

Understanding the Foundations

Chapter 2

God's Calendar – A Framework for Understanding Scripture

A New Calendar

When God formed the nation of Israel, one of the first things that He gave them was a calendar. In Exodus 12:1, He started the countdown for the final plague on Egypt and marked that day as the first day of the first month of the year. The new calendar had seven special times called “feasts.”

¹ *The LORD spoke to Moses, saying,* ² *“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘These are the appointed feasts of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; **they are my appointed feasts.**’”* Leviticus 23:1-2 (ESV)

It is important to recognize that this was not a “Jewish” calendar with “Jewish” holidays. God said that it was HIS calendar and HIS special days and that He expected HIS people to follow it. He also emphasized that these feasts were to be observed forever. We will examine the calendar in more depth in later sessions but tonight I would like to just give you a brief overview of it.

A Framework for Understanding

When we read in Leviticus 23 about the feasts of God (called the moedim in Hebrew), they seem very foreign and unfamiliar to us. That is unfortunate because, as you will see, these feasts actually provide a framework for understanding Biblical prophecy.

In addition to the weekly Sabbath there are three annual feasts in the spring (Passover, First Fruits and Pentecost) and three annual feasts in the fall (Trumpets, Atonement and Tabernacles).

2018 Feasts Dates



Passover and Unleavened Bread

Mar-30 through Apr-7



First Fruits of the Harvest

Mar-31 through Apr-1



Shavuot Pentecost Feast of Weeks

May-20 through May-21



Yom Teruah Day of Trumpets

Sep-9 through Sep-10



Yom Kippur Day of Atonement

Sep-18 through Sep-19



Sukkot Feast of Tabernacles

Sep-27 through Oct-1

Biblical days start at sundown and end at sundown the following calendar day.
The dates shown are approximate and others may observe the feasts on slightly different days.

The three spring feasts have clear prophetic meanings that have been fulfilled.

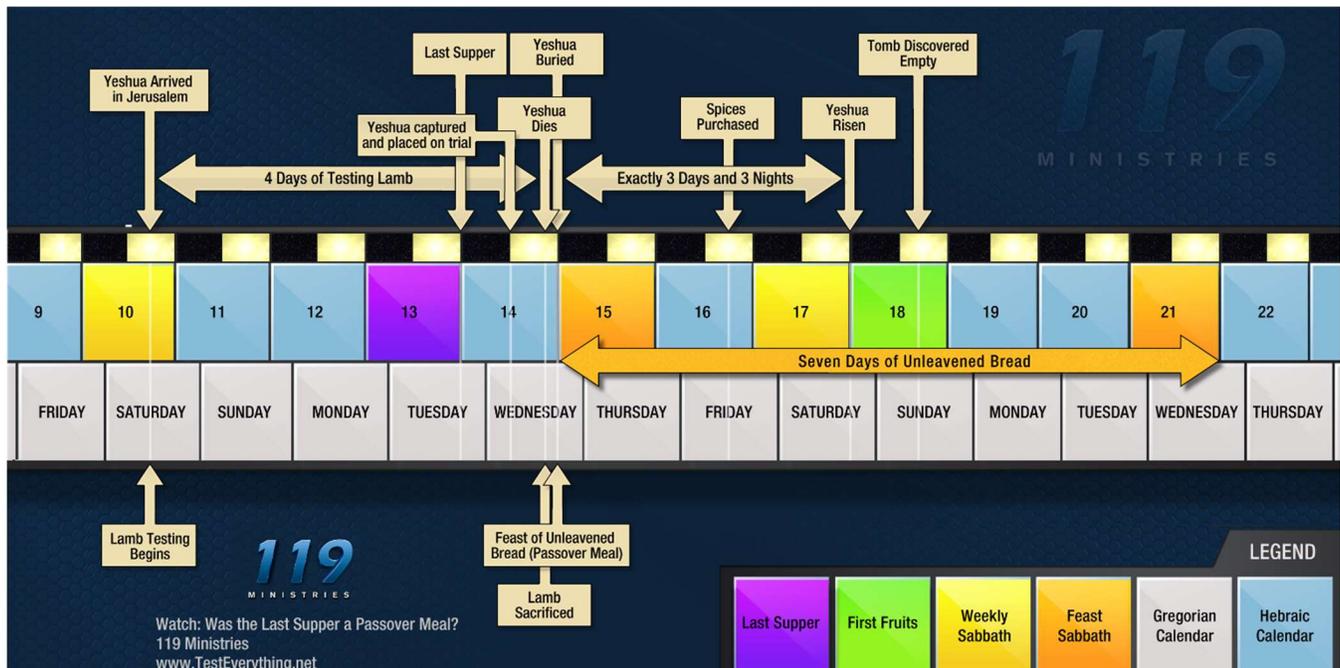
- Passover – The Sacrificial Death of Christ
- First Fruits – The Resurrection of Christ
- Pentecost – The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit

The prophetic meanings of three fall feasts have not yet been fulfilled. We will discuss Pentecost and the fall feasts in later sessions. However, tonight we will focus on Passover and First Fruits to demonstrate the incredible precision of the Scriptures and give you an idea of what the Fall Feasts may reveal.

