
a *Grace Notes* course

History II

The Temple

Its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Christ
by Alfred Edersheim

Lesson 17 – Chapter 17, Post-Mosaic Festivals

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Instructions for Completing the Lesson

Begin each study session with prayer. It is the Holy Spirit who makes spiritual things discernable to Christians, so it is essential to be in fellowship with the Lord during Bible study.

Instructions

1. Read the lesson notes carefully.
 2. Look up and study each passage of the Bible that is mentioned.
 3. Complete the answers to the QUIZ and send your response to Grace Notes. The instructions for returning the Quiz are at the end of the lesson.
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Chapter 17, Post-Mosaic Festivals

Besides the festivals mentioned in the Law of Moses, other festive seasons were also observed at the time of our Lord, to perpetuate the memory either of great national deliverances or of great national calamities. The former were popular feasts, the latter public fasts. Though most, if not all of them, are alluded to in the Canonical Scriptures, it is extremely difficult to form a clear idea of how they were kept in the Temple. Many of the practices connected with them, as described in Jewish writings, or customary at present, are of much later date than Temple times, or else apply rather to the festive observances in the various synagogues of the land than to those in the central sanctuary.

The reason of this is evident. Though those who were at leisure might like to go to Jerusalem for every feast, yet the vast majority of the people would, except on the great festivals, naturally gather in the synagogues of their towns and villages. Moreover, these feasts and fasts were rather national than typical--they commemorated a past event instead of pointing forward to a great and world-important fact yet to be realised. Lastly, being of later, and indeed, of human, not Divine institution, the authorities at Jerusalem did not venture to prescribe for them special rites and sacrifices, which, as we have seen, constituted the essence of Temple worship.

Arranging these various feasts and fasts in the order of their institution and importance, we have:-

The Feast of Purim

1. The Feast of Purim, that is 'of lots,' or the Feast of Esther, also called in 2 Maccabees xv. 36 'the day of Mordecai,' which was observed in memory of the preservation of the Jewish nation at the time of Esther. The name 'Purim' is derived from 'the lot' which Haman cast in connection with his wicked desire (Esth 3:7; 9:24). It was proposed by Mordecai to perpetuate the anniversary of this great deliverance on the 14th and the 15th of Adar (about the beginning of March), and universally agreed to by the Jews of his time (Esth 9:17-24). Nevertheless, according to the Jerusalem Talmud, its general introduction after the return from

Babylon formed a subject of grave doubt and deliberation among the 'eighty-five elders'--a number which, according to tradition, included upwards of thirty prophets (Jer. Megillah, 70 b).¹

Even this shows that Purim was never more than a popular festival. As such it was kept with great merriment and rejoicing, when friends and relations were wont to send presents to each other. There seems little doubt that this was the 'feast of the Jews,' to which the Saviour 'went up to Jerusalem' (John 5:1), when He healed the 'impotent man' at the Pool of Bethesda. For no other feast could have intervened between December (John 4:35) and the Passover (John 6:4), except that of the 'Dedication of the Temple,' and that is specially designated as such (John 10:22), and not simply as 'a feast of the Jews.'

Ceremonies of the Feast

So far as we can gather, the religious observances of Purim commenced with a fast--'the Fast of Esther'--on the 13th of Adar. But if Purim fell on a Sabbath or a Friday, the fast was relegated to the previous Thursday, as it was not lawful to fast either on a Sabbath or the day preceding it. But even so, there were afterwards disputes between the Jews in Palestine and the much larger and more influential community that still resided in Babylon as to this fast, which seem to throw doubt on its very early observance. On the evening of the 13th of Adar, or rather on the beginning of the 14th, the Book of Esther, or the Megillah ('the roll,' as it is called), was publicly read, as also on the forenoon of the 14th day, except in ancient walled cities, where it was read on the 15th. In Jerusalem, therefore, it would be read on the

¹ The learned Jost (Gesch. d. Judenth., i. 42, note 1) suggests that these '85 elders' were really the commencement of 'the great synagogue,' to which so many of the Jewish ordinances were traced in later times. The number was afterwards, as Jost thinks, arbitrarily increased to 120, which is that assigned by tradition to 'the great synagogue.' 'The great synagogue' may be regarded as the 'constituent' Jewish authority on all questions of ritual after the return from Babylon. Lastly, Jost suggests that the original 85 were the signatories to 'the covenant,' named in Nehemiah 10:1-27.

evening of the 13th, and on the 15th--always provided the day fell not on a Sabbath, on which the Megillah was not allowed to be read. In the later Jewish calendar arrangements care was taken that the first day of Purim should fall on the first, the third, the fifth, or the sixth day of the week.

