

LESSONS FROM THE PASSOVER AND UNLEAVENED BREAD SEASON

The Holy Days have rich meaning for us in reminding us of the major steps in God's great plan to save all of mankind and bring us into His great Family. As the Passover and Unleavened Bread season draws near it is good to reflect on the meaning of these two feasts and probe even deeper than we ever have before in learning from them.

Both feasts celebrated great events in the history of Israel as God brought them out of physical captivity in Egypt. They also celebrate great events in God's plan to redeem us from the captivity of sin.

The Passover

The Passover was to be a yearly reminder of God's intervention in delivering the Israelites' firstborn from death at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 12:26-27). During the time of the last plague which came upon the land of Egypt, God told the Israelites' to kill an unblemished lamb and sprinkle its blood on their lintels and doorposts so they could be passed over by the death angel who would kill all the firstborn in Egypt (Exod. 12:21-23).

That first Passover was a symbolic type of our sins being passed over and being spared from the eternal penalty of sin - death (Rom. 6:23). It pictured, in advance, the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the sins of all mankind. He is called "our Passover" lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and 1 Peter 1:18-19. John the Baptist upon seeing Jesus approach him said: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Seriousness of the Passover sacrifice

The Israelites were told to pick out a lamb on the 10th day and hold it for four days (Exod. 12:3). During those four days it was very easy to become attached to it with it wandering around in their household. To have to kill it after those four days was to be a deeply emotional experience to help them to feel what it was like for God to give up His only Son (John 3:16) in order to pass over our sins.

We are told not to take the Passover unworthily but to examine ourselves beforehand (1 Cor. 11:27-28) and make sure we are doing our best to follow God's ways. A great price was paid to make forgiveness available to us and God wants us not to take it lightly.

In Israel no uncircumcised person was to take the Passover (Exod. 12:48). Circumcision, one of the original signs of God's covenant people (Gen. 17:9-11), has been replaced with baptism (Col. 2:11-12) and so only those who have been baptized today partake in the annual Passover service.

Footwashing

Before Christ ate His last Passover before He was crucified He washed the disciples feet (John 13) and said: "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15). By washing their feet, Jesus was illustrating to His disciples that He had come to earth to serve mankind.

Shortly afterwards, He proved the extent of His extraordinary service to this world when He voluntarily gave His very life for the sins of all mankind (Matt. 20:27-28). The footwashing ceremony that takes place before the bread and wine is taken depicts the attitude of humility and service to others that Christ wants all of us to have.

Meaning of the Bread

When Christ kept His last Passover before He was about to be killed He changed the symbols from the Passover lamb, which was an Old Testament type of Christ's sacrifice, to the new symbols of the bread and wine (1 Cor. 11:23-27) which picture Christ's body and His blood which was sacrificed for us.

The bread pictures four things -:

- The literal body of Christ which was broken for us (Luke 22:19).
- The Word of God which is the bread of life (Matt. 4:4, John 6:48). We need to use God's Word, the Bible, to grow in grace and knowledge and be more like God (2 Peter 3:18).
- The church - "We, being many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). We should be thankful for the body of the church - our brethren who we are called together with. We should have a renewed sense of dedication to serve our brethren and strive to resolve any differences we might have and be unified with one another in the church like never before.
- The mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5-8) and having the same love and concern that Christ showed when He was here on earth.



By symbolically ingesting Christ we focus our minds on allowing Him to live His life in us (Gal. 2:20). It takes self-discipline to submit to God's will and not live our own way, especially when our will clashes with God's will. One of the great meanings of Christ's sacrifice for us should be to "purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:14).

His Flesh Was Broken But Why Weren't His Bones Broken?

We know that Christ's flesh was torn and broken but why did God make sure that none of His bones would be broken (John 19:33-36), as is pictured by the Passover lamb being roasted whole with no bones broken (Exod. 12:43-46)?

Now, our bones make up our inner framework and picture our inner strength. I suspect the importance of God ensuring His bones weren't broken is a type of Christ's inner strength of character, through God's spirit, not being broken through the ordeal that He went through. He did not compromise an inch with sin through all that He went through (1 Peter 2:21-23). By doing so He left a very powerful example for us to follow in not compromising with God's way of life as we go through trials.

By His Stripes We Are Healed

The prophet Isaiah wrote that "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5). It wasn't just Christ's death, pictured by His shed blood, which paid the penalty for our sins. The physical torture that He went through was also a part of paying the penalty for our sins. Death is the ultimate penalty for sin but along the way we go through all kinds of pain and suffering.

