

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20*

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Remembering Jesus

Christians differ in the times and manner of their remembrance of our Saviour, Jesus. Of course, believers remember Him constantly in our daily walk. He inspires our actions and our thoughts. But all agree that there are times when we remember Him - His life, His death, His resurrection - and in a formal manner.

All believers recall Jesus' own words: '*...this do in remembrance of me*'. It is a regular service - for some daily, for others weekly or quarterly. Others believe it is an annual memorial of those awesome events.

But it isn't just a matter of the timing or the name, for the memorial of the death of Jesus the Messiah is in fact a renewal of our relationship with Him - our 'covenant' with Him, first made at our baptism.

Our Covenant

Baptism represented our 'death' to the old self, our 'resurrection' to a new life in Christ - in the words of the hymn: '*...ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven*'. We enter into a covenant by which our fractured

relationship with the Father is repaired through Jesus. In return we commit to heed His words: '*...If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love*' (John 15:10) - words spoken the very eve of His sufferings. It is surely appropriate to recollect this commitment.

The *Churches of God* do this on an annual basis - for Jesus included in His instructions that the memorial is observed on '*...the same night in which he was betrayed*' (I Corinthians 11:23) - again appropriate for a 'memorial service'.

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament [covenant] in my blood: this do you, as oft as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do shew the Lord's death till he come (Corinthians 11:23-26)

No Partying

From the Scriptures we also learn that this is not a 'party' - not a celebratory meal as was the Passover (a celebration of freedom for Israel). This memorial is a solemn occasion, when brethren came together as an assembly (vv.20-22) to remember His suffering and death, his flesh cruelly broken by Roman lashes.

If you are hungry, says Paul, then eat at home!

The Corinthian brethren were not only 'making a meal' of it but were also being partial - v.21 (*cp* James 2:1-4) - ignoring the poor and needy among them.

There's a tendency to institutionalise the service (which we call *Lord's Supper*). Paul, for example, says: '*...*

the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me' (vv.23-24). The Greek word used for bread' [*artos*] is a general word that includes both leavened and unleavened (flat) bread - *ie*, made without a raising agent. As the service is held the evening before the eating of Passover - which was eaten with unleavened bread - some insist on *unleavened* bread, though this isn't necessary, though traditional.

Similarly, though tradition has it that we take wine, Paul simply calls it '*...the cup*' (v.26). This gives latitude to those for whom alcohol is a problem.

As the service is an *annual* event its timing is determined by fixing the time of Jesus' crucifixion. This was at the *Feast of the Passover* in Spring. For this, the *Churches of God* accept the reckoning determined by the Hebrew calendar. Ω

What's in a name...

The service is known by a variety of names:

- Lord's Supper
- Eucharist
- Communion
- Passover
- Lord's Table

Some Christians confuse the Lord's Supper with the Passover:

Passover

- for ever
- eaten early Nisan 15
- a celebration
- a celebratory meal
- begins *Unleavened Bread* week
- 'Passover' lasts 7 days
- observed in the family
- must be circumcised
- no foot washing
- lamb, bitter herbs *etc*
- a full meal
- eaten without leaven
- no self examination
- celebrates freedom

Lord's Supper

- till Christ returns
- taken early Nisan 14
- a memorial
- a solemn service
- precedes *Unleavened Bread* week
- one evening service
- observed in assembly
- must be baptised
- foot washing
- bread and wine
- not a meal
- bread not specified
- self examination
- covenant renewal

Prepare. Examine yourself:

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drink damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world (1 Corinthians 11:28-32)

Unleavened Bread

The 'official' sacrifice in the Temple of the Passover lamb was at the time of the evening sacrifice (between 3pm and 4pm). The law of Passover was that the lamb was to be segregated from the flock on Nisan 10 (on the Hebrew calendar), sacrificed on Nisan 14 and eaten at the beginning of Nisan 15 - that is, after the end of the 14th. [*In the Biblical East the 'day' began at sunset*]

The Passover recalled the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian slavery. They slew the lambs and placed the blood over the door of their homes in Goshen, thus protecting themselves from the death which swept through Egypt that night. On that first Passover the Israelites ate the sacrificed lamb, with everyone prepared to leave. Being on the move there was no time to bake bread - done daily, usually - so the Passover is celebrated with unleavened bread - bread made without a raising agent (*eg yeast*).

