
Christian Holidays:

Passover

by: Ronald L. Dart

How is it possible that a Christian church some 25 years after the ascension of Christ was still observing the oldest known Jewish holiday? And they were. It is easily demonstrated. And this wasn't a Jewish church. This one was mostly Gentile.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about 55 A.D. and scholars generally agree that the letter was written about Passover season. He was addressing a problem that was disgracing the church. It was a total disgrace and almost in passing as though he took it for granted, he made a remark about Passover that is kind of startling if you're paying attention.

A Disgusting Idea

The story is in First Corinthians and it is in the fifth chapter. Paul wrote to them and said, "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife."

It's a disgusting idea and yet there it was. Paul continues, {2} "You people are puffed up and you haven't mourned, you haven't looked inside yourself, you haven't corrected this, that he that has done this deed might be taken away from among you. He ought not to be among you. {3} I'm not there in body, but I'm present in spirit, I have already judged this, concerning him that has done this deed. {4} In the name," which means by the authority, "of our Lord Jesus Christ, {5} To deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Now I don't know what that means but whatever it is, I don't want any part of it. They were going to actually put this man out of the midst of the church.

A Little Leaven Leavens the Whole Lump

Paul continues in verse 6, "Your glorying is not good, don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" Now the reference is to bread and how bread became leavened. I think anyone who has made sourdough bread knows how this works. You have a little lump of starter and you work it into the larger lump of dough, and you set it aside and let it leaven the whole thing. You

may have to work the dough a little bit more than once. The idea is just a little bit of the leavened dough will end up leavening the whole lump of bread.

Paul's point is if you allow somebody like this in the church just to continue, this is going to spread throughout the whole church. Not that everybody will be doing what this man does but it can affect the collapse of morals and structure in the church.

So, Paul says in verse 7, "Purge out the old leaven," in other words, get this man by the collar and put him out of the church. "Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened." Strange statement isn't it? In other words, put out the old leaven so you can be a new lump, as you are unleavened. But if they are unleavened, how can you get leavening out? Well, it is not that hard really, he is saying, "Purge out the old leaven," metaphorically, "so you can be a new lump as you are unleavened," literally.

So, this man is sin in the church, you have already put the leavening out of your houses, now put it out of the church.

Our Passover Sacrificed for Us

Then Paul makes this statement, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, {8} Therefore let us keep the feast." What feast? Well, Passover, obviously.

"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."

Now how is the connection made here to the Passover? We all know that Christ died for our sins, we all know His blood cleanses us from our sins. But why the Passover? And why was this church observing it and why was Paul advocating it?

Behold the Lamb of God

Well there is a clue to this in a strange statement made by John the Baptist. He was down by the Jordan River baptizing because there was a lot of water down there (John 3:23, 1:26). It takes a lot of water for baptism by immersion where you can get people under it. As he was baptizing people along the Jordan River, he looked up and saw Jesus walking down the bank of the Jordan River toward him and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

As a Christian you might hear that statement and say, "So, what's your point? But if you had been a Jew standing near John at that time, this would likely have been the first time you heard anything like this. What do you mean, Lamb of God? It wasn't that they were not familiar with the idea of a lamb as a sin offering, the laws made provision for that.

For example, in Leviticus chapter 4 and verse 32, the Lord was speaking to Moses and He said, "If a man brings a lamb of the sin offering, he shall bring a female without blemish. {33} He shall lay his hand on the head of the sin offering and slay it for a sin offering." Then He has all

kinds of details about what the priests had to do. And finally says, {35} "The priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him."

So, the idea of a lamb taking away one man's sins was not foreign to John's companions, when he says, "The Lamb of God that takes away sin," so far so good. But the idea of a man as a sacrifice, as a sacrificial lamb, was utterly foreign, and what was just as foreign to these people was the idea of taking away the sins of the whole world.

Judaism

Judaism was not a world evangelizing faith. It was a Jewish faith. If you wanted it badly enough to be a part of that faith you could become a God-fearer and attend synagogue and keep the laws of God up to a certain point. If you really wanted to get serious about it, you could be circumcised and for obvious reasons not a lot of Gentiles went that far.

But it was a Jewish faith and contrary to anything in the law and the prophets, Judaism had become an exclusive faith.