Country people, who went into their market towns every week on the Monday and Thursday, were not required to come up again specially for Purim, and in such synagogues the Megillah, or at least the principal portions of it, was read on the previous Thursday. It was also allowed to read the Book of Esther in any language other than the Hebrew, if spoken by the Jews resident in the district, and any person, except he were deaf, an idiot or a minor, might perform this service.

The prayers for the occasion now used in the synagogue, as also the practice of springing rattles and other noisy demonstrations of anger, contempt, and scorn, with which the name of Haman, where it occurs in the Megillah, is always greeted by young and old, are, of course, of much later date. Indeed, so far from prescribing any fixed form of prayer, the Mishnah (Megill. iv. 1) expressly leaves it an open question, to be determined according to the usage of a place, whether or not to accompany the reading of the Megillah with prayer.

According to the testimony of Josephus (Antiq. xi. 6, 13), in his time 'all the Jews that are in the habitable earth' kept 'these days festivals,' and sent 'portions to one another.' In our own days, though the synagogue has prescribed for them special prayers and portions of Scripture, they are chiefly marked by boisterous and uproarious merrymaking, even beyond the limits of propriety.

The Feast of the Dedication of the Temple

The Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, Chanuchah ('the dedication'), called in 1 Maccabees iv. 52-59 'the dedication of the altar,' and by Josephus (Antiq. xii. 7, 7) 'the Feast of Lights,' was another popular and joyous festival. It was instituted by Judas Maccabeus in 164 BC, when, after the recovery of Jewish independence from the Syro-Grecian domination, the Temple of Jerusalem was solemnly purified, the old polluted altar removed, its stones put in a separate place on

the Temple-mount, and the worship of the Lord restored. The feast commenced on the 25th of Chislev (December), and lasted for eight days. On each of them the 'Hallel' was sung, the people appeared carrying palm and other branches, and there was a grand illumination of the Temple and of all private houses. These three observances bear so striking a resemblance to what we know about the Feast of Tabernacles, that it is difficult to resist the impression of some intended connection between the two, in consequence of which the daily singing of the 'Hallel,' and the carrying of palm branches was adopted during the Feast of the Dedication, while the practice of Temple-illumination was similarly introduced into the Feast of Tabernacles.

All this becomes the more interesting, when we remember, on the one hand, the typical meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles, and on the other that the date of the Feast of the Dedication--the 25th of Chislev--seems to have been adopted by the ancient Church as that of the birth of our blessed Lord--Christmas--the Dedication of the true Temple, which was the body of Jesus (John 2:19).

The Origin of this Festival

From the hesitating language of Josephus (Antiq. xii. 7, 7), we infer that even in his time the real origin of the practice of illuminating the Temple was unknown. Tradition, indeed, has it that when in the restored Temple the sacred candlestick was to be lit, only one flagon of oil, sealed with the signet of the high-priest, was found to feed the lamps.

According to tradition, the first candlestick in that Temple was of iron, tinned over; the second of silver, and then only a golden one was procured.

This, then, was pure oil, but the supply was barely sufficient for one day--when, lo, by a miracle, the oil increased, and the flagon remained filled for eight days, in memory of which it was ordered to illuminate for the same space of time the Temple and private houses. A learned Jewish writer, Dr. Herzfeld, suggests, that to commemorate the descent of fire from heaven upon the altar in the Temple of Solomon (2 Chron 7:1), 'the feast of lights' was instituted when the sacred fire was relit

on the purified altar of the second Temple. But even so the practice varied in its details.