Sometime after the middle of the night they were led out of Egypt by Moses, a fiery pillar preceding them. It was truly '*...a night to be remembered*'.

The term 'Passover' covers the seven day festival beginning after the end of Nisan 14 with the eating of the lamb (Ezekiel 45:21). The LORD appointed this as an annual festival (Leviticus 23:5-7)

Christian Celebration

The *Unleavened Bread* festival has important Christian significance, and was observed by the early church - both Jewish and Gentile brethren (1 Corinthians 5). Jesus used

leaven as symbolism. By avoiding leaven and by eating *unleavened* bread for these seven days we symbolically put on Christ-like behaviour

- Jesus spoke of leaven as the way the Kingdom spreads. Like leaven it penetrates, diffuses and changes (Matthew 13:33) - both personally (us) and society through us (Matthew 5:13-16)
- of the *false teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees* (Matthew 16:12) and of *Herod* (Mark 8:15) - spiritual and political poison. Together they sought to undermine and destroy Jesus and the Kingdom values which he represented. Truth is found in the Word - not tradition
- of *hypocrisy* (Luke 12:1). As his disciples we are, unlike the Pharisees, to be open and above board in all our dealings: '*what you see is what you get*'
- The apostle Paul, writing during the *Unleavened Bread* festival, applies the symbolism of leaven to the *toleration of sin* in the assembly by the Corinthian brethren (1 Corinthians 5: 1-8). It is clear from this passage that the church there was observing the festival - as do thousands of Christians in our day

This year (2008) the **Lord's Supper** will be observed the evening of Friday, April 18, and **Unleavened Bread** April 20-26
Contact us for details of how to observe

The Easter Story

Remember me, said Jesus. How? Is there an alternative to Easter?

Easter! New hats and frocks. The Easter parade. Rolling coloured eggs. A Sunday sun-rise service. Great fun for the kids. A focus on life renewed: the resurrection of Jesus, triumphant over the grave.

The season, though, began less joyously. Friday - 'Good Friday' - is a day of sadness. By tradition that's when Jesus suffered an ignominious death on a Roman stake. In some Christian societies it's a day for self-flagellation. Some individuals submit themselves to a mock crucifixion. The steps of Jesus along the Via Delorosa in Jerusalem are traced in pageantry.

Death and Resurrection

But such remembrance is far removed from actuality. The spring festival known as Easter - as most Bible students know - did not originate with the death and resurrection of Jesus, pre-dating him by hundreds of years. The 'death and resurrection' of a Saviour is a concept well-known in the Old Testament.

Some scholars see it implied in the Genesis description, in Eden's garden, of a 'promised seed', a suffering Messiah: "*He will crush your [ie Satan's] head and you will crush his [the Redeemer's] heel*" (ch 3:15). Job, one of the earliest of the Bible writers, also understood it: "*I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has thus been destroyed then out of my flesh I shall see God*" (Job 19:25).

The Psalmist sings: "*Therefore my heart was glad and my glory [soul, life] rejoiced; my body too will dwell securely. For you will not leave my soul in [the grave] nor allow your holy one to see corruption*" (Psalm 16:8-10).

Jesus, too, saw this teaching - in the life of the prophet Jonah, drawing from there the analogy of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40). Examples of this could be multiplied!

It isn't surprising, then, to find that early in man's history the concept had crept into the religion of those who had rejected God's revelation - men who *altered*

God's truth into falsehood, and revered and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25).

That a Saviour would die and be resurrected is a concept known widely in the ancient world - even apart from the Bible revelation. It gave rise to the various mythical cycles in which the 'god' dies and is miraculously restored to life.

Any substantial Encyclopaedia, of course, will detail how these various rites were absorbed into the Christian church from around the fourth century. They include the forty days of Lenten abstinence, the sun-rise service on Easter morning (*ie* facing east), the rolling of coloured eggs. Ezekiel 8:16 is instructive.

These practices replaced the 'death and resurrection' festivals instituted by God and observed by Jesus, the apostles and the first Christians.

