

January - March 2015

ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Christ Our Passover

The Shepherd Who Became The Lamb • It's All About Relationship • John Chapter 11: The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus

The Festivals of God

Festivals, irrespective of culture or religion are appropriate occasions for cheerfulness and merriment. It is the best time of the year for bonding, renew old ties and strengthen relationships. However, if the essence of the festival is directly attached to a religious belief, we owe it to ourselves to ascertain the truthfulness of its origin.

The purpose and meaning why it should be kept should not remain a "mystery"; and the celebrants should fully understand why they have to believe and keep them. It is therefore important to know the origin of these festivals, who is the primary proponent, and what are the benefits that will result in observing them.

Now the God of the Bible has laid out certain feast days and commanded everyone - regardless patrimonial lineage and origin - to observe them when their season comes. The command is found in Leviticus 23:2: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: These are MY appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies". Take note that God declared that He Himself appointed these festivals. It is not for Israelites only, thus everyone who wants to obey the God of the Bible are duty-bound to keep them.

These are the festivals in their order of succession:

- Passover
- Days of Unleavened Bread
- Day of Pentecost
- Feast of Trumpets
- Day of Atonement
- Feast of Tabernacles
- The Last Great Day

These festivals carry lessons that has everything to do with the purpose why God created the human race. It spells out the step by step procedures that will lead to salvation and the ultimate destiny of man. A thorough understanding of the meaning of these festivals are fully explained in the magazine titled, "Roman Holidays vs. God's True Holy Days". For your FREE COPY contact the address listed at the editorial box of this publication; and make sure your name and address and the publication you are requesting are correctly specified.

Eleno S. Mellomida

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Christ Our Passover

Who, what, is the Passover? What is its history? Should Christians keep the Passover today? If so, how and why?

Passover is the religious festival that celebrates the deliverance of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptians. The term is derived from the Hebrew *pasach*, which means “to pass over.”

The Lamb of God

In the book of Revelation, Christ is called “the Lamb” more than two dozen times, and is symbolically portrayed as a lamb “that was slain” yet lives (Revelation 5:6,12). The innumerable multitude of Revelation 7 is identified as “those who come out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 14). The end-time saints overcome the devil “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (12:11). The 144,000 of Revelation 14 are those “who follow the Lamb.” They are “the redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” (verse 4).

The New Jerusalem is called “the Lamb’s wife” (21:10). The “names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” are inscribed on the city’s twelve foundations (verse 14). The city has no temple, and no need for the light of the sun or moon, for “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (verse 22), and “the Lamb is its light” (verse 23). The “throne of God and of the Lamb” are in the city (22:1, 3), and only those whose names are in “the Lamb’s book of life” may enter through its gates (21:27).

The early church, with roots firmly embedded in the soil of Jewish religion, could not have failed to realize the significance of the title “Lamb of God,” or of portraying Christ as a sacrificial lamb. The lamb was the dominant animal of Israel’s sacrificial system. It was associated particularly with the festival that began the year’s holyday cycle—the Passover. All the adult members of the earliest church had heard the story of how God used the blood of lambs to protect the firstborn of their forefathers during the night of terror in Egypt. Most had come to Jerusalem every year for as long as they could remember to

commemorate that awesome event.

Every year, the people would come with their lambs. Every year, the sacrificial rite would begin in the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan. A priest in the Temple would kill the first lamb at about 3:00 PM. The killing of the lambs continued without interruption for about three hours, the entire period known as *ben ha arbayim*, “between the two evenings” (Exodus 12:6).

The lambs were quickly prepared and cooked in preparation for the Feast that would continue far into the night. During that “night to be much observed” (Exodus 12:42), the elders would recount the story of the Exodus once again. The people would think of how glorious it must have been for those who had served the Egyptians for so many years. No doubt, many related the story of their forefathers to their own plight as Jews living under Roman dominion. They looked for the day when God would once again set His hand to liberate His people. They looked for the day when a “new Moses” would arrive on the scene. They knew the prophets had declared it: Messiah would come!

But when? How much longer before the people, like their ancestors at the edge of the Red Sea, would “see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13)?

