

# **FIRST FRUITS BIBLE STUDY**

## **The Basic Concept: A Backyard Analogy**

Most simply stated, "First-Fruits Giving" can be likened to picking the very first ripe, red, juicy, Jersey tomato of the season off your vine and offering it at the altar to the God who brought it forth from seed, with praise and thanksgiving for all the harvests of the past and with a sure confidence and faith that before the season is over, your vine will yield an abundant crop. Let's examine some of the biblical history behind this concept.

## **Biblical Roots - Old Testament**

In Exodus, God commands the entire nation of Israel to honor God by bringing the first crops of their harvest to the house of the Lord. The people were forbidden to use any part of the harvest until the first fruits were offered to the Lord. To neglect these first-fruits offerings (or any others) was considered robbery of God (Malachi 3:8 NRSV). Giving of the first fruits was an act of allegiance to God as the giver of all.

The Feast of First Fruits marked the beginning of the grain harvests in Israel. Barley was the first grain to ripen of those sown in the winter months. Scripture specifies the Feast of First Fruits as Sunday "on the day after the Sabbath." (Leviticus 23:9-11 NRSV). The last grain to ripen was the wheat, and the first fruits from this harvest were offered 50 days later at Pentecost.

Each spring, Israel celebrated Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of First Fruits at the same gathering. The following details will become highly significant a little later: On the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, the Passover lambs were killed at 3:00 p.m. and prepared for eating. At 6:00 p.m. the Passover began and lasted until the following sundown. At 6:00 p.m. Saturday (the start of Sunday) the day of First Fruits began. On Sunday morning a sheaf or handful of early barley harvest was reverently cut and the barley removed, filling a bowl. It was then taken to the Temple and waved before the Lord.

## **The New Testament - The First Fruits of the Dead**

During Holy Week, Jesus and the disciples gathered in Jerusalem for Passover. After the Passover meal was eaten, Jesus was arrested at midnight. At 9:00 a.m. Friday, the Roman trial began; Jesus was crucified at noon. He was buried before 6:00 p.m., when the Sabbath began. Jesus lay in the tomb Friday evening and Saturday and arose from the dead on Sunday, the very day of the Feast of the First Fruits. Thus, Paul refers to Christ as the first fruits of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20 NRSV). In this

reversal, God has given us God's first fruits, God's only begotten Son, that we may have eternal life.

Note: Only the Gospel of John locates Jesus' death on the "Day of Preparation", which is interesting in that according to his interpretation, at 3:00 p.m., as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the temple, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was dying a sacrificial death on the cross. However, it does not conflict with Easter morning being the Feast of the First Fruits.

### **Questions for discussion:**

1) How does God's command to the Israelites regarding their first fruits translate to the fruits of our labor today? Specifically, how do we define our first fruits? Who gives them? How are we to prioritize how we use them?

2) In a tough economy, which includes an uncertain job market, does God still expect us to take the leap of faith in giving our first fruits? From what events in their salvation history did the Israelites draw their faith? From what events in your own salvation history do you draw your faith?

3) "Simply Giving" is an electronic fund transfer program whereby your Sunday offerings are electronically transferred from your bank to your church's bank account, weekly, monthly, or semi-monthly. How do you feel about elevating the priority of your offerings through "Simply Giving"? How might this program help you to become a first-fruits giver?

4) What feelings come to mind knowing that God offered up God's First fruits, God's only begotten Son, for you on the cross?

5) Jesus said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (Luke 6:38 NRSV) How have you seen this promise come alive in your life?

### **Personal Exercise:**

Take out your checkbook and, starting three months back, read through it like a book. What does it say about your priorities? What story does it tell about you and your relationship with God?

Take stock of all that Christ has done for you and pledge to give back the tithe of all that God gives you.

## First Fruits Bible References

**Exodus 22:29** You shall not delay to make offerings from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses.

**Exodus 23:16** You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the **first fruits** of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor.

**Exodus 23:19** The choicest of the **first fruits** of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

**Exodus 34:22** You shall observe the festival of weeks, the **first fruits** of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year.

**Exodus 34:26** The best of the **first fruits** of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. **Leviticus 2:14** If you bring a grain offering of **first fruits** to the Lord, you shall bring as the grain offering of your **first fruits** coarse new grain from fresh ears, parched with fire.

**Leviticus 23:9-11** The Lord spoke to Moses: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the **first fruits** of your harvest to the priest. He shall raise the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall raise it.

**Leviticus 23:17** You shall bring from your settlements two loaves of bread as an elevation offering, each made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of choice flour, baked with leaven, as **first fruits** to the Lord.

**Leviticus 23:20** The priest shall raise them with the bread of the **first fruits** as an elevation offering before the Lord, together with the two lambs; they shall be holy to the Lord for the priest.

**Numbers 15:20-21** From your first batch of dough you shall present a loaf as a donation; you shall present it just as you present a donation from the threshing floor. Throughout your generations you shall give to the Lord a donation from the first of your batch of dough.

**Numbers 28:26** On the day of the **first fruits**, when you offer a grain offering of new grain to the Lord at your festival of weeks, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not work at your occupations.

**Deuteronomy 18:4** The **first fruits** of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the **first** of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him.

**Deuteronomy 26:2** You shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

**2 Chronicles 31:5** As soon as the word spread, the people of Israel gave in abundance the **first fruits** of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.

**Nehemiah 10:35** We obligate ourselves to bring the **first fruits** of our soil and the **first fruits** of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord;

**Nehemiah 12:44** - On that day men were appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the **first fruits**, and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the law for the priests and for the Levites from the fields belonging to the towns; for Judah rejoiced over the priests and the Levites who ministered.

**Proverbs 3:9** Honor the Lord with your substance and with the **first fruits** of all your produce;

**Jeremiah 2:3** Israel was holy to the Lord, the **first fruits** of his harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says the Lord.

**Ezekiel 44:30** The first of all the **first fruits** of all kinds, and every offering of all kinds from all your offerings, shall belong to the priests; you shall also give to the priests the **first** of your dough, in order that a blessing may rest on your house.

**1 Corinthians 15:20** But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who have died.

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