

The Passover

It seems incredible that in spite of the nine plagues which came to pass exactly as Moses, under inspiration, had told him, Pharaoh was still obstinate as to refuse to let the Israelites go. One senses that many Egyptians would have been glad to have seen them released as they would have suffered considerably from the plagues – crops destroyed, animals killed or diseased and a great storm which would have blown down trees and severely damaged their homes.

When Israel at last left Egypt, the “mixed multitude” that left with them would have been mainly Egyptians. In Exodus ch. 11 we read how they were favourably disposed to the Israelites. Let us read Exodus ch. 11 vs. 2-3:

“Tell the people that men and women alike are to ask their neighbours for articles of silver and gold (The Lord made the Egyptians favourably disposed towards the people, and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh’s officials and by the people.).

Whilst they were to ask for things before the tenth plague occurred and also immediately afterwards, it was not just jewellery. When you think of the wood for the tabernacle and the skins for the covering and fine Egyptian linen, they probably had cart-loads of materials ready to go with them.

Pharaoh did not wish to see Moses again, and so doubtless the message was given to the court officials, and they seem to me to have been willing to let the people go, hence giving them things in readiness for their departure, but Pharaoh probably countermanded it.

Let us read from this 11th chapter vs. 4-9: ”So Moses said, This is what the Lord says, About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl, who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt –worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal. Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, Go, you and all the people who follow you! After that I will leave. Then Moses, hot with anger left Pharaoh. The Lord had said to Moses, Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you – so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt.”

It was sheer obstinacy on Pharaoh’s part. He was not concerned at the suffering of his people because of him refusing to let the people go. Doubtless thousands of the Egyptians’ firstborn sons would die and even more thousands of their animals.. Pharaoh’s hypocritical folly caused Moses to be “hot with anger” at the immense suffering he would cause.

This dire warning of the tenth plague – the death of every firstborn – would have swept quickly through the land. That night they would have gone to bed in abject fear of what might happen – and what did happen, as we know, even the death of Pharaoh’s firstborn and the firstborn of every household.

In Ex. Ch. 12 we have the account of the Passover. Let us read ch. 12 vs. 1-11: “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbour, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what

each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the door-frames of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted, over the fire, along with bitter herbs and bread made without yeast. Do not eat eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire-head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover."

The account is very familiar to us, but there is a lot of in-depth material here. To start with, there was a change of the calendar: the first month of the Jewish civil year was Tisri, when the day of Atonement and the feast of tabernacles took place. This was changed, and, instead, the first month of the religious year was to be Abib, corresponding with our March/April and then the day of Atonement became the seventh month of the religious year – seven being the number of completion, when the final Atonement will take place.

The meaning of 'Abib' is 'green ears of corn', denoting the spring and appearance of new life, the resurrection and a new beginning. The Jewish year was based on lunar months of 30 days, or 360 days in a year, which meant that it did not keep in time with the seasons based on a 365-day year. To bring the two years into line, if the barley harvest was not ready at the time of Passover, they inserted an additional month, hence the wide variation from March to April for the Passover date.

On the tenth day of the month each household had to select a lamb from the flock and examine it carefully to see it had no blemish keep it penned ready for sacrifice on the 14th day of the month. If they belonged to a small family they were to share a lamb with another family. The very fact they had sheep, in spite of being slaves, indicates that, although in slavery, they had some freedoms.

In v. 5 we are told it could be a lamb or goat of a year old, however, there is never any reference to a goat being offered at Passover. Could be, from a practical point of view, goats were kept for milk and the young male goats eaten early on, so there would be few year-old goats.

V. 6: They were to "take care" of the young lambs, and the Hebrew indicates 'to guard, to take custody of'; they would have given them special treatment as they kept it – the AV renders it as 'kept' (what's the point of saying that??). We are not told of the special treatment they gave them, but doubtless it would have been well groomed, even with oil being anointed on their heads. The lamb was eaten on the 15th day. It is significant that Mary anointed Jesus on the 10th of Abib (John 12:1), the same day as they selected the lamb. Turning to 1 Peter ch. 1 we see that the Passover lamb pointed forward to Jesus. 1 Peter ch. 1 vs. 18 & 19:

"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

The Passover lamb was one of the flock, but without blemish. The lamb was physically perfect, which foreshadowed the perfect character of Christ, who, although one of the flock of humanity, never sinned and so was the perfect sacrifice to take away sin.

In verse 6 the phrase, “people of the community of Israel” is rendered in the AV, “the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel”, and we understand in the Septuagint this is rendered, ‘Ecclesia’ - a group of called out ones, so as we picture the individual households, it was like a lot of ecclesias forming the congregation of Israel. And it is the same with us today, the congregation of called out ones throughout the world; the ecclesias form one united whole.

