

# Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread

*Take your time to read through this lesson (in sections if you prefer), looking up the indicated scriptures, which are part the story flow. The other referenced scriptures support the text and you can add to your understanding, and prove this material for yourself, by studying these in your Bible as well.*

By now you are familiar with the account of the first Passover in Exodus and the fact that the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread are Feasts that God still expects His people to keep.<sup>1</sup> He wants us to keep His Feasts and rehearse their spiritual meaning from year to year so that we never forget how they illustrate His wonderful plan of salvation for mankind. So even though you've "heard it all before" let's remind ourselves of what happened during that first Passover, then move on to what occurred during Christ's last Passover and what it - and the Days of Unleavened Bread - mean for us.

## Setting the Scene

We begin our review with the terrible famine in Egypt, which occurred many years before the Exodus, and threatened to destroy all life in Egypt and the surrounding area. Years earlier, God had set in motion a rescue plan to save His people from this famine - and through a series of circumstances a young Israelite named Joseph had risen to power in Egypt. With God's help, Joseph had correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dreams, which foretold the seven-year famine, and had wisely suggested a plan to store grain in preparation for it (**Genesis 41:25-36**). In gratitude, Pharaoh had appointed Joseph as ruler over the land, second only to him, and had given Joseph the task of administering the plan. Nine years later, and two years into the famine,<sup>2</sup> 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 for the duration of the famine. After the famine the Israelites continued to live in the land of Goshen, reputedly the best land in Egypt, where they raised their families and looked after their flocks. As the years passed, the number of Israelites living in Egypt grew enormously (**Exodus 1:7**).

## Slaves in Egypt

In the course of time, the memory of the famine faded, and a new Pharaoh arose who didn't know about Joseph and his role in saving Egypt. But this Pharaoh WAS very concerned about the vast multitude of Israelites living in his land (**Exodus 1:8-9**). Recognising that their sheer numbers posed a potential threat, he placed them under bondage and made them slaves. Many years passed and the Israelites suffered cruelly under the new regime (**Exodus 2:23**).

However, God knew about their suffering. In fact, many years earlier God had told Abraham about this time, explaining that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land and would suffer affliction for 400 years (**Genesis 15:12-14**). But God had also

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<sup>1</sup> See Exodus 12:14,17; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. For more information, see "The Holy Days and God's Plan" Holy Day lesson.

<sup>2</sup> There were seven years of plenty before the famine began (**Genesis 41:29-30**) and Joseph's family went to live in Egypt two years after the famine started (**Genesis 45:9-11; Genesis 47:5-6**), so nine years had passed.

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promised to deliver Abraham's descendants from this slavery - and was now about to keep that promise (Exodus 2:24-25; Exodus 6:4-8). He chose a man named Moses 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 requested that they be allowed to leave Egypt in order to make a sacrifice to the Lord. But Pharaoh refused their request - and worked the Israelites even harder. Next, God told Moses and Aaron to warn Pharaoh of the terrible plagues He would send upon the land if he refused to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh still didn't heed their warning, so God sent plague after plague upon the Egyptians until their land was ruined (Exodus 5 - Exodus 10).

Even then, Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go, 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 to be protected from this 10<sup>th</sup> plague. Read Exodus 12:1-13 to find out what they were supposed to do.

### The First Passover

The Israelites did exactly as God instructed, and later that night the LORD<sup>3</sup> passed through the land, killing all the Egyptian firstborn *and* the firstborn of their animals. A great cry arose when people realised what had happened. Everyone was affected, even Pharaoh's firstborn son died, but NONE of the Israelites were killed because they had obeyed God's command to kill a Passover lamb and put some of its blood on the doorposts of their homes. Pharaoh finally gave in, and sent a messenger to Moses in the middle of the night to tell him that the Israelites were now free to go.

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 of salvation 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 got together to keep the Passover as usual. Read Mark 14:12-16 to set the scene.

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<sup>3</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> Genesis Lesson and the 4<sup>th</sup> Teen Lesson.)

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## Jesus and the New Testament Passover

The Jews called this whole period of time, including Passover, "unleavened bread" - which is why Mark refers to it in those terms. And on that evening, the disciples were having a Passover *meal* just as the Israelites (or more specifically, the Jews<sup>4</sup>) had done since the Exodus. But while they were eating, Jesus began to show 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 to wash someone's feet when they arrived at your home because people often travelled by foot, wearing sandals, and their feet would get dirty! But the disciples *were* surprised when Jesus began washing their feet because the meal had already begun and it was the job of a servant to wash feet - 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 one another! 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. But loving and serving each other isn't something that is just limited to adults! God wants all of us - including you teens - to have a "foot-washing" attitude toward others.

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 5:7). And we no longer celebrate the Passover as the ancient Israelites did by eating a meal of lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs.<sup>5</sup> 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! 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

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<sup>4</sup> The rest of the tribes of Israel did not continue to keep God's Law or the Holy Days (see, for example, Psalm 78:9-11; Ezekiel 20:13, 18-24; Ezekiel 22:26).