Three Days and Three Nights

³⁸ Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” ³⁹ But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Matthew 12:38-40 (ESV)

I have always heard that this verse could not be taken literally because there are not “three days and three nights” between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. However, this chart shows that if we use God’s calendar instead of man’s calendar, the Gospel accounts are very exact.



119-Ministries, who created this chart, has an excellent free video that explains it very well. I highly recommend watching their video so, I will not cover all the details that they do. Note that in the above timeline, the Last Supper is not a Passover meal as you may have heard in the past. The brief accounts of the Last Supper in Matthew, Mark and Luke seem to conflict with the more detailed account in John. We do not have time to cover this issue tonight but, if it concerns you, I will be happy to share my understanding of it with you later.

[The Passover](#)

We first hear about the Passover in Exodus 12.

¹ *The LORD said to Moses and Aaron...* ² *“This month shall be for you the beginning of months...”* ³ *Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household...* ⁵ *Your lamb shall be without blemish...* ⁶ *and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly... shall kill their lambs at twilight.* ⁷ *“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it...”*

¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD.

¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Exodus 12:1-7, 12-14 (ESV)

On the night of the Passover, every first born in Egypt was to die, both man and beast. This would have included the Israelites but God provided a means of salvation for them... if they would obey.

Many point to this terrible judgement as proof that the “God of the Old Testament” was cruel and vengeful. We could spend an entire session on this one point but, for tonight, suffice it to say that this was the tenth plague and not the first. God had patiently worked to show the Egyptians who He was and to soften their prideful and stubborn hearts for over a year. Also, the same salvation that God provided for Israel was available to any Egyptians who would humble themselves by obeying the God of the Israelites. Some accepted it, most did not.

The Prophetic Fulfillment

As amazing as the first Passover was, it was only a shadow of what its ultimate fulfilment would be. Two thousand years later, on the tenth day of the first month of God’s calendar, Jesus entered Jerusalem.

¹² The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast [Passover & Unleavened Bread] heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” ¹⁴ And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, ¹⁵ “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” John 12:12-15 (ESV) / Zech 9:9

Tens of thousands of people had come to Jerusalem for the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. As they gathered that Saturday along the road waiting for the shepherds to bring in the thousands of sacrificial lambs, the true “Lamb of God” (John 1:29) entered the city. As the above reference to Zechariah’s prophecy shows, everything that Jesus did that week was in direct fulfillment of prophecy.

For the next four days, Jesus, like the lambs, was tested. He entered the temple and drove out those who were ripping off the people who came to worship. He taught the true meaning of the God's Commandments, healed the lame and opened the eyes of the blind. Over and over, the hypocritical leaders sought to trap Him in His words, but His wisdom left them dumbfounded and the crowds were astonished. Like the Passover lamb, he was completely without blemish.

Though their hearts raged against Him, the corrupt priests and leaders of the people were unable to arrest Him because *“His time had not yet come.”* Yet, when the four days of testing were completed, they were suddenly able to arrest Him. They immediately brought Him to trial that very night. Night trials were against the law but they didn't want any interference from the priests and leaders such as Nicodemus who recognized Him as the Messiah. They dragged Him before Pilate (Matthew 27:11) to have Him crucified yet even the pagan Roman governor found no fault in Him. (John 18:38)

However, unlike the Passover lambs who were killed quickly and humanely, Jesus was beaten mercilessly and was nailed to an execution stake to die the most agonizing death possible... every detail of that horrible day was a fulfillment of prophecy after prophecy.

Finally, in the middle of the afternoon of the 14th day, when the lambs were being killed at the Temple, Jesus died. Nicodemus went to Pilate to plead to have Jesus' body so that it would not be thrown in a pile of corpses by the Romans. He hurriedly wrapped it in a burial cloth and laid it in a tomb that he had bought for himself. Normally, the body would have been cleansed and wrapped with spices but nothing more could be done for Jesus that day because the Sabbath began that evening.