The lamb had to be killed at “twilight”; it was at the end of the 14th day, just before the 15th day commenced.

The blood represented a life dedicated to God. Then a bunch of hyssop was used as a kind of brush to put the blood on the two door posts and the lintel. Hyssop in Britain is not the hyssop of Egypt or Israel as it does not grow in either country. It is believed to have been one of the Sorghum grasses which would have acted more like a paint brush. Some seem to give the impression that they had a bowl of blood and splashed it on. I think that is wrong, none of it would have fallen to the ground. Let us read together Heb. Ch. 10 v 29 and find the significance of this:

“How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?”

To have trodden on the blood would have been a total disregard for the type. In Hebrew, there is a letter of the alphabet with two uprights and a bar across the top. Every Hebrew letter has a specific meaning, and this one means ‘a fence’ a protective fence, and so to be protected by the blood of Christ we must never tread it underfoot.

Verse 8 of Ex. 12 says the lamb had to be “roasted over the fire”. They probably used a kind of rotisserie. When I was in a remote part of Lebanon we having landed in the desert with no food, that was no problem; they killed a sheep, put an iron pole through the length of the sheep and rested the two ends of the pole on stones and turned it every now and then whilst the sheep itself was over the fire. I guess the Israelites would have roasted their lambs somewhat like that. Some see in this a type of the crucifixion of Christ. Verse 9 says they were not to eat it raw. The Egyptians ate raw flesh in honour of their god Osiris; the Israelites were not to have anything associated with idolatrous practices. Raw meat is fatty and very indigestible, whereas roast lamb well cooked would have hardly any fat and be tender and easy to digest. And therefore more healthy. The lamb was not to be cooked in water, meaning boiling or stewing, to do that would mean cutting the up the carcass

If there was any left over it was to be burnt in the fire so that none of the flesh corrupted, fulfilling the type, “neither did Christ’s flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31).

They were to eat it with bitter herbs. When I consulted Strong’s for the word ‘herbs’, it was listed but the original word column was blank. The word ‘herb’ is not in the original and the words ‘bitter herbs’ is really just the word for bitterness. Whatever this bitterness was it would have reminded them of the bitterness they experienced whilst in slavery; certainly the Egyptians “made their lives bitter with hard bondage.” Sometimes when we participate in Christ’s Passover we think back with bitterness about our own lives. Jesus experienced the bitterness of sinners against himself.

The passover meal was to be eaten with unleavened bread. In the case of bread, leaven causes it to go mouldy quickly and in this case it is a symbol of sin. Let us read 1 Cor. Ch. 5 vs. 5-8 and see how we are to avoid the sinful yeast.

“hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.”

Verse 11 – they were to eat the meal in haste; the word seems to mean in trepidation. They were to be ready to move of at a moment’s notice with their cloaks tucked in, sandals on their feet and staff in their hands. Here they were about to leave everything behind in trepidation of the Egyptians’ reactions and the hardness of the journey. Some time we will be in a similar position – having to leave everything behind at the coming of Jesus and face the judgement seat. Things we have never done or things we have done and maybe done wrongly will be uppermost in our minds and we will just plead for mercy. We know, of course, that we are not worthy of immortality – it is all by God’s mercy and grace – yet He has called us and so wants us that He sent His Son who died that we might be saved.

At the end of v 11 we read that it is the Lord’s Passover. The angel of the Lord passed over all the houses where they had the protection of the blood. We are told that Hebrew word “passover” has the meaning of ‘to spare’, rendered in the Septuagint as ‘protect’ as in the sense of overshadowing. The word is also used to

Indicate to hover over, stay over, protect, abide over. Let us have a look at Isa. 31 v 5 :“Like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem, he will shield it and deliver it, he will ‘pass over’ it and will rescue it.” Actually, the Lord did not just ‘pass over’ it, He hovered over it. He was there all the time and kept them under His wings. Just a quick look at Matt. 23 v 37 : “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”

The conditions were that the Israelites were not allowed to go out of the house; in our case we must keep with the ecclesia and be protected by God’s angel hovering over us, caring for us, and our sins are forgive through the blood of the lamb.

Several times it is emphasised who should or should not eat of the Passover lamb. Ex. 12 vs. 43-48:

“The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, These are the regulations for the Passover: No foreigner is to eat of it. Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it. It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. The whole community of Israel must celebrate it. An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it.”

In v. 43 we are told that “no foreigner is to eat of it” (NIV). It seems that the criteria for eating of the Passover was that all the males were circumcised. Circumcision initiated a man into Israel and so, following the type, it is baptism that initiates us into Christ and therefore it is only those baptised who should share in the Christ Passover meal because we are in Christ. Let us read Eph. 2 vs. 12-13 :

“Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But

now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.

