

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 4:12:2007

Reading: Leviticus 23:1-4

FOCUS ON THE FEASTS

1. SETTING THE SCENE

Do you live by a calendar or diary ? My life is pretty well governed by my diary. I live by that. I would say that many of you do also. *We operate on the basis of the Gregorian calendar that means there are 365 days in the year, with the exception of a leap year.* You see, we are all captives of time. Day by day and hour by hour we look at our watches and consult our calendars. We plan for the future and we set dates. Many of you carry personal planners, or nowadays it is hand held personal computers, and they help you remember appointments or special days. All of us are captives of time. But God is not shackled by time. God is eternal. God lives above time. *To God a thousand years is as one day, and one day is as a thousand years.* (2 Pet 3:8) However, God does have a calendar and it is important that we understand God's calendar, for when we understand it, we will know what God is doing in this world, and we will know what is really important in life. Now God's calendar was originally given to the Jewish nation, and it is found in (Lev Ch 23)

In that chapter, there is a listing of seven very special events that took place every year in the nation of Israel.

These events are called “ *the seven feasts of Jehovah,*” and they make up God's calendar. Over the centuries Israel's national life has revolved around her great feasts. In the days of the Tabernacle, and later, in the Temple, Abraham's sons heeded the Lord's call to assemble “ *before the Lord thy God in the place which He shall choose.*” (Deut 16:16) By Biblical mandate the nations observed seven feasts. These celebrations were clustered together in the spring and autumn. The spring feasts were *Passover* (23:5) *Unleavened Bread* (23:6) and *First Fruits* (23:10) They fell within days of each other in the months of March and April. Fifty days later came *Pentecost* (23:16) in the month of May and June. The autumn feasts were *Trumpets* (23:24) the *Day of Atonement* (23: 27) and *Tabernacles* (23:34) and they occurred in the months of September and October.

Now as we come to “ *Focus on the Feasts,*” there are several things that I want you to notice by of introduction. I want you to think about,

1. The Typology of God's Word:

You see, when we come to the Scriptures we need to distinguish between the various parts of the Bible. In this book there are Historical sections, Biographical sections, Prophetic sections, Poetical sections, Doctrinal sections, Practical sections and Typical sections. Now what is a type ? John Philips says that a type “ *is a species of prophecy.*” Irving Jensen says, “ *An Old Testament type is a figure or representation of something to come.*” Now we do well to remind ourselves of the value placed on the Old

Testament Scriptures in the writings of the New Testament. Paul tells us that “ *Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.* ” (Rom 15:4) Indeed Paul refers to certain Old Testament happenings as “ *types.* ” (1 Cor 10:6-11) Another translation of (10:11) reads “ *Now all these things happened to them as types.* ” So we are justified in placing the things mentioned by Paul among the types, they were not only actual experiences of the Israelites but they were intended to teach future generation’s necessary and important lessons. Now Old Testament types illustrate specific Scriptural truths. They demonstrate the fact that “ ***the Old is in the New revealed and the New is in the Old concealed.*** ” Much New Testament truth is concealed in the Old Testament in the types. And God attaches great importance to the types.

Probably one of the reasons why the Lord dealt so severely with Moses in relation to the smiting of the rock was that Moses spoilt an otherwise perfect type. (Num 20:11) The Rock had already been smitten (Exo 17:6) and as that was a type of the death of the Lord Jesus it was not necessary to smite it again. *Does this incident not show us that God is extremely jealous of His types ?* Now typical teaching has been avoided by many because of the excesses of the few. A Christian used to rave about a certain preacher who was very deep because he could tell you about the ass’s head and the droppings of the doves, we need to be careful lest typology becomes tripe logy. John Philips says “ *A danger in handling Bible types is to strain their significance or to*

use artificial, overly imaginative, and Biblically unsupported methods of interpretation. If we avoid doing that, we can look to the types of the Bible for rich and rewarding teaching. ” 1.

