

## THE RESURRECTION AND THE WAVE SHEAF OFFERING

In learning about God's Holy Days in Leviticus 23 such as Passover and the Feast Unleavened Bread one might get the impression that the events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ don't rate a mention in God's Holy Day plan. This would be an incorrect assumption.

The events surrounding the resurrection of Jesus Christ are not neglected by God in His Holy Day plan. They are intimately connected with a special ceremony that was performed by the Levitical priesthood that God gave to Israel that occurred during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In Leviticus 23 after the instructions for the Passover and Unleavened Bread God goes on to say in verse 10 and 11: "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. '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'".

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Israelites commemorated the wave sheaf offering on the day after the weekly sabbath (the Sunday) that fell during the Feast.

Those of us in the church are the firstfruits of salvation (James 1:18) before the latter greater harvest of souls in the millennium and after.

In 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 Paul wrote the following about who symbolized the first of this firstfruits harvest when he said: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming."

Jesus Christ symbolized the very first of the firstfruits. He is the captain of our salvation – the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18).

The wave sheaf offering was performed on the day after the weekly sabbath that fell during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

The wave sheaf was usually cut right after sunset so there would be the maximum time to have it prepared and waved at the Temple at the time of the morning sacrifice around 9am that Sunday morning. The wave sheaf offering came from the very first sheaf of the firstfruits harvest – in other words, the first of the firstfruits.

Deuteronomy 16:9 speaks of the wave sheaf offering as the time when "the sickle is first put to the standing grain"(NRSV). The sheaf of grain had to be standing when the wave sheaf was cut loose from the ground at sunset at the very end of the weekly Sabbath. The picture is of Christ, resurrected just before the end of the sabbath, standing, awaiting the time of His ascension to the Father.

The barley grain of the wave sheaf was parched, thrashed and sieved into fine flour ready to be waived the next day at the time of the morning sacrifice. About the same time Jesus Christ ascended to heaven and was accepted by the Father as the true wave sheaf offering (John 20:17-29) - the first of the firstfruits.

What was the symbolism of waving the offering to God? Waving was also done with the peace offerings where God, the priests and the offerers all got to share in the eating of the animal sacrifice. Traditionally, the ceremony of "waving" seems to have meant that parts of the sacrifice were swung or elevated towards the altar, signifying that they were given to God, and then swung back again, indicating that they were given back by God to the priests for them to eat.

The acceptance by the Father of Christ as the Wave Sheaf consecrated Him as our High Priest, just like the wave offering that consecrated the Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 29:19-21). Just as the waving of the offering pictured it being accepted by God and then given back by Him to the priests and their families, so has Christ, our High Priest in heaven who intercedes for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25), been given back in service to the church, those who are becoming priests of God (Revelation 5:10).

Just as the new grain could not be eaten until the wave sheaf was offered, neither could those called by God and reconciled to Him fully partake of salvation through receiving the Holy Spirit until He had ascended to be accepted by God for all of them and all humanity. Through His ascension He was waved to God. He was waved back to us for our benefit when He later descended that same day.

What must have this scene in heaven been like? Psalm 24 and Revelation 4 and 5 give us a sense of what this may have been like. It was the first time that Jesus had seen the Father face to face since He became a mere pinprick in Mary's womb. It must have been an incredibly emotional and teary-eyed moment, to say the least, when they finally embraced each other again. Upon His return there was tremendous joy as well. Soon after He returned Jesus indulged in some fun tom-foolery when He suddenly disappeared at the moment the two disciples finally worked out and recognised it was Him when they got to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32).

When Christ was dedicated to and accepted by God, He became the token of the remainder of the spiritual harvest. Paul refers to this firstfruits offering in Romans 11:16 when he says: "For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches." With the consecration of the firstfruits the whole harvest was also consecrated.

With His consecration to God the rest of the first spiritual harvest was consecrated to God. Jesus became a pledge from God that what happened with Christ – His resurrection and ascension – would happen for us as well. We, too, will ascend to meet him in the clouds at the first resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

After Christ returned from heaven He gave the great commission to His disciples (Matthew 28:19-20). In essence He said: "The firstfruits wave offering has taken place. Get out there all over the world now and reap that first, smaller harvest of souls." He wants us to put our hearts and souls into supporting God's first harvesting of souls right now!