

## THE WAVESHEAF OFFERING

Around the Passover we focus a lot on the death of Christ and what that means for us in the church. Since none of the seven festivals of God are devoted to the resurrection of Jesus Christ do we give enough focus to the resurrection? Because of the overemphasis on the resurrection by mainstream Christianity with the celebration of Easter it's easy to over react to that and focus solely on the death of Christ to the neglect of the importance of the resurrection and the events that followed His resurrection from the dead.

Is the resurrection neglected in the Holy Day plan of God? I would like to submit to you that it isn't neglected by God in His Holy Day plan and that it is intimately connected with a special ceremony that God gave to Israel that occurred during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

In God's Holy Day instructions He gave a special ceremony that commemorates an important event that occurred very soon after He was resurrected. It is called the wavesheaf offering and in this article I would like to explain what the wavesheaf offering was and the symbolism behind it.

In **Leviticus 23** after the instructions for the Passover and Unleavened Bread God goes on to say in **verse 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. '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'" (**verses 10-11**).

There were two major harvest seasons in Israel. The first was the smaller grain harvest which started with barley around the Passover season followed by wheat around Pentecost. The second and greater harvest season was the fruit harvest that concluded with the Feast of Ingathering or the Feast of Tabernacles as we most often call it. God has used the harvest seasons to teach God's people the proper sequence of events and the key elements of His salvation plan—His "harvest" of human beings in giving them eternal life.

The first harvest represents the firstfruits of salvation – His church in this age proceeding the return of Jesus Christ. It is a much smaller harvest compared to the greater harvest of souls that will occur when Jesus Christ brings the Kingdom of God to this earth in the millennium and beyond.

The wavesheaf offering was performed on the day after the weekly sabbath that fell during the Days of Unleavened Bread. It 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 on Sunday morning. The wavesheaf offering came from the very first sheaf of the firstfruits harvest – in other words, the first of the firstfruits.

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 pioneer for the rest of the church in this age – the firstborn from the dead (**Colossians 1:18**).

What was the symbolism of waving the offering to God? This was not the only offering waved to God. Waving also done with the peace offerings where God, the priests and the offerers all got to share in the eating of the animal sacrifice. It was also done with consecration of Aaronic priesthood and the law of jealousy where there was suspicion of adultery.

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 (see also **Leviticus 9:18-21; 10:14-15; Numbers 6:19-20; 18:18**).

How did Christ symbolize this waving ceremony? In **John 20:17** we read of an event that occurred soon after He was resurrected. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" For you ladies out there it's interesting to note that Jesus gave privilege of being the first person to see Him after His resurrection to a woman and not to His disciples.

The acceptance by the Father of Christ as the Wave Sheaf consecrated Him as our High Priest, just as the wave offering that consecrated the Aaronic priesthood (**Exodus 29:19-21**). And, just as the waving of the breast and the right thigh pictured the offering accepted by God but 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 saints, those who are becoming priests of God.

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 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. His ascension may well have taken place at the same time of day the wavesheaf offering took place at the Temple.

What must have this scene in heaven been like? We get a glimpse of this in **Psalms 24** if you'd like to turn there. Starting in **verse 3** we read: "Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart... Who *is* this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors!" (**verses 3-4, 8-9**).

**Revelation 4 and 5** paints a similar vision. John sees God the Father sitting on a majestic throne with a rainbow around it and a sea of glass before surrounded by the 24 elders on thrones and a great multitude of angels. There is no sign of Jesus Christ until He begins to walk across to them over the sea of glass and stood as a Lamb that looked as if it had been slain.

While this vision occurs later it does help paint a picture of what the scene 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 Jesus indulged in some fun tom-foolery when He suddenly disappeared at the moment the two disciples finally worked out and recognized it was Him when they got to Emmaus.

There is some confusion created by using the term wave-sheaf because in English a sheaf is usually used for a stalk of grain. The Hebrew word "omer" translated sheaf is actually a dry measure of grain that was equivalent to a handful of flour. The first stalk of grain was ground into flour before it was waved before God.

