

Some thoughts and prayers for Lammas Day – Sunday 1st August 2021

The next few weeks are a critical time for farmers. The fields are “white for harvest” and some warm dry weather is needed for the combine harvesters to roll.

The word *Lammas* first appears in the writings of King Alfred and is thought to be derived from an old English word for ‘loaf’ followed by ‘mass’. (like Christmas is from Christ+mass). In the early English church it was customary to consecrate bread made from the first-ripe corn on this day, when prayers would be said for a safe in-gathering of the full harvest - celebrated at the end of September / early October with “Harvest Home”. Remember Boaz getting “merry” at the end of harvest in Ruth chapter 3, verse 7! In modern times the prayers for a safe in-gathering seem to have been neglected with the emphasis on a celebration of “Harvest Festival”. It is good to be reminded of the need for the blessing of the Lord God on the crops and the work necessary for our food supply!

As a Bible Study we will look at the festive celebrations appointed for God’s people in the Old Testament – and of course celebrated by Our Lord Jesus Christ and used in his preaching and teaching.

Read Deuteronomy chapter 16, verses 1 – 17:-

There were three major festivals appointed for the People of God in the Old Testament:-

1) Passover (Deuteronomy 16, verses 1 - 8) – The commemoration of the deliverance of the children of Israel from bondage in Egypt. The feast of unleavened bread and the killing of the passover lamb. This was to be observed as an ordinance for ever, with the story of the deliverance told to each generation. The whole of Exodus chapter 12, verses 1 – 36 are worth reading to remind ourselves of the drama which was to be remembered down the years to the present day.

We can easily miss the reference to harvest but it is there in Leviticus chapter 23 verses 9 – 14. The first cut sheaf of the harvest was to be brought to the priest to be waved before the Lord “*on the morrow after the Sabbath*” (verse 11). This meant that the Feast of the Passover was also the time for prayer to the Lord for the harvest of the land. The theme is picked up by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 7:- “*Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed*” - a reference to the Passover itself, and in 1 Corinthians 15, verse 20:- “*Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.*” - a reference to the first sheaf of corn brought to the priest at Passover time.

2) Feast of Weeks – Pentecost (Deuteronomy 16, verses 9 – 12) – Seven full weeks plus the day after the seventh Sabbath. Fifty full days after the waving of the first cut sheaf to the celebration of the end of the barley harvest and start of the wheat harvest. This was when the loaves of bread made from the new corn were brought and presented to the Lord – see Leviticus chapter 23, and verses 15 – 17.

3) Feast of Booths / Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 16, verses 13 – 15) – The celebration of the completion of the harvests which took place 6 months after Passover. See Leviticus 23, verses 5 – 6 and verse 39. This was to be a time of rejoicing before the Lord: a thanksgiving for the produce of the land which the Lord God had given them.

Down the ages the people of God have recognised that the Lord God is sovereign over the fruits of the land on which we all depend. This should encourage us in prayer. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us to say “*Give us this day our daily bread*”! Can we make this the basis of our prayers this coming Sunday, the traditional “Lammas Day”? Below are some suggestions for us to use.

The Lord’s Prayer – meditating carefully on each phrase.

and

Lord God, you made heaven and earth, and all that is in them, we pray that you will bless the fruits of harvest and multiply them abundantly. We pray for seasonable weather that this year's harvest may be a plentiful one. Rejoicing in your gifts, we offer you our grateful thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.