We are told that "by His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). The Passover also reminds us of the blessing of healing and the forgiveness of our breaking the physical laws which cause sickness and disease. Following on from that, we should examine ourselves and how we treat our bodies and be determined to glorify God in our bodies by having a healthy diet and lifestyle (1 Cor. 3:16-17, 6:20).

In Isaiah 53:4 we read: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." Griefs and sorrows are neither spiritual nor physical afflictions – they are, in fact, emotional afflictions. God here appears to be highlighting the importance of emotional healing, which spiritual and physical healing are both closely connected to.

Time can heal most emotional wounds caused by our own sins or those of others but some of those wounds can become infected and deeply affect us emotionally. Like physical healing, God is quite prepared to help heal us emotionally when we bring these things to Him and ask Him in faith to heal us on the inside (Jam. 5:16).

Meaning of the Wine

The wine pictures Christ's shed blood (Luke 22:20) to cover all our horrible past sins which gives us a wonderful fresh start. We are then forgiven of our past sins, though mindful we have to change our life from here on.

The wine is called the cup of blessing in 1 Corinthians 10:16. It reminds us of the many blessings we are to be thankful to God for in this life and the loyalty He has shown us in blessing us with all we have, including His forgiveness. It reminds us of our need to show that loyalty in return to Him in heartfelt obedience.

The shed blood of our Saviour, the cup which we drink, also symbolizes sharing in His suffering in this life with the many trials we go through (Matt. 20:23). Sufferings in their own way can be one of the blessings inferred to by the reference to the wine being called the cup of blessing.

We are called to be living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2) poured out like a drink offering in service and sacrifice (Phil. 2:17) for God and others as Christ has done for us. As God has forgiven us we need to forgive others for their faults (Matt. 6:14-15) and even forgive ourselves for our own sins as well.

Christ said that He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom comes (Matt. 26:29). This is a type of the High Priest, which Christ is for us now (Heb. 4:14-15), not drinking wine when he is serving in the Temple of God (Lev. 10:8-11). Wine is also a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

The Feast Of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread anciently symbolized the great Exodus of the Israelites and their deliverance by God out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:17).

For those of us in the church it pictures putting sin out of lives as well as developing the character of God. In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 Paul wrote: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. *Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*".



Leaven or yeast is what is put into bread to make it rise. Leaven is compared to sin (1 Cor. 5:8) because just as leaven puffs up bread so does sin puff us up spiritually. God does not want us puffed up with our own importance but humble and willing to serve others.

Once we have repented of our sins and been forgiven by God, we must strive to forsake sin completely. We must come out of this world's ways of sin (Rev. 18:4) just as Israel left Egypt which is also a type of sin (Heb. 11:25-26, Rev. 11:8). We must be striving to put all sin away from us. That is our part in God's Master Plan for us.

"Today removing leaven from our homes for seven days reminds us that we, too, through prayer and God's help and understanding, must recognize, expel and avoid sin. The Feast of Unleavened Bread is thus a time of personal reflection. We should meditate on our attitudes and conduct and ask God to help us recognize and overcome our shortcomings" (God's Holy Day Plan, p.22).

It's NOT the Feast of Not Eating Leavened Bread!

We have to remember that it is not called the Feast of not eating Leavened Bread but the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Not only do we need to put sin out of our lives but we also have to put on God's character. We need to develop all of the fruits of God's spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

Mr Armstrong often referred to the two broad ways of life as the way of GIVE and the way of GET. Christianity is a way of life. It is the way of GIVING!

Some members can often live their lives as if avoiding doing certain wrong things is all that it means to be a christian, not realizing that Christianity is far more than that! Christianity is primarily an OUTGOING way of life - a life of service to others. It's not just about avoiding sins – it's very much about doing good and enriching the lives of other people.

Paul encourages us to be RICH in good works in 1 Timothy 6:18. If you were asked to write a list down of all the good works that you have done in the last couple of weeks how many things could you come up with? Could you come up with more than a couple of items?

Is our love merely limited to our own small circle of friends? Is it limited to giving only when it is convenient to us? These are some hard questions we can ask ourselves. Christ challenges us to reach as far as we can with the way we give of our time, friendship and resources to other people when He tells us, "But if you love those that love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same" (Luke 6:32).

Most of us remember John F. Kennedy's famous quote, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country!". Put in the context of the church we could say, "Ask not what the church can do for you but what you can do for the church!"

In 1 Corinthians 5:8 Paul talks about the unleavened bread of sincerity of truth and sincerity. Here are two specific qualities we can look at in our own lives at this time. Do we really speak and live the truth and with sincerity and not hypocrisy (saying one thing but doing another)?

Why Unleavened Bread?