Messiah Appears at Last

By the time Jesus’ ministry began, many false messiahs had come and gone. Nevertheless, the people still expected the real Messiah to come at any time. And when He came, many believed He was the Messiah.

John the Baptist had come in the spirit and power of Elijah, and had done his job well. He had prepared the way before Christ by calling upon the people to repent of their sins, and by identifying Jesus as the Messiah. Luke informs us that John “went into all the region around the Jordan” with his message of repentance (Luke 3:3). Matthew tells us that “Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the

region around the Jordan went out to him [John], and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:5–6).

John's influence was great. Many recognized him as a true prophet of God. When he identified Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and testified that Jesus “is the Son of God” (verse 34), John's audience listened—and many believed.

John's influence, then, was one reason many believed Jesus was the promised Messiah. Another reason was that many had heard of the unusual events surrounding both the birth of Jesus and the birth of John (Luke 1:63–66; 2:8–18). A third reason—perhaps the most important of all—was the many miraculous signs that affirmed Jesus as the promised Messiah. One sign, which occurred a short while before Jesus' “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem, was particularly outstanding.

Jesus Comes to Jerusalem

Before His death, Jesus caused quite a stir in Judea. He had raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38–44), and word of this marvelous event had spread throughout the region (12:9, 17). For this reason, a great multitude that was in Jerusalem for the Passover went out to meet Him as He rode into the city on a young donkey (verses 12–19). They knew He was the Messiah, for only the Messiah could raise the dead. Besides, the stories—now over three decades old—of angels appearing to shepherds and directing them to the newborn Christ-child were still circulating, as were the stories of the dozens of healings and exorcisms Jesus had performed over the preceding three years or so.

Now the Messiah comes to Jerusalem! Was this not what the people had expected? Had not the prophets declared that the Davidic King would establish His throne in the Holy City? At last, He's here. Jerusalem welcomes her King.

But all were not pleased with the Messiah's coming. By the time He arrived, the chief priests and the Pharisees had already contrived a plan to have Him put to death. They plotted to put Lazarus to death as well, for his resurrection had caused many to believe in Jesus.

In the end, their plan worked. Jesus was arrested, tried, and condemned to death. But before He was arrested and taken away, Jesus had one last meal with His disciples. It was the night portion of the fourteenth of Nisan, just hours before Jesus' arrest. “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer,” He said to His disciples, “for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15–16).

Jesus knew His hour had come. Soon He would be mocked and scourged and put to death. But His teaching ministry was not over yet. He had some final instructions for His disciples.

Jesus Institutes New Testament Passover

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was

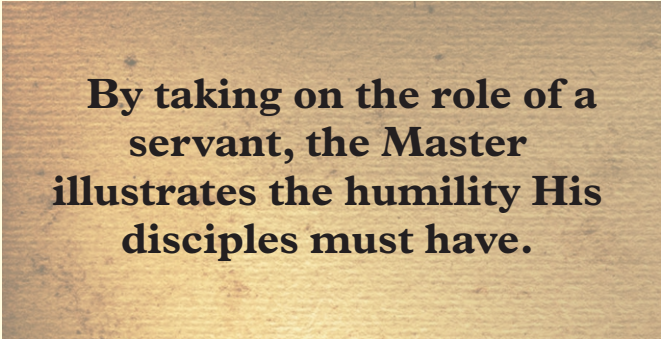
going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded” (John 13:1–5).

What was the purpose of this act? What lesson was the Master illustrating when He stooped down to wash His servants' feet? “So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them’” (verses 12–17).

By taking on the role of a servant, the Master illustrates the humility His disciples must have. He also sets an example for them by doing for them what He expects them to do for each other.

Notice that by taking the bread and wine in memory of Jesus, we proclaim His death “till He comes.” The followers of Christ will be keeping this custom until Christ returns!

Now, back to the story....



By taking on the role of a servant, the Master illustrates the humility His disciples must have.

Jesus Is Put to Death

The chief priests and Pharisees were successful in pulling off their plot to kill Jesus. On the fourteenth of Nisan, the day the Jews killed the Passover lambs, Jesus was led to Golgotha, where He was crucified.