Either the head of a house might light one candle for all the members of his family, or else a candle for each inmate, or if very religious he would increase the number of candles for each individual every evening, so that if a family of ten had begun the first evening with ten candles they would increase them the next evening to twenty, and so on, till on the eighth night eighty candles were lit. But here also there was a difference between the schools of Hillel and Shammai--the former observing the practice as just described, the latter burning the largest number of candles the first evening, and so on decreasingly to the last day of the feast. On the Feast of the Dedication, as at Purim and New Moons, no public fast was to be kept, though private mourning was allowed.

The forms of prayer at present in use by the Jews are of comparatively late date, and indeed the Karaites, who in many respects represent the more ancient traditions of Israel, do not observe the festival at all. But there cannot be a doubt that our blessed Lord Himself attended this festival at Jerusalem (John 10:22), on which occasion He told them plainly: 'I and My Father are one.' This gives it a far deeper significance than the rekindling of the fire on the altar, or even the connection of this feast with that of Tabernacles.

The Feast of Wood Offering

The Feast of Wood-offering took place on the 15th Ab (August), being the last of the nine occasions on which offerings of wood were brought for the use of the Temple. For the other eight occasions the Talmud names certain families as specially possessing this privilege, which they had probably originally received 'by lot' at the time of Nehemiah (Neh 10:34; 13:31). At any rate, the names mentioned in the Mishnah are exactly the same as those in the Book of Ezra (Ezra 2). But on the 15th of Ab, along with certain families, all the people--even proselytes, slaves, Nethinim, and bastards, but notably the priests and Levites, were allowed to bring up wood, whence also the day is called 'the time of wood for the priests.' The other eight seasons were the 20th of Elul (September), the 1st of Tebeth (January), the 1st of Nisan (end of March or April), the 20th of Thammus (save, 'for

the family of David'), the 5th, the 7th, the 10th, and the 20th of Ab. It will be observed that five of these seasons fall in the month of Ab, probably because the wood was then thought to be in best condition.

The Rabbinical explanations of this are confused and contradictory, and do not account for the 15th of Ab being called, as it was, 'the day on which the axe is broken,' unless it were that after that date till spring no wood might be felled for the altar, although what had been previously cut might be brought up. The 15th of the month was fixed for the feast, probably because at full moon the month was regarded as at its maturity. Tradition, of course, had its own story to account for it.

According to one version it was Jeroboam, the wicked King of Israel, to whom so much evil is always traced; according to another, a Syro-Grecian monarch--Antiochus Epiphanes; and according to yet a third, some unnamed monarch who had prohibited the carrying of wood and of the firstfruits to Jerusalem, when certain devoted families braved the danger, and on that day secretly introduced wood into the Temple, in acknowledgment whereof the privilege was for ever afterwards conceded to their descendants.

The Wood used in the Festivals

The wood was first deposited in an outer chamber, where that which was worm-eaten or otherwise unfit for the altar was picked out by priests who were disqualified from other ministry. The rest was handed over to the priests who were Levitically qualified for their service, and by them stored in 'the wood chamber.' The 15th of Ab was observed as a popular and joyous festival. On this occasion (as on the Day of Atonement) the maidens went dressed in white, to dance and sing in the vineyards around Jerusalem, when an opportunity was offered to young men to select their companions for life.

We may venture on a suggestion to account for this curious practice. According to the Talmud, the 15th of Ab was the day on which the prohibition was removed which prevented heiresses from marrying out of their own tribes. If there is any historical foundation for this, it would be very significant, that when all Israel, without any

distinction of tribes or families, appeared to make their offerings at Jerusalem, they should be at liberty similarly to select their partners in life without the usual restrictions.

Fasts/The Four Great Fasts

The fasts may be arranged into public and private, the latter on occasions of personal calamity or felt need. The former alone can here claim our attention. Properly speaking, there was only one Divinely-ordained public fast, that of the Day of Atonement. But it was quite in accordance with the will of God, and the spirit of the Old Testament dispensation, that when great national calamities had overtaken Israel, or great national wants arose, or great national sins were to be confessed, a day of public fasting and humiliation should be proclaimed (see for example, Judg 20:26; 1 Sam 7:6; 1 Kings 21:27; 2 Chron 20:3).