In Deuteronomy 16:3 we read about two other reasons why God told Israel to eat unleavened bread and abstain from leaven. Firstly we are told that they didn't have leaven because they left in haste and secondly, it was called the bread of affliction in the same verse reminding them of the bitter affliction of slavery that God had delivered them from.

What are the lessons for us today? Just as Israel left in haste from Egypt, which is a type of sin, we have to put sin out of lives with urgency. We can't fool around with sin. If we stay in a sinful environment too long it will overtake us and enslave us. Paul tells us that a little leaven leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6-8). If we let Satan and sin get a foot in the door they will push open the whole door. That's why we cannot afford to compromise even a little.

The Bread of Affliction

There are three lessons that we can learn from the meaning of the bread of affliction. Firstly, it pictures the trials that we have to suffer in this life (Acts 14:22) to have eternal life. That reminds us that if we want anything worthwhile, such as eternal life, we have to work hard for and even suffer for it.

Secondly, it pictures what Christ had to suffer for us (1 Peter 2:21) by voluntarily dying a painful death to make the precious gift of forgiveness available to us all.

One other great lesson of the bread of affliction is the lesson that SIN HURTS! That is something we have to believe not just in our minds but deep in our hearts as well. How much we believe deep down in our hearts that sin hurts is shown in the choices that we make each day. Sometimes we love our sins a lot more than we should.

Satan's subtlety and deception is in regularly being able to convince us to look at sin from a selective viewpoint - focusing on the pleasure more than the inevitable kickback that follows just around the corner. We would not deliberately choose death over life (Deut. 30:15), but often we will gamble with the consequences of sin in order to pursue what we want.

Lessons from Deleavening

There are lessons that we learn from the rituals of de-leavening our homes, abstaining from leaven and eating unleavened bread. Do we think about them as we go through them? Obviously de-leavening our homes shows us that we have to thoroughly put sin out from every nook and cranny we can get to.

It teaches us that God's way of life is not a smorgasbord. We can't pick and choose. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by EVERY word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). We can ask ourselves, "What areas am I still holding back from God?"

Sometimes it's hard to tell whether certain things contain leaven or not. This can teach us the lesson of avoiding the grey areas. Sometimes we accidentally eat something leavened. This shows us how easy it is to sin (Heb. 12:1) and how much we need God's help to avoid sin.

Sometimes we find leaven during the feast we missed when de-leavening just like we find hidden sins in our life which have to be put away immediately.

We have to eat unleavened bread every day – “seven days shall you eat it” (Exod. 12:15). This teaches us our need to come to God seeking His help and power every day and be renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). Seven is the number of completeness, teaching us that we need to put sin out of our lives completely.

God takes a stern view on being sacrilegious – profaning those things which He has declared holy, such as the Sabbath. While the penalty in ancient Israel for a sin like stealing a lot of money was restitution, the penalty that God set down for anyone in ancient Israel who ate leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread was death (Exod. 12:15)!

Those who don't believe the Holy Days aren't to be kept today could ask the question why God would punish the Israelites who ate leaven during the Feast of Unleavened Bread and who ate on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:29) with death if He was later going to take away the requirement to keep the Holy Days.

The True Wave-Sheaf Offering

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Israelites commemorated the wave sheaf offering on the first day of the week that fell during the Feast (Lev. 23:10-11).

The wave sheaf was the very first sheaf of wheat that was harvested in Israel during the early harvest which concluded at the feast of Pentecost seven weeks later. The first harvest was the smaller of the two annual harvests.

The wave sheaf was the first of the firstfruit harvest. Those of us in the church are the firstfruits of salvation (Jam. 1:18) before the later great harvest of souls in the millennium. In 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 we see that Christ is called the first of the firstfruits so the wave sheaf that was waved at the very beginning of the early harvest represented Jesus Christ.

The Sabbath before the wave sheaf offering is the memorial of the resurrection of Jesus Christ who rose near the end of the Sabbath. On the day after (Sunday) He rose to heaven and was accepted as the true wave sheaf offering (John 20:17-29) - the first of the firstfruits.

On the weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread it's worthwhile to take time to remember the resurrection of Christ which occurred on that day and His acceptance as the true wave sheaf on the day after and all that it means for mankind.

A Special Time of Year

The festival season of Passover and Unleavened Bread is a special time of year for all of us. The events that they portray are foundational to all the great events to follow them in the great plan of God.

This Passover season focuses our minds on Christ's sacrifice and on the incredibly deep pain that He voluntarily suffered to pay for all the sins that we have committed in our lives. Paul urges us to let the awareness of that deep pain that Christ went through on our behalf motivate and inspire all of us on to the deepest level of repentance possible through the help and power of God's spirit (Heb. 9:14).