2. The History of God’s People:

You see, in the preceding book of Exodus we see Israel in Egyptian bondage serving Pharaoh and his gods. Here there were no “ *feasts of Jehovah,* ” no “ *holy convocations,* ” no “ *times of rejoicing,* ” they were slaves in a foreign land. In New Testament language they were in bondage “ *to the god of this world.* ” (2 Cor 4:4) But to this down trodden people redemption came by the blood of the Lamb. They were brought out of Egypt separated from its people and idolatries to become the chosen people of Jehovah. (Ex 19:4) God’s “ *peculiar treasure,* ” “ *a people near unto the Lord,* ” (Ps 148:14) Now it was after Israel had been brought out of Egypt, gathered around Jehovah in the wilderness (Lev 7:38 27:34) with His presence in the midst, His cloud hovering over them that He gave these commandments concerning His feasts.

This passage would have been no use to them in Egypt, other interests occupied them there, but now alone in the desert separated unto God, the objects of His redeeming grace He was able to tell out His hearts desire. 1, 2,

3. The Relevancy of God’s Truth:

You see, the calendar we are about to examine shows God’s plan for the human race, beginning with the death

of the Lord Jesus at Calvary, followed by His bodily resurrection from the grave, His ascension to heaven, the beginning of the church at Pentecost, the present church age, the appearing of our Lord to translate the church to glory, the tribulation that follows the church's rapture, the regathering and regeneration of Israel, and the return of Messiah to reign on earth. *God's prophetic calendar containing all the above events is recorded in one chapter in the Bible.* All of these future events are to be located in various parts of the Bible, but in this wonderful chapter they are all presented in sequence. Think of it, in one single chapter in the Bible, we have God's prophetic plan for the whole of the ages. And while this calendar was given originally to the nation of Israel, the events listed in it reach forward to the present church age and beyond. Now as we come to this chapter Lehman Strauss says we should look for three things.

1. The Primary Association of the Passage:

To whom was it spoken ? Why did God speak like this ? Well, here were rules and regulations drawn up by God Himself and intended for the nation of Israel. (23:1-2)

2. The Prophetic Anticipation in the Passage:

Does it contain a prediction of the future ? Does its message have an immediate and a future fulfilment ? Does it not only tell us what God has done, but what God is doing now and what He is going to do in the future ?

3. The Personal Application of the Passage:

Is there a message for the Christian today in the book of Leviticus ?

Now keeping those things in mind I want us to set the scene this for everything that will follow.

(1) A DESCRIPTION THAT IS GRAPHIC

There are three sets of words that are used to describe these feasts. Look if you will at (23:2) Note the three sets of words. " *My feasts,*" " *holy convocations,*" " *the feasts or festivals of the Lord.*" Now from this description we gather three things. These " feasts, were

(a) HIS GATHERINGS: The Keyword is Appointment:

Do you see how Moses puts it ? " *My feasts,*" J. N. Darby translates it " *These are the set feasts of Jehovah.*" The word signifies " *to meet by appointment.*" Alfred Edersheim refers to the feasts as " *the trystings of Jehovah.*" Jehovah was the host, His people were the guests, and these were divinely appointed seasons for the Lord to meet with His people. To have His own whom he redeemed, come together and rejoice in Him was the delight of His loving heart. It staggers one's mind to ponder the thought that we worthless creatures afford the great God of eternity His complete delight. They were His gatherings the keyword being appointment. *Now in the New Testament equal emphasis is laid upon the gatherings of the church.* In (1 Cor Ch 11) where Paul deals with the matter of headship and the Table he speaks of the coming together of the believers as an assembly.

In the Book of Hebrews the Christian is exhorted “ *Not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting one another and so much the more as see the day approaching.* ” (Heb 10:25) Believers in apostolic times gathered as a “ *spiritual house to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* ” (1 Pet 2:5-6) They met to remember the Lord, for mutual edification, for prayer. My are these not the divinely ordained gatherings for Christians today ? Do you recall the four fold realm in which the Early Church met ? (Acts 2:42) ***They moved in the realm of the Word, in the realm of Fellowship, in the realm of the Cross, in the realm of the Throne.*** Now here’s my question. What right do Christians have in missing “ *His gatherings,* ” ? Or what right do Christians have in choosing at which gathering to be present ?

