

# First Fruits – What Kind of Lump Are You?

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## MAIN VERSES

Decided, since we're still in the week of unleavened bread, might as well talk about some things concerning the week of unleavened bread, right? So we had Passover last Monday evening, and it was possibly the most enjoyable Passover Seder I've ever been to. Possibly the most beautiful. I really appreciate the efforts of Katie Price and Angie Knapp and everything they put into having that Seder. Did you guys come? Who came? Who came? Who came? Was it beautiful? It was awesome. I really, really enjoyed Passover.

Of course, that kicks off the week of Unleavened Bread. And during the week of Unleavened Bread, we have a special day. And as we're fixing to read in the scriptures, we're going to read some scriptures today. And that doesn't mean one or two verses. But there's a special day, and it was the day of first fruits, is what some would call it. I don't have a problem with that name.

## First Fruits and Its Significance

It was the day when the first harvest, the barley harvest, a sheaf was cut, and there was a rite that was carried out in the temple, and it was way before the Lord. And why this was so important is because we present everything to God, we give the first to God, and we wave it before the Father, if you will, in praise and glory to God. And this is one of the reasons why the very first of the crop is way before the Lord, especially with Yom HaBakurim—Israel would not dare partake of the crop until it was way before the Father. That's what Scripture says.

The day of firstfruits, the presentation of the very first of the crop has to be way before the Father before you're allowed to partake of it. And this sets the tone for the entire rest of the year. This sets the tone for Shavuot, when the tithes are brought, and Sukkot, when the second tithes are brought, and when all the harvest is brought in. This is the first harvest of the year,

entering into giving God the praise for the blessing that he gives to us. And so that's what we're going to talk about today. We'll call this day First Fruits.

## Reading Leviticus 23

And if you would turn to me to Leviticus chapter 23, probably the most favorite chapter in this movement. We know it well, and we're going to keep reviewing it. Leviticus chapter 23, verse 4. Okay, everybody look up for a second. Do no ordinary work. What's that remind you of? Do no work. You're not supposed to work. Huh? Sabbath. Thank you. If I ever ask a question, it's usually a stupid simple answer. It reminds you of a Sabbath, right?

So the term Sabbath is not used in this chapter, and that's kind of relevant for a discussion we're fixing to have. But do no work reminds you of the Sabbath, right? Because on Sabbath, you don't do what? Work. Exactly. Right? So on the first day, you're not going to do any work. Could be a pseudo-Sabbath, if you will. But you shall present a food offering to the Lord for seven days. And on the seventh day is a holy convocation. And you shall do no ordinary work on the seventh day. Also could be considered a Sabbath. Okay. In an aspect.

Verse 9. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you to reap its harvest. They're going to go into the land and they're going to do what? Reap the harvest. Reap the harvest. Someone already changed it for me. Thank you, sir, for being on top of that. And on the day after the what? It is a statute forever throughout all your generations and all your dwelling places.

## The First Fruits Rite

So this rite of this day takes place when the first of the harvest is brought before the priest, and the priest is going to wave a sheaf of barley, and you can't eat what? Bread or grain. You can't partake of that year's harvest until this happens. Why not? Because it needs to be presented before the Lord.

I have a little graph here, and I want you guys to take a look at this beautiful graphic. Who made this beautiful graphic? It was me. You got lamb and all this stuff. This is a graphic I made a long while ago. And I want to talk about firstfruits today and a controversy.

## A First-Century Controversy

See, last week I mentioned briefly a controversy about firstfruits between two groups of people—technically three or four, but regardless, two main groups of people in the first century—and I wanted to review that today, not because of some big teaching, not because I want to declare something that is right and something is wrong. I want to give you guys information because you will come across this controversy and you at least need to have a little bit of information about it. Everybody's nervous—fantastic.

So this is Passover week, everybody. Guess what day the lamb is representing? The 14th of Nisan, the 14th of Aviv, if you will, and that's the day the lambs were slain. And that evening, you eat the lamb, right? And that kicks off a seven-day feast known as Feast of Unleavened Bread. Everybody's familiar with this, right? This is just review, right?

And you have first day, second day, third day, fourth day, fifth day, sixth day, seventh day of unleavened bread. Now, in [Leviticus 23](#), it states that there is another day within this week called first fruits, as we just read. And it happens when? The morrow after the Sabbath. Okay?

## The Literal Text and Its Interpretation

So typically when we read that, the literal text, when's the Sabbath day? Sixth day, seventh day, seventh day of the week, right? And so the day after the seventh day of the week is what? Day one. Who said Sunday, you pagans? So day one is Sunday, right?

And so... Technically speaking, this year—1, 2, 3, 4, 5—are we in the fifth day of Unleavened Bread? I think we are. Let's just say we are. Today's the Sabbath, so tomorrow would be firstfruits if we're taking the text literal. It would be Sunday, right? So firstfruits happens right here. And maybe the Sabbath day was back here on day three. Firstfruits would be right here, and so on and so forth, right?

In the first century, there is a bit of a controversy, right? You see the sons of Zadok and the sons of Betus. Basically, the Sadducees. Everybody knows who the Sadducees are? They were... the priestly families, and we're just going to discuss this in a minute.

## The Sadducees' Literal Approach

Long story short, the Sadducees came from the priesthood. From the Hasmoneans, if you will, even. After the whole Hanukkah conflict happened, the Hasmoneans, right? They drove out the Greeks and they established a reign over Israel. They took Judea back. The priesthood took

Judea back, right? And we always celebrate this every year in the winter. They were, but then the next generation went downhill quick.