To these the Jews added, during the Babylonish captivity, what may be called memorial-fasts, on the anniversaries of great national calamities. Evidently this was an unhealthy religious movement. What were idly bewailed as national calamities were really Divine judgments, caused by national sins, and should have been acknowledged as righteous, the people turning from their sins in true repentance unto God. This, if we rightly understand it, was the meaning of Zechariah's reply (Zech 7; 8) to those who inquired whether the fasts of the fourth, the fifth, the seventh, and the tenth months, were to be continued after the return of the exiles from Babylon.

At the same time, the inquiry shows, that the four great Jewish fasts, which, besides the Day of Atonement and the Fast of Esther, are still kept, were observed so early as the Babylonish captivity (Zech 8:19). 'The fast of the fourth month' took place on the 17th Thammus (about June or July), in memory of the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar and the interruption of the daily sacrifice. To this tradition adds, that it was also the anniversary of making the golden calf, and of Moses breaking the Tables of the Law. 'The fast of the fifth month,' on the 9th of Ab, was kept on account of the destruction of the first (and afterwards of the second) Temple. It is significant that the second Temple (that of Herod) was

destroyed on the first day of the week. Tradition has it, that on that day God had pronounced judgment that the carcasses of all who had come out of Egypt should fall in the wilderness, and also, that again it was fated much later to witness the fulfilment of Jeremiah 26:18-23, when a Roman centurion had the ploughshare drawn over the site of Zion and of the Temple. 'The fast of the seventh month,' on the 2nd of Tishri, is said by tradition to be in memory of the slaughter of Gedaliah and his associates at Mizpah (Jer 41:1). 'The fast of the tenth month' was on the 10th of Tebeth, when the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar commenced.

Other Fasts

Besides these four, the Day of Atonement, and the Fast of Esther, the Jewish calendar at present contains other twenty-two fast-days. But that is not all. It was customary to fast twice a week (Luke 18:12), between the Paschal week and Pentecost, and between the Feast of Tabernacles and that of the Dedication of the Temple. The days appointed for this purpose were the Monday and Thursday of every week--because, according to tradition, Moses went up Mount Sinai the second time to receive the Tables of the Law on a Thursday, and came down again on a Monday.

On public fasts, the practice was to bring the ark which contained the rolls of the law from the synagogue into the streets, and to strew ashes upon it. The people all appeared covered with sackcloth and ashes. Ashes were publicly strewn on the heads of the elders and judges. Then one more venerable than the rest would address the people, his sermon being based on such admonition as this: 'My brethren, it is not said of the men of Nineveh, that God had respect to their sackcloth or their fasting, but that "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way" (Jonah 3:10). Similarly, it is written in the "traditions" (of the prophets): "rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto Jehovah your God" (Joel 2:13). An aged man, whose heart and home 'God had emptied,' that he might give himself wholly to prayer, was chosen to lead the devotions.

Confession of sin and prayer mingled with the penitential Psalms (Psa 102; 120; 121; 130).²

In Jerusalem they gathered at the eastern gate, and seven times as the voice of prayer ceased, they bade the priests 'blow!' and they blew with horns and their priests' trumpets.

In other towns, they only blew horns. After prayer, the people retired to the cemeteries to mourn and weep. In order to be a proper fast, it must be continued from one sundown till after the next, when the stars appeared, and for about twenty-six hours the most rigid abstinence from all food and drink was enjoined. Most solemn as some of these ordinances sound, the reader of the New Testament knows how sadly all degenerated into mere formalism (Matt 9:14; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33); how frequent fasting became mere work- and self-righteousness, instead of being the expression of true humiliation (Luke 18:12); and how the very appearance of the penitent, unwashed and with ashes on his head, was even made matter of boasting and religious show (Matt 6:16). So true is it that all attempts at penitence, amendment, and religion, without the Holy Spirit of God and a change of heart, only tend to entangle man in the snare of self-deception, to fill him with spiritual pride, and still further to increase his real alienation from God.³

² Our account is based on the Mishnah (Taan. ii). But we have not given the Psalms in the order there mentioned, nor yet reproduced the prayers and 'benedictions,' because they seem mostly, if not entirely, to be of later date. In general, each of the latter bases the hope of being heard on some Scriptural example of deliverance in answer to prayer, such as that of Abraham on Mount Moriah, of Israel when passing through the Red Sea, of Joshua at Gilgal, of Samuel at Mizpah, of Elijah on Mount Carmel, of Jonah in the whale's belly, and of David and Solomon in Jerusalem. Certain relaxations of the fast were allowed to the priests when actually on their ministry.