Many were sorely disappointed. They had been so certain that this man was the Messiah, but now their hopes were destroyed. Rather than Jesus leading a revolt and overthrowing the Romans, the Romans led Him to the outskirts of town and executed Him. This could hardly be the Messiah, they thought.

The problem was that they expected Messiah to lead a successful campaign against the Romans and restore Israel to national greatness. They thought the revolt would begin then and there. That's what the people were hoping for when they took up palm branches and went out to meet Jesus with cries of “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel” (John 12:13).

The people were not looking for a “religious” experience, and “Hosanna” was not a feel-good “religious” term. As David H. Stern rightly notes, “Actually, 'Hoshia' na' is a prayer addressed to the Messiah, quoted from Psalm 118:25–26; Psalm 118 is Messianic throughout....The implication is that the crowds recognized and honored Yeshua [Jesus] as the Messiah by shouting, 'Please, deliver us, Son of David!'—'Son of David' is a Messianic title...and the crowds wanted their Messiah to deliver them from the Roman overlords” (*Jewish New Testament Commentary*, p. 63).

No doubt, many of Jesus' followers and admirers were ready to follow Him into battle. They knew the prophets had foretold Messiah's victory over Israel's enemies, and they were willing and ready to participate in His campaign against the Roman overlords and their Jewish minions. Redemption and salvation were not “religious” words. These terms pertained to the deliverance of Israel from Roman dominion and the restoration of national greatness.

We can understand the people's—especially the disciples'—fear and disappointment once Jesus was led away and put to death. It appeared that He wasn't the Messiah after all, though He had healed the sick and afflicted, cast out demons, and raised the dead. A great prophet and man of God? Yes. Messiah? No. How could He be? After all, Messiah was supposed to win the battle against evil—and there is no victory for a dead man!

Or is there?

This is where the people's understanding of Messiah's mission was lacking. Little did they know that the key to understanding Christ's purpose for coming into the world was hidden in the Feast that was about to commence—the Passover.

Jesus “Fulfills” the Law and the Prophets

Before looking at the profound meaning of the Passover, let's briefly look at what Jesus said about His mission—what He did and did not come to do.

Early in His ministry, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill [to bring to fullness]. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled [accomplished]” (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus did not abolish the Ten Commandments, as some think. He magnified them (Isaiah 42:21) by exposing the erroneous interpretations that had been attached to them and bringing out their full meaning. In fact, He brought to light the fullness of all previous revelation. That's what He means when He says He came “to fulfill” the Old Testament Scriptures (“the Law and the Prophets”).

The disciples failed to understand the extent to which the Scriptures pertained to the Messiah until after Jesus' resurrection. Only then did they come to understand how Jesus “fulfilled” the Law and the Prophets. “Then He [the risen Christ] said to them, 'These are the words which I

spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.' And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” (Luke 24:44–45). That's how Jesus “fulfilled” the Law and the Prophets. He didn't do it by abolishing commandments that were in force before Moses and were to remain in force as long as there are human beings on this planet.

Earlier that day, Jesus had said to two others, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” Then, “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (verses 25–26).

Once Jesus enlightened His disciples by giving them the Holy Spirit (John 20:22) and opening their minds to the Scriptures (Luke 24:45), they were soon able to see Christ throughout the Law and the Prophets. At last they could see that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem just a few days before His death was indeed a “triumphal entry.” He accomplished His mission. He fulfilled the Scriptures. And now it was up to the disciples to proclaim to the world that Jesus is the Messiah, that “He is risen,” and that He will come again in power, as King of kings and Lord of lords, and establish His everlasting Kingdom upon this earth.

The Scriptures took on wonderful new meaning—and so did the annual Festivals and holydays. The apostles and disciples, with the whole church, could now see Christ in all the institutions of the Old Testament. That's why Paul, writing in the mid-50s A.D., could say, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7), and expect the Corinthians to understand.