And that's the politics that we don't typically talk about during Hanukkah. Because the priesthood now established themselves as kings over Judea. It's not really kosher for the priests to also be the kings of Judea. And we'll see a few figures who didn't really like to be questioned on their authority of how they ran things. The priests are supposed to be servants of the kingdom. Even the high priest, a servant to the kingdom.

And so the Sadducees essentially came from the priesthood and were sympathetic, if you will, to the Hasmoneans. The Sadducees believed the literal text in the Torah, right? They valued the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, as the breath-inspired word of God and everything else was more or less commentary. It's important, but just the Torah. No oral traditions, no added commentary. If you said, well, you read into the text a little bit, they'd say, no, that's not what it says. It says this. They were very literal in their translation.

## The Pharisees' Interpretive Approach

Then you had another group of people who were pretty much the common folk. Anybody want to take a crack at who they were? Pharisees. The Pharisees. This was a group of people, the common folk. They had a lot of sages, a lot of smart guys, loved to study Torah. But they also had an understanding among themselves that sometimes there's gaps in Scripture where things aren't defined. And we have to fill this gap with interpretations or sometimes traditions or we need to find a bridge. And so we know that they had an oral law, an oral Torah, extra commentary, traditions and so on and so forth.

They did not believe that firstfruits was Sunday, like the Sadducees did. Well, Matt, why would they think differently? I mean, it says the morrow after the Sabbath, right? Well, they believed that the day after the first day of Unleavened Bread was firstfruits. They considered Unleavened Bread 1 kind of like a Sabbath, if you will, because it says don't work—it's kind of the same thing, right?

Okay, and so while the Sadducees would be celebrating firstfruits on here, the Pharisees would want to celebrate it right here on the 16th of Nisan, the morrow after, if you will. And this brought up a huge controversy in the first century, which we're going to explore here in just a minute. And it's fascinating because the Sadducees view [Leviticus 23](#) exactly how it's written. The Pharisees try to take into account all the scriptures and give all the scriptures a little weight.

## The Joshua Connection

And so the reason they came to this conclusion and why they refused to celebrate firstfruits on the day after the Sabbath actually comes from an opinion on Scripture, Joshua chapter 5. If you read Joshua chapter 5, I don't have a slide for it, starting in verse 10. On the evening of the 14th day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, this is when Israel first came into the land, the Israelites celebrated Passover.

## Crossing the Jordan and Eating Grain

Yay! It's like the first time and they had to get re-circumcised and all that mess, right? That was a big deal. The day after, the Israelites came to the land of Jericho. Can you imagine how powerful that would have been? You walk into the land—Jordan split all the way up, right? Jordan River. You walk in, you're going to celebrate Passover in the land that God had promised you, promised your forefathers. Now you're going to eat some of the food, some of the produce, some of the grain, roast it up, eat it, and then the manna stops. No more of what is—bread. Why? Because it had been fulfilled. Can you imagine how powerful that would have been for you to be that generation?

Wait a second, it says they ate the grain, right? On the day after? But they can't eat the grain until after firstfruits. And so the Pharisees believed that when they ate the grain it was the 16th of Nisan and obviously they couldn't have eaten it unless the first day of Unleavened Bread was considered a Sabbath and that ushered in the firstfruits. Everybody get that?

Now there are opinions on whether that produce was stored up grain or something else. There's lots of opinions. But I do find it amazing how you can have two different arguments for the same thing and they both are supported with Scripture. They both have good points. Or Matt, which one do you agree with? I'll tell you in a minute.

## The Sadducees and Hasmonean Dynasty

So this is the lineage, or this is the hierarchy, the timeline of the Sadducees and the Hasmoneans who actually ruled over Judea, okay? See Judas Maccabee? You guys remember him? Right? Now we're back in, what, the 160-ish? 160s of B.C. You've got Judas, Jonathan, Simeon, John, Aristobulus, whatever his name is. Alexander Janius, right? Now we're within the first century BC. All of these guys were Hasmonean dynasty. They were priesthood, but they were ruling Judea. Alexandra—so they've got the queen there—and then down here is where the Herodian dynasty took over.

You see, the Pharisees were a dedicated group of people. We see that in Scripture. Paul was a Pharisee. Very intelligent group of people. Loved to study the what? With all their heart, soul, and might. They loved God, wanted to carry out every commandment in their everyday lives as much as possible. Even commandments that only apply to temple, there's got to be a way that we can put this into our lives to walk it out.

And so these were the common folks, and when the Sadducees, if you will, the Hasmoneans, were setting themselves up as rulers and kings, they understood that this was a conflict of interest. You can't run the temple and run the country. I mean, politics, this is just not good. Taurus says this is not what you're supposed to be doing. And so there was a civil strife, Republicans versus Democrats. No, you're wrong. You're wrong, right? But much worse.

## Alexander Janius and the Pharisee Conflict

So Alexander Janius, you can call him Janius the jerk if you would like, and I'll tell you why. He was very hateful towards the Pharisees, towards the common folks. They're beneath him, a bunch of peons, go away. And so the Pharisees invited the Syrian army, who they just kicked back a century earlier, back in to rule Judea, take out Alexander Janius, take them out, and we'll support you.

How bad would your ruler be? Imagine a hundred years after the American Revolution, the common folk reaching out to England: "Hey guys, can you come back? Take us over?"

This happened. Syrian general came to the lands. The Pharisees decided, well, our grandparents defeated these guys and established our freedom back. Maybe it's better to serve one of our own, Janius, even if he's corrupt, than to serve the Syrians. So they sent the Syrians away. Listen, no, no, go away.

