
Christian Holidays: Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are about Jesus Christ

by: Ronald L. Dart

There is an old hymn I remember singing in church when I was just a boy. It is striking to me today because it represented an understanding of the Bible, in earlier generations, that I think has been lost in many churches today.

The song was, and you may know it, "Christ our Redeemer died on the cross, died for the sinner, paid all His due, all who receive Him need never fear. Yes, He will pass, will pass over you. When I see the blood," repeated three times, "when I see the blood, I will pass, I will pass over you."

I sang that song for years and never realized where the theme, Passover, came from. There was a time when the great hymn writers had a sense of the connection between old and new. They realized there was a strong tie between the death of Jesus and the Passover of the Jews, but just as that connection presented problems for the early church, which it did, it presents problems today as well.

A lot of folks don't like the idea of anything Jewish being connected with their Christianity and yet here is this old hymn and here is what God said to Moses, in Exodus 12 verse 23, "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you." Verse 13, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

The Blood of the Lamb

The implications of this are far-reaching, it is the blood of the Lamb applied that enables God to pass over us and spare us the destruction around us. It seems a shame to me that some Christian

churches have lost touch with this great Passover Festival. They see Christ in it, when they bother to look, but somewhere in history, they stopped observing it annually on the anniversary.

In observing communion, or the Lord's supper every Sunday, or monthly, or quarterly, they forgot that it was originally an annual observance. I suppose in the process they forgot, altogether, that it was the Passover.

God spoke to Moses and said in Exodus 12 verse 24, "You shall observe this for an ordinance to you and your sons forever. {25} And it shall come to pass, when you come into the land the Lord will give you, just as he has promised, you shall keep this service. {26} And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say, What does all of this mean? {27} "You shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed their heads and worshiped."

Christian theology has the blood of Jesus Christ applied to our lives and God passes over us and our sins.

The Lord Smote the Firstborn

Well, "the children of Israel," in verse 28 of Exodus 12, "went away, did what God commanded Moses and Aaron. {29} And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne to the firstborn of a captive in the dungeon, and even the firstborn of all of the cattle." What a terrible, terrible tragedy to befall Egypt.

So, after midnight, when the destroyer had done his work, and it was safe to go out, and in a manner of speaking, it was morning after midnight, so they were able to go out.

Get Out

Well in verse 30 of Exodus 12, "Pharaoh rose up in the middle of the night, all his servants, and all the Egyptians and there was a great cry in Egypt because there was not a house where there wasn't somebody dead. {31} Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Get up and get out. Go serve the Lord as you have said. {32} Take your flocks. Take your herds, be gone, and bless me also. {33} And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people that they might send them out of the land in haste, to get them out of here because if we don't, we are all dead men. {34} And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders."

Israelites Ate Unleavened Bread

In verse 39 it says, "They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they brought out of Egypt for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out and couldn't wait and had not prepared themselves any food." Any cook will understand that you have to have time for bread to rise. So, they ate unleavened bread.

I think a lot of people look no further than this in considering why this feast is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We are going to look further than that, but first let me point out a couple of interesting things in the Exodus account.

430 Years

Verse 40, "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt was 430 years, {41} And it came to pass at the end of the 430 years, even the self-same day it came to pass, that all the hosts the LORD went up out of the land of Egypt." Now this is a remarkable statement because it points not merely to a sort of a region of time in the past, it points to a singular day 430 years before.

Now if you have ever looked this up in the commentaries you will find out very quickly that the chronology of this, from the time they went into Egypt and came out of Egypt doesn't work. It is actually talking about the period of time all the way from the call of Abraham until the coming out of Egypt. It is not clear exactly what day that was 430 years before, but it lends credence to the idea that the Festivals of Jehovah are much older than the days of Moses. Now, there is no way to be certain, but symbolically, the day fits an event described in Genesis chapter 15.

God Called Abraham

If you are a Bible reader you know that God called Abraham out of his own land and told him to get to the place where He was going to give him a land for an inheritance.

In Genesis chapter 15, "After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Don't be afraid, Abram: I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward. {2} And Abram said, Lord GOD, what will you give me, seeing I have no children, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus." You are making all kinds of promises to me, but I am an old man. I have everything I need. What are you going to give me?