An Amazing Prophecy

Let's now turn our attention to the Passover instructions God gave to Israel as they prepared to depart their homes and leave Egypt behind. “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father....Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year....Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the first month. Then the whole congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. Then they shall eat the flesh on that night... It is the LORD'S Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt... Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:1–13).

The Jews who came out to meet Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem just before the Passover Feast had no idea that this familiar text of Scripture was prophetic in nature, and that it held the key to understanding the Messiah's

mission.

Notice how the various components of this instruction perfectly symbolize the Messiah and His work of redemption: The lamb without blemish symbolizes Christ, who was without sin. Jesus was killed on the fourteenth day of the first month, the same day the Passover lamb was killed. Christ died at the “ninth hour” of the day (Matthew 27:45–50; Mark 15:34–37; Luke 23:44–46), or 3:00 PM, precisely the time the first lamb of the Passover sacrifice was killed. (The phrase translated “at twilight”—*in the evening* in the KJV—in Exodus 12:6 is *ben ha arbayim*, which means “between the evenings,” and refers to the period between 3:00 PM, the “ninth hour” and sunset.) The Israelites were required to put the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their homes and eat the flesh of the sacrificial animal that night. Only then would their firstborn be saved from death and set free from bondage. Similarly, because of Christ's broken body and shed blood—His self-sacrifice—God delivers us from the bondage of sin and saves us from eternal death.

Foreseeing His death and resurrection and alluding to His redemptive work as the sacrificial Lamb of God, Jesus said, “If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world....so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me” (John 6:51, 57).

The Jews of Jesus' day could not have known that every year, at the Passover, they pictured the Messiah's mission; that the story they had heard so many times was prophetic, and accurately foreshadowed not only the Messiah's death, but also the very month, day of the month, and time of day He would die. But now, in hindsight, the disciples of Jesus and thousands of others could see with great clarity how Christ fulfilled the Scriptures. Now they could reflect upon the teachings of Jesus and events of His life, and read the Law and the Prophets under an entirely new light. Now they could observe those ancient Feast days with a completely new perspective.

With his new Christ-centered view of an ancient text and a very old Festival, Peter writes, “[Y]ou were not redeemed with corruptible things...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18–19). Declaring that “Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us,” the apostle Paul adds, “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” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

The life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—the “Christevent” for short—not only transformed the lives of the disciples, but also brought profound new meaning to centuries-old practices such as the Passover and other annual Festivals.

A Christ-Centered Passover

Consider for a moment how the Christ-event turned

the disciples' world upside down.

First, as they came to the fullness of truth regarding the divine identity of Jesus, the disciples had to redefine, but not abandon, the strict monotheism they inherited from their fathers. God is one! So says Israel's sacred creed (Deuteronomy 6:4; James 2:19). But with the new understanding that (1) God sent Jesus, and (2) Jesus is God, it was necessary to redefine the meaning of “one” as it applies to the Deity. The transformation in thinking had been made by the time John penned his Gospel (John 1:1–14; 10:30; 14:7–11). God is still one, but the one Divinity consists of more than one Person.

Second, the old prejudices toward Samaritans and the uncircumcised had to be put aside as a new vision of the “people of God” came into focus (Acts 10:28,34,35; 15:7–9; Galatians 3:29; 6:16; Ephesians 3:1–6). The new “Israel of God” extended well beyond the borders of the Promised Land. Spiritual principles underlying institutions such as circumcision, the priesthood, and the ceremonial-sacrificial system—all connected to the Land and the Temple—were applied to the expanding international church.

Third, the time-honored Festivals and holydays God had given to Israel in the time of Moses took on new meaning. No longer were they only Exodus-centered memorials or harvest festivals suited to Israel's agricultural climate. The coming of Christ brought their full and universal significance to light.

The first Feast to be understood in Christological terms was the first one of the year—the Passover Festival, which includes the Days of Unleavened Bread. Let's see how the Christ-event enlightens us as to the profound meaning of this Festival.

As we have seen, Christ Himself is our Passover. Rather than offer an animal sacrifice in memory of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, we commemorate Christ's self-sacrifice by taking the symbols of His broken body and shed blood each year. We also wash each other's feet at that time, just as He did when He instituted this memorial.