These “ *feasts,* ” were “ *His gatherings,* ” and the keyword was appointment. But do you know what happened ? In the process of time these “ *feasts,* ” lost their significance and degenerated into formal empty things. As you read down (Lev Ch 23) you will notice the phrase “ *unto the Lord,* ” repeated many times, for the Lord is the centre of all activity. These are not the feasts of man, they are the feasts of the Lord. But during the lifetime of Christ they were no longer “ *my feasts,* ” but they were called “ *the feast of the Jews.* ” (Jn 5:1 7:2) The outward form was present but the inward reality was absent. You see, that which is Divinely sanctioned and Scripturally approved if carelessly handled becomes an empty and lifeless thing. Do we not find an up to date application in this in the Lord’s Supper ? So often we observe the Lord’s Supper

formally, mechanically, routinely, you could nearly set your watch as to what’s coming next. This weekly remembrance which should be fresh is often formal, it is mechanical when it should be motivational, and it is flat when it should be fragrant. (a)

(b) HOLY GATHERINGS: The Keyword is Requirement:

Ten times in this chapter they are called “ *holy convocations.* ” (23: 2, 3, 4, 7,) Or “ *sacred assemblies.* ” This is the keynote of the book of Leviticus “ *holiness.* ” (19:2) Dr. Graham Scroggie says, “ ***In Exodus we read of God’s approach to us, but in Leviticus of our approach to God. In the one book Christ is the Saviour, and in the other Christ is the Sanctifier. Exodus reveals God as love, Leviticus reveals God as light. In the one we are brought into union with Him, and in the other we are brought into communion. Exodus offers us pardon, but Leviticus calls us to purity.*** ” The Psalmist says, “ *holiness becometh thine house O Lord forever.* ” (Ps 93:5) But what began as “ *holy convocations,* ” had in Christ’s day become “ *unholy convocations,* ” the Jews held the feasts but the Lord was absent. Was it not because of a lack of holiness that Ananias and Sapphira were disciplined ? (Acts 5:3)

Was it not because of a lack of holiness that God disciplined some in the fellowship at Corinth, they had turned the Lord’s Supper into an orgy of eating and drinking, they had failed to judge themselves, therefore the Lord judged them. (1 Cor 11:31) Now it’s interesting

that Paul speaks of those who were “*drunken*,” in (1 Cor 11:21) and when you compare that with (Lev Ch 10) there is a striking parallel. Do you recall Nadab and Abihu who offered strange fire before the Lord ? (Num 10:1-11) Could it be that they offered this strange fire before the Lord under the influence of drink ? Whatever, the Lord is holy and He demands holiness in the life of His people. He repeatedly says, “*Be ye holy for I am holy.*” (Lev 19:1) Some years ago at a woman’s Bible study group the subject of worship was discussed. One woman said, “*you worship God in your way and I will worship Him in my way and my way satisfies me.*” The big question is not, “**Am I satisfied with my manner of worship, but is God satisfied ?**” Surely much of what passes for worship today is “*strange fire* ?” There is so much of man in it, so much of the flesh in it, so much of self in it. We need guidance in this business of worship, and God has given us a calendar to guide us.

(c) HAPPY GATHERINGS: The Keyword is Enjoyment:

Israel’s religious festivals were great days, times of rejoicing. The Hebrew word for “*joyous*,” (chad) was applied exclusively to the great annual feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, when all the males in Israel had to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem. Far from being dull, this was a time to rejoice. Do you see this chapter that lies before you ? *It does not list a series of funerals, or a series of fights, it lists a series of feasts.* Being a believer means enjoying the privilege of complete and joyful fellowship with God. Is your Christian experience marked by enjoyment or endurance ? Has your

redemption led you to rejoice ? Has your salvation given birth to a song ? (Col 3:16) (1)

(2) A DESIGN THAT IS SPECIFIC

What was God’s specific design and purpose in giving these feasts ? Well, I believe there was a 3 fold purpose or design. These feasts,

(a) WERE PRESERVATIVE:

They were given as memorials of God’s dealings with them in grace. For example the Passover was a reminder of their redemption from Egypt, the sheaf of first fruits of the fact that the land belonged to the Lord. *Pentecost was a reminder to them of the giving of the Law.* Pentecost was the anniversary of the giving of the Law. The Feast of Trumpets was a memorial of the time when the nation was gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai to meet with God. (Ex 19:13-19) The Day of Atonement was a reminder of God’s character as revealed to us in (Exod 34:6-7) And in Israel’s history the Feast of Tabernacles commemorated their liberty, their first night as a redeemed people. On that night they encamped in Succoth (Ex 12:37) which means “*booths, huts, tabernacles*,” and for 40 years they had no permanent shelter. You see, the Lord wanted to preserve the memory of those early days ever fresh in their minds.