Worship - God's Way

Having initiated human life, the Creator gave us guidance on how to live and how to worship Him. One aspect was a series of annual reminders of His plan - seven recurring annual festivals each of which highlights an aspect of that plan, and each pointing to Jesus Christ. The Spring festival consists of the sacrifice of the *Passover*, followed by the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*, the whole being loosely termed 'Passover'.

In harmony with God's perfect timing (*eg* Galatians 4:4), Jesus died late in the afternoon of Nisan 14*. At this time, between 3pm and 4pm, the Passover lamb was ceremonially sacrificed in the Temple. Paul refers to Jesus as '*Christ our Passover*' (I Corinthians 5:7). Many Christians today observe it as the 'Night to be remembered', investing it with Christian significance.

It begins a week of rejoicing known in the Scriptures as *Unleavened Bread*. To the Corinthian brethren - largely Gentile - Paul in that same passage acknowledges that the brethren were observing these days (vv.6-8). Passover is to be observed 'throughout your generations' - and will continue to be observed after Messiah returns.

Jesus, however, introduced a further observance which is to continue *until* he returns.

Lord's Supper

It is a solemn memorial of his night of betrayal, anguished suffering and subsequent crucifixion on a Ro-

man stake. Called by Paul the *Lord's Supper*, it is held annually 'on the night in which he was betrayed' - the beginning of Nisan 14*.

At the evening meal on that Passover eve he introduced the simple everyday symbols of bread and wine as representative of his broken body and shed blood: "*For I have received from the Lord what I have also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'Take, eat. This is my body broken on your behalf. This do in remembrance of me'. Similarly he took the cup after they had supped saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you shall proclaim the Lord's death till he comes*" (I Corinthians 11:23-26). Note that the Passover is 'for ever', while the memorial is 'until he comes'.

A Lesson in Humility

Further, Jesus enjoined the practice of 'foot washing', having himself set the example to the disciples at that last meal before he suffered: "*...if I, your Lord and Teacher, wash your feet you surely ought to wash one another's feet; for I have set you an example so that you might do just as I did to you.... If you grasp these truths, blessed are you if you practice them*" (John 13:12-17).

A Pure Heart

The *Days of Unleavened Bread*, also observed by the early church, was a period of seven days starting with the Passover during which no 'leavened bread' - ie yeasted, raised, fermented bread - was eaten. In Christian use it is symbolic of a pure life, energized by the risen Christ through his Spirit. Leaven is corruption, physically. Spiritually it signifies hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and false teaching (Matthew 16:12).

This festival thus encapsulates the concept of *resurrection*, a *pure heart* and *pure truth*. The Scriptures therefore give no specific day - eg 'Easter Sunday' - to commemorate this momentous event. Rather it is an entire week of celebration during which Christians live without this symbolic corruption in our bodies or our homes. By our eating daily of *unleavened* - 'sweet' - bread we are reminded that throughout life we 'feed on *'that bread which came down from*

Bible Sabbaths

Any student of the Christian Scriptures knows that the Sabbath is the seventh day of the week - our Saturday. (It began at sunset on Friday until sunset on Saturday.) It is often overlooked, however, that there are other 'Sabbaths'

These Sabbaths - there are seven - occur annually, and are linked to God's festivals. (They are listed in Leviticus 23.)


Two of these are connected with the *Unleavened Bread* festival, marking the first and last day of this seven day festival.

They are not full Sabbaths as are the *weekly Sabbath* and the *Day of Atonement*. However, they are days when we lay aside our routine work - our '*... customary work*' (Leviticus 23:7, 8 NKJ). These annual observances are 'holy convocations' - days for hearing and discussing God's Word - His revelation to mankind.

They are also days for rejoicing, celebrated with, when possible, fellowship and a communal banquet.

heaven' (John 6:51).

The Bible festivals (the 'appointed feasts of the LORD' - Leviticus 23:2 - not of Moses) are free from the leaven - hypocritical and false - that permeates most of Christianity by the observance of days which are plainly from idolatrous sources.

This year, why not commit yourself to the observance of those days God has set aside for His people! 

**This on the calendar widely used throughout the then known world. On the current, Julian, calendar it falls sometime in March/April. A calendar linking the old calendar and the new is available from any of our addresses.*