Before we take the bread and wine, we examine ourselves to make sure we do not take the symbols in an unworthy manner. We realize that we are renewing the covenant we agreed to at baptism. Therefore we maintain an atmosphere of solemnity when we come to the service, and remind attendants that only the baptized may partake of the bread and wine (though others may participate in the foot-washing portion of the service if they wish).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread reminds us that the Heavenly Father has delivered us from the bondage of sin through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the true Lamb of God. We do not gradually remove leavened products from our homes during the seven days of the Festival, so technically the feast does not picture “putting sin out” over a lifetime. The blood of Christ has removed our sins, and the seven-day festival pictures the ideal of living sinless lives in Christ. However, in actuality we do not live sinless lives. Therefore the Festival's high ideal,

while not technically picturing the gradual process of discarding sinful practices, does underscore the importance of putting sin out of our lives as soon as it is discovered.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is not just about refraining from leavened products for seven days. The law states, “[S]even days you must eat unleavened bread” (Leviticus 23:6). By eating unleavened bread for seven days, the Israelites were reminded of how their forefathers came out of Egypt in haste (Exodus 12:33–34). For the followers of Christ, the Feast pictures the solution to the sin problem. We are “sinless” only to the degree in which we put Christ into our lives. He is the Source of our spiritual sustenance. He is the Bread that came down from heaven; eternal life comes through continuously “feeding” on Him (John 6:57–58).

“Let Us Keep the Feast!”

Self-examination should be an ongoing practice, but we should give it special attention as the Passover season approaches. In preparation for this year's Festival, why not do the following:

Read each of the Gospel accounts of Christ's last supper with His disciples, His agony in the garden, and His suffering, death, and resurrection. As you read, put yourself in the picture; keep in mind that He suffered and died on *your* behalf.

Read the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20), and think deeply about each command, how it is worded, how it applies to you. Let God's Law be a mirror for your life. Examine yourself under the light of each commandment. Be honest. Confess your sins to God, and think of things you can do to avoid committing those sins in the future.

Immediately after reading and meditating on the Ten Commandments, read the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Ask yourself how you measure up as you carefully read each point Christ discusses.

Whatever you do, don't neglect prayer. Make Psalm 51 your prayer. Ask God to help you see within the darkened corners of your own mind. Ask Him to remove the blinders so that you can see yourself as He sees you. Then ask Him to blot out your transgressions, wash and cleanse you, purge you, and create a clean heart within you.

Finally, read Romans 8, and just believe what it says. Then you will truly be ready to keep the Feast. “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was 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” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

What You Should Know About the Days of Unleavened Bread

This section is for those who are new to the *Church of God International*. It is also for those who have been with the church for a while but need a refresher on the basic why's and how-to's concerning the Days of Unleavened

Bread, a Festival God originally gave to ancient Israel, and whose practice continues today.

To those who are not accustomed to the practice, observing the Days of Unleavened Bread can seem “strange.” These days, casting out leaven from one's home and avoiding it for a week, sounds radical—especially for a “religious” custom.

Leavening is a substance used to ferment dough, causing it to rise or “puff up.” Without it, bread is flat, hard, sometimes even “rubbery.” These leavening agents include yeast, baking powder, and baking soda.

So what is this week of flat bread all about? Why is this Festival celebrated by the *Church of God International*?

Why Israel Kept It

Thousands of years ago, God freed the Israelites from terrible bondage and slavery in Egypt. This divine act of mercy and grace was central to Israel's history. The Israelites were to reflect on this monumental event and remember God's faithful, loving hand in action. It came to symbolize God's salvation for His people.

The night before the Israelites left for the Promised Land, after God's horrifying plague against the firstborn of Egypt, the Egyptian Pharaoh told Moses and Aaron, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested” (Exodus 12:31).

Because God caused all the firstborn of Egypt to be struck dead, the Egyptians wasted no time in begging the Israelites to leave the country. They had had enough. It was time for the Israelites to pack up their belongings and go. “So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing” (verse 34).

God therefore chose to use bread without yeast to remind Israel of her deliverance from Egypt. He said, “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt” (verse 17).

