

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Passover
2013

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Matthew 28:19-20

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A TIME TO REMEMBER

I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; And giving thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also, after supping, saying, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; as often as you drink it, do this in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show the Lord's death until He shall come (I Corinthians 11:23-26)

Familiar words to every Christian, and especially poignant at this time of year. As we are reminded by the apostle Paul, this is the annual solemn observance, on '*...the night in which he was betrayed*', when we gather as the 'church family' to remember the suffering and death of our Saviour.

As the apostle had to point out to the unruly brethren in Corinth who were observing the Supper 'unworthily' (*ie*, in an unworthy manner), it is a time of solemn remembrance—not a time to party but an opportunity to reflect on the significance of our Saviour's suffering for us individually.

Such reflection should lead to change! Paul adds: '*...if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*' (vv'31-32). As wrote the Psalmist: '*...Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and*

know my thoughts, and see if any wicked way is in me; and lead me in the way everlasting' (Psalm 139: 23-24).

The apostle repeats what Jesus had told the Twelve on that evening before the feast of the Passover (John 13: 1ff): the bread and wine represented his sacrifice.

Prompted by dissent among the disciples Jesus added a further element to the memorial. Having washed the disciples' feet he said '*...I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you*' (v.15). It's a practice continued by many Christians to this day.

A 7-day Feast

This supper took place on the evening of Nisan 14*—during which day Jesus was tried (falsely) and condemned to death by both the Roman and Jewish authorities, the Romans for sedition, the Jews for blasphemy. (Jesus died for both Jew and gentile).

As John records, the supper (Gk *deipnos*) was '*...before the feast of the Passover*', so Jesus died at the time of the Temple sacrifice of the Passover—between 3pm and 4pm—and entombed around sunset.

That evening, the 15th Nisan, the Passover lamb was eaten together with unleavened bread ('flat' bread,

* Nisan is the first month of the calendar used in the Bible, equating with our March/April

in which there was no raising agent’). Originally celebrating the Israelites’ release from Egyptian slavery, it was a joyous occasion—truly ‘a night to be much observed’.

The sacrifice of the lamb and the eating of it began the seven-day *Feast of the Passover*: ‘...*In the first month, on the fourteenth of the month, you shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days. Unleavened bread shall be eaten* (Ezekiel 45:21). It was also known as the *Days of Unleavened Bread*—(eg Acts 20:6).

A Christian Observance

While the majority of Christians today observe ‘Easter’, the early church continued with these Bible festivals—both Jew and Gentile. Only in later centuries did this decline, the festival of Easter being substituted to accommodate the incoming heathen who were used to its observance. [Ishtar was the Babylonian goddess worshipped as ‘*The Queen of Heaven*’ - cf Jeremiah 7:18]

The evening following the Lord’s Supper (*ie* the beginning of Nisan 15) marks the beginning of the seven day *Feast of Unleavened Bread*. It is the ‘Passover’ within Judaism, and observed by many Christians as ‘*the night to be much remembered [or, observed]*’ (Exodus 12:42). As the *Literal Translation* puts it: ‘...*It is a night of celebration to Jehovah, for bringing them out from the land of Egypt*’. For Christians it marks the beginning of the *Unleavened Bread* festival.

The apostle Paul makes clear that thus, the *Feast of Passover*, was observed by the brethren in Corinth: ‘...*purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For also Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast; not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*’ (I Corinthians 5: 7-8).

Clear out the *spiritual* leaven (hypocrisy, false teaching, malice *etc*), he tells us, as you have already put out the *physical* leaven (‘...*as you are unleavened*’). It is an annual focus on those aspects of our personal lives which detract from the life of Christ in us. **Ω**

Pentecost 2013

The following annual observance is *Pentecost*, in early summer. This year it is Sunday, May 19

KEEP THE FEAST!

Jesus died for us at the hand of Jew and Gentile, having suffered horrendously—by his scourging and crucifixion, and possibly by stoning while on the cross (for his supposed blasphemy—Leviticus 24:16, 23). But we must focus on the *why* rather than the *how*. For Jesus did not remain on the cross. He was triumphant over death, resurrected to the right hand of the Father and ‘...*declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*’ (Romans 1:4).

Similarly, while we should be diligent to avoid the *physical* leaven during the festival and to daily eat *unleavened* products—yet our main focus must be on the *spiritual* significance.

Jesus rose, *is risen, is alive evermore*—and lives in every true believer. As we take in the unleavened bread during the festival we are symbolically putting on those qualities exhibited by Jesus (*read, for example, Colossians 3*). And making the mental effort, aided by God’s Spirit, to actually implement them in our daily lives.

Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He searching the hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God

Romans 8:26-27

What Date?

Confusion can arise between the calendar dates used in the Bible and those generally in use in today’s world (the ‘Gregorian’).

In the Bible, ‘days’ begin in the evening at ‘sundown’. That is, late afternoon as the sun visibly declines. Thus Nisan 14 begins at sundown on the 13th, *etc*.

Confirmation of this is Leviticus 23:32, regarding the *Day of Atonement*—which is (v.27) the 10th day, yet begins on the 9th ‘at evening’: ‘...*you shall humble your souls in the ninth of the month at evening; from evening until evening you shall keep your sabbath*’

2013

Lord’s Supper: 25th March* (Sunday evening)
Unleavened Bread: 26th March*—1st April