The Sabbath

While the six feasts of the LORD come once a year, it was the weekly Sabbath that defined the daily life of the Israelites. *“Keeping the Sabbath”* is the fourth of what we know as “The Ten Commandments” but God instituted the Sabbath at the very creation of the earth. Man's first day in the Garden of Eden was a Sabbath. How important is the Sabbath? Moses had been on Mount Sinai with God for 40 days. He had received the entire Law, the Torah, and it was time to go back down. Listen to what God said to Moses as he was preparing to leave:

¹³ “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘**Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.**’ ¹⁴ You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. ¹⁵ Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. ¹⁶ Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. ¹⁷ It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel...” Exodus 31:13-17 (ESV)

If at the end of this class, I say to you, “*Above all, remember...*” That one thing would probably be the most important of everything we discussed. The disciples understood this and, even though their master had been killed, they obeyed God’s Law and waited.

This is the main point of confusion about the timeline of the crucifixion and resurrection. In God’s calendar, days begins at sundown rather than midnight as we are accustomed to. Therefore, the weekly Sabbath, being the 7th day of the week, begins at sundown on Friday night. The tradition of “Good Friday” came from people who read that Jesus was buried before the Sabbath and they thought that meant on Friday evening. However, if we continue reading in Exodus 12, we will see that there were actually two Sabbaths that week.

The Feast of Unleaven Bread

¹⁴ “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever... ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ **On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days...**” Exodus 12:15-16a (ESV)

Therefore, the day that started with the Passover meal, the first of the seven days of “Unleavened Bread” was like a Sabbath in that no work was to be done.

Therefore, on our chart, the 15th day of the month, the day following Jesus’ crucifixion, was a feast Sabbath.

The disciples would not have been able to purchase spices until the 16th day which was Friday. By the time they were able to find someone to buy the proper burial materials from and take them back to where they were staying to prepare them, the day was already getting late. Since it was now Friday evening, the weekly Sabbath was starting so they had to wait yet again. The weekly Sabbath ended at sundown on Saturday evening. However, without lights, they could still do nothing until sunrise on Sunday morning.

When Sunday morning came, the women took the spices and made their way to the tomb. You can imagine how they felt. Besides dealing with the death of someone they loved, Jesus' body had been mangled horribly by the crucifixion. Now it had been laying in a tomb for three days. To make matters worse, there was a huge stone over the entrance that they could not move and there were soldiers posted to keep them away. Somehow, they went anyway, not knowing they were about to learn the true meaning of the Feast of First Fruits.

First Fruits

While most of us have heard of the Passover, we don't hear much about the Feast of First Fruits.

*⁹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹ and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. **On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it...** ¹⁴ And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever... Leviticus 23:9-14 (ESV)*

First Fruits is the first day after the weekly Sabbath following the Passover. It has a very profound meaning to the Jewish people in that it recognizes God as their sovereign provider. The waving of the first sheaf of grain before the LORD acknowledges Him as the provider of the harvest, not the farmer. Even though First Fruits is right next to Passover in the calendar, its connection with Passover could not be seen until the coming of Christ. Paul explains it this way:

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...

*²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, **the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.** ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: **Christ the firstfruits**, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.* 1 Corinthians 15:12-14, 20-23 (ESV)

When the women arrived at dawn, the guards were gone, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty. After exactly three days and three nights, Jesus was raised from the dead, exactly as He had said! It was God, not the corrupt religious leaders nor the Romans, who was sovereign.

The sheaf that was waved before the LORD on First Fruits was only the first sheaf of the harvest. Thousands more would follow! In the Passover, Christ took away our sin that we can live in right relationship with God. In First Fruits, He destroyed the power of death so that it can no longer enslave us through fear. (Hebrews 2:14-15) We may still fear the loneliness of losing someone and we may fear the pain that may be associated with our own death. However, as Paul said, we do not grieve as others grieve who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13) Likewise, Jesus said, that we need not fear as others fear. Evil men may be able to kill us but after that they are utterly powerless to do anything more. (Luke 12:4-7)

My grandfather believed in the doctrine of “soul-sleep” which says that when you die, your soul sleeps – knowing nothing – until the day of resurrection. He might have been right but my guess is that when he closed his eyes in death, it was only a blink. The apostle Paul never rested from serving the LORD despite unimaginable hardships. When he was sitting in prison under a sentence of death, he wrote this:

¹⁹ ...I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

*²¹ **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.* Philippians 1:18-24 (ESV)

To Paul, death was no more frightening than being locked in a room with no walls. This is the heritage that Passover and First Fruits give us! And there is far more...