All of that was about to change and the key to that change was in the short little phrase, "The Lamb of God that takes away the sin," not merely of a man, but "of the whole world. "

That theme is also found in one of the mantras of the Christian faith John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." But gave him how? God gave His only begotten son but how did He give Him? He gave Him as 'the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.' He gave Christ as our Passover, but you see this Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world had to die to remove anyone's sin.

The Passover Story

In Exodus 12 beginning at the very beginning of the chapter, God spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt and He said, "This month shall be the beginning of months. This is the first month of the year to you. {3} Speak to the congregation of Israel saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take every one of them a Lamb according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house." In verse five He says, "Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You shall take it from the sheep or from the goats." It can be either a kid or a lamb.

"You shall keep it up until the 14th day of the same month, and the whole congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening." Now there is some uncertainty about what 'in the evening' means but it is not important for this discussion.

Verse 7, "They shall take the blood, strike it on the two side posts and on the upper doorpost of the houses where they shall eat the Passover. {8} They shall eat the flesh that night, roast with fire, and with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs, shall they eat it."

Why Unleavened Bread?

Now right here is introduced one of the singular peculiarities of the Passover. It is one that Paul refers to in his letter to the Corinthians. Why unleavened bread? Well first, in the law, this is Exodus 34 and verse 25, this provision is made, "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven" Now what would that have to do with anything?

Well all of their leavened bread was sourdough. It was fermented. The fermentation process was a kind of corruption. Leaven bread was sour and unleavened bread was sweet. Actually, the Hebrew words for this tends to imply precisely that.

Well Paul picks up on the symbolism when he tells the Corinthians this, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven," and by that he means the older sourdough bread.

You know the starter that people use for sourdough bread can go back a generation. It can be something they have kept for a very long time, so it could be very old. So, we don't keep the feast with old leaven, {8} "Neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." For the Hebrews, the difference between leavened and unleavened bread was one of sour and sweet. Of something that is corrupt and something that is not corrupt. So, you don't eat the Passover, the flesh of the Passover lamb with leavened bread for that symbolizes corruption. You eat it with the sweet unleavened bread which symbolizes truth and purity, in Paul's way of sincerity and truth.

Remember, Paul had told the Corinthians to get this man who was sinning out of the church, just like they had gotten leaven out of their houses, so leaven symbolizes corruption and there was to be no corruption connected with the 'Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.'

Later, in connection with the haste of the Exodus, the Israelites had to eat unleavened bread for seven days and the idea there was that they did not have time to leaven the bread and let it rise, but here, they had plenty of time, it was simply not allowed. The symbolism of unleavened bread runs down a different channel from merely being in a hurry and not having time for leaven bread to rise.

Back to the Passover

So, back to the original Passover in Exodus 12 and verse 9. He said, "Eat none of the lamb raw, nor sodden or cooked with water, roast it with fire, the head with the legs and everything having to do with it. {10} You shall let nothing of it remain until morning, and that which remains of it until the morning you shall burn with fire. {11} And here's how you're supposed to eat it, With your loins girded or your belt on your waist," which means fully dressed. "Your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in a hurry. It is the Lord's Passover."

Now here is a question to ask at this point, is this just pure symbolism or is there a reason why it had to be this way? Well, the reason was, these people were not even going to bed that night and

by the time they got the lamb killed, dressed and roasted, they would be eating it rather late and events were going to overtake them, so they needed to get it eaten quickly. The events were not going to give them any time for leisure.

He said in verse 12, "I will pass through the land of Egypt, this night, I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment. I am Jehovah."

"And the blood." Remember, they were to take some hyssop and dip it in the blood and strike it on the lintels and doorposts of their houses. {13} "The blood shall be a token to you upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt." From this, this little idea, "I will pass over you" comes the name of this great festival, The Passover.

Passover Is Not Going Away

But at the core, the Passover is "The Lamb of God." As I noted earlier, this day may well have been one of the appointed times of Jehovah even before this time, but the events of this occasion stamp themselves indelibly on this festival.

"This day," He says in verse 14, "shall be to you for a memorial, and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations, you shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever." Passover is not something that is going to go away. It is going to change somewhat with Christ, just as it appears to have changed on this occasion from a previously existing festival, but it will never stop being celebrated.

"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, even on the first day you shall put away leaven out of your houses, for whoever eats leaven bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel."

