

Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

Read through this lesson with your parents (in sections if you prefer), looking up the specific scriptures you are asked to read as these are part of the story flow. The other referenced scriptures support the text and you can add to your understanding, and prove this material for yourself, by reading them as well.

The first Feasts that we celebrate each year are the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, and they picture something very important that had to happen for God's plan of salvation to be accomplished. We'll begin with the events that led up to the first Passover to find out what it is.

Setting the Scene

Many years before the first Passover that God instituted, a devastating famine threatened to destroy all life in Egypt and the surrounding area - including the area where the Israelites lived. But God had set in motion a plan to rescue His people from this seven-year famine - and through a series of circumstances had "arranged" for a young Israelite named Joseph¹ to be living in Egypt at that time and to be in a position to save His people (**Genesis 45:5-8**).

With God's help, Joseph had correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, which foretold the famine, and had suggested a plan to store grain in preparation for it (**Genesis 41:25-36**). Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he appointed him as ruler over the land - second only to him - and asked him to administer the plan.

Two years after the famine began, Pharaoh had given Joseph's father and his brothers - the Israelites - permission to live in Egypt, where Joseph could look after them and supply them with grain while the famine lasted. After the famine, they continued to live in Goshen - the best farming land in Egypt - raising their families and looking after their flocks. As the years passed, the number of Israelites living in Egypt grew enormously (**Exodus 1:7**).

Eventually, the memory of the famine faded and a new Pharaoh came to power who didn't know about Joseph and what he had done, or why the Israelites were in Egypt. All he knew was that there were too many of them living in his land and he wasn't happy about it! Concerned that the Israelites might be a threat to Egypt's security, he placed them under bondage and made them slaves. And for many years they suffered terribly under the new regime (**Exodus 2:23**).

¹ Joseph's life is covered in the Genesis section of the Old Testament Lessons.

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However, God knew what they were going through. In fact, He had actually warned Abraham years before that his descendants would be slaves for 400 years in a foreign land and would suffer cruelly (**Genesis 15:12-14**). But God had also promised to deliver Abraham's descendants from this slavery - and was now about to keep that promise (**Exodus 2:24-25**). He chose a man named Moses² to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and contacted him in an unusual fashion to tell him about the mission. You can read about this in **Exodus 3:1-10**.

Moses must have been amazed when God spoke to him from a burning bush, but he did what God asked and went to Egypt. Then he and his brother Aaron went to see Pharaoh as God had instructed. They told him what God had said and asked for permission to leave Egypt in order to make a sacrifice to the Lord. But Pharaoh refused the request - and worked the Israelites even harder. Next, God told Moses and Aaron to warn Pharaoh of the terrible plagues He would send if Pharaoh did not allow the Israelites to leave. But Pharaoh still refused to let them go, so God sent plague after plague upon the Egyptians until their land was ruined (see Exodus 5 - Exodus 10).

Even then Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites leave, so God told Moses that He was going to send one last terrible plague on the Egyptians. God had protected the Israelites from all but the first three plagues (**Exodus 8:22**), but they had to follow His specific instructions if they wanted to be protected from this 10th plague. Read **Exodus 12:1-13** to find out what those instructions were.

The First Passover

The Israelites did exactly as God said and that night the LORD³ passed through the land of Egypt, killing all the firstborn of the Egyptians *and* the firstborn of their animals. Even Pharaoh's firstborn son died, but none of the Israelites were killed because they had obeyed God's instructions to kill a lamb and put some of its blood on the doorposts of their houses. And finally Pharaoh gave in. He sent a messenger to Moses in the middle of the night to tell him they were now free to go.

² The life of Moses is covered in the Exodus section of the Old Testament Lessons.

³ Most English Bibles refer to the God of the Old Testament as "the LORD", but we also - as you will have noted - refer to Him as "God" in these lessons. (Information about *who* this God is can be found in the 1st Genesis Lesson and the 4th Teen Lesson.)

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Each year after that the Israelites were to keep the Passover just as God had instructed and explain to their children that they were celebrating the Passover as a *reminder* of how God had saved them from death (Exodus 12:21-27). What they didn't know then was that the Passover is the very first step in God's GREAT plan for mankind, when His Son, Jesus Christ, died to save EVERYONE from death!

Now let's skip forward in time to the night before Jesus died, when He and His disciples kept the Passover together. Read **Mark 14:12-16** to set the scene.⁴

Jesus and the New Testament Passover

Jesus and the disciples were having a Passover *meal* just like the Israelites did. But while they were eating, Jesus showed them a NEW way to keep the Passover. He started by washing His disciple's feet! (John 13:1-5).

This seems very strange to us today, but it was a common custom at the time Jesus lived. When people travelled they had to walk or perhaps ride on a camel or a donkey, and because they wore sandals their feet would get dusty and dirty! So as soon as they arrived at their destination their feet would be washed. But the disciples *were* surprised that Jesus was washing their feet because it was the job of a servant to do that - and Jesus was their master!

So why did Jesus wash their feet? Well, it was because He wanted them to learn how important it is to serve each other! And Jesus explained that by washing their feet He had set an example for them (and us) to follow (John 13:12-17). So that's exactly what we do as part of the Passover service today - we wash one another's feet! This reminds us that we are to love and serve each other, just as Christ did.

