

Our Passover— Sacrificed for Us

“Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” **ABOUT FOUR THOUSAND** years ago a man of old age arose early one morning, **—I Corinthians 5:7** awakened his son, a robust young man, and together they started on a three-day journey which took them into the “land of Moriah.” Accompanying them were two young servants of the household. They did not go empty-handed, for they took with them the necessary equipment for the offering of sacrifice, such as the wood and fuel for starting fire.—Gen. 22:1-3

As the journey's end drew near, the party halted and the elderly man instructed his servants to remain behind while he and his son continued on to the place where the sacrifice was to be offered. The young man, strong and muscular, carried the wood, and his father carried the fuel and the knife. However, there was something about this scene that was puzzling. They were going to offer sacrifice, which the son knew. Yet, they had no animal to offer. Finally, he boldly spoke to his father about it as they approached the top of the

mount. Observing that they had the wood and the fuel, he inquired, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" His father's simple answer was, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."—vss. 4-8

This father and his beloved son were Abraham and Isaac. God had asked Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, but Isaac had not yet been advised of this. Abraham, perhaps with an ache in his heart, was keeping this information to himself, not wishing to impose a long, drawn-out period of suffering upon his son. His statement that God would provide a lamb was an expression of his implicit faith. Paul explains that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. Indeed, God did do this in a figurative sense, for Isaac was restored to his father from the very jaws of death.—Heb. 11:17-19

Abraham demonstrated his faithful obedience, and we find Isaac on the altar, his father with knife poised to slay that miracle child. Just as the muscles tightened to strike that fatal blow, Abraham heard his name called. Turning around to investigate, he found himself face to face with an angel who told him not to harm his son, and also drew his attention to a lamb caught in a nearby thicket. This was the lamb which God provided, and Abraham was instructed to use it as a substitute for Isaac on the altar of sacrifice.—Gen. 22:9-13

To the casual reader who is unacquainted with the plan of God for mankind's redemption, this may seem no more than a strange tale handed down from ancient tradition. To the consecrated

followers of Christ, however, it is an event with vital meaning. God had made a wonderful promise to Abraham which, after the patriarch showed his willingness to give his son as a burnt offering, God confirmed by his oath. The promise was that through Abraham's seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 22:15-18) There was something, though, which stood in the way of that blessing. It was sin and its penalty—death.

Before the people could be blessed there had to be an atonement for sin. The “seed” through which the blessing was to come must die as a sacrifice in order to bring that to pass. In the account of Abraham offering his son Isaac, we have an enlightening illustration of a coming glorious reality when the Heavenly Father himself would give his own Son, Jesus, for the sin of world. The lamb which God provided to be sacrificed in lieu of Isaac foreshadowed “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

ANOTHER PICTURE

By an unusual sequence of circumstances, including the selling of Joseph into slavery, all the natural descendants of Abraham through Isaac were eventually held captive in Egypt. They were burdened under their taskmasters and longed for deliverance. Finally, in the Lord's providence, Moses was sent to them, and under his leadership their exodus from Egyptian bondage was effected. This was accomplished, however, only by the direct intervention of God on their behalf—an intervention that was manifested by miracles.

Because Pharaoh refused to grant liberty to the Hebrews, one plague after another was visited upon him and his people, the Egyptians. There were ten plagues in all, and not until the last one did the ruler of Egypt actually grant the Israelites the privilege of leaving the country. It was immediately following the tenth plague that the historical exodus of the Hebrews occurred.

In connection with the tenth plague, we are furnished with another picture of the importance of blood, and the offering of a “lamb,” in God’s plan of salvation. The plague brought the death of Egypt’s firstborn, from the firstborn of Pharaoh down to the firstborn of the poorest laborer. However, an arrangement was made by God whereby the firstborn of Israel could escape death. It was the provision of the blood of the Passover lamb offering.

It is a well-known story in the Bible, but as a rule its full significance is overlooked. Through Moses, God instructed that each family of the Israelites was to take a lamb into the house on the tenth day of the first month, keep it until the fourteenth day, when it was to be slain and the blood sprinkled on the lintels and door posts of the house. The Lord explained that where the blood was sprinkled according to instructions, the firstborn would not be killed.—Exod. 12:1-13; Num. 33:3

The Apostle Paul speaks of the “church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” (Heb. 12:23) He also states that “Christ our passover,” as declared in our opening text, “is sacrificed for us.” The word “church” in the New Testament is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means

“called out” ones. The “church of the firstborn” is a class called out, or selected, from the world. They are brought under the special protection of the blood of Jesus, the antitypical Passover lamb, prior to the deliverance of the whole world, as represented by the deliverance of all Israel from Egyptian bondage.