He was thrilled at this. Let me see—I have an illustration here. This is a fantastic illustration. So this is Alexander Janius, and he's over here having a banquet after this whole incident happens, where the Pharisees were going to overthrow him but went back. And here he is—this is just an illustration—drinking lots of wine, with servants and soldiers all around him, chilling, hanging, partying. He's drinking, eating grapes, and then you see over here. I don't know if you can see this on the right side of the picture, but they look like they're building stuff, right? They're putting up a stake in the ground, and then they have some guy on the ground working on a cross beam. Oh no, they're crucifying someone.

And all of these little things right here are crosses all over the city of Jerusalem. Who do you think is hanging on those crosses? Well, Janius was so upset that the Pharisees would even

think about crossing him that after the Syrian army left, he took 800 of the prominent Pharisees, brought them into Jerusalem, crucified them as he watched and drank wine and cheered. And then before they died, he brought their families, their wives and their children, up in front of the cross to watch them die. And then he slit the throats of the families while the Pharisees were on the cross watching their family die. 800 crosses, 800 families. Janius the jerk.

How do you think this helped the Sadducean and Pharisee relationships? This happened in 67 BC, I believe, around there. You think this really helped? Pharisees and Sadducees really didn't like each other. That was a sidetrack.

## The Sanhedrin and Its Appointed Leaders

Here are the timelines of the Nasi. You guys remember what the Nasi was? Prince, if you will, the head of the Sanhedrin. There was a Nasi, there was a president, and then there was a vice president as well. And these were the two main leaders of the Sanhedrin, as we were discussing a few weeks ago. So you have several, several different people. Coincidentally enough, even during the time of Janius, the Pharisaic, if you're pre-Pharisaic, leaders were actually involved in the Sanhedrin and voted into the Nasi.

So Simeon ben Shattach is a very interesting character. He was the Nasi over the Sanhedrin during the time of this king of Judea ruling. Matt, what's the point of this? Why are you getting to that? Well, I want you guys to understand that the Sanhedrin was the one that made what kind of decisions. Did the Sanhedrin declare the calendar legally? Whatever they declared, that was it, right? The new moon had to be declared by the Sanhedrin, right? What day firstfruits is has to be declared by who? You can say it out loud. They were the legal judges of Israel, appointed by God back in Exodus and Numbers, declared in Numbers and Deuteronomy. These were the people that were in the role that had the same spirit of Moses. He took some of the spirit of Moses and gave it to them so that they would reign and rule legally over Israel.

## Simeon ben Shattach and the Ketubah

So Simeon ben Shattach, he's an interesting guy because you guys ever heard of the ketubah? What's a ketubah? It's a marriage contract, right? And it has all these things—I'm going to do this and what the guy is going to give to the wife and what the wife is going to do—and it's a legal contract and it was pretty much made to protect the wife in a relationship. There were many of these things, ketubahs, used in marriages. I think we found one back in the 3rd century BCE, but it was not common. Ketubahs were not common. They didn't really exist in ancient

Israel. This guy was the first one to standardize ketubahs in marriages in Judea, about 100 BC before Yeshua. Just a little tidbit.

After he left his role, you have this guy right here, Shemaiah. Shemaiah was a Pharisee guy. Pharisees love to do what? Study Torah, right? Study the Word of God. And he set up an established school, a rabbinic school, for studying the Word of God, studying Torah. And he knew that it had to be funded somehow, so he set up a charge. You'd have to pay daily—a few coins here every single day. And it was great for the rich and the wealthy who wanted to learn, but the poor couldn't really afford it.

## Hillel the Elder and Access to Learning

Well, what if you were poor and you wanted to study Torah? This is where a man by the name of Hillel, the elder—you ever heard of him? That's what the rabbinic school, the house of Hillel, came from. This man was so poor, but he wanted to learn Torah, that he got up on the roof and would listen in through the ceiling to learn Torah. But sometimes it gets cold. And one day, or one evening, the disciples that were learning realized they couldn't see the light coming through, the moon or whatnot coming through the ceiling anymore, and they looked up and something was blocking it. What's blocking it? So they crawled up on the roof, and there was this guy freezing to death, unconscious, trying to learn Torah. Hillel. So they pulled him down, revived him, and Shemaiah relieved the status of payment. He opened it, made it more relaxed so that the poor could come in and learn. Hillel, the great prophet. Right?

## Shammai and the House of Hillel

Another man you may be familiar with is Shammai. Anyone ever heard of Shammai? House of Shammai, if you will. These are the two main factions in the first century that were always arguing about petty stuff and some big stuff as well. These two men led different schools, if you will. After Shammai passed away, Hillel the elder was elected, showed his level of intellect when it came to the Torah, and he was elected as Nasi over the Sanhedrin.

## Firstfruits: Two Legal Days

After he died, his son came into play. His son was very short-lived. And then Shammai went from being the vice president into the level of Nasi. Shammai died in 30-31 AD. Many people believe that's the year that Yeshua was convicted on the cross. Coincidence? I don't know. Matt, why are you getting into this? During this era, the Sadducees still had, even though the Nasi

was a Pharisee, a lot of weight and a lot of pull in the Sanhedrin. They were the wealthy. They were the ones who could pay for deals. They had the power. And so during this time, we can assert that firstfruits was celebrated on Sunday. Now, around the turn of the century, the weights began to shift a little bit, and they actually made a deal with Shammai, that the Sadducees could still remain in power during his position. So think of Congress, right? Do you think people get paid off in Congress? I don't know. I mean, I don't know. You can only assume. Corruptness reigns, right? So we know that at least during the time of Shammai, he supported the interests of the Sadducees. Because of this, we can assert that for the first 30 years, potentially the lifetime of Yeshua, firstfruits was legally declared and accepted as the first day after the first Sabbath after Passover.