"And Abraham said, {3}"Look, You haven't given me any children, and one born in my house, just an ordinary servant is going to wind up inheriting everything here. {4} And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, No, this is not going to your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own body shall be your heir. {5} And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and count the stars. Can you number them? So, shall your seed be. {6} And Abraham believed in the LORD; and the LORD counted it to him for righteousness."

It is remarkable, in a sense, you listen to this, or you read this phrase right out of the Bible, yes, we are supposed to believe God, and so forth, but do not know how rare it is for even one person to really believe in another, and what it means when someone does.

God said to Abraham in Genesis 15 verse 7, "I am the Lord that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans and I gave you this land to inherit it {8} And he said, Lord God, how shall I know that I shall inherit it? How is this going to be made secure to me?" Now there's a curious thing that follows in this. All of us know that when the time comes to set up an inheritance, we've got

to do it legally, don't we? There are laws, there are customs, there are things that have to be addressed in the process of turning over property from one person to another. Now for God to be able to give this land to Abraham, He had to own it in the first place, right? That is not a problem because we all know God owns everything, but he does say specifically He is going to really deed this land, and the land were talking about is all the way from the Nile River to the Euphrates that He is going to deed to Abraham.

A Covenant Deed

In order to create a covenant deed, they had to actually do the things required in those days for the deed.

So, God said, verse 9 of Genesis 15, "Take a heifer, three years old, a she goat three years old, a ram three years old and a turtledove and a young pigeon, {10} He took all of them, split them in the middle, and laid each piece one against the other. He didn't bother dividing the birds." What this is, is a sacrifice. All these animals are killed, divided, and split into two sides.

"When the fowls came down on the carcasses, Abraham sat there and drove them away, so they wouldn't defile this sacrifice."

I have to stop and take a moment and explain something to you that otherwise might be lost. In the very earliest of times one of the ways of creating a covenant between individuals was that they would cut themselves, put a little blood in a cup and they would drink one another's blood, becoming therefore blood brothers. In later times, this changed to actually drinking the blood of a shared sacrifice, and then in still later times it became a matter of sharing a sacrificial meal. In other words, this thing was done before God in that the animal was sacrificed and then the blood was presented to God and then the flesh of the animal is shared between the two people. Something like that is going on here. Of course, God is not going to sit down and eat a covenant meal with Abraham, but nevertheless the sacrificial arrangement has been done.

Now in verse 12 of Genesis 15, "And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abraham, and lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him, {13} And God said to Abraham, I want you to know this of the certainty, your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them and they shall afflict them for 400 years." Not 430 years, 400 years. You know something that is interesting about this, that in the initial years of the Israelites in Egypt they were not afflicted, as long as Joseph was alive, they were treated well in the land of Egypt.

We don't know much about the timing of all the events that took place there but what is really interesting is that on this particular day, the prophecy is given that they would afflict Israel for 400 years and it says in verse 14, "That nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge, and afterwards shall they come out with great substance." Now you may recall that, in the Exodus account, when the Egyptians came to them and told them to get up and get out, the Israelites said, "Give me that ring, give me that necklace" and the Egyptians were very quick to bestow all of their jewelry upon the Israelites in order to get them out of the place. It was just because they owed it to the Israelites for hundreds of years of slavery.

God says at the end of this period of time that they would come out with great substance and what the book of Exodus tells us is 430 years from the time that the promise was made to the very day, it was fulfilled as Israel came out.

Verse 15, "You, Abraham, shall go to your fathers in peace, be buried at a good old age, {16} But in the fourth generation, they will come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full." The problem was, the Amorites possessed the land, and God had not yet found sufficient reason to dispossess them.

"And it came to pass {verse 17}, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace and a burning lamp that passed between these pieces, {18} In the same day the Lord made a covenant." The expression in Hebrew is cut a covenant with Abraham, "saying, Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates." God himself passed between the parts of these animals, entering formally into a covenant with Abraham and binding himself to fulfill the deal.

Fulfillment of the Promise

So, this day when Israel walked out of Egypt, 430 years to the day, after this day in which Abraham entered into a covenant for receiving the land of Palestine, is a really fascinating comparison between these two events.