The Passover night in Egypt foreshadowed the entire Gospel Age. It has certainly been a night-time, symbolically speaking. “Darkness” has covered the earth, “and gross darkness the people.” (Isa. 60:2) However, the “morning” will come and, with it, a great deliverance. (Ps. 30:5) This deliverance, just as was the case with Israel, depends upon the salvation from death of the firstborn. Just as in the type, so now, this “passing over” of the firstborn is brought about through the blood of the Lamb—“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

A PERPETUAL MEMORIAL

The Israelites were commanded to commemorate this great event each year. On the fourteenth day of their first month they were to slay a lamb for the Passover. It was important for them to do this because it served as a reminder of the mighty deliverance God had wrought for them and how his outstretched arm had been over them in that time of their great need.—Exod. 12:14,24-27

When Jesus, the foretold Messiah, came to the Jews nearly two thousand years ago, they were continuing to celebrate the Passover, but they understood practically nothing of its typical significance. John the Baptist, however, seemed to

comprehend what the lamb foreshadowed. It was he, as quoted earlier, who spoke of Jesus as “the Lamb of God.”

The entire period of Jesus’ earthly ministry was characterized by the sacrificial service which he rendered on behalf of the people. The common people heard him gladly and rejoiced in the blessings of health and life extended to many of them. However, their religious rulers were bitterly opposed to him. They “despised and rejected” Jesus, plotted to kill him, and led him to death as a “lamb to the slaughter.”—Isa. 53:3,7

There were time features in God’s plan, and not until three and one half years following the start of the Master’s ministry were his enemies permitted to arrest and kill him. He was to be the antitype of the Passover lamb, and it was essential that his blood be shed on the fourteenth day of Israel’s first religious month, Nisan, which began with the new moon occurring closest to the spring equinox. When this time drew near in that momentous year of God’s plan, Jesus announced his intention of going to Jerusalem where he expected to be arrested and put to death.

From the time Jesus made this announcement, his disciples were more or less bewildered. They expected him to be a great king and to establish a powerful, worldwide kingdom. What could a dead Christ do? Peter rebuked Jesus, saying, “Be it far from thee [to die], Lord.” (Matt. 16:22) Jesus, however, would not be turned aside from what he knew to be the divine will for him. He had come to die for the church of the firstborn and for the whole world, and he intended to

finish the work his Heavenly Father had given him to do.—I John 2:2

THE UPPER ROOM

The Jewish day begins at sundown and lasts until sundown the next evening. Sometime during the thirteenth of Nisan, Jesus gave instructions concerning the necessary preparations for the Pass-over due to be celebrated that evening. Previously, it appears, he had made arrangements with one of his friends to use an “upper room” in his house, and he told the disciples how they could locate the proper place.—Luke 22:8-12

When evening came, Jesus and the twelve went to this room where the Passover meal was to be eaten. The feeling was tense in the hearts of the disciples that night. It seemed evident to them that tragedy was looming. “One of you shall betray me,” Jesus said to them, and with one accord they asked, “Is it I?” (Matt. 26:21,22) There was only one who knew to whom Jesus referred, and that was Judas, the betrayer.

As they continued to eat the Passover meal, it was evident that the disciples had not as yet grasped the idea of sacrifice and its relationship to themselves as followers of Jesus, because they began wrangling over who would be greatest in his kingdom. Jesus, however, was not disturbed by their lack of understanding. Instead, he used the occasion as an opportunity to give his disciples a much-needed object lesson in humility and the true spirit of sacrifice and service. He washed their feet and explained that the one who would be greatest among them would be their servant.—John 13:1-17

The Passover supper finished, Jesus took some of the unleavened bread which remained and some of the “fruit of the vine” and passed it to his disciples, saying, “Take, eat; this is my body. . . . Drink; . . . this is my blood.” (Matt. 26:26-29) Whether or not they then remembered what Jesus had previously said to them concerning the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood we do not know. (see John 6:51-56,63) However, even if they recalled his former remarks, they still did not understand what Jesus meant.

Not until the begetting of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was it possible for any of Jesus’ disciples to comprehend the meaning of what he said to them that night. They did not then recognize that his body was to be broken in death and his blood poured out. They did not know that this was in order that they might receive the benefits of sanctification and justification through the sacrifice of his life. As they ate the “bread” and drank of the “cup” which Jesus offered to them, they were unable to realize that in doing so they were symbolizing their dependence for life upon his sacrifice as the “Lamb of God.”

JOURNEY TO GETHSEMANE

They sang a hymn and left that upper room, slowly making their way out of the city to the Mount of Olives, across the brook Cedron, and finally to the Garden of Gethsemane. As they made that final journey together, Jesus told them many things. One of the things he said was that they would all be offended that night because of him. To this Peter responded, boasting that even though all

others might forsake Jesus, he would not do so, and was even willing and ready to die for him. (Matt. 26:31-33) Peter meant this, as he later demonstrated when he attempted to rescue Jesus from the mob by the use of a sword.

Reaching the garden, Jesus took three of his most beloved disciples—Peter, James, and John—apart from the others and asked them to watch with him. Then he went a little farther in order to be alone with his Heavenly Father, and there he prayed. (vss. 36-44) The supreme test of his loyalty to God's will had come. His "land of Moriah" had been reached. The circumstances were all in readiness for the consummation of his sacrifice.