When Shammai died, we're not sure how long it took, but that is when Gamaliel the Elder—he was the guy who mentored Paul—was elected to become the Nasi of the Sanhedrin. He was very pro-Pharisee, right? So sometime after Gamaliel came in is when the power began to shift in the Sanhedrin. We don't know how long it took. Of course, we know the power of the Sadducees ended in 70 AD, but regardless, sometime after 30 is when the idea of Unleavened Bread 2, the second day of Unleavened Bread, or Nisan 16, began to be pushed in the Sanhedrin to be declared. Everybody still with me? After 30 AD, when the Sanhedrin began to declare firstfruits as the 16th of Nisan, it was a legal declaration from the legally positioned people, the judges of Israel.

## Two Correct Days

I say this to tell you something that may hurt your head. In the first century, firstfruits was legally declared on two different days of the calendar, and they were both correct. You can hear the earth crack. Why? Because the Sanhedrin, they were the ones in charge of declaring the feast days, the new moons, and so on and so forth. And so, okay, well, that's all fine and dandy, and I love all the history stuff and whatever—what do you think? What do you think the right day is? Well, I mean, we're celebrating it tomorrow as a fellowship, and we're coming together. It's a convenient day to celebrate it, I admit. Sunday, we can all come together and have lunch together. Okay, Matt, but is that the right day? Well, of course it is. It's the right day. Well, what about the 16th of Nisan? That's not the right day? No, of course that's the right day too.

It has been a debate for a very long time. Of course, we know after the temple was destroyed, only two sects of Judaism survived. Pharisees were rather small—I think there was only 8,000 of them in Judea. Two sects of Judaism survived after the temple was destroyed: the Pharisees and the followers of Yeshua. Because each one of them understood that their faith, their

practice, their worship of God wasn't dependent on a temple. If God chose to take the temple away, we can still teach our children about the ways of God. We can still practice, to an extent, the ways of God. So the Pharisees compiled the Mishnah, which we know comes from the Pharisees, but it gives, we assume, a very accurate account—at least according to Josephus and Philo—of what went on in the first century. And today, modern Judaism continues to celebrate firstfruits on Nisan the 16th, the second day of Unleavened Bread. So which one's right? In the first century, they both were.

I want to shift gears a little bit, and I know—I'm sure I'll get an email for my remarks on firstfruits. That's okay. We can argue all day long. I'm sympathetic to both, and I understand both arguments. But I want you guys to be aware of this controversy, because there will be people that will make you think disagreeing with what day firstfruits is on is a salvational issue, and that's just stupid. I believe that... I believe, I will say this, I believe that Yeshua rose on firstfruits, and he fulfilled, brought fullness to that day. And we'll go over that in just a few minutes. But I want to discuss something else here, and I know that was my history, that was my geek-out. I want to get into some application.

## Hezekiah's Passover

You guys know Hezekiah's Passover? Has anyone ever read this account? No? Okay, this is located in [2 Chronicles 30](#). And you don't have to go back and highlight all the stuff about firstfruits—that's fine, it's fun to study—but I want you guys to at least take note of 2 Chronicles chapter 30 right now, because this is important to reread. This is important to study. Why is it so important? Because we see the heart of God take place and reveal itself in this chapter.

Now, to get you up to speed: Hezekiah was one of the greatest kings over Judah. This is after the whole split—David, Solomon, done, split—and we know the northern tribes went up, and who took the northern tribes away? Assyria took them away. This is after that took place, okay, like the next generation after. And Hezekiah is king over Judah, and he has Jerusalem there, he has the temple. This is before Babylon comes in and destroys it. And he's zealous for the ways of God, and he wants to invite the remnants of all of Israel back together. So he sends messengers up to the northern tribes, up to the northern area: Listen guys, I know you turned into a bunch of heathens, and I know y'all became a big old idol-worshiping bunch, and I know that God punished you—Assyria came in—but you're leftover, you were spared, you're still here. Would you come back to the ways of God? Would you come back to Jerusalem? Would you sit

down with a covenant meal with God and celebrate Passover with us like hasn't been done since the time of David? Will you do that? And so he sends messengers out to do this.

## Return to the Lord

And if you follow along with me, we're going to read basically this chapter, starting in verse 1. It says, verse 1: "So carriers went out throughout all of Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, and the king had commanded, saying, O people of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. Do not be like your fathers and brothers who were faithless to the Lord, the God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see."

It's powerful. If you come back, if the desires of your heart are to seek God, he'll be merciful. That's who he is. He wants fellowship with you. Don't turn your back on him. And so they ended up celebrating in the second month. Why? Well, because Scripture actually allows for that—people who touched a dead body could come in the second month and celebrate it. So all of Israel—the priests weren't ready in time, so they did the second month. And so, verse 10, the couriers went out.

Repent, guys. We're going to set this up. We're coming back to God. We're coming back to the heart, that whole thing. We're coming back to the courts of God. You're invited. Let's do this. Let's sit down for this covenant meal. What happens? People of the highlands start mocking them. Whatever, get out of here. Ooh, God. Whatever, we serve God here. We serve God our way. We serve God like our fathers did. But some of the remnant came back.

## The Feast in the Second Month

Now this is where it gets interesting. "And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month"—a very great assembly. "They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the Kidron. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the 14th day of the second month, and the priests and the Levites were ashamed." So people came to Jerusalem and they weren't consecrated. They weren't ready. They had let their level of kedushah drop, if you will. And the priests had to slaughter the lambs for them and give them to them.

