

In Remembrance of Me

*“This do in
remembrance of
me. . . . For as often
as ye eat this
bread, and drink
this cup, ye do shew
the Lord’s death.”*
—*I Corinthians*
11:24,26

ON THAT PORTENTOUS

evening nearly two thousand years ago, pious Jews all over the land were gathering with their families to celebrate once more the Feast of the Passover. For one small group, this evening held special interest and even premonition. He whom they so dearly loved, and to whom they had been looking for the realization of their long delayed expectations, had been making foreboding statements which both puzzled and troubled them. Only a short time earlier, he had told them, “He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matt. 16:21) On other occasions, he had said that he must “go away,” and that he must lay down his life.—John 14:28;16:7

These were strange words from one who had been talking of establishing a kingdom in which

they had been led to believe they would share. When one of his followers remonstrated at his exposing himself to death, their Master used the occasion to invite them to also lay down their lives in death, saying, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."—Matt. 16:24,25

Now, having followed his instructions to prepare the Passover, this little band of twelve had gathered with their Master in the upper room to celebrate the feast. At its conclusion, there came another of those strange statements. "He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."—Luke 22:15-20

BONDAGE IN EGYPT

The Jewish celebration, known as the Passover, and its deep significance was born of the agony and despair of the bondage of the nation of Israel in Egypt. They had gone there as a small number at the invitation of Pharaoh, on Joseph's request, in

order to escape the famine in the land of Canaan. There they had prospered, and they and their flocks and herds increased mightily. In course of time, however, there arose a new Pharaoh “which knew not Joseph.” (Exod. 1:8) As he observed the multiplication of the Jews in their midst, he began to fear for the safety of his own people. The burdens which Pharaoh then forced upon the Israelites to restrain their increase became intolerable. They cried unto the Lord for relief. In answer to their cries, the Lord sent Moses to deliver them from the hand of their oppressors. Under the direction of the Lord, Moses brought various plagues on the land.

LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH

The last of these plagues, and the most grievous, was the slaying by the destroying angel of all of the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of animals. The firstborn of the children of Israel were to be spared if they followed the Lord’s specific instructions. The Lord had told the Israelites that in the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, each household was to slay a lamb “without blemish.” The blood of this lamb was to be sprinkled on the two side posts and on the upper doorpost of the houses in which the lamb was to be eaten. It was to be eaten “in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs . . . [and] his head with his legs.” Nothing was to be allowed to remain. Anything not consumed was to be burned by fire.—Exod. 12:6-10

The manner of its eating was also significant. “Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand;

and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S pass-over." (vs. 11) The Lord then told them that he would pass through the land of Egypt that night and would smite all the firstborn in the land, both man and beast. However, the blood of the slain lamb on the doorposts and lintels of the homes of the Israelites would protect the firstborn within.—vss. 12,13

At midnight, all the firstborn of Egypt, including even the firstborn of Pharaoh himself, were smitten of the Lord, and also the firstborn of the cattle. There was not a house in all the land that escaped. So great was the consternation and dismay of the Egyptians that Pharaoh rose up in the night and, calling Moses and Aaron to him, ordered the Israelites with their flocks and herds to leave the land forthwith. Thus it was that with a mighty hand the Lord accomplished the release of the nation from their bondage in Egypt. (Exod. 12:29-31; 14:8) It was the terror and discomfiture occasioned by the plagues brought by the Lord, particularly that final dread affliction involving the slaying of all the firstborn of the Egyptians, that secured their release.

The Lord admonished the Israelites, saying, "This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever." (chap. 12:14) When they should finally come into the promised land of Canaan, they were to keep the feast and explain to their children that it was the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover. This was to remind them throughout their generations that the Lord had 'passed over' the houses, wherein dwelt the firstborn of the children of Israel in

Egypt, when he destroyed the firstborn of Egypt and delivered the Israelites from their oppressors. It was “a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.”—Exod. 12:42

THE FIRSTBORN ARE MINE

At the time of the Passover experience in Egypt, the Lord gave Moses instructions on another significant point. He said to Moses, “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.” (chap. 13:1,2) On the eve of the deliverance of the Israelites, the lives of the firstborn alone were in danger. These were the Lord’s special concern, and for them the Lord had prepared a sure refuge—the covering blood of the lamb. All of the firstborn who availed themselves of this blessed provision were saved alive during that terrible night. Therefore, the Lord held these to be his. “All the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself.” (Num. 8:17) These were to be sanctified, or set apart, as his own special possession and to perform a special service.

