

The Celebration of Passover

*“When he seeth the
blood, . . . the LORD
will pass over the
door, and will not
suffer the
destroyer . . . to
smite you.”
—Exodus 12:23*

THE JEWISH PEOPLE USED

the moon in the reckoning of their time, and each new moon represented the beginning of a new month. The new moon which came closest to the spring equinox was established as the beginning of their ecclesiastical new year, thus the first day of their calendar month Nisan. On the fifteenth day of that month, the Feast of Passover began which lasted for one week. This was a special time of joy, peace, and blessing because they remembered the deliverance of their nation from Egyptian bondage and servitude.

The Passover season began on the 15th day of their month Nisan at 6:00 P.M. However, the main interest concerning the true followers of our Lord Jesus at this special season of the year centers upon the slaying of the sacrificial lamb which preceded the Passover feast, and took place on the 14th day of the month.

THE PASSING OVER

When the Passover was instituted, the firstborn of Israel were spared if they remained under the blood of the slain lamb as indicated by the words recorded in our featured text. When the time arrived for the deliverance of the Jewish people from bondage, their masters in Egypt refused to let them go to the land of Canaan. One after another the Lord sent nine different plagues upon the Egyptians, relieving them only when their Pharaoh sought mercy and made promises which he afterwards soon broke.

The Lord's servant was Moses, and he announced that the firstborn in every family of Egypt would die in one night, and that in the home of the humblest peasants, as well as in the home of the Pharaoh, there would be great mourning. It would surely come upon the entire nation if he continued to harden his heart and resist the Divine instructions. The first three plagues were common to all who were living in Egypt, including the district in which the Israelites were residing. The next six plagues affected only the particular region that was occupied by the Egyptians.

The last, or tenth, plague would be common to the entire land of Egypt, including the part that had been apportioned to the Israelites. To escape the plague, it was necessary for each household to slay a select lamb, and sprinkle its blood upon the side posts and upper parts of the doorways to their homes. The lamb was also to be eaten in the same night with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, and those who partook of it were instructed to have their staff in hand, and to be girded and ready for

a journey. They were to do so with full expectancy that the Lord would smite the firstborn of Egypt with death, and make them willing to release the Israelites from bondage.

ANCIENT JEWISH CEREMONY

The Israelites were commanded to celebrate this Passover as the first feature of their Law Covenant, and as one of their most important national memorials. Jews have respect for their ancient custom, but some may never have considered its true meaning and importance. Why was the lamb slain and eaten, and why was its blood sprinkled upon the doorposts of their homes? What reason was there behind the Divine command, and why are the Hebrews indifferent to this subject? Truly a reasonable God gives reasonable commands and, in due time, his people will understand the significance of God's wondrous ways. Many Christians are also unable to give a reason for any hope they may have in connection with the Passover.

IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE SYMBOLS

The Bible has been written with various types of symbolic language, often based on physical characteristics that are found in our natural environment. The Jewish Sabbath is based on the number seven which in Bible language points to perfection. It is thus used to foreshadow a season of rest, blessing, and the release from toil, sorrow, and death. Features of the Mosaic Law were designed by the Heavenly Father to teach important lessons in connection with various aspects of his plan that will ultimately bless his human creation.

THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB

The Passover lamb represented our Lord Jesus as the true Lamb of God, as spoken by John when he was engaged in his work of baptizing. We read in the scriptural account, “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away [beareth, *Marginal Translation*] the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

The Passover lamb’s shed blood, in turn, represented the death of our Lord Jesus as a perfect man. The sprinkling of that blood symbolizes the impartation of Jesus’ merit on behalf of the household of faith, the passed-over class during this present Gospel Age.

Blessed are those whose eyes of faith recognize that Jesus was the true Lamb of God and that his blood symbolizes the cancellation of their sins inherited from Adam.

THE 1,000-YEAR KINGDOM

Under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom, this special class will share with our Lord as the seed of promise in blessing all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:16-18) A thousand years has been set aside by our loving Heavenly Father for the Christ class to lift up and bless all the obedient of mankind, and to offer them life, which had been forfeited by Adam. This will take place here on a perfected and rejuvenated earth. The whole human family has been alienated from God since the very dawn of the creation of man. They came under the Divine sentence because of disobedience to the laws of God and have together inherited the sorrows of sin, pain and death until the present time.