My do we not constantly need to remind ourselves of the grace of God that has reached us, and what we were when it reached us. John Newton never allowed himself

nor the world to forget the super abounding sovereign grace of God that stopped and rescued him on his wild career. Throughout life as a constant reminder, he kept a text of Scripture hanging above the mantelpiece in his study which said, “ *thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.* ” (Deut 15:15) My Never forget what God in His grace has done for you. (a)

(b) WERE PROPHETIC:

Seven feasts that portrayed the basic facts of redemption even though this was something that the nation of Israel could not discern at this time. Certainly these seven feasts were memorials of past events but they were more than that. *They were foreshadowings of future events.* The Passover was a type of the death of Christ and the redemption accomplished by that. The firstfruits speak to us of the resurrection of Christ. Pentecost speaks to us of the ascension of Christ, and the last three feasts speak to us of the coming again of Jesus Christ. Now are those not the four central facts of history ? Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and return. All the purposes of God in grace, in government, and in glory. (a) (b)

(c) WERE PRACTICAL:

This must not be overlooked. You see, while these feasts related to the past and they related to the future, but they also related to the present. They had a practical value to the Israelites. For one thing, God wanted to instruct His people in,

1. The Principle of Faith:

You see, by these feasts God was brought into the affairs of everyday life in a most remarkable way. Look if you will at (Deut 16:16-17) Now I want make some simple observations here. Notice,

• **The People:**

“ *All thy males,* ” (16:16) It might appear in those days as now that some men were negligent in attending to spiritual matters. The man is the head of the home holding rightful authority from God and God expected that these males should stop their work and go to Jerusalem and worship at these set feasts. Now is not amazing that today many males put work before worship, money before God, self before the Saviour ? They tell you that they cannot take time off to assemble before the Lord. My how can we expect to lead our families in the ways of the Lord, if the husband is not giving attention to worship ?

• **The Purpose:**

Look at (16:16) again. Now the feast of Unleavened Bread, included the Passover and Firstfruits, the Feast of Weeks was Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles included Trumpets and the Day of Atonement.

• **The Provision:**

“ *And they shall not appear before the Lord empty, every man shall give as he able, according to the blessing of the*

Lord thy God which He hath given thee.” (16:17) You see, these men were not only to leave their lands and possessions to go to the feasts, but they were not to appear before the Lord empty. That is, they were to bring to Him their sacrificial gifts. Every Lord’s Day we are given a similar opportunity to appear before the Lord, but are we coming prepared ? When you come up to appear before the Lord what do you bring with you ? ***Do you bring with you a sacrifice of praise ?*** (Heb 13:15) Do you bring with you a thanksgiving heart ? Do you honour the Lord with your substance ? Paul says, “ *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him.*” (1 Cor 16:2) Brethren, when you come up before the Lord, and gather around His Table, do you bring with you an appropriate Word ? Oh, so many of you Christian men are coming up before the Lord and you are empty ? *You’re empty of praise, you’re empty of prayer, and you’re empty of ministry.* You have nothing to give to the people of God as they gather around the Lord’s Table, because you yourself have not spent in His presence soaking up His Word.