Why the Church of God International Keeps It

Because the Bible commands it (Leviticus 23:6–8)! It's quite possible—and in some cases probable—that your ancestral divisions did not come out of Egypt with Moses and Aaron. Perhaps you, the reader, may be a descendant of cruel Egyptian slave masters who enforced the Pharaoh's decree that the Israelites make bricks without straw. Why, then, would you celebrate this ancient Feast?

The apostle Paul saw deeper, more significant meaning in the “Jewish” Feast. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul addressed a problem of sexual immorality, a case in which a man had “his father's wife” (1 Corinthians 5:1). In their pride, rather than putting the unrepentant, immoral man out of the church, the Corinthians tolerated this wicked sin in their midst. Paul used “Unleavened Bread” language in his corrective words to the largely Gentile church: “Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you

may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth” (verses 6–8).

Paul compared “yeast,” or leavening, with “malice and wickedness,” or sin.

Jesus likewise spoke of sin and false teaching in terms of leaven. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” He warned (Matthew 16:6, 11; cf. verse 12; Luke 12:1).

The correlation between sin and leaven is clearly evident when read back into the Exodus account. On the night before the Israelites left Egypt, they were to sacrifice a Passover lamb and eat it. The blood of the lamb was to be put on the tops and sides of their doorframes on the houses wherein they ate. This lamb's blood, representing the blood of “Christ, our Passover lamb,” protected Israel's firstborn from the same fate as Egypt's. When the blood covers and protects us from divine retribution, we are expected to rid ourselves of sin—to repent.

This is taught in the example set all the way back in Moses' time, and we should take it to heart. As Paul wrote, “Now these things [surrounding the Exodus] occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (1 Corinthians 10:6).

Here is How You Can Keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread

It is the long-held tradition of the *Church of God International* and other churches of God to literally keep the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread as commanded by God in the books of the Law. If this has not yet been your practice, you may find it spiritually energizing. It can help you to be mindful of sin and the importance of casting it out of your life while under the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Before the Feast begins (we have holyday calendars available upon request), get rid of all the leavened products in your home. These include items such as bread, cookies, cakes, and anything else that contains leavening agents.

Eat “unleavened” bread each day throughout the Feast, as God told the Israelites to “eat bread made without yeast” (Exodus 12:18) throughout the seven days; “you must eat unleavened bread” (verse 20; cf. Leviticus 23:6).

You can bake your own “bread made without yeast” (you might want to get a palatable recipe from someone), or you can go to the local grocery store and buy Passover matzos, Ry-Krisps, Triscuits, or Wheat Thins Original (check the ingredients to be sure).

If possible in your area, attend worship services with others who are keeping the Feast. The *Church of God International* always welcomes visitors and newcomers to its services. The first and seventh days of the Feast are annual Sabbaths, distinct from the weekly Sabbath day of rest. Through Moses, God told the Israelites, “On the first

day [of the Feast] hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work... And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work” (Leviticus 23:7,8). On these days the church holds special worship services to celebrate God's calling us (spiritual Israelites) out of sin (Egypt) and into a new life in Christ (Promised Land).

Do not neglect the spiritual dimension of the Feast, which is the fulfillment of the physical. God's primary concern does not ultimately deal with bread, crackers, and going to church on the right days. Certain physical “rites” or “ceremonies” commanded of God are important and indeed required of Christians, but we should not let them become empty, shallow, and vain. There should be substance undergirding the form.

Be especially mindful of Christ's powerful, efficacious, and loving sacrifice for us at this time of year. He died for our sins. Only by applying that historic sacrifice to our lives can our sins be eradicated, washed away.

But if we claim to be “under the blood,” then we must continue to live our lives with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. If we don't, and instead live with the yeast of malice and wickedness, then we are “crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace” (Hebrews 6:6).

Let's use the spring holyday season to honor God and renew our covenant with His Son. By accepting Jesus' ultimate gift of grace, and by obeying all His commands, you can apply the blood of the Lamb to the doorframe of your life.

The Double Festival

The Passover was the first of all the annual Feasts, and historically and religiously it was the most important of all. It was called both the Feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the two really forming a double Festival.