Verse 18: "For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves. Yet they ate the Passover contrary to what is written."

All right, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on. So many people from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun—these are northern tribes, a bunch of golden-calf-worshiping fathers who were taken away into exile because God punished them—they came in and they didn't cleanse themselves. They were unclean. Maybe someone touched a dead body, who knows. And they ate the Passover contrary to what was written.

Where does it say you can't eat the Passover if you're not in a certain state, if you're unclean, if you touched a dead body, if you're not sanctified? What book says that? Where does it say that? In the Torah. This is a commandment of God. The commandments of God say you've got to be circumcised. They may not have been circumcised, who knows. You have to be circumcised, be clean, can't have touched a dead body if you want to eat the shelamim offering known as the Pesach.

## The Heart of God Over Rules

Why? Because it has a level of Kedushah—holiness, exactly. And therefore, you have to have a certain level of holiness in order to partake of the holy offering. They didn't. And they ate it anyway. In other words, breaking Torah.

For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, "May the good Lord pardon everyone who sets his heart to seek God, the Lord, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness." Where are the sanctuary's rules of cleanliness kept? Is that something the Pharisees elaborated on? That's the oral law, right? No, this is talking about Torah.

People were coming in and they wanted to come back to the father. They wanted to go before the father. They wanted to come back in covenant with the father. They wanted to worship the father. They wanted the father to hear their praises. They wanted to tell the father, thank you for being merciful. Thank you for loving us. They wanted to tell the father, I know I have sinned. I know my fathers before me had sinned. Will you forgive me? Can I come back into covenant with you, oh father? Can I eat the meal that represents the very thing, the freedom from the world, coming into your kingdom and covenant with you? Father, can I eat this? So please, please, please.

Probably not circumcised, who knows? Unclean, not sanctified. A sin to eat the Passover. What does Hezekiah pray? "Oh, Father, pardon anyone whose heart is to seek you. Pardon anyone who seeks your face, who wants to be in covenant with you. Anybody who's trying their best to be in God's presence, who doesn't know they've been so far gone in the world that they don't

know what to do. Father, pardon them so that they can be your people, so that they can experience your love, so that your love and your mercy will manifest throughout all the world."

## God's Healing and Restoration

And the Lord heard—verse 20—and the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people, sanctified them so that they could eat the Pesach. And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with gladness. And the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day and night, singing into the night to the Lord. And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the Lord because they might as well have been newbies at this point.

So they ate the food of the festival seven days. They ate all of the festival offerings, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord, the God of their fathers. Guys, this is a powerful account that reveals the heart of God. And I'm going to say something, and it's not popular to say this, but if we read Scripture, we see it: God yearns for relationship more than He yearns for rules, right?

In the story of Israel we see this: He wants relationship. He wants a relationship with imperfect people. You can always be trained, you can always follow in faith, you can always obey, but the Father understands that you're not perfect. There will be times when it's up to Him whether He still wants to show His love to you.

I think this is a powerful account that speaks of forgiveness, that speaks of justice, that speaks of mercy, that speaks of grace. And the Father said, "All right, they can come into Jerusalem, which has the same level of Kedushah as the Temple Mount. Why? Because they ate the Passover in Jerusalem, with the minor offerings within the gates of the city. They're not sanctified, unclean, but their heart's desire was to come before the father, to rekindle that relationship to God."

## The Father's Heart and Hezekiah's Example

It's incredible because on one side we have King Hezekiah, and he's representing God here. This chapter represents the story of the sheep being returned and the shepherd rejoicing. There's a great teacher in the Gospels who spoke about that. There was another story about a son who went away and defiled himself. The son was unclean. And when he realized, "Wow, I don't need to be here anymore. I want to go back to my father's house, the place of my father's house. I

want to go back to him." He stood up, came to the gate of the city, and began to walk through the gate into the city.

He had no shoes on, clothes all torn up, probably had pig feces on them, smelling like a herd of swine, walking through the city. Now we often envision the father's house as just a long road, the prodigal son walking down a long road with no one around. But what if it was a town, a village that most people lived in? They were neighbors. There's a marketplace, and the son begins to walk. People start to look up and notice him.

"Oh, that's that kid that ran away. That's the sinner. That's the one who turned against his father. That's the one who turned his back on his father's inheritance. That's the one who said, 'No, I don't care about you, father.' Look at him coming back in his shame. Look at that kid, barefoot now. Not rich anymore, are you? Smelling like pigs."

## **The Shame and Honor**

It says that the father looked up and ran. Now, running isn't an honorable thing. I mean, older folks don't run—it shows that they've messed up. In the first century, I mean, if you were over 25, you didn't run anymore—you walk. You always see it in the Gospels, the Pharisees, how they walk everywhere very slowly, right? Because they're wise and trying to portray that they have everything worked out. They're very wise, they're mature, right?

But if you're running somewhere, you forgot something, right? You forgot the baby's bottle, forgot the baby. You're not mature; you're not wise. Here he comes, booking it down the road, so much so that people are probably noticing him. They see a trail of smoke coming. Who's this? It's his father—the wise, mature man that lives in the house—running towards his son.

What's going on here? The father runs up to his son and looks up at everybody, putting his arm around his son and starting to walk with him through the city. And he takes his coat off and he puts it around his son. Everybody's looking. And he takes his shoes off and he puts them on his son. And he takes his signet ring and puts it on his son. Holding his son. Sharing in the shame of his son as they walk down the street. Attempting to restore some type of honor.

