

# Day of Thanksgiving

## CELEBRATING THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE GOSPEL

### Deuteronomy 26:1-11

### Day of Thanksgiving

### Analysis by Paul Jaster

When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess, and you possess it, and settle in it, 2you 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. 3You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time, and say to him, "Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us." 4When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 5you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. 11Then you, together with

the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: No Sale!**

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *First Fruits of the Law***

There are “first fruits” and there are “first fruits”: there are the “first fruits of law” and the “first fruits of the gospel.” Deuteronomy 26 chronicles the first. God commanded that the first fruits of the land be given to the priests, Levites & aliens, so that Israel might continue in the land God had given them as an inheritance to possess. Two chapters later, Deuteronomy 28:68 spells out the consequence of not obeying this command and others like it. God will put the Israelites on speed boats back to their enemies in Egypt on the shortest route possible. And then, comes the ultimate insult, laced with a hefty dose of fitting irony! The people will offer themselves for sale as slaves to their former owners, the Egyptians, BUT ...there will be NO BUYER. This is the way the law works: Do this, or else!

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Insufficient***

Today we often encourage “first fruits giving” on Thanksgiving or during the harvest time of year as a biblical model for our stewardship or our giving not as a law or a commandment but as a recommendation or suggestion. I know I have. Maybe this sounds less legalistic. Yet, this is still a far cry from the “first fruits” the gospel has in mind. The “first fruits of the Gospel” involve greater seeds and harvests than just agricultural or financial ones. And the “first fruits of the Gospel” flow from God to us in Christ and in his Spirit and are received by faith.

Anything else is insufficient.

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *No Sale***

God is interested in a bigger and greater harvest, like what becomes of those who have faith in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ. And so, as far as eternity is concerned, these lesser sales are “No Sale.” God doesn’t buy it.

## **PROGNOSIS: God Buys...and We Celebrate**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Christ, the First Fruits of the Resurrection***

Commentators like to say that in the New Testament the term “first fruits” is never used literally, but rather always metaphorically by Jesus and his disciples. Actually it is used “literally,” just not legally but rather gospel-ly. 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23 reminds us that Christ has been raised, the first fruits of those who have died. The implication is that there will be many, many more resurrections for those who belong to Christ and that their resurrection will be similar to Christ’s. Note the movement of this gift. Not from us to God, but rather from God to us, received by faith.

### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *The First Fruits of the Spirit***

Those who believe in Jesus as the “first fruits of the resurrection” are given Christ’s own Spirit and become a people who are the first fruits of the Spirit. This is the harvest that God seeks, which itself becomes a “seed” or planting in God’s world.

### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *A Global Ministry***

The “land” which God gives us as an inheritance is not a garden plot or even a whole country (like Israel or the United States of America). The land God gives us is the world...the entire world. And our role is not to “possess it,” but rather to

proclaim Jesus in it, who is the “first fruits of the resurrection.” And our “first fruits” of time and money go not to support a parochial priesthood in our little corner of the world but to fund and foster a global ministry. This the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ buys...and we celebrate...with all the bounty that the Lord has given to us and to our household.