The Passover was celebrated on the first month of the religious year, on the fourteenth of Nisan (our March/April), and commemorated the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egypt and the establishment of Israel as a nation by God's redemptive act. The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the day after the Passover and lasted seven days (Leviticus 23:5–8). This combined Feast was one of the three Feasts that all male Jews who were physically able and ceremonially clean were required by Mosaic Law to attend (Exodus 23:17; Deuteronomy 16:16). The other two were the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These were known as the pilgrimage Festivals; on all of them special sacrifices were offered, varying according to the character of the Festival (Numbers 28–29).

Theologically the Passover finds its heart in the doctrine of propitiation. The Lord entered Egypt bent on judgment (Exodus 12:12); but, seeing the blood, He passed over that house completely at peace with those who were sheltering there. His wrath was assuaged by the blood of the lamb [The New International Dictionary of the Bible, page 350]. **AG**

The Shepherd Who Became the Lamb

by Winston S. Co



Ancient Israel was an agricultural economy. There were two primary sources of livelihood: namely farming and animal husbandry. Every family owned arable land for farming and for raising livestock. Livestock was a valuable commodity and was the primary source of wealth. Both Abraham's and Job's net worth were measured in terms of livestock (Genesis 13:1-2 and Job 1:1-).

As a valuable asset, the sheep are watchfully cared for, closely shielded and attentively safeguarded. The sheep require round the clock attention. They need good pastures to graze on and clean waters to drink. They too are vulnerable to animal attacks and are too playful to be handy. The only way to ensure this is for the shepherd to stay day and night alongside his sheep – especially when in the open field. Thus, the occupation of the family shepherd often times went to the firstborn son (as in the case of Abel in Gen. 4:1-2; and in special cases to the most responsible son like David in 1 Samuel 16:10-11).

There are three major roles of a shepherd, they are:

1. He provides for the sheep. He provides the needs of the flock by leading them to grazing pasture to feed, and finding them pools of clean waters to refresh.

2. He guides the sheep. The sheep are guided in flock into the field so they won't get lost. They are gathered into the pen by night. When one goes astray it is fetched and when lost, he will search for it.

3. He protects the sheep, shields the sheep from harm and defend them from attacks by wild animals.

The Relationship

The role of a shepherd is to provide, guide and protect his flock at all cost. He is their provider and protector. David protected his sheep and rescued them from harm at the risk of his own life (1 Samuel 17:34-37).

On the other hand, most sheep grow to trust and rely upon their shepherd. They learn to recognize his voice and even learn the sound of the tapping of his staff. A bond is built and the sheep feel fully secure. The sheep will follow him. Wherever the shepherd leads, the sheep follows.

He would then watch the flock. If any sheep would stray the shepherd would follow it until it was brought back to the flock. He would also provide the flock with water by leading them to a stream or at troughs attached to wells. In the evening, the shepherd would call the flock back to the sheepfold. A sheepfold is an enclosure or pen for the sheep. Usually the walls of the sheepfold were made of stone. As the shepherd led the sheep back to the fold, he would count them to make sure that all had returned. He would let them pass under his rod to ensure their numbers are complete.

During the evening the shepherd would watch the entrance to the fold to ensure that none of the flock would be endangered. The gate to the sheepfold is the gate that

the sheep would pass through as they entered the enclosure. The sheepfold provides protection and the shepherd allows the sheep to enter the sheepfold by the gate.

Yahweh has always been portrayed as the Shepherd of Israel. The Jews know this by heart. They are all so familiar with David's Psalm 23 which says "The Lord is my Shepherd" and "The Good Shepherd" mentioned in Ezekiel 34:22-31. The Title of "Shepherd" of Israel belongs to God. "He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and will gently lead those that have their young" (Isa 40:11), is a picture drawn from pastoral life of Yahweh's care over His children.

John 10

Using the shepherd story in John 10, Jesus claimed, "I am the gate for the sheep," and John 10:7, "I am the good shepherd" John 10:11, 14. Jesus said, "I am the gate for the sheep," a gate into security and the only access into the sheep's pen. This claim was clear to the Jews. They knew exactly what Jesus was claiming. The title of the Good Shepherd of Israel is without doubt Jesus' claim of being the Messiah.