Later, for convenience, these firstborn were exchanged en masse for the Levitical tribe of Aaron and his sons. The tribe of Levi thus became the Lord’s, and these were then appointed “to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for

the children of Israel.” (vs. 19) Aaron and his sons, themselves of the tribe of Levi, had already been consecrated into the priesthood. It was fitting, therefore, that the Levites should be chosen to be the priestly tribe. In the subsequent division of the land of Canaan, the tribe of Levi had no inheritance, but were supported by tithes supplied by the remaining tribes. The duties of the priests were many. Probably the most important was the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement of the bullock and the Lord’s goat as an offering for sin, “to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year.”—Lev. 16:34

REMEMBER THIS DAY

After the Lord had directed Moses relative to the setting apart to him of all the firstborn, Moses again reminded the people of the importance of the experience through which they had just passed under the Lord’s guidance. “Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; . . . And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, . . . that thou shalt keep this service in this month. . . . And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. . . . And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt.” (Exod. 13:3,5,8,16) “Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year.”—vs. 10

The ‘frontlets’ here mentioned were small leather cases containing strips of parchment on which

were written words to remind them of their deliverance from bondage, God's promise to bring them to the land of Canaan, and various instructions, in order that they properly follow his commandments and pass these on to their children.—Exod. 13:2-10,11-17; Deut. 6:4-9,13-23

The Lord told them that the memory of all these things should be in their hearts. To assist them to be mindful of them, that they might always walk in his ways, they were instructed also to "write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." (Deut. 6:9) This was even prior to the time when the Ten Commandments were engraved on tables of stone for all to see and to do. The frontlets, which were to be bound on their arms or worn on their foreheads, were to serve as additional reminders of these things. In the New Testament, these frontlets are called phylacteries, from a Greek word meaning a safeguard, or guardian. They were to love and serve the Lord with all their heart and all their soul and all their might. (vs. 5) By wearing these frontlets on their arms and on their foreheads, the Israelites would be reminded of God's goodness to them, and of his instructions and commandments. Thus they would be guarded from forsaking his paths.

SHADOW OF GOOD THINGS TO COME

That remarkable experience in the life of the nation of Israel is still most dear to the hearts of reverent Jews the world over. It is of special interest to the church of this present Gospel Age. The Apostle Paul tells us that those things which happened to Israel were "a shadow of good things to

come.” (Heb. 10:1) Our Lord Jesus was a Jew, born under the Law, and subject to all its provisions and ordinances, including the observance year by year of the Feast of the Passover. He and his twelve disciples accordingly had come together in the upper room on that fateful evening for this purpose.

Jesus knew by his knowledge of prophecy that his time had come, for he was destined to be “cut off” in the “midst of the week.” (Dan. 9:26,27) He knew that the Passover lamb that was slain there in Egypt on the fourteenth day of Nisan in the evening, and whose blood provided protection for the firstborn of Israel, pictured himself. He was that perfect Lamb of God who would give his life as a ransom for the whole world. (John 1:29) He was about to meet the demands of justice by giving his life on behalf of all mankind.

At the end of the Passover supper, when they had finished observing the feast, Jesus said to them, “I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then, we read, “He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:15-20) Anticipating the terrible events of the morrow, when he would complete his sacrifice on the cross and so fulfill the requirements of the Law, we find our Lord initiating a new (Continued on page 35)

(Continued from page 31) ordinance, or ceremony. This 'Memorial' ceremony established by Jesus is the only one, beside baptism, that is enjoined upon his footstep followers of this Gospel Age.