Why? Because he's just happy he has his son back, that he came back. Should his son have arrived all dirtied up? No, he should have taken a shower first. What's wrong with you? No. Guys, I believe this story shows the heart of God.

## **The Two Brothers**

Father, pardon them, everyone who seeks, pardon them who want to return to your glory and your presence and praise you. They're not in a proper state. They're breaking the rules by eating the Passover. I can just see the Father: "Yes, now they're sanctified, fixed. Put His coat on them. Put His shoes on them. They're fine. My children have returned to me."

And there's another character in the story. It was the brother. Remember the brother? He was right there with the father, hugging his brother. "I'm glad you're home, right?" But he stayed at the house. "He didn't deserve to come back. What's he doing back?" And he became jealous that the father was so happy throwing a party.

Guys, which are you? You have two people here. You have the brother—that same attitude we see in Scripture with the Pharisees, whom John the Baptist and Jesus fought against because they represented that same attitude. Eager to throw judgment at someone who has lost the ways of God, who doesn't fully understand that they need to be cleansed before they come back. I mean, their heart is for God, but that's not acceptable.

And then you have someone like King Hezekiah, someone like Yeshua. You're a leper? That's okay. Twelve years of blood? Healed. You're dead? That's okay. Can't touch dead folks? Not dead anymore.

As believers, as we're commanded to follow the example of Hezekiah fulfilled in Yeshua—when you see someone whose heart and will and desire is to serve God, guess what your job is? Not to sit here and say, "I'm glad I'm more righteous than you." Your job is to pray for them. Your job is to lift them up to the Father. "Father, give them what they need. Father, expose Your glory to them. Father, strengthen them. Allow me to participate. Allow me to be their brother and sister in Christ. Allow me to strengthen them."

Or you could be like some of the Pharisees who thought that just because they were Judeans, they were automatically in the kingdom. They were always in covenant. It's funny because when John the Baptist, in [Matthew 3:9](#), some of the Pharisees and Sadducees actually came up to John the Baptist baptizing folks, right? And these people were baptizing to get clean, to go to the temple. Baptizing unto repentance, they were dunking in the river, asking God, "Take me back, Father." And the Sadducees and the Pharisees come, and boy, does John the Baptist just roast them?

He says in verse 3 of [Matthew 3](#), the first time in [Matthew 3](#): "Do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' We have Abraham. We're the seed of Abraham. God owes us a role in His kingdom because of that."

## Raising Up Children

I tell you that out of these stones, these pebbles on the ground, God can raise up children for Abraham. I see people, I see other believers who are so apt to give judgment to others before they even pray for them. What are you? Are you the one who believes that God owes you a spot in his kingdom? Pebble on the ground. That can be a seed of Abraham. God can make that so. The greatness of God will always be more powerful than our own understandings or agendas. How did they eat the Passover without being clean? God had a plan of reuniting people back into his kingdom. I would recommend and encourage you to go back and read this chapter after services, maybe tonight.

Verse 23, this is cool. Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness, so that there was great joy in Jerusalem. For since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven. They did what? What? They kept it for another week? They can't do that. Torah says it's seven days. You can't just have a good time and make it 14. God heard their prayers in joy in his habitation in heaven.

## The Unorthodox Situation

The reason I want to show you this chapter is because it's a very unorthodox situation that took place. God was there. God has rules and regulations. He has his Torah for a reason. To bring order to chaos. If we want to go back to ancient Near Eastern stuff, that was the principle of it. To expose the order of his sovereignty and the king of who he is. Of course, Torah is important. Rules are important. They are the witness of how great our God is. It's just a fascinating story to show the power of God in the form of love.

Coming back to firstfruits. I wonder if they celebrated firstfruits twice. Maybe the first week they did it on the 16th and then the...

## The Greater Passover

In [1 Corinthians 15:12](#), now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God because we testified

about God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it's true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. But if the Messiah has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those who have also fallen asleep in the Messiah have perished. If in Messiah we have hope in this life only, we are all people most to be pitied.

Paul is essentially saying a doctrine that's shared by the Sadducees, that there was no resurrection, but others as well. And he's focusing in on the resurrection. Wow, what's important about the resurrection? Well, the resurrection is pretty important because the resurrection was the witness of what took place on the cross. What took place on the cross was the start of a revolution, was the start of a greater exodus, a greater Passover. Something that took place that we would no longer be slaves to Egypt. No, we weren't slaves to Egypt in the first place. We were slaves to sin. We're no longer slaves to Pharaoh. We were slaves to the powers that be in this present evil age. What took place on the cross was a greater Passover. The resurrection was the notary seal on it. That's why it was so important. Christ was raised from the dead. That's what took place on the cross was legitimate. And then some people are saying the dead aren't raised. We heard the teaching that the dead aren't raised anymore. If the dead aren't raised then Christ wasn't raised and why are you here? Why are we even meeting here if Christ isn't raised we should be pitied. This is horrible. Christ was most definitely raised and then Paul continues in verse 20. He says but in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits. What? Why is Paul using this language, firstfruits?

## The Last Adam

He's wanting to show us something. And he's pulling Adam into it. It's amazing because Adam had a job in the garden. You guys remember, keep the garden, be an image bearer, create worshipers, be fruitful, multiply, expand Eden over the world. Adam had a job to do. Did he do it? No, Adam failed in his vocation of an image bearer. You're going to hear me say that term a lot over the next few months, image bearer. When Messiah came, Paul calls him the perfect image of God. He took up the vocation. He didn't drop it. He not only completed it, through his suffering, he exposed the unconquerable love of God to the world. Breaking chains, that's what Paul says. Breaking all chains, breaking slavery, restoring creation. It's funny because then Paul calls him what? The last Adam. Why? Because he fulfilled the vocation that Adam was always meant to do. And when he rose from the dead, he was the firstfruits.