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

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produce beings who would have the potential of becoming part of His divine "family"!<sup>6</sup> So God sent His Son 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 (Hebrew 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. 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 us 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.<sup>7</sup> God also tells us that this sacrifice - the brutal beating and horrible death on the cross - makes it possible for us to be healed - physically, emotionally *and* spiritually (Matthew 8:16-17; 1 Peter 2:24).

The Passover is a joyous, yet solemn and serious church service and only those people who are baptised can take part in it.<sup>8</sup> 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. Jesus' death, and the blood that He shed when He died, delivers US from death (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 2:9) - just like the blood shed by the Passover lamb and daubed on the doorposts of the Israelites' homes protected them from death.

### Playing Our Part

But, if you remember, the Israelites had to put that blood on the doorposts **THEMSELVES** in order to be saved from death. And we also have to do something if we want to be saved from death. We have to **REPENT** of our sins - and **ACCEPT** Christ's sacrifice and His shed blood to cover those sins! This is a process that begins with a

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> We read in Psalm 49:7-8 that no man can ransom their life for another because the ransom is too costly and can never suffice. But Jesus came to give His life as a ransom for us (Matthew 20:28; 1 Timothy 2:6) and even though it cost Him His life, it can suffice because of the righteous, sinless life He led (Hebrews 9:13-15).

<sup>8</sup> 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, and those who partake of the New Testament Passover are those who have been "bought with a price" - the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23) and circumcised in "heart" through conversion, baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit (Romans 2:28-29; Colossians 2:11-13).

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willing and repentant heart; one that responds to God's calling and is willing to turn from living its own way to living God's way. The process culminates in the baptism ceremony, when we formally accept Christ's sacrifice to cover our sins and rise from the waters of baptism with our sins forgiven.

Most of us don't begin thinking seriously about baptism until our late teens or early twenties, but the process begins long before this, as we begin to respond to God's calling and decide that we want to live our life His way. This is a natural part of becoming an adult in the Church and it is what God desires and expects us to do.

If you are reading this, then probably one or both of your parents have made this commitment to God and are already baptised. Don't be afraid to ask how God called them and brought them to the point of making this life-changing decision and commitment (**Romans 6:3-6**). You can learn a lot from them and they can give you the support you need as you begin to go through this process yourself.

### A Living Saviour

The fact that Jesus was willing to die for us is something we should never forget or treat lightly. What He did for us is truly amazing and it shows the tremendous love that He and the Father have for all of mankind (**John 3:16; Romans 6:6-8**). At the same time, it also seems awful that He had to die for us, doesn't it? And it WAS awful. But, as you already know, that's not the end of the story. Something wonderful happened and Jesus was resurrected after three days and nights in the grave. So we don't have a DEAD Saviour, we have a LIVING Saviour, who now lives with His Father in heaven - interceding on our behalf and helping us in time of need (**Hebrews 4:14-16; Hebrews 9:24**).

Christ's resurrection to eternal life was an essential part of God's Plan.<sup>9</sup> He died for us so that our sins (upon repentance) can be forgiven, but if He had not also been resurrected, NONE of us would have any hope of eternal life. (**Romans 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15:12-23**). It's because He lives that we can be brought back to life AFTER death and have the opportunity to live FOREVER as sons and daughters in God's Family!

### 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 these days.

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**).

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<sup>9</sup> It's pictured in the Holy Days by the wave sheaf offered during the Days of Unleavened Bread (**Leviticus 23:11-12**).

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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 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; 1 John 1:7). As a result, we should do our very best to live God's Way of Life and not succumb to the ways of this world (Romans 6:12-22).

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 remove. Although this is something that baptised members of the Church focus on at this time, it is also something that you young people can do as well. So take the time during Unleavened Bread to "pinpoint" areas that you need to change - and find ways to "de-leaven" your own life.

God explained to His people that they were not to work on the first and last days of Unleavened Bread because these are annual Sabbaths when no work is to be done. Instead they were to have "holy convocations" on these days. We follow the same practice today and meet together 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 this evening we remember how God delivered Israel from slavery and brought them out of the land of Egypt - and how He has delivered us in a similar way from our sins and the wrong ways of this world. This is also something that you young people can think about at this time of year as well. Consider what your life would be like if you weren't part of the Church and the kinds of problems you might have - and then thank God for showing you a better way to live. Yes, of course, trying to live God's Way of Life in this world can be difficult and may bring its own problems, but the resultant happiness and blessings that come from obeying God far outweigh those difficulties.

### Conclusion

The Spring Holy Days remind us of Jesus Christ's pivotal role in God's master plan - and of what He did for each of us. This is why it's so important for us to celebrate and rehearse the meaning of these days each year. It's easy to take these things for granted because we've heard them all our lives, but it TRULY is PRICELESS knowledge. There is NOTHING more important than understanding that God's Plan for mankind - our salvation and our future in His Family - is only possible through Jesus Christ - our soon-coming King *and* our Lord and Saviour (Acts 4:12; Romans 6:23).