Before this sentence or curse can be removed, it is necessary that a satisfaction of justice be made. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul explained, "Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these."—Heb. 9:22,23

FIRSTFRUITS AND AFTERFRUITS

The class of believers who are being selected during this present Gospel Age to carry out this future work of regeneration are referred to as the "church of the firstborn" by the Apostle Paul. (Heb. 12:23) James speaks of them as a firstfruit class and writes, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." (James 1:18) John the revelator also said, "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed [bought, *Marginal Translation*] from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."—Rev. 14:4

These scriptural references to the 'firstborn' and the 'firstfruits' point to the Christ class who are being called from the earth during this time. This implies that there will also be others of God's human family who will be blessed later as afterfruits in his ultimate plan for the world of mankind.

ALL ISRAEL PASSED OVER

In connection with the Passover celebration, it was God's purpose to save all Israel. As a typical

people, they represented the entire human family who will ultimately come into harmony with God and will be granted eternal life. This will take place in the antitypical land of promise—a perfected earth.

The entire nation of Israel was later miraculously delivered from Egyptian bondage by the powerful hand of God, and led by Moses across the Red Sea. That deliverance served to illustrate the ultimate release of all mankind from the power of sin and death. Pharaoh and his soldiers were totally destroyed, which prefigured the final destruction of Satan and his forces of evil.

CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN

The solemn event which we will celebrate again this year was originally shown by the passing over or sparing of the firstborn of Israel who remained under the saving blood of the lamb of God. They alone were spared from death that night, while all others were destroyed. Later, the deliverance of the whole nation took place, which represents the work of the glorified Christ, head and body, who will bring man back to the ways of God.

The firstfruits unto God—the church of the firstborn—are being spared during the present Gospel Age because they are under the blood of Christ. The remainder of mankind will be given an opportunity to know and follow the great antitypical Moses—our Lord Jesus, who is the true Lamb of God. He will ultimately lead the people of earth from the bondage of sin and death to the joys of life under the administration of his glorious future kingdom.

During this time in which the selection of the Christ has been taking place, these called-ones of God have had the eyes of their understanding opened to an acknowledgment of their own condition of bondage. They realize their need of deliverance from sin and death, and trust in God's desire to grant them a place in Christ's kingdom. They are those who have responded to the grace of God, have made a consecration of themselves to him and his service, and in return have been begotten again by the Holy Spirit of the Heavenly Father.

With this firstborn class, it is a matter of life and death whether or not they remain faithful to their High Calling in Christ Jesus. They must remain under the precious blood of sprinkling, and in full assurance of God's abundant grace being continuously exercised on their behalf. For any of these to go out from this condition, it would imply a disregard of Divine providence in connection with their consecrated lives. It would signify that they did not appreciate their share in the mercy of God, as represented by the blood of the Lamb. Of such, the Scriptures declare, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."—Heb. 10:26

Thus, the church of the firstborn through the begetting of the Holy Spirit and the greater knowledge and privileges they enjoy in every way at the present time, have a greater responsibility than the world will, who will have the guidance of Christ's mediatorship during his future kingdom here on earth.

WITH UNLEAVENED BREAD

The Apostle Paul clearly identified the Passover Lamb with our Lord Jesus when he admonished, “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”—I Cor. 5:7,8

When addressing the Christ class, the Apostle Peter identified them by saying, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” (I Pet. 1:2) We are to put on Christ not merely by faith, but, to the extent of our ability, we must put on his character and be transformed into his glorious image in our hearts.

FEEDING UPON THE LAMB

We are to feed upon our Lord Jesus even as the Israelites fed upon the literal lamb. Instead of the bitter herbs, which aided and whetted the Jews’ appetites during that nighttime, we have bitter experiences and trials which the Lord provides for our spiritual development. These trials help to wean our affections from earthly things, and give us increasing appetite to feed upon the Lamb and the unleavened bread of Truth. We are to remember that here we have no continuing city, but as pilgrims, with staff in hand and girded for the journey, we are now on our way to the heavenly Canaan. All of the glorious promises that the Heavenly Father has in reservation for those who are

now residing under the precious blood of Jesus will come to pass with the fruition of all of our hopes in the narrow way of sacrifice.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF HIM

Our Lord Jesus spoke of himself as the Passover Lamb of sacrifice. On the same night that he was betrayed and only a few hours before he was to be crucified, he gathered his disciples into the upper room. "When the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this pass-over 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."—Luke 22:14-16

It was necessary that as Jews under the Law they too were required to observe the Passover supper. It was to be celebrated on that particular night, the 14th day of Nisan after 6:00 P.M. even as it was when the typical lamb was slain. As soon as he had fulfilled the requirements of the type, Jesus then instituted a new memorial which was based upon the old ceremony, but instead substituted his own perfect life which he would soon give for the sins of the world.

