

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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The Passover Week

Many Christian believers are observing 'Lent', a 40-day period of minor abstinence (items of food, cigarettes, beer *etc*) - though an observance not found in the Christian Scriptures. Other Christians are about to begin observance of the Biblical '*Days of Unleavened Bread*'.

'Unleavened Bread' is a seven day observance dating perhaps from before the time of Moses. It is one of '...the feasts of the LORD—see Leviticus 23:4. Ezekiel calls the seven day festival 'Passover' (*ch* 45:21).

During it believers do not eat any food item - mainly bread - that contains *leaven* (a raising agent, *eg* yeast, baking powder). It echoes the time when the clans of Israel were departing from Egypt 'in haste' and didn't have time to make bread. Before the festival begins we remove all leavening agents (substances that will 'puff up', as yeast—I Corinthians 5:2) from our property.

[*Note: the Festival is a joyous 'feast', a time to celebrate with a variety of unleavened foods!*].

The festival does, however, have significance for Christians and was observed by Jesus, the apostles and the early church, both Jew and Gentile.

The Corinthian brethren, for example, are known to have ob-

served it (I Corinthians 5: 6-8 CEV). Writes Paul: '*...Stop being proud! Don't you know*

how a little yeast can spread through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast! Then you will be like fresh bread made without yeast, and that is what you are. Our Passover lamb is Christ, who has already been sacrificed. So don't celebrate the festival by being evil and sinful, which is like serving bread made with yeast. Be pure and truthful and celebrate by using bread made without yeast'.

The King James version has '... *therefore let us keep the feast*' - the Greek verb *heorazo*, 'to observe a festival'. The Jews among them would certainly continue to observe this in remembrance of their deliverance from slavery. But it has wider significance for Christians.

Symbolism

Jesus used the term (leaven, Gk *zume*) to describe the way the kingdom spreads itself, just as does yeast in dough (Matthew 13:33).

But leaven also has negative meanings relating to their insidious ability to spread themselves. Jesus, for example, called the perverted teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees 'leaven' (Matthew 16:12, and see *ch* 23!).

Elsewhere (Luke 12:1) He applies it to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. The apostle Paul adds (I Corinthians 5:8) '*...malice and wickedness*', contrasting it with '*...the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*'. Leaven 'puffs up' so also

The Lord's Supper

Universally observed—under a variety of names and at different times—by professing Christians the Lord's Supper is a solemn memorial of the suffering and death of our Saviour, Jesus.

In the seventh-day church of God movement it is observed annually '*...in the night he was betrayed*' (I Corinthians 11: 23)—a date determined each year by reference to the Hebrew calendar.

Unity with the Father

The observance is, unlike the Passover, a solemn remembrance. It is a re-affirmation each year of our covenant, made at our baptism, with the Saviour. Central to it is the unity each and every one of us has with the Father and with Jesus through their indwelling Spirit. It is intensely *personal* and totally independent of any sectarian affiliation we each may have.

It is unfortunate that brethren are encouraged to align with a 'denomination'. For the most part there is minor doctrinal difference between the many church of God denominations—certainly much less than the differences between the churches of God in the beginning of the second century (Revelation 2, 3).

Top Down

Most destructive is the attempt to impose a hierarchical governance modelled on that of ancient Israel. It expresses a fundamental misunderstanding of the church that Jesus is building. Such an approach induces a 'ghetto' mentality—'us alone'. And refocuses our spiritual unity on a man-made organization rather than on God.

It also paves the way for heretical teaching to be imposed wholesale 'from the top', as an autocracy hands down its own uninspired doctrinal will. The debacle of the departure from the faith of the Worldwide Church of God is a living example—and a warning to others which continue to inflict such a yoke of bondage.

Simply, the first Christians assembled for fellowship with other believers—no denominational affiliation. Too soon those at Corinth became sectarian, following—as today!—preferred leaders. Paul corrected them. (I Corinthians 3). They also confused the Lord's Supper with Passover, making this solemn memorial supper a feast. Paul

Passover...cont'd

represents arrogance, false pride. It includes all those characteristics that are part and parcel of our human nature (Mark 7:20-23).

In sum, our annual observance as Christians of this festival is a pointed reminder of our determination to model our character on the perfection of Jesus. Our eating of 'unleavened' bread for the seven days is symbolic of our '*put[ing] on the Lord, Jesus Christ*' (Romans 13:14, Colossians 3:10), becoming Christ-like.

In the *Lord's Supper* (the previous evening) we remember the suffering and death of Jesus. In Passover week (the seven *Days of Unleavened Bread*) we celebrate His resurrection. He had died at the time of the slaying of the Passover lambs just as the *Unleavened Bread* festival was beginning (John 19:31), and had risen at the end of the weekly Sabbath during the festival - '*...the firstfruits of those who slept [died]*' (I Corinthians 15:20).

[If you would like further information on its observance please contact us, Our *Ministudies* 42-44, available on our web site www.cgom.org, give further explanation]

Ω

This year (2011) the Days of Unleavened Bread are April 19-25 (beginning previous evening). The first and last days are annual celebratory Sabbaths

corrected them (*ch. 11*). [*'The Passover'* is what we have traditionally called the celebratory '*Night to Be Much Remembered*'.]

Personal Unity

As this solemn memorial again approaches it is important that we examine how we each shape up to the covenant we made at our baptism. In the light of ongoing disputes between churches a focus on our personal relationship with the Father and with our Saviour is appropriate.

A study of the prayer of Jesus just before he instituted the memorial of his suffering (John 17) is instructive. It is through our positive personal relationship with the Godhead that we can be in harmony and unity with all our brethren around the world, wherever they fellowship in truth. Ω