Why does he keep using this term, firstfruits? Firstfruits, firstfruits. Because the first of the harvest of the year praises God for everything that comes after and sanctifies that harvest.

Messiah was the firstfruit. He was the first fruit of the dead. And all those that through him are in covenant with God will follow. But in order, as Paul says, first Messiah. Why was Messiah the first fruit? Lazarus was raised from the dead before Messiah, wasn't he? So Messiah wasn't the first fruit of the dead. He wasn't the first. That guy who fell on the bones of Elijah? The girl? Talithia? Why was Messiah the first fruit of the dead? He was the first one that had a body of new creation. He was the first one that had that resurrected body. Scripture promises us that we will have likened unto it.

## The Firstfruits Practice

Romans 11. This might be off topic, but I kind of wanted to give you guys a little bit more information about what firstfruits was in the first century. So Paul's speaking, and earlier in Romans, he's kind of reaming out the Judeans for thinking they're better than the Gentiles because of their history and their bloodline and so on and so forth. But then in Romans 11 he kind of sits the Gentiles down, these non-Judeans that have come into the faith, and he's like listen guys. Who do you think you are right? And he says now I'm speaking to you Gentiles and as much then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Judeans jealous and thus save some of them. But if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world what would their acceptance mean but life from the dead. And if the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump. And if the root is holy, so are the branches. Anybody familiar with that verse? That the firstfruits offered, and so is the whole lump? What lump? Anybody ever?

So firstfruits, if Paul is speaking about the firstfruits of the year, right? The one that's on Leviticus 23, one celebrated sometime this week, depending on both. It was a sheaf that was to be waved, right? Everybody, what's a sheaf look like? You picture it like a little sheaf, right? Like a lulav, but barley, right? That's not how they did it. It was treated as a type of grain offering. And so we know from the Mishnah that what took place is on the Sabbath day. Now, the Mishnah gives us an account of how the Pharisees did it. So, of course, 16th of Nisan. And it says that on the first day of unleavened bread, which is the day that you do no work, right? They went out. On Passover, they went out and they tied some of the sheaves together, right? So they didn't have to do that. And then on the 11th bread, they went out and they had the reaper. What's it called? Sickle. And they went out and the people followed them and they made a big deal out of it. They were like, hey, guys. Is it time to get the sheaf ready? Yeah, it's time to get there and to get everybody excited. And then they got down and they had the crowd really involved in this because it was a big deal. And he's about to cut the sheaf. He's like, hey guys,

should we go ahead and cut this sheaf? And all the crowd went, yeah, let's do it because we got an offering to God. Yeah, let's do it. And he looks at them again. Are you sure? Should we cut the sheaf? Yeah, let's do it. Even if it's a Sabbath, should we cut the sheaf? Yeah, let's do it because we've got to offer up for Christ. And so they did that twice. And they actually did that to shame the Sadducees that could no longer do it their way because they lost power. Yeah, we're doing it today, Jack.

So they cut the sheaf, and then that night is when they kind of... It wasn't a filtering system quite as extensive as the loaves at Shavuot, but they got the grain ready and so on and so forth, roasted, and they let it sit all night. And then the morning came, the 16th of Nisan, and they would get basically a log of oil, if you will, and they mixed the flour of the barley, the grain, with oil, lots of oil. They made what we would call a lump. Everybody say lump, lumpy, right? And at one point they added in frankincense, incense to it. And this is what they would wave. They would add something called a kometz. Everybody say kometz, not khametz. Spell it with a kof instead of a... It's a measurement. It's a fistful. And they would take, I believe it was three or four fingers.

## The Sheaf and the Lump

And this is what they would take of the incense to put in the dough. And they would wave it. And here's a picture of an awesome little book that's out of print, but I got a copy and it was really exciting to read this: *Colorful Ceremonies of the Bais HaMikdash*, according to the Rambam, Yosef Israel, page 117. And this is the illustration, according to Rambam's opinion of the Mishnah, of how this was done. So you had a whole lump, right? And you'd wave the lump similar to how you would traditionally wave a lulav. It was a lump—that was the sheaf of barley.

Well, why is that? They had to offer something. It was an offering. And so what they did is they took an omer—that's the measurement. They reached down deep into the lump where all the oil had settled and they would take a fistful out. And then they would take this fistful over to the altar and they put it into a sanctified vessel, which would in turn elevate the rest of the lump. And then they would touch it to the horn of the altar, and that would elevate it all. And then they would take it out of the vessel, and it would be offered on the altar as a soothing aroma to the Lord.

So I can't help but think that when Paul says, "If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump," I just can't help but think that's temple talk. And what he's speaking about is the seed of Abraham has always been holy. You can't just dismiss the lineage, the promises made to

Abraham through the people of Israel. You can't do that. Abraham was the one that was chosen to reestablish Eden. I mean, that was it. Through Abraham, your families are going to go through all the stars. All the stars, really? Yeah, kings of nations, all nations, everybody. It's going to be your family. How? Because Messiah is going to come from you.

And then [Galatians 3:29](#) says: "If you're in Messiah, you're Abraham's seed. You're one of those stars." An imperfect person. That's right. An imperfect person restored in a new creation of God. And so that's what Paul's doing. He's using temple terminology, in my opinion, as an example of this.

Guys, that was my last of my geek-out slides. And I hope you were able to bear with me. Did you guys learn anything? Something?