After He had washed their feet, Jesus introduced something else that we are to do on the night of Passover. You can read about it in **Luke 22:14-20**.

When we keep the Passover today we no longer need to kill (or sacrifice) a lamb as the Israelites did, because the Passover lamb they killed pictured Jesus Christ. He is called the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29) and "our Passover" (1 Corinthians

⁴ Mark calls this the first day of "Unleavened Bread" because that's what the Jews called this whole period of time.

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5:7). And we no longer celebrate the Passover as the ancient Israelites did by eating a meal of roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs.⁵ Instead, we keep it by washing one another's feet, eating a small piece of unleavened bread and drinking a small amount of wine. Then we finish by singing a hymn, just as 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 disobeyed God's commandments (Romans 3:23) and that the penalty or punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23a). This means that, humanly speaking, the only thing we have to look forward to after death is..... death! We have all sinned, so we will all die. But God didn't intend "death" to be the final outcome of our lives. His whole purpose in creating man was to produce beings who could become part of His divine "family!"⁶ So He sent Jesus Christ to this earth to be our Saviour (1 John 4:14) - to die for us so that our sins can be forgiven and we can be saved from the penalty of death (Hebrews 9:25-28).

The Bible tells us that Jesus was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). This means that *from the very beginning* it was God's Plan that Jesus would come to this earth and die for us. In fact, He is the *only* one who could pay the death penalty for us - because of *what* He did and *who* He was. Jesus was God in the flesh.

As we've been learning in these lessons, the Being who became Jesus Christ existed with God in the very beginning and He is the Creator of all life (John 1:1-3, 14; Colossians 1:16). But when He came to this earth He didn't come as a Spirit Being like God the Father, He came as a human being - a normal person just like you and me - so that He could save us (Philippians 2:5-11). Except that Jesus wasn't exactly like you and me because He lived a perfect life! In fact, He is the only person who has NEVER sinned! And this means that the death penalty did NOT apply to Him. Jesus did not deserve to die and that's why His sacrifice could pay for the sins of all mankind (Hebrews 9:13-15). God also tells us that this sacrifice - the brutal beating and horrible death on the cross - makes it possible for us to be healed (Matthew 8:16-17; 1 Peter 2:24).

⁵ This further instruction on how to keep the Passover came from the apostle Paul - see 1 Corinthians 11:17-33.

⁶ The Bible reveals that God is creating a "family" and that 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.

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The Passover is a joyous, yet solemn and serious church service and only those people who are baptised are allowed to take part in it.⁷ And when we gather together 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 (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus' death, and the blood that He shed when He died, delivers US from death - just like the blood shed by the Passover lamb and daubed on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes protected them from death.

What Jesus did for us was wonderful and it shows the tremendous love that He and the Father have for us (John 3:16; Romans 6:6-8). But it seems awful that He had to die for us, doesn't it? And it WAS awful. However, as you all know, that's not the end of the story! Jesus was resurrected after three days and nights in the grave - and His resurrection was a VERY important part of God's Plan.⁸ Without it we would have no hope of Eternal Life.

Our sins can be forgiven and we can escape the death penalty because Jesus died for us, BUT it's because of His *resurrection* 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

Immediately after the Passover are the Days of Unleavened Bread. Read **Exodus 12:14-20** to find out what God told the Israelites about this day.

We see here that God commanded His people to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread every year as a reminder of how He had brought them out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 13:6-10). And these days remind us that God has also brought US out of slavery - out of spiritual slavery to this world and sin (Romans 6:6).

For seven days we eat unleavened bread as God instructed; that's bread made without leavening - something that makes it rise, like yeast, baking powder or baking soda (Leviticus 23:5-6). Leaven is used as a "type" of sin in the Bible, and eating *unleavened* bread reminds us that, once we've accepted Christ's sacrifice

⁷ In ancient Israel, the only "foreigners" allowed to participate in the Passover were those "bought for money and circumcised" (Exodus 12:43-44). The same principle applies today spiritually, to those who have been "bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20:7:23) - and circumcised in "heart" (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11-13).

⁸ It's pictured in the Holy Days by the wave sheaf offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:11-12). You can find out more about this in the [Day of Pentecost](#) lesson.

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to pay the penalty for our sins, we are now considered *unleavened* or *without sin* in God's sight (1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 10:14-17). Because of this we should do our best not to sin and strive to live "unleavened lives" - God's way!

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 "examine ourselves" to see if there is any leaven (or sin) in our lives that we need to get rid of too!

God explained to His people that they were not to work on the first and last days of Unleavened Bread, but have "holy convocations" on these days. We follow the same practice today and meet together on the Feast days for special Holy Day services!

On the evening beginning the first day of Unleavened Bread we celebrate the Night to be Much Observed or Remembered (Exodus 12:41-42) by getting together in family groups for a delicious meal and fellowship. During the evening we remember how God delivered the Israelites from slavery and brought them out of the land of Egypt - and how He has delivered us in a similar way from the wrong ways of this world.

Conclusion

God tells us to keep these Holy Days forever (Exodus 12:17). The reason He does, is so that we will NEVER forget His wonderful 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).