On an earlier occasion, the Jews had asked Jesus for a sign that they might believe in him, although only the day before he had fed five thousand from a few loaves and fishes. They reminded him that their fathers had eaten manna in the desert. (John 6:30,31) Jesus said, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (vss. 47-49,51) The account then tells us, "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."—vss. 52,53

In one sense, the Jews were right, for how could they eat his flesh? This was a "hard saying" to them, and we read, "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him." (vss. 60,66) We need not think, however, that they fell into the error of some who believe that they actually partake of the literal flesh and blood of the Master.

The bread and wine that he offered to his disciples there in the upper room were merely symbols. The bread symbolized his broken body and the fruit of the vine his shed blood. These together

represented the sacrifice of his life on behalf of mankind. Our partaking of the bread and wine symbolizes our partaking of the merit of our Lord's sacrifice, and manifests our faith in him as our Redeemer. The faith thus manifested is the basis of our justification, or righteousness, before God. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." (Rom. 5:1) How glad we are for this loving provision of the Heavenly Father on behalf of the antitypical firstborn!

FIRSTFRUITS AND AFTERFRUITS

Only the "church of the firstborn" have so far received the merit of Christ's sacrifice. (Heb. 12:23) These antitypical 'firstborn' are also referred to in the Scriptures as "firstfruits." (James 1:18; Rev. 14:4) This clearly suggests that there shall be 'afterfruits.' Just as it was God's purpose that not only should the firstborn of Israel be delivered, but that the entire nation should be released from bondage, so also will it be in due time with the whole world of mankind. For Jesus Christ died not for the few, but for all mankind. He "gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (I Tim. 2:6) He said that the hour would come when all who are in their graves would hear his voice and come forth. (John 5:28,29) Herein is God's great love for his fallen, human creation manifested. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—chap. 3:16

There is a 'due time' for these blessings to be bestowed upon mankind. The Apostle Paul makes

this clear in his wonderful sermon about the resurrection. He tells us, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits [Christ and the church]; afterward they [of the world of mankind] that are Christ’s at [during] his coming [presence].”—I Cor. 15:22,23

Our Lord Jesus died on the cross nearly two thousand years ago. Yet mankind is still going down into the grave. This is so because ‘Christ the firstfruits’ is not yet complete. The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ is not one, but many—“As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (I Cor. 12:12,27) During this Gospel Age, the Lord has been selecting and testing those who shall make up this body of Christ. He has been taking out of the world a little flock, “a people for his name.”—Acts 15:14

These have accepted Jesus’ invitation to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. (Matt. 16:24) Having faith in his shed blood, they have presented themselves “a living sacrifice.” (Rom. 12:1) They have no inheritance in the land, for their treasure is in heaven. These “by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Rom. 2:7) They are drawn by the wonderful hope that, if faithful, they will be joined with their head in glory, and will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The purpose of this reign will be the blessing of all the families of the earth.—Rev. 2:10; 20:6; Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:27,29

The selection and proving of this firstfruits class is the glorious work of the Gospel Age. This explains the seeming delay in the fruition of God's plan of salvation for mankind. When this firstfruits class is complete and the church joined to her head, then will the kingdom of God be set up in power and glory. Then will the merit of Christ's redeeming blood be applied on behalf of the whole world of mankind. Then will begin the work of restitution of mankind back to the glory and beauty and perfection that had been father Adam's in the lovely Garden of Eden. Then, indeed, will have come the due time for the afterfruits—when God's law will be written, not on tables of stone, but in the grateful, loving hearts of all men.

For now, though, the development of the Lord's special people continues. The antitypical firstborns, whose deliverance must precede that of the world, are still under the protection of the covering blood of the Lamb. Their sacrificial work is almost complete, and they look forward to soon receiving the consummation of their hope of being with their Lord, and of participating in the blessing of all the families of the earth. Until then, they are ever mindful of the sacrifice of their Lord and Master, and they reverently keep the Memorial of his death on Calvary's cross. With humility, they partake of the bread of life and the merit of his shed blood. Faithfully, they also lay down their own lives in sacrifice, filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. This they do in grateful remembrance of him. ■