³ Of the three sects or schools the Pharisees were here the strictest, being in this also at the opposite pole from the Sadducees. The fasts of the Essenes were indeed even more stringent, and almost constant, but they were intended not to procure merit, but to set the soul free from the bondage of the body, which was

Further particulars would lead us from a description of the Temple-services to those of the synagogue. But it is interesting to note how closely the Roman Church has adopted the practices of the synagogue. In imitation of the four Jewish fasts mentioned in Zechariah 8:19, the year was divided into four seasons--Quatember--each marked by a fast--three of these being traced by tradition to Bishop Callistus (223), and the fourth to Pope Leo I (44). In 1095, Urban II fixed these four fasts on the Wednesdays after Ash-Wednesday, Whit-Sunday, the Exaltation of the Cross, and the Feast of S. Lucia (13th December). The early Church substituted for the two weekly Jewish fast-days--Monday and Thursday--the so-called 'dies stationum,' 'guard or watch-days' of the Christian soldier, or Christian fast-days--Wednesday and Friday, on which the Saviour had been respectively betrayed and crucified.

regarded as the seat of all sin. Besides the above-mentioned fast, and one of all the firstborn on the eve of every Passover, such of the 'men of the station' as went not up to Jerusalem with their company fasted on the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, in their respective synagogues, and prayed for a blessing on their brethren and on the people. They connected their fasts and prayers with the section in Genesis 1, which they read on those days--praying on the Monday (Gen 1:9) for those at sea; on the Tuesday (v 11,12) for all on a journey; on the Wednesday (v 14) on account of the supposed dangerous influence of sun and moon, against diseases of children; and on the Thursday (v 20) for women labouring with child and for infants.

Quiz - Instructions

The following questions relate to your study of this lesson.

Respond to the questions as required.

You have choices about sending the quiz back to Grace Notes.

- If you received an email file containing the questions, you can use the REPLY feature of your e-mail application to open the file. Enter your responses in the reply message. Then SEND the message to Grace Notes.
- You can enter your answers on these pages, then send the whole file back to Grace Notes as a file attachment. This is handy, but these lessons will average 100K to 200K in size. As an alternative,
- After you answer the questions here, copy and paste the whole list of questions into a new MS Word document; then, send the new file to Grace Notes as an attachment. The new file will, of course, be much smaller than this main file.
- Finally, you can print the Quiz pages on your printer and send your response back to Grace Notes in the regular mail. If you do this, send the mail to:

Grace Notes
% Warren Doud
1705 Aggie Lane
Austin, Texas 78757 USA

Whichever transmission method you use, when Grace Notes receives your response, we will send you the next lesson in the series.

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Questions on The Temple, Lesson 17

1. All of the festivals of the Jewish religion in the time of Christ were mentioned in the Law of Moses. [True/False]

Answer:

2. The Feast of Purim was observed in memory of the preservation of the nation in the time of _____.

Answer:

3. The “feast of the Jews”, which the Lord Jesus was attending when He healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda, was most likely the Feast of _____.

Answer:

4. What book of the Bible was read publicly on the Feast of Purim?

Answer:

5. The book of the Bible which was read could be read only in Hebrew. [True/False]

Answer:

6. Who was the person mentioned in the book of Esther who was subject to the anger and contempt of the Jews who heard his name being read?

Answer:

7. The Feast of _____ was also called the Feast of Lights.

Answer:

8. The Feast of Wood Offering was held in the Jewish month of _____.

Answer:

9. The wood used in the Feast of Wood Offering was selected by priests who were disqualified from any other ministry. [True/False]

Answer:

10. The only fast that was ordained by God, that is, it is commanded in the Bible, is the one that occurred on the Day of _____.

Answer:

End of Quiz
