

THANKING THE LORD

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“Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year” (Exodus 23:14).

After Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the Lord also gave the Children of Israel more laws that were to be kept. Among those laws was this: “Three times you shall keep a feast to me in the year.”

The first of these feasts was called “The Feast of Unleavened Bread.” For this occasion the Children of Israel were told to eat only unleavened bread for a period of seven days—this during their special month called Abib. The Hebrews had their own ecclesiastical year, and Abib was the first of these months. Translated, the name means green ears of grain, or fresh fruits. It was so named because grain, particularly barley, was in ear at that time. This first feast was also known as the Feast of the Passover.

The second feast that was to be remembered was the Feast of Harvest. This was to be celebrated some seven weeks after the first one. (It was also known as the Feast of Pentecost, because it was about the fiftieth day from the Feast of Unleavened Bread.) The Jews celebrated this day with holy rest, rejoicing, and a free-will offering to the Lord. On this second feast, they frequently presented the first fruits of the season.

The third and final feast was called the Feast of the Ingathering. This celebration came at the end of the year of harvesting, when the final fruits of the land were brought in for storage. It was also known as the Feast of Tabernacles, because of the small booths or dwellings that the Israelites constructed during this celebration from branches and the leaves of trees. These small shelters appeared on roofs of houses, in the courts, in the streets and in the fields. This celebration continued for eight days.

All males of the Jewish Church were expected to make an appearance at the Temple during these three Feasts. It was truly a time of rejoicing, celebration and thanksgiving. Many animals were brought to be sacrificed, and the Sabbath was recognized with even greater ceremony and ritual.

In some countries today, there is day set aside as a thanksgiving holiday. In many other countries, there is a harvest festival. These are times when people pause in their labors to give thanks to the Lord. Although the holiday is set by the various different countries, it is really a religious holiday, going back to the time of Moses himself.

Everyone who loves the Lord knows that every day is a day of thanksgiving to Him, especially each Sunday in worship. We also know that just *saying* thank you to the Lord for all He provides for us is not enough. For the Lord can look into our hearts to see if we *really* mean it! When we sing special songs and pray to the Lord before His Word, He can tell if we mean what we say.

When the Lord was on this earth, certain people asked what they should do to show their love for Him. His answers were very simple. One time He told them the story of the good Samaritan, who was kind to a wounded neighbor. The Lord told them that if they loved Him, they would go and do the same to their neighbors if they needed help. On another occasion He said, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me" (John 14:21).

So, if we really do appreciate all the wonderful things the Lord gives us, the many blessings we receive each day of our life, the love of friends and parents, then let us tell the Lord so in song and in prayer. He wants to know if we appreciate what is given to us. And then we can show how much we love Him by keeping His Commandments every day of our life. We can also show thanks to our parents by saying "Thank you" and by obeying the rules in our homes. This is a way to show our thanks to the Lord, who really gives us everything.

When the family gathers for a Thanksgiving dinner or a harvest celebration, look over the table at all the food there. Then remind yourselves to give thanks to the Lord in a blessing before the meal, knowing the Lord can look into your hearts to see if you really mean it. The custom of thanking the Lord at a special time each year goes back as far as Moses and the feasts celebrated by all the Children of Israel. And, like all the people since who have given thanks to their Maker, we too will receive many other blessings all our life besides food for our bodies. The Lord will also provide us with rich foods for the mind, which will build an angel inside of us that will be fed to eternity in heaven.

Amen.

Lessons: Exodus 23:14-19; Leviticus 23:33-44; *Arcana Coelestia* 9294