- **The Promise:**

Look if you will at (Ex 34:23) You see, while the men of Israel assembled at Jerusalem, the watchful eye of God was upon their homes, wives, children, and land. Now this was a great test of faith for the men. Just to take God at His Word . If they would attend to the things of God, the Lord would attend to their things. Is this principle not implicit in the words of our Saviour ? “ *But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these*

things shall be added unto you.” (Matt 6:33) There was the principle of faith. Of course these feasts provided,

2. Seasons of Fellowship:

And thereby were intended to maintain national unity. The word “ *convocation,*” appears at least ten times in this chapter. It means “ *a calling together,*” or “ *an assembly.*” These feasts were regular annual get-togethers, seeking to maintain national unity. Now do you recall that this unity was broken in the days of Jeroboam ? (1 Kings 12:26) You see, Jeroboam realised that fellowship would promote unity so he established false worship. Do you see what he done ? He established gods of **Human Creation:** idols. There were places of **Human Conception:** Bethel and Dan. He had priests of **Human Ordination:** not the sons of Levi. There were feasts of **Human Invention:** the 8th month. There was an altar which was a **Human Imitation.** Now all of this was in marked contrast to the worship of Jehovah. Do you know something ? Seasons of fellowship ought to cement rather than fragment, they ought to unite rather than divide. Do you recall what the Psalmist said ? “ *Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity for there the Lord commanded the blessing even life for evermore.*” (133:1)

But through these feasts God was not only instructing His people on the principle of faith and seasons of fellowship, but He also sought to convey the

3. Concept of Fidelity:

For these seven feasts were intended to teach faithfulness to God and His Word. They were just to do what the Lord asked them to do. Of course as they celebrated the feasts in the divinely appointed time and place it gave an opportunity to explain to the members of their family why they did it. “ *What mean ye by this service ?* ” (Ex 12:26) This was important for the continuity of the testimony, for the feasts were intended to teach them, that God had a claim on their lives. (1) (2)

(3) A DIVISION THAT IS PROPHETIC

Now these annual feasts were seven in number.

1. Passover: speaks of the death of Christ (1 Cor 5:7)
2. Unleavened Bread: speaks of a separated walk.
3. The First Fruits: typical of the resurrection.
(1 Cor 15:23)
4. Pentecost: which looked forward to that day in history when the Holy Spirit came down. (Acts 2:1)
Now an interval of four months elapsed between the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets. (23:33)
5. The Feast of Trumpets: speaks of Israel’s regathering (is 27:12-13 Joel 2:15 Matt 24:29) But it also applies to us for we are waiting for the sound of the trumpet.
6. The Day of Atonement: illustrates to us the day of Israel’s cleansing.
7. The Feast of Tabernacles: pictures that future kingdom where Jesus “ *shall reign where’re the sun.* ” The feasts are seven in number and this being the number of completion, the picture is complete in every detail.

Here we have God’s prophetic calendar, a perfect outline of God’s dealing with the Jew and the Gentile from first to last. Now I want you to notice that these feasts are divided into sections of three and four.

(a) The First Four Feasts were Literally Fulfilled by Christ at His First Coming:

The Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost followed each other closely. Indeed all these took place in the first three months in Israel’s calendar. Then an interval of four months (23:24) during which there was no feast of Jehovah. Rather there was a long pause between the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets. Now that’s significant. Indeed it seems to be that the truths foreshadowed in the first four feasts are related to the church, while the last three feasts are related to the nation. (a)

(b) The Last Three Feasts will be Literally Fulfilled by Christ at His Second Coming:

The interval between the feasts in Israel’s religious calendar illustrates the time gap between the first and second advents of the Lord. As there were no feasts as far as (Lev Ch 23) is concerned between Pentecost and Trumpets so there are no feasts during this present age. The church of course has one feast, that is the Lord’s Supper, and this feast embraces all the truths found in these feasts. Passover reminds us of the bread and wine, symbols of His death. Unleavened Bread, speaks of holiness of life that is so necessary to a true remembrance

of Christ. First-fruits bring to mind the fact that He is risen. Pentecost, an unbroken loaf suggests the oneness of the body of Christ. In the Feast of Trumpets we show forth the Lord's death till He come. *Now do you know where we are living right now ?* We are living between the Feast of Pentecost and the Feast of Trumpets, and during that time Israel was busy in wheat harvest. My are you involved in the harvest ? Sure, you have come to God through the Lamb, you have experienced resurrection life through Christ, you are putting sin out of your life, but are you involved in the harvest ? When the Saviour comes again, will he find you faithful ? Will he find you involved in this great spiritual harvest ? Will he see you,

***Gathering in the lost ones for whom our Lord did die
For the crowning day is coming by and by***