The events of the Exodus are the fulfillment of this promise, and I suspect it is the very day 430 years before the Exodus, when the ceremony took place, when the promises were made, and the covenant was cut. This day was in a very important way a precursor of the Passover and because of the symbolism involved, I suspect it was on anniversary of this date, that Abraham was sent to offer his only son Isaac as a sacrifice.

You know, I don't know what it would take as a Bible reader, not to see the connection between Abraham going up to offer his only son as a sacrifice, and John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." Now can I prove that this connection is there, no!

I'm not trying to prove anything to anyone. I'm reaching for an understanding of what God is doing and why he is doing it and I hope that you're reaching out too. Part of the understanding we are looking for, focuses on the curious question of unleavened bread.

Christ our Passover was Sacrificed for Us

Paul said to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, {8} Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." The impression one gets from the Exodus is, that it was merely a matter of the Israelites fleeing out of Egypt and having no time for their bread to rise, but somehow, it seems to me there ought to be more to it than that. Paul certainly thought so. In fact, Jesus gives us a very strong indication of it Himself.

Jesus is the Bread of Life

There is a long passage in the sixth chapter of the book of John that I want to call your attention to.

In John six, verse one says, "After these things Jesus went over the Sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberius and {2} a huge crowd of people followed him, because they saw his miracles that he did on people who were diseased." It is really easy to understand why people would be fascinated by this, not to mention why they would want to go if they were sick,

"But {3} Jesus went up into a mountain, and He sat there with his disciples. {4} And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near." This is a seasonal thing. We are at a time of year when certain things like Passover and unleavened bread are going to be on Jesus' mind and on the minds of all of His listeners.

Now {5} "When Jesus lifted up his eyes, he saw a huge company had come to him and he said to Phillip, "Where can we buy bread to feed all of these people?" Now you may wonder why Jesus would even concern himself with all of that, but this is Middle Eastern hospitality and He felt that these people had come to him and He felt a sense of responsibility. In what follows, is not exactly in line with what we want to talk about, but it is this incredible miracle of the five loaves and a few fishes with which Jesus fed thousands of people.

In verse 14, it says, "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, "This is of a truth that the prophet that should come into the world," {15} and when Jesus began to realize that they're going to come and take Him by force and try to make Him a king, He departed to a mountain himself alone." At this point, Jesus did everything he could to get away from the people. He went off into the mountain and finally got into a boat and crossed the sea because these people were ready to start a revolution and he didn't want any part of it, because He had something else that He had to do.

"Now when they found Him on the other side of the sea," This is John 6 and verse 25, "They said to Him, Rabbi, when did you come over here?" Jesus didn't consider that question worth answering because he immediately answers what's on their mind. {26} He said, "I am going to tell you the truth, You seek me, not because you saw miracles, but because you ate bread and were filled. {27} You know, you people really should not labor for the food that perishes, you should work for that food that endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give you, for him has God the Father sealed." {28} Then they said, "Well what shall we do that we might work the works of God?" {29} Jesus answered and said, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent." And they then, ready to argue with Him, it seems like, because they were back and forth, back and forth, they said, {30} "What sign will you show us then that we may see and believe You. What are you going to do? {31} Our fathers ate manna in

the desert, and as is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat," which proves that Jesus was right in judging their motives.

They couldn't make it through three or four sentences without coming back to the question, you did these five loaves and two fishes thing again and it was good food. Do it again! We want to see it again! And implicit in all this is, You were not satisfied when you saw it once, you want to see it again, it is not because you want to see the miracle, it is because you want to fill your belly. Jesus said to them, {32} "I will tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you that bread from heaven, My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. {33} For the bread of God is He which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Jesus is starting into a theme here that is connected to the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread which is on His mind at this time. He is thinking of Himself, presenting Himself as the bread of God which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.

{34} "Then they said to him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Now Jesus is ready to drop it on them. He said {35} "I am the bread of life, he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes on me shall never thirst." And right here, we begin to find the connection with the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover, which was fast approaching.

A Difficult Crowd

This was a difficult crowd for Jesus. For some reason, they seemed to be very much at odds with Him and I wouldn't want to say that he got testy with them, but He was within His own area of patience with them, and still pretty firm with this group. It is worth remembering that when all was said and done and after 3 1/2 years of His ministry, Jesus had the grand sum total of 120 disciples.

