

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

This lesson is rather "meaty" so you may like to teach it in stages. I've indicated several passages of scripture to read aloud - these are part of the story flow and it's best to use a good modern version of the Bible for this. The other referenced scriptures support the text and you may also wish to read (or ask your children to read) a selection of these as part of the lesson.

The Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are the first Feasts that we celebrate each year. They picture something very important that had to happen for God's Plan for mankind¹ to come true. To find out what it is, we'll start by looking at the events that led up to the very first Passover.

Setting the Scene

Many years before God told the Israelites to keep the first Passover there was a terrible famine in a country called Egypt - and in the surrounding area where the Israelites lived. During a famine there is not enough food to eat and people get very hungry. Some people even die. But that didn't happen this time! That's because God had already planned to save His people from this famine!

Before the seven-year famine arrived, God had "arranged" for an Israelite named Joseph to be living in Egypt. You probably know the story.² Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers and had ended up in Egypt. When the king of Egypt - who they called Pharaoh - had some strange dreams he couldn't understand, God showed Joseph what they meant. Pharaoh's dreams were about the coming famine!

Joseph explained this to Pharaoh and also came up with plan to save the Egyptians from it (**Genesis 41:25-36**). So Pharaoh made Joseph one of the rulers of the country and told him to put his plan into action. By the time the famine arrived there was plenty of food in storage so the people wouldn't starve. This made Pharaoh very happy, so when Joseph asked if his father and brothers could come to live in Egypt, Pharaoh said yes! He gave Joseph's family the best land to live in, and soon there were many Israelites living there (**Exodus 1:7**).

¹ God is creating a "family" and His plan is to make us part of that family. For more information, see "The Holy Days and God's Plan" lesson in this series.

² The story of Joseph's life is covered in the Genesis section of the Old Testament Lessons.

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

Slaves in Egypt

After a while, this Pharaoh died and a new Pharaoh ruled Egypt. But he didn't like all the Israelites living in the land, so he made them slaves. They had to work very hard and the Egyptians were very cruel to them. But God knew what was happening! In fact, He knew it was going to happen even BEFORE it did - and He had promised to save them (*Genesis 15:12-14*). So when the time came to keep this promise, God chose a man named Moses³ to lead the Israelites out of slavery and out of Egypt (*Exodus 3:1-10*).

God told Moses and his brother Aaron to go and ask Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. But Pharaoh said, "NO"! And then he made the people work harder! So God sent Moses and Aaron to give Pharaoh a warning. God was going to send terrible plagues on Egypt if Pharaoh didn't let the Israelites leave. But Pharaoh STILL refused to let the people go. So God sent plague after plague upon the Egyptians until their land was ruined (see *Exodus 5 - Exodus 10*).

The First Passover

Even then, Pharaoh didn't let the Israelites go, so God told Moses that He was going to send one last terrible plague upon Egypt. God had protected the Israelites from most of the other plagues, but they had to follow God's instructions if they wanted to be protected from this 10th plague. Let's read **Exodus 12:1-13** to see what those instructions were.

The Israelites did what God told them to do and they were protected. But all the firstborn of the Egyptians *and* the firstborn of their animals died. And when Pharaoh's firstborn son died, Pharaoh finally changed his mind! He sent a message to Moses telling him that the Israelites were now free to leave.

Each year after that, the Israelites were to keep the Passover as God instructed. He especially wanted them to explain to their children WHY they were celebrating the Passover. It was to REMIND them of how God had saved them from death (*Exodus 12:14, 26-27*). But what the Israelites didn't know then was that the Passover is a picture of the very first step in

³ The life of Moses is covered in the Exodus section of the Old Testament Lessons.

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

God's GREAT plan for mankind. It pictures the time when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died to save us all from death!

Now let's skip forward in time to the night before Jesus died, when He and His followers (disciples) got together to keep the Passover.

Jesus and the New Testament Passover

Jesus and the disciples were having a Passover meal just like the Israelites did (Mark 14:12-16). But while they were eating Jesus began to show them a NEW way to keep the Passover.

He started by washing their feet! (John 13:1-5). This seems very strange doesn't it? But it wasn't strange then. You see, people at that time didn't wear shoes like we do. They wore sandals. And when they travelled anywhere, they had to walk or ride on a camel or a donkey, and of course their feet got dusty! So whenever they arrived at someone's home their feet had to be washed! But the disciples WERE surprised that Jesus was washing their feet because that was a servant's job and Jesus was their master or leader.