If we go back to **Leviticus 23** we'll see further instructions relating to the wave offering in **verses 12 and 13**. There we read: "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. 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.

The unblemished male lamb offered as a burnt offering along with the flour of the wave sheaf represented Jesus Christ, the oil mixed into the fine flour represented the Holy Spirit, given to Christ without measure, while the drink offering of wine which accompanied the offering symbolised the shed blood of the Son of God (**Matthew 26:27-28**), which cleanses us from sin (**1 John 1:7**).

The barley grain was parched, thrashed and sieved into fine flour. Animal sacrifices mercifully were not beaten like Christ was but grain offerings were beaten very fine to symbolize Christ's broken body. It is significant that barley is the crop used to symbolise not only Jesus Christ but the church as well. Barley is adaptable to a greater range of climate than any other cereal. It is able to grow and ripen in a shorter time than any other cereal and it has greater resistance to dry heat than other small grains.

Christ as the first of the firstfruits is called the firstborn from the dead (**Colossians 1:18**) tying the resurrection to the symbolism of 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" in the NRSV. The sheaf of grain had to be standing when the wave sheaf was cut loose from the ground at sunset after the weekly Sabbath. The picture is of Christ, resurrected from the dead, standing, awaiting His ascension to the Father.

When Christ was dedicated to and accepted by God, He became the token of the remainder of the spiritual harvest. With His consecration to God the rest of the first spiritual harvest was consecrated to God. He 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.

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 firstfruit the whole harvest was also consecrated.

I heard an interesting story from a Rabbi that I met who was a Messianic Jew (those Jews who also believe Christ was the Messiah and in the validity of the New Testament). Where he is from in Texas, they regularly have droughts one year in every three. A few years back he sought permission from the local grain co-op to wave the first grain before God on wavesheaf Sunday and in the seven years that he has been doing it they have not had one drought in all that time.

That story and the blessing that came as a result of that reminds me of one of the purposes of the wave offering. It was to give thanks to God for the harvest and to ask His blessing on the food they would make from it just as we ask a blessing before our meals after the example of

Christ blessing the bread and wine at His last Passover. On a spiritual level we should give thanks for Jesus and our church brethren and ask for God's blessing on them also.

The wave offering was also important in that it marked the beginning of the count to Pentecost. Pentecost is seven weeks after the wave offering. We tend to think of Pentecost as symbolizing the birthday or the beginning of the church but in another sense it represents the end of the harvest that begins on wavesheaf Sunday and ended at Pentecost time in the Holy Land. Samuele Bacchiocchi suggests that the seven weeks from the beginning to the end of the barley harvest ending in Pentecost represent the seven eras of the church.

In **Leviticus 23:15-16** we read: "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. 'Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath; then you shall offer a new grain offering to the LORD.'" Here we have a 50 day count "**TO** the day after the seven sabbath." Counting back 50 days the starting point is the sabbath before the wave offering.

In **Deuteronomy 16:9-10** we read: "You shall count seven weeks for yourself; begin to count the seven weeks from *the time* you begin *to put* the sickle to the grain. Then you shall keep the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God." Here we have what appears to be a different count. Here we count seven weeks (49 days) from the wave offering. No mention here at all of 50 days.

Do we have two separate counts to Pentecost – a 50 day count from the weekly sabbath before the wave offering and a 49 day count from the wave offering? If this is the correct interpretation why might this be so? My suggestion is that one is from the day Christ was resurrected (the weekly sabbath) and the other is from the day He ascended to the Father.

After Christ returned from heaven He gave the great commission to His disciples. 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!

In conclusion, the wave offering was an offering of the first grain from the first smaller harvest. It symbolized Jesus Christ as first of the firstfruits. He was the firstborn from the dead. The wave offering was waved symbolizing the people giving it to Him and He giving the harvest back to us. Jesus symbolized this by ascending to heaven to be accepted by the Father and then returning to earth and giving the church the Holy Spirit and serving us as High Priest. He became a pledge from God that what happened with Christ – His resurrection and ascension – will happen for us as well. We, too, will one day be resurrected and ascend to meet him in the clouds at His glorious second coming.