Now this really is a strange custom, isn't it? You wonder why in the world would people do this? As you come up to Passover every year, you see matzo showing up on the shelves of grocery stores and everybody knows that Jewish people eat matzos during the days of unleavened bread.

Do You Think That Eating Unleavened Bread is a Weird Custom?

One Sunday morning I was sitting in a hotel restaurant having a late brunch and what should happen but here comes bounding through the door a giant, over 6-foot-tall, rabbit, it is a guy or a gal in a rabbit costume and began to make the rounds around the tables giving little colored eggs to all the kids in the place. Now if you think unleavened bread is a strange custom, what about a custom that teaches children that rabbits lay eggs, colors these eggs all kinds of different colors, takes them out and hides them and tells the children that the Easter Bunny laid these eggs out there and says, "Let's go find these Easter eggs." And somehow or other this is connected with a Christian custom. Maybe we shouldn't talk about whether something is peculiar or not in this context.

The Days of Unleavened Bread

Let's continue in Exodus 12 and verse 15, "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread," in this case there is strong biblical significance to the idea of unleavened bread and I haven't even begin to touch on some of the primary emphasis of it and there is even, believe it or not, a Christology, that is a doctrine of Christ connected with the days of unleavened bread.

"Even the first day," God says, "You should put away leaven out of your houses, whoever eats leavened bread from the first day to the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel and the first day there shall be a holy convocation and the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation, no manner of work shall be done in these days except what everybody has to eat." You can do work to prepare food to eat but take off from your normal job.

The seven days of unleavened bread run from the 15th to the 21st of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. The first and last days are actually Sabbath days no matter what day of the week they fall on, which has by the way, interesting implications for the passion week of Jesus Christ.

God says, "You shall observe the feast of unleavened bread for in this selfsame day I have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt, therefore you shall observe this day, in your generations, by an ordinance forever."

Like I said, Passover isn't going away. There is reason to believe that Passover did not come in with Moses and every reason in the world to believe that it did not go out with Moses. Change, yes. We will have to talk about that in subsequent articles. They did change but they didn't go away.

"In the first month, on the 14th day of the month, at even, you shall eat unleavened bread until the one and 20th day of the month at even" (Exodus 12:18). Seven days. Notice all of the emphasis, he really is nailing this down.

"Seven days there should be no leaven found in your houses." Of course, once you understand that leavening is a symbol of sin, then it makes all kind of sense. You have to keep sin out of your lives and out of your homes and out of your churches. "For whoever eats that which is leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger, or one born in the land. You shall eat nothing leavened in all your habitations, you shall eat unleavened bread." Got it? Do we finally have it? It is all here as to what he really wants us to do.

Purge Out the Old Leaven

It is out of this that Paul's statements to the Corinthians suddenly begins to make a little bit of sense. Paul wrote to the Corinthians in chapter 5 and verse 7, "Purge out therefore the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened, for even Christ our Passover was sacrificed

for us, therefore let's 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 thought of doing away with this festival never crossed Paul's mind. Paul was explaining the meaning of the season to the Gentiles who otherwise wouldn't get it.

Kill the Passover Lamb

So, Moses called all the elders of Israel in and he said to them, "Draw out and take a lamb according to your families and kill the Passover. Take a bunch of hyssops and dip it in the blood in the basin and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that's in the basin and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning." Why not?

The Lord Will Pass Over

"Okay," says Moses, "Don't go out of your house until morning" (Exodus 12:22). Why not? Well here's why not! "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians." He is taking final vengeance upon the Egyptians in this country. "And when he sees the blood on 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." Now 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 that is round about us.

An Old Hymn

Some Christians have long understood the connection between the blood and the Passover lamb. There is an old hymn that I remember singing in church when I was just a boy. It goes something like this, "It was Christ our Redeemer who died on the cross, died for the sinner, paid all his due, All who receive Him need never fear, Yea, He will pass, he will pass over you."

Then the chorus goes, "When I see the blood," three times, " I will pass, I will pass over you." The connection with the Passover is inescapable.

You know it seems a shame to me that most Christian churches have lost touch with this great festival. They see Christ in it, when they bother to look, but in ceasing to take note of it annually, they have lost track of its origins. I think they have lost a great deal of meaning of the festival and of their own history in the process.

Why the Blood?

You know it is rather interesting, it's important what was done here, because God could just as easily have told the Israelites, "Stay indoors, I know where your houses are. I am not going to come through your neighborhoods. I'm going to the Egyptians and I'll destroy all their firstborn and you people will be just fine, and there will not be any dogs barking in your neighborhood."