## Honoring God with the Firstfruits

Now I want to talk about something serious. [Proverbs 3:9-10](#). "Honor the Lord with your substance and with the firstfruits of thy increase." What does this mean? Well, in the context of Scripture, it's basically saying when God gives you produce and your crops and barley and wheat and all the increase, the firstfruits of it is supposed to be offered to God, right?

So how do we apply this today? What's the first thing you guys think of when you see this verse? What is Matt fixing to talk about? You think tithing? Okay, money, right? Hey, tithing is a great thing. I absolutely support tithing. A lot of people have an issue with tithing today. They're like, "Matt, we can't tithe biblically because biblically, it was all crops and then you took it to the temple and you did all this. So we don't have a temple anymore. You can't tithe."

And I look at them and I say, "Do you keep Passover?" "Well, of course I do. But there's no temple. You can't keep Passover." Why do we keep Passover? Why do we keep Sukkot? Why do we keep Shavuot when you can't biblically? Because there's a commandment in Scripture to teach our children the ways of God. So we memorialize the feast days so that our children will know about the oracles of God, the Torah of our God, so that they will know why are we so dead set, stubborn in our faith of Yeshua? It's because of these things. It's because of the word of God.

I'm going to train my son up in Passover and how Passover was done, even if we don't eat the Shalmein offering because there's no temple. I'm going to train him up in Sukkot. He'll ask, "Dad, why are we staying out in the middle of the woods in a tent with flies and stink bugs everywhere?" I said, "Because, son, if the temple was built, we'd be doing this in Jerusalem."

Whoa, that'd be pretty cool." It would be cool. So we're going to memorialize it, and I want you to think about that every year.

I want my son to see me give out of my increase, my financial increase. I want my son to know that God expected his people to reciprocate gratitude back to him. He'd say, "Matt, you can't send it to the temple, though." I can't. I give it to my community. I give it to FIT, but people sometimes give it to organizations that help around the city or other ministries that are edifying God. I give it to you. I give it to my community because you guys have been such a blessing to me, and I believe that God has blessed this community, and there's no doubt in my mind every single family here, God has brought here for a reason. I think that every single family here could probably agree.

So yes, I tithe every week through text. I want my son to know that that is an oracle of God. And I want him to know and understand what gratitude looks like. But that's not the point of me bringing up this verse.

## More Than Just Money

See, writing a check and saying that I'm honoring God with my substance, that's easy. Anyone can do that. Anyone can drop some cash in the box and keep on walking. What about the increase that God has given to you? What about all of the blessings that God has given to you?

See, people invest three things in the things they love: their time, their energy, and their money. Do you give the first fruits of your time to God? No, you just write a check every month, give it to FIT or give it to wherever. Okay, you're missing the point. When you wake up in the morning, do you give the first fruits of your time to God? "What do you mean, Matt, like prayer or something?" Yeah, I mean starting your day off, dedicating everything, the whole crop of the day to God. Father, I give this time, this is the firstfruits to you. May the entire crop of the day be blessed. May it be sanctioned by you. May it honor you. Your energy, the first fruits of your energy, go to honoring God. The blessing that God has given you.

Is it a blessing to have children? Are you honoring God through the blessing he's given you? Is it a blessing to have a spouse? Don't you mess this up. It's a blessing to have a spouse. Are you honoring God with the firstfruits? Are you honoring God with the blessing that he's given to you? It means your marriage should revolve around the holiness of God and God's kingdom. Men, your job is to be leaders. Your wife can probably do a better job at it. It's not her job description. Man up. What are you doing with the increase that God has given to you? Money's

easy. I'm talking about everything else. Are you giving the first fruits back to God in order that all of it would be to his honor and his glory? Always giving gratitude to your king.

"Matt, you really took that verse out of context." I don't think I did.

## Yeshua as the First Fruit

Yeshua was the first fruit, right? Right? Why? The first one that God raised from the dead. What did Yeshua give to God? We're supposed to be ambassadors, right? Ambassadors of Yeshua, our role model. What did he give to God? [Philippians 2:8](#): "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. Even death on the most painful weapon that the Roman Empire had to thwart revolutionaries. Even on the cross."

Are you giving back to God the increase that he's given to you in its whole context, not just money? See, I believe that Yeshua brought fullness. I always say fulfilled and everyone's like, "Oh, check, done, disappeared." No, fullness, fulfillment, full, filled. I mean, synonyms. I believe that Yeshua brought fullness to firstfruits on that Sunday morning when the tomb was found empty.

We need to stop just thinking about firstfruits being about grain. It's important because that's the context of when the command was given in Leviticus. But guys, when Yeshua came, walked out of that tomb, there was a fullness that was brought and exposed to that day and that occasion. It's about celebrating a new type of harvest. The first of a new beginning. The first offered in which everyone else will follow in the riches as believers.

Scripture and the prophets talk about a renewing of heaven and earth that takes place when heaven and earth will be combined and the renewing of all things will come to pass. I believe that started on the cross. And we're doing a series on that in a couple weeks. But I think that started on the cross. New creation. You're a new creation. Nothing else is. I mean, it started with you—new creation. The renewing of heaven and earth.

What did God say in [Genesis 2:1](#)? He said in the heavens and earth were finished. The Tanakh reads [Genesis 2:1](#) as, after God had all creation set, everything's done, it said the heavens and the earth and all the host of them were finished. And maybe it's a stretch in the movement. We stretch a lot of things. But is that why Yeshua said that on the cross? Because new creation had begun. All things made new had begun. A greater harvest has come. A greater exodus has now happened. A greater Passover has now happened. Fullness of the word of God has come to pass in Yeshua. He is the first fruit of creation and we follow.

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