However, the original Passover was for all the family, including the children. Indeed, it was necessary for one of the children to ask what the feast was all about. Let us read from Ex. Ch. 12 vs. 26-27 :

“And when your children ask you, What does this ceremony mean to you? Then tell them, It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians. Then the people bowed down and worshipped.”

It seems to be the Jewish custom today that the children share in the meal. Whilst I am not advocating children actually partaking of the bread and wine, there can be no objection to them being in the meeting and hearing of the reasons for our remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice.

It was essential for the Jews to keep the Passover; indeed, if for some special reason they were unable to do so an alternative date was fixed. This would seem to indicate that it is essential, where possible, for us to meet in ecclesias to regularly break bread. Let us read John 6 vs. 53-58 :

“Jesus said to them, I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live for ever”.

Of course, where it is not possible to meet in an ecclesia to break bread then we should do it on our own.

The Passover consisted of two parts: the eating of the Passover meal and from the day of the eating of the lamb on the 15 for seven days they were to eat unleavened bread, called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The day of Passover was the first day of the feast. Let us read Ex. 12 vs 15-17 where we have the details:

“For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day until the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat – that is all you may do. Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come”.

The name of the feast is derived from the word MAZZOH meaning unleavened cakes, hence the Jewish unleavened bread called MATSOS. It is made of flour and water, rolled into flat cakes and baked in a hot oven. Probably for the first Passover they did not have any bread. They had to leave Egypt in haste so would have had no time to cook the bread. Ex. 12 v 34 then v 39) . In Deuteronomy, unleavened bread is termed “bread of affliction” and the reason is given for this description, “for thou camest forth out of Egypt in haste” (16:3). The insipid, disagreeable taste was a reminder of their deliverance from the Egyptian bondage

As we saw from 1 Cor. 5 vs. 6-7, leaven is the symbol of sin, and if they had any leaven during the seven days of the feast, they were to be excluded from the camp. The number seven stands for completeness, perfection – symbols of a complete life, free from the sin of leaven. Now obviously we are not free from sin, but because we are in Christ we can be forgiven our sins and so in that sense are sinless, because our sins are blotted out. In Ex. 13 v 16 we are given the way we can overcome sin. Ex. 13:16 :

“And it shall be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the Lord brought us out of Egypt with His mighty hand”.

The Jews take this so literally and put Bible verses on their hands and wear a little box on their foreheads which has Bible verses inside. What it really means is that we have to work with our hands in the service of the Lord and keep His commandments in our heads, and also in our hearts of course.

The Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread combined, in essence, all the sacrifices. The smearing of the blood of the sin offering on the altar and before the veil is seen in the putting of the blood on the door posts and lintel. The eating of the lamb was like sharing in the peace offering meal. The burning of the remains of the animal speaks of a burnt offering – the necessity for a complete dedication to God. The unleavened cakes, like the meal offering which was a sweet savour unto the Lord.

Whilst this feast was so important, it seems remarkable that there is no record of it being kept precisely as recorded in Exodus ch. 12.

The first year after leaving Egypt they seem to have kept it the same, but an allowance was made for those unable to keep it on the 14th of the first month to keep it on the 14th of the second month.

None born during the wilderness journey were circumcised, which seems to indicate the Passover was not kept until they entered the promised land (Joshua 5 v 5).

Looking at 2 Chron. 35 we have Josiah's unprecedented celebration of the Passover. Instead of each family, or combination of families, providing a lamb, we find, v 7 that Josiah provided 30,000 sheep (for the 'lay' people). Then in v. 13 we see they not only had the roasted lamb but other food boiled in pots.

Ezra celebrated the Passover, but not all participated in it (Ezra 6:19-20).

And so we come to the Passover as kept in Jesus' days. I have read several accounts of this, but they all seem somewhat different and certainly different from Exodus ch. 12. Today the Jews keep Passover again it is different from Exodus ch. 12 or as in Jesus' days.

There is difference of opinion as to whether Jesus actually kept the Passover meal – certainly they (the disciples?) had a meal together. My feeling is that Jesus did not keep the Jewish Passover. I think it was kept on the day before (before what?).

Most of the reasons for this are in John's Gospel. Let us look at John ch. 13. In verse 1 we read, “It was just before the Passover feast...” v 2: “The evening meal was being served”. It does not say 'Passover', but 'supper'. Now let us read vs. 27-30

They had virtually ended the meal, so there was no need for him to go out and buy food. Anyway, the Passover was always regarded as a Sabbath, and so all the shops would have been shut. One couldn't buy anything on the Sabbath, so it must have been the day before the Passover.