The question now was not whether Jesus would willingly die as the "Lamb," but whether he could endure all the "contradiction of sinners" against everything he had done in his life to serve his Heavenly Father. (Heb. 12:3) The greatest of these contradictions was that he would soon be arrested and put to death as a blasphemer of this very one—the Father he loved and served so faithfully. Thus, out of that loving, but now "exceeding sorrowful" heart, came the cry to his God, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."—Matt. 26:38,39; Luke 22:42

"Not my will, but thine, be done." These were the words which revealed the Master's final victory. He was indeed the one foretold by the prophet who was to be "brought as a lamb to the slaughter" and who, "as a sheep before her shearers is dumb," would offer no resistance. (Isa. 53:7) "And

there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.” (Luke 22:43) With renewed determination and inner strength, the “Lamb of God” was ready to be offered.

ARREST AND TRIAL

Judas had informed Jesus’ enemies of his movements, and a multitude was now approaching Gethsemane determined to arrest and kill the “Prince of life,” the one whose only crime had been that of doing good. (Acts 3:14,15) The details of the arrest are well-known. Peter used a sword to try and prevent the arrest, and the Master reproved him for such rash action. This was a good lesson for Peter, and it also demonstrated to all concerned that Jesus gave himself up voluntarily.

Then followed the trial before the Jewish high priest, after which Jesus appeared before Pilate, the Roman governor. Jesus was condemned for claiming to be the Son of God and a King. Little did the wicked hearts of his accusers realize how blessedly true were the great facts of his divine sonship and eventual kingship. Few indeed since then, even among his professed followers, have been able to confess with proper understanding that Jesus is truly the Son of God. How few also have comprehended the scope of his kingship—that he is to be the King of kings and ruler over all nations.

His enemies obtained Pilate’s reluctant consent to kill the Master, and he was crucified—while his enemies and the curious looked on and mocked. “If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross,” they cried. “He saved others; let

him save himself.” (Matt. 27:39-43; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-37) What they did not understand was that the Lamb of God was voluntarily dying in order to provide salvation for them. Jesus had saved some temporarily, but he knew this was not all that God had in his plan for man. As his Heavenly Father loved the whole world, so did he. He was dying in order that all, even his enemies, might have an opportunity to obtain eternal salvation when his kingdom would be established upon the earth.

THE LAMB SLAIN

“It is finished,” the Master cried, and committed his life into the hands of his Father, the eternal Life-giver. (John 19:30; Luke 23:46) The Lamb had been slain—the Lamb which God had provided. A loving Father had offered his beloved Son in sacrifice. The blood of the antitypical Passover lamb was now shed. There was no literal lamb now that could be offered as a substitute. Jesus, the Lamb of God, himself bore our sins, for God “laid on him the iniquity of us all.”—Isa. 53:6

The upper room scene, the Gethsemane experiences, the trials before the high priest and other authorities, and finally the crucifixion, all occurred on the fourteenth of Nisan—that is, from sundown to sundown. Thus the typical Passover, so far as God was concerned, was brought to an end. There was no need that it be further commemorated, for the antitypical Passover lamb had been slain. “Jesus, . . . by the grace of God . . . [tasted] death for every man.”—Heb. 2:9

A MEMORIAL OF JESUS' DEATH

Returning our thoughts to the upper room scene, Jesus had instituted something new. It was not a new Passover, but a simple service, to help his disciples in every part of the age to remember his death, the benefits they derive therefrom, and their privilege of sonship as a result. This service consists simply of partaking of a morsel of unleavened bread and a sip of the fruit of the vine—the “bread” representing his broken body, and the “cup” his shed blood.

This year, once again, little companies of Jesus' disciples will come together on the fourteenth of Nisan—April 2, after sundown—to remember his death. Now, more than at any previous time, we should stand as it were, with staff in hand, for the evidences are clear that “the time is short.” (I Cor. 7:29) May the realization of this cause the Memorial season this year to be one in which we will renew our vows unto the Lord and resolve to pay them even more faithfully than ever before.

How grand, as we partake of the emblems, to realize our blessed association with Jesus! How thrilling to know that we are remembering the antitype of that which was foreshadowed by God's dealings with Abraham and Isaac, and with the Israelites at the time of the Exodus! God plagued the Egyptians back at that time, and now the present world order is being plagued in preparation for the great deliverance to be wrought when the reign of Christ and his faithful Bride begins.

Meanwhile, as the “church of the firstborn,” we are under the protection of the blood and are being prepared to serve the people, in cooperation with

the antitypical Moses, in rescuing all mankind from the bondage of sin and death. Brethren, may we appreciate our privileges more fully, and may it be with hearts filled with rejoicing, yet in great solemnity and determination, that once more we symbolically eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood—"our passover . . . sacrificed for us." ■