God could've done that, couldn't He? Why the blood? Well I will tell you what I think, I think He was looking down through the thousands of years, to the sacrifice of His own Son, The Lamb of

God who takes away the sins of the world, thus establishing the fact that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

God is just. If anyone commits a crime, the penalty has to be paid and we saw in the previous article that because of the enormous amounts of blood shed by the Egyptians, because of the fact that for generations they had taken all the male children, not just the firstborn, but all of the male children of the Israelites. They grabbed them by the ankles and threw them into the river to the crocodiles, which I think explains why the first of the plagues was turning the river into blood.

We know that after all these generations, a price was going to have to be paid.

In Exodus 12 and verse 12 God said, "I will pass through the land of Egypt, and when I come through here, I will see the blood on your door posts and I will pass over you." And hence the name of this great festival of Passover.

Observe the Passover Forever

God says in Exodus 12 and verse 24, "You shall observe this thing for an ordinance to you and your sons forever. {25} And it shall come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you according to what is promised that you shall keep this service. {26} And it shall come to pass when your children shall say to you, "What do you mean by this service?" {27} You shall say, "It is the sacrifice of Jehovah'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."

Lord Smote Firstborn of Egypt

"The children of Israel went away and did all that the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. {29} It came to pass, that at midnight, the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne, to the firstborn of a captive in the dungeon and all the firstborn of cattle." They all died.

After midnight, when the destroyer had done his work, it was safe to go out. And in a manner of speaking, it is morning after midnight and so the restriction on the Israelites of not going out till morning, would've allowed them to go out in the dark of the morning.

"Pharaoh rose up in the night," verse 30, "he and all his servants and all the Egyptians and there was a great cry in Egypt for there was not a house where there was not one dead. {31} He called for Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Get up, get out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel and go and serve the Lord like you said, {32} take your herds, take your flocks and be gone and bless me also."

Israelites Spoil the Egyptians

"The Egyptians were urgent upon the people" (Exodus 12:33). You know, I don't doubt that a bit. When you consider the implications of all these people had been through for all of the nine

previous plagues and then to have this last terrible calamity come down on their heads, realizing it was because they had kept these people slaves, and it was because they had killed these people's children that all of this was happening to them. I would think they would have been anxious to get them out of Egypt. For they said, We are all dead men if we don't get them out of here.

"And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs, bound up their clothes on their shoulders {35} and the children of Israel did what God said, they asked of the Egyptians jewels of the silver, jewels of gold and raiment {36} and the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians so they gave them anything they asked for, and they spoiled the Egyptians." You know I don't doubt that either.

"And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about 600,000 on foot, men besides children. {38} And a mixed multitude went up with them, flocks, herds, and lots of cattle. {39} And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought out of Egypt, because it had not been leavened. They were thrust out, they couldn't wait and hadn't prepared themselves any food and they had to cook it quick and couldn't wait for the bread to rise."

The Self-Same Day

Let's continue in Exodus 12 and 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 430 years, even the self-same day, it came to pass, that all the host of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."

Now that is a remarkable statement, for it gives singular significance to a day 430 years earlier. Now it is not exactly clear to us what that day was. We can't nail it down or be precise about it but it lends credence to the idea that the festivals of Jehovah, that is the appointed times of Jehovah, are much older than the day of Moses, for this singular day was significant long before Moses ever came on the scene.

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. How would you answer Mr. Dart's question "why was this church observing [Passover], and why was Paul advocating it?"
2. Do you know of any times in your life where a "little leaven" was "leavening the whole lump"?

3. What similarities are there between the original reason for Passover and Christ's being our Passover?
4. When and how did God's Feast Days become known as the Feast of the Jews?
5. If you observe the Feast of Unleavened bread, what have you gleaned from observing it?
6. What are your thoughts about Mr. Dart's point that leavened bread was sour and unleavened bread was sweet?
7. Why do some Christians believe God's Feast Days were done away with if He Himself stated that they were an everlasting covenant?
8. If you keep Unleavened Bread, how do you purge out the "leaven" within yourself?
9. How amazing is the fact that God the Father loves us so much that He sacrificed His own son, so that we could have eternal life?
10. Why then is it so hard for Christians to want to understand and observe God's Holy Days?