

## Passover and The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

By Brian Herren

While an earnest study of the Old Testament may prove elusive in light of cultural disparity, unfamiliar vocabulary, and the demands it places upon a more comprehensive approach to the workings of an Eternal God, the efforts are often met with a rich revelatory experience in Christ. The history of man is marked by his interaction with the Creator and witnesses from the beginning the exquisite labor whereby the Only Begotten Son has reconciled the faithful to the heavenly courts from whence He is come. Peter rightly attributes the authorship of the ancient records of the Old Testament (II Peter 3:2) and Paul wrote that he believed every word (Acts 24:14). From the beginning, every measure of creation is set forth to bear record of the Father (Genesis 1:1), this work being the express purpose of His creative faculty. In such an expression, the honest student finds from the very beginning the shadow of things eternal manifest in those items more tangible to human intellect. Paul eloquently wrote the same:

*“For God hath revealed unto them the invisible things of him, from the creation of the world, which are clearly seen; **things which are not seen being understood by the things that are made**, through his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse...”* (Romans 1:20).

To take one small piece, often considered a tired discussion, we can view the Passover in such light. While the fundamental elements of the Passover may be received apathetically by those accustomed to its repetitious consideration, there remain beautiful nuances to be rightly won for the triumph of the thoughtful. We are familiar with the account (Exodus 11 & 12) of the tenth and final plague upon Egypt during the period of Israelite captivity. The Israelites had lived in Egypt for 430 years (Exodus 12:40) before they departed (which is also how long Enoch dwelt on earth before his departure: Genesis 5:24). They had lived as slaves for a portion of that time, Moses' grandfather Kohath having entered the land as a free man before a new pharaoh revoked the favor that had been initially enjoyed by the Hebrews on account of Joseph (Rachel's firstborn).

The first three plagues affected the Egyptian and Hebrew alike, while the next six were selectively visited upon the Egyptians. The ninth plague (3 days of darkness) would have been a striking blow to the Egyptians who worshipped the sun, and served as an early reference to the 3 days which

Christ would be entombed (see also III Nephi 4:4,17). The tenth plague would again involve all of the inhabitants of Egypt, including those in Goshen. It would result in the death of the firstborn of all those who did not honor the true and living God by way of their obedience to the instruction given. The Lord instructed the Hebrews to select a lamb from among the flock on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Abib (the month is called Nisan after the Babylonian captivity). The lamb was to be separated from the flock and considered special, a male that was born without any defect. On the even of the 14<sup>th</sup> day, the lamb was to be sacrificed, and eaten. The blood was to be taken and applied to the two side posts of each door using a bunch of hyssop, and also the upper door post (lintel). The faithful observers were to remain in their homes throughout the night. At midnight the Lord smote (killed) all of the firstborn of the inhabitants of Egypt, whether man or beast, except for those who had obeyed His instruction concerning the sacrifice and consumption of the lamb, along with the marking of the door with the lamb's blood. The Lord passed over the homes of those who had obeyed His counsel, and so the Hebrews remember this blessing as the "Passover" More instruction for the Hebrews was given and is recorded in Exodus 12 and 13, Leviticus 23, Deuteronomy 16, and Numbers 9. Additional instruction included the provision that the Passover lamb be killed outside of the city walls (Deuteronomy 16:5), and be used without breaking a single bone (Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12).

The Christian observer finds an additional witness of the Savior in the Passover, and rightfully so, provided that everything given from the beginning of time is given to prepare men to receive our Lord Jesus Christ. One quickly recognizes that the Passover lamb is symbolic of the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and that it is by His blood that we are spared from the wages of sin (I John 1:7, Revelation 1:5, Hebrews 9:13-14, Revelation 1:5-6, John 6:53-54, Hebrews 9:17-28). Just as the Passover lamb was to be killed outside of the city walls, so Christ was crucified outside of the gates at Golgotha (Matthew 27:35). Of the three men crucified on the day of Christ's death, He was the only one that perished without a single bone being broken (John 19:32-33), maintaining harmony with the prophetic nature of the sacrifice at Passover. The Hebrews had once used hyssop in the keeping of the Passover rites, and it was hyssop that was raised before our Lord (John 19:29).

The timing of the crucifixion more clearly identifies the Passover kept by the Hebrews with the life and death of our Savior. It was on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Abib

that Jesus entered Jerusalem (John 12:1-13) and it was precisely on the day of Passover that the Lamb of God was sacrificed (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22).

The Israelites were instructed to eat the flesh of the Passover lamb, and mark their homes with his blood. If they were obedient, the Lord would save the lives of their firstborn from death. This salvation was not promised to all, but to the firstborn. God has defined his firstborn as the children of Israel, the seed of Abraham (Exodus 4:22). Paul suggested that this birthright is come upon men by way of their faith, and not their lineage alone. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul wrote:

*“Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham...That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that they might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith...For ye are all the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

(Galatians 3:7,14, 26-29).

