a holiday rooted in the thankfulness of the pilgrims who expressed their gratitude to God for His bountiful blessings on their families and crops. They feasted, rejoiced, and expressed thanksgiving unto the Lord. Why has Thanksgiving in America changed so drastically over the years? Apathy and indifference are part of the answer. But the real answer lies in the fact America is a nation no longer right with God. Remember, the Feast of Booths followed the Day of Atonement in Israel. That is important! No nation can be thankful or properly rejoice until they are right with God. The “Feast of Booths” involved thanksgiving for harvest but it rested on a foundation of being spiritually clean and right with God.

Verse 40-41

“And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month.”

On the “first day” of the seven days of the “Feast of Booths,” the people were to gather boughs and branches of certain trees. Some suggest their booths or tents were to be constructed out of these “boughs” or “branches.” Obviously the booths were constructed out of some type of wood. According to the prophet Nehemiah, the booths were built out of different types of trees than those mentioned in Leviticus 23:40 (Nehemiah 8:15-18). Therefore, it is believed the “branches of palm trees” and “willows of the brook” were carried in the hands of the Israelites and waved before the Lord as they came to worship and celebrate during the “Feast of Booths.” Every worshipper carried different types of branches in each hand reminding them of the valleys and plains through which they had traveled while in route to Canaan.

Verse 42-43

“Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”

The “booths” constructed by the Israelites were real booths constructed of boughs of living trees, solely for the purpose of this festival. “All that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths” is a vital part of this festival. Once Israel came out of the wilderness and entered into the land of Canaan, children would be born who never crossed the Red Sea or walked in the wilderness. It was important they be connected with their heritage of redemption and provision by Jehovah God.

God wanted every “generation” of Israelites to know He was “the LORD their God.” Every generation had the responsibility to keep celebrating the “Feast of Booths” as a visual lesson and reminder how God “brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 31:13).

The words “that every generation may know” carry a tone of warning for Israel and for each of us. Israel had several periods in their history where they failed to keep the feasts and they suffered severely for it. The decline of Sunday school and church attendance by individuals and families is resulting in a generation of young adults, young people, and children who do not know Christ and His redeeming work on the cross. It is imperative that “every generation know” what Jesus Christ has done for the world and for us!

Conclusion

Christians do not celebrate festivals and special feast days such as Passover, the Day of Atonement, or the Feast of Booths (Colossians 2:16-17). Contrary to the claims of some today, Christians are not required to keep the Sabbath day. Christians are under the new covenant and there are no observances to keep (Hebrews 8). So, how do believers today celebrate redemption and God's provision and blessing? How do we teach our children and the generations to come about the Lord's goodness and grace?

The answer is an inner relationship with Jesus Christ. Every feast and festival of Israel was but a shadow or type of what was to come. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of every Old Testament type. He is the rest of the Sabbath. He is the way through the wilderness. He is the permanent dwelling for the weary pilgrim. He is the reason we have food on our tables and a roof over our head. Christians do not celebrate the "Feast of Booths." We celebrate the fulfillment of the "Feast of Booths," Jesus Christ.

Has the Lord done anything for you worth remembering? Has He saved your soul from sin? Has He brought you through a barren wilderness into a fruitful place of rest and peace? If so, what are you doing to remember His gracious acts?

Amen.