In his letter to the brethren at Corinth, the Apostle Paul emphasized this special purpose and said, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped,

saying, This cup is the new testament [new covenant] in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."—I Cor. 11:23-26

THE ANTITYPICAL LAMB

Jesus was explaining to his disciples that they would no longer be celebrating the type, but were to recognize him as the true Lamb of God, who in the Heavenly Father's purpose had been "slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8) This understanding gave the Passover season and the killing of the sacrificial lamb a new and higher level of sacred significance, and a spiritual meaning that others cannot appreciate. Jesus' disciples were instructed to remember him and his death as the antitypical lamb each year on its anniversary.

The proper date this year to celebrate this great event will fall on April 7 after 6 P.M. At that hour will begin the 14th day of the month Nisan according to the Jewish reckoning. We encourage all of the Lord's people everywhere to gather wherever possible with others of like precious faith, and to once again partake of the sacred emblems in remembrance of our dear Lord Jesus. We should remember the great sacrifice which he made on our behalf, and for the whole world of mankind to be testified in due time. The fact that it is the anniversary of his death makes the matter of even greater significance.

OUR PARTICIPATION

We recall the circumstances of the first Memorial with the blessing of the bread and the cup—the

fruit of the vine. Jesus explained that these represented his own broken body and his own shed blood, and that those who are his followers should participate with him in these emblems. By doing so, they are feeding upon him, partaking of the merit of his shed blood and sharing with him in his sacrifice. In his letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul spoke of this special relationship with our Lord Jesus as “communion,” or participation, with him in the Heavenly Father’s arrangement.

Paul wrote, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.”—I Cor. 10:16,17

Keeping in mind the ‘passing over’ of the sins of the firstborn through the merit of the precious blood of Jesus, let us keep the Passover Feast with joy and with the prospect of sharing with him in the administration of his glorious kingdom of Truth and righteousness which is near at hand.

DRINKING THE CUP

Trials and difficulties will come into our consecrated lives by partaking of this cup. However, by so doing and as faithful followers of Jesus, we will have the great privilege of sharing with him in the passing over of the whole obedient human family from the present condition of sin and death, and to the glorious earthly kingdom that has been prepared for them. This was represented by Israel’s release from bondage in Egypt, and into the promised land of Canaan.

With the soon completion of the last members of the body of Christ, and the end of their testing as to faithfulness unto death, will come also the resurrection change of the church to be with and like her Lord. Then, as our Master declared, those who now partake of his broken body and participate in his cup of suffering and self-denial will drink with him the new wine of joy in the kingdom beyond the veil.

On the occasion of the institution of the memorial of his death, the Master in his conversation with the apostles promised his faithful followers, "I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."—Matt. 26:29

THE CUP OF JOY

Jesus was here contrasting two great aspects of the 'cup.' This side the veil it is a cup of sorrow and suffering. In the millennial kingdom that is just before us, it will be the cup of joy and glory. It thus symbolizes our Savior's sufferings and death, and our own participation with him in these sufferings. It also points forward to joy and gladness in the sense in which the Lord used the words 'fruit of the vine' in this text—the joys of the heavenly kingdom.

The Heavenly Father marked out for our Lord Jesus in his earthly experience a certain and specific course. This course constituted his cup of suffering and death. But the Father also promised him that after he had drunk this cup faithfully, he would be given a different cup, a cup of glory, honor, and immortality. Jesus was authorized by God to

make the same offer to those who would respond to his call and desire to become his followers. They would gladly suffer with him, drink of his cup of death with him, and then would participate with him in his future cup of joy.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

We are all to pass through the trying experiences represented in these illustrations. We are to lay down our lives in the Divine service, submit ourselves to the Father's will and, if faithful unto death, to share with our glorious Lord in his kingdom. "If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."—Rom. 8:17

We joyfully accept the invitation to drink of our dear Lord's cup. When the cup has been drained to the last, we will receive the cup of kingdom joys. While Jesus had a great blessing in the obedience which he rendered to his Heavenly Father, it was necessary for him to drink the cup of sorrow until the last moment of his earthly life, when he cried, "It is finished." (John 19:30) And so it is with the members of the Christ who faithfully remember him on this very solemn occasion. ■