Paul goes further in his letter to the Romans, writing: *“...Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”* (Romans 9:6). He writes more about Abraham and those who qualify as his seed/descendants:

*“...that he [Abraham] might be the father of all of them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also; And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”* (Romans 4:11-13).

By these scriptures we understand that it is the faithful that are a kind of firstfruits to God (see also James 1:18). They will not suffer spiritual death because the Lord will “pass over” them just as He did the firstborn of the

Hebrews in Egypt. They will have been obedient to His commandments, finding a symbolic feast in the Lamb of God and having their homes marked with the blood of His atonement.

A passage of note further recommends our perennial consideration of the Passover in the contemporary Church. We read the following in Exodus 12:14: *“And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever.”* A worthy discussion of the Passover might include acknowledgment that it was to be kept generation upon generation by way of an ordinance. Is there an ordinance in the Church today which honors this instruction? The Passover was commissioned to be a memorial, so one would look for an ordinance that draws us to remembrance. The Passover was kept by partaking of a lamb, set apart on the 10th of Abib, and killed on the 14<sup>th</sup> of the same. We should look for an ordinance then that at least symbolically involves eating the body of a Lamb that was separated and killed on the same. The Passover was a celebration of the deliverance God made for His people. Is there an ordinance in the Church today whereby we remember our deliverance from bondage?

The Passover is honored in the Church today in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, when we eat bread in remembrance of the flesh of the Lamb of God, who was separated on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan and crucified on the 14<sup>th</sup>. We partake of wine to symbolize His blood. In our remembrance, we note how it is Jesus Christ whereby we are delivered from the bondage of sin after the days of our captivity.

The suggestion that the Passover feast is honored in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is witnessed in Christ, who kept the Passover by breaking bread and giving to His disciples. He then took wine and bid them to drink. How did the Lord keep the Passover feast? The same way that those in the Church do today (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22).

*“...the disciples came unto Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples...And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and brake it, and blessed it, and gave to his disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is in remembrance of my body which I give a ransom for you. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it*

*to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is in remembrance of my blood of the new testament, which is shed for as many as shall believe on my name, for the remission of their sins. And I give unto you a commandment, that ye shall observe to do the things which ye have seen me do, and bear record of me even unto the end.”* (Matthew 26:13,14,22-25).

Christ’s fulfillment of the law was not often an exoneration of men from the merits of morality, but an opportunity for the same principles to be visited in spiritual practice, for the welfare of the soul rather than the observation of the flesh.

Finally, wisdom demands that one search the scriptures if a clear identity of those entitled to this ordinance is to be discovered. With regards to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, the Church has held from its restoration to the earth that emblems should only be served to those who have made a covenant with God. This covenant is witnessed in the baptismal waters and confirmed by the Spirit. This practice is supported by the words of Christ when He commanded that the bread and wine be served *“unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name.”* (III Nephi 8:32). No one was to be forbidden to worship with the Saints, but this ordinance was only to be administered to those who were rightly baptized (Christ also spoke of ordaining one with true authority to oversee these works, demonstrating again the value of authority):

*“Therefore if ye know that a man is unworthy to eat and drink of my flesh and blood, ye shall forbid him; nevertheless ye shall not cast him out from among you, but ye shall minister unto him, and shall pray for him unto the Father, in my name, And if it so be that he repenteth, and is baptized in my name, then shall ye receive him, and shall minister unto him of my flesh and blood.”* (III Nephi 8:61-62).

If the comparison of the Passover and the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is an accurate one, a similarly restricting portion of counsel should be found to govern participation in the Passover feast. In Exodus 12, we read the following prohibition:

*“And the Lord said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover; **there shall no stranger eat thereof**; But every man's servant that is bought for money, **when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof**. A foreigner and a hired servant shall not eat thereof.*

***In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land; for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.”*** (Exodus 12:43-49).

The Passover was to be enjoyed only by those who had made a covenant with God (compare to III Nephi 8:32). While everyone was invited to make a covenant with Him, and none were refused circumcision, only those who had made the covenant were to partake of the ordinance. Moreover, though the ordinance would be kept in many homes, it was to be kept “in one house” (study II Nephi 12:3-16 and Doctrine and Covenants 1:5e) and was not to be “carried forth” out of that house. Those who made a covenant were treated the same, whether they were born a Hebrew, a slave, or a foreigner (compare to Galatians 3:28), and there was one law to govern all, one faith, one covenant honored, one God (compare to Ephesians 4:3-6).

Truly the Lord is without beginning or end, weaving the thread of continuity in every dispensation through the revelation of His Son, that we might learn in the spirit those principles once observed in the flesh. Praise the Lord for His beauty, for He has not left us without a testimony of the truth. While a study of the Old Testament may demand a greater exercise of our finer faculties, the Holy Ghost attending, it is sure to shed light upon those elements of doctrine which shall remain forever relevant in the hearts of the faithful. In the mouth of two or three witnesses, He has established the truth of all things (Doctrine and Covenants 6:13b), that those who earnestly question will not go without.