But Jesus washed their feet because He wanted them to learn that we need to love and serve each other, just like He did! And He told them that we should follow His example and wash each other's feet on the night of Passover too (John 13:12-17). So that's exactly what we do!

After He washed their feet Jesus showed them something else that we are to do on the night of Passover. Let's read about it in **Luke 22:14-20**.

When we keep the Passover today we don't need to kill (or sacrifice) a lamb like the Israelites did. That's because the Passover lamb they killed was a picture of Jesus Christ. Jesus is called the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) and He is "our Passover" (1 Corinthians 5:7). And we no longer need to eat a meal of roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs like the Israelites did.⁴ Instead, we keep the Passover in the way Christ showed us. We wash each other's feet, eat a small piece of unleavened bread and drink a small

⁴ This further instruction on how to keep the Passover came from the apostle Paul - see 1 Corinthians 11:17-33.

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

amount of wine. Then we finish by singing a hymn, just like the disciples did (Mark 14:26). But what does it all mean?

We Need to be Saved

Well, the Passover is all about the fact that we need to be saved from death and that it is Christ who saves us! You see, the Bible tells us that everyone has sinned and broken God's Law (Romans 3:23) and that the penalty (or punishment) for sin is death (Romans 6:23a). This means that after we die we would just stay dead. We would never have the chance to live again. But God WANTS us to live forever as part of His Family! So He sent His Son to this earth to die INSTEAD of us. Jesus died so that our sins can be forgiven and we can be saved from the penalty of death! (Hebrews 9:25-28).

The Passover is a very special church service and only those people who are baptised can take part in it. When we meet together on that night to eat that little piece of unleavened bread and drink that little bit of wine, it reminds us of what Jesus did for us and for everyone who has ever lived (1 John 4:14; Hebrews 9:25-28). Jesus' death, and the blood that He shed, delivers US from death - just like the blood on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes protected them from death!

Even though it seems awful that Jesus had to die for us, what He did was wonderful! And something amazing happened after He died. When Jesus had been dead for three days and nights, God brought Him back to life! So Jesus didn't stay dead! He's ALIVE and He now lives with God in heaven! And Jesus' resurrection is a VERY important part of God's Plan. You see, He died so our sins can be forgiven and we can escape the death penalty. But it's because He was resurrected that we can be brought back to life after we die and have the opportunity to live forever! (Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:12-23).

The Days of Unleavened Bread

After the Passover are the Days of Unleavened Bread. Let's read Exodus 12:14-20 to find out what God told the Israelites about these days.

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

We see here that God commanded His people to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread. They were to be reminded every year of how He had brought them out of slavery in Egypt. The Days of Unleavened Bread also remind us that God has brought us out of slavery from the wrong ways of this world! So for seven days we eat unleavened bread just like God said. That's bread made without leavening - something that makes it rise, like yeast, baking powder or baking soda (Leviticus 23:5-6). Perhaps it seems strange that God wants us to eat *unleavened* bread, but that's because *leaven* is sometimes used to picture sin. And because Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins, we are now considered without sin or *unleavened* in God's sight (1 Corinthians 5:7).

God also tells us to put all leaven out of our homes before the Days of Unleavened Bread begin (Exodus 12:19-20), so we "de-leaven". We get rid of all the "leavened" bread and goodies in our homes and we also look to see if there is any leaven (or sin) in our lives that we need to get rid of too!

Then God explained to His people that they were not to work on the first and last days of Unleavened Bread but keep them as "holy convocations". They were to meet together on these days and have a special Holy Day Service. So that's exactly what we do today! And on the evening beginning the first day of Unleavened Bread we celebrate the Night to be Much Observed or Remembered (Exodus 12:41-42). We get together in family groups for a delicious meal and fellowship, and remember how God rescued Israel from slavery and brought them out of the land of Egypt. We also remember how He has rescued us from the wrong ways of this world.

God tells us to keep these Holy Days forever (Exodus 12:17). The reason He does is so that we will NEVER forget His plan for mankind. Because we keep God's Holy Days we understand something that most people in the world don't - that God wants all of us, one day, to be part of His Family in the Kingdom of God. And the Spring Holy Days remind us of Jesus Christ's important role in God's master plan. None of it would be possible without Him! (Acts 4:12; Romans 6:23).