Now He says to this gang here in John 6 verse 36, "You have seen me but you don't believe. {37} All the Father gives me shall come to me and he that comes to me I will never cast out. {38} I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. {39} And this is the Father's will, which has sent me, that of all that He is given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. {40} And this is the will of Him that sent me, that everyone that sees the Son and believes on Him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Now the Jews {41} listened to all of this and murmured at Jesus, because He said, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." {42} They said, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he say, "I came down from heaven? {43} Jesus said, "Don't murmur among yourselves, {44} No man can come to Me, except the father which sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Now there is an interesting circumstance about that spirit of the Father drawing him. It is in the very next verse, verse 45, "It is written in the prophets, they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes to me." Boy, that speaks volumes for the religious audience of that time. They were not listening to the Father, their faith was not the faith of the Father. They were not following in the steps of Old Faithful Abraham,

not at all. They had a form of godliness but there was no power to it. There was no strength to it. Jesus said, "Anyone who has been taught of God, who follows God will come to me." {46} "No man has seen the Father, save he which is of God, He has seen the father. {47} Verily I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life," and then Jesus makes a remarkable statement. {48} "I am that bread of life."

What are the Days of Unleavened Bread All About?

So, when you come to the question of the Days of Unleavened Bread, and you ask, "What is that all about? Well, in fact, it is a little bit hard for people to grasp at first, but the command in the Bible is that you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days. This is not merely an abstinence from leaven as some people might think. There's actually the receiving of unleavened bread for the seven days of the festival. What would that unleavened bread be? Jesus, the bread of life.

Sin symbolically is a kind of leaven. In that sense, Jesus as the bread of life must be himself unleavened and without sin. Jesus said in John 6 verse 48, "I am the bread of life. {49} Your fathers ate manna in the wilderness and they are all dead. {50} This is the bread that comes down from heaven, that if a man eat of it He will not die. {51} I am the living bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat this bread, he will live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

When I read this passage, I can't help reflecting on all the years I thought about, read about, sang about, trusted the blood of Jesus Christ to take away my sins, which is fundamental, it is Christianity 101, it is right there in the basics, but I never gave a thought to the flesh of Jesus which He said He would give for the life of the world. It is really funny because, that somehow has not made it very far or very deeply into the Christian consciousness. The blood of Christ has. The blood of Christ is very well recognized, it is shot through all of your hymnals, there is that thin red line of blood that people say runs in the beginning of the Bible all the way through the end and I understand that. We all do.

But Jesus said, He would give his flesh for the life of the world, and there is a distinction here. Now the Jews who were listening did not like this. {52} "The Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? {53} and Jesus answering said something truly astonishing to these people. "Verily, verily I say unto you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. {54} Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. {55} For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. {56} He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him,"

Now it doesn't take a lot to realize the connection directly with the Lord's supper, Communion, Passover, where we take a little wine and a little piece of unleavened bread, as symbols of the shed blood and the broken body of Jesus Christ. This is why at the Passover, the 'Last Supper', Jesus handed them the cup and said, "Take this and drink it. This is my blood of the new covenant."

You know, this was a hard saying, even for Jesus' disciples and in the end, some of them turned back and walked no more with Jesus. What was inescapable about this passage is the connection between the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread and the Lord's supper which He would soon institute with his disciples.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think many Christians have forgotten Passover?
2. Why would a Christian prefer to observe Good Friday and Easter, rather than God's Holy Day?
3. Why are God's Holy Days considered Jewish Feasts? Do not people realize that they were given to all of Israel?
4. Have you ever considered that the 430 years may have started with the calling of the covenant of Abraham?
5. Do you think that maybe the Feast Days pre-existed before Moses taught them to Israel?
6. Do you see the connection between Jesus and unleavened bread?
7. What spiritual experiences have you had when you observe Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread?
8. How can we make sure that we do not have just a form of godliness?
9. Do you think that the blood of Christ is held in more importance than the flesh of Christ?
10. What do you think Jesus means when He tells the people 'follow Me and you will never thirst or hunger'?