The Sin Offering

Now, the Scripture says the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). In ancient times, God has provided a way of teaching and reminding the people about sin and the consequences of such action. This practice is known as the sacrificial system. The instruction is written in Leviticus 4:27-31.

The sinner would lean on the sheep, put their hand on the head of the lamb and confess their sins. So, there is a symbol of transference of sin and guilt. In effect the ritual symbolized the lamb's taking away of your sin and died in your stead. It taught and reminded the sinner that death is the penalty of sin and blood had to be shed. Hebrews 9:22 tells us that "blood is required to cleanse sins". (See also Hebrews 10:1-4 and 11)

The Lamb of God

The ancient sacrificial system points to Christ as the messiah and savior (Hebrews 9:23-28, Romans 3:25-26). Jesus is the lamb of God and as the Passover sacrificial lamb He took all our sins as God laid upon Him all the sins of the world (Isaiah 53:6-7). Peter said: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1 Peter 2:24-25)." Paul added: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)."

Jesus is the only true sacrifice for the sins of the world. The shadow or symbol of the sacrificial lamb is overtaken by the reality that is in Christ (Hebrews 10:11-18).

Unique Perspective

John has a unique perspective about the role of Christ. He knew that Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29-36). In the heavenly realm Jesus is portrayed as the Lamb of God who is the shepherd of God's people – the saints (Revelation 7:17).

This is a great truth, a unique insight and a divine perspective. Jesus is the Lamb of God because God made Him an atonement for the sins of the world. It was God the Father who sacrificed Christ as our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7). Therefore, in God the Father's perspective and in the spiritual realm of things, Jesus is the Lamb – The Passover Lamb – of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Summation

The Passover is all about Jesus Christ and His redemptive sacrifice. Jesus the shepherd of God's people is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was the Word who created all things, the God of the Old Testament, the God who instituted the Passover and the Lord of glory.

Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God – He is our Passover. Our shepherd became the lamb. Our Creator came to die for us. Therefore, let us all put our faith in Him. He will forgive our sins and grant us salvation and eternal life. He will cause death to pass over us and lead us into His majestic presence. **AG**

**"Thy word is a lamp
unto my feet, and a
light unto my path"**
Psalms 119:105

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It's All About Relationship

by Ferdie Padilla



Much of the reality we face deals with the inescapable fact that we all have relationships one way or another. Much of what drives us, influences us or affects our lives in so many ways is due to our relationships. And when we do come to think about it, it's really all about relationships. When it comes to salvation, we also face basically the same thing. When we come to think about it, the whole plan of God boils down to something we all can relate to, something we can understand because it's something we all have experienced. The whole plan of God involves relationship. If we use this framework in understanding it, this will make us better appreciate His plan of salvation for mankind and a lot of other "doctrinal" concepts found in the pages of your Bible.

In The Beginning

Relationships implies that there are at least two individuals. It's difficult to imagine whether a relationship exists between "me" and "I", between "yourself" and "yourself". But we can be certain that a relationship can exist between 2 or more persons. Now, from the very beginning (if there's really a beginning), a relationship had been in existence. John 1:1 (Today's NIV) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning." Dropping to John 1:18 (TNIV) "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known." We can check other translations for the same verse and the same idea is expressed: John 1:18 (KJV) "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." In the old English, "bosom" implies closeness to the heart and that is exactly what is expressed in John 1:18 (NRSV) "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known." This passage, therefore, reveals a relationship between God the Father and His Son from the beginning. It is very clear that a Father-Son relationship was already

in place. It was a familial relationship from the very beginning.

Now, let's go to another beginning account in the book of Genesis, to the account when man was made. Gen 1:26-27 (NIV) "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'" So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This verse would make us wonder and ask, "Why would God create man in His own image?" If we study the creation account, man is the only one who is special, different from all other creatures God created. He was the only one created in God's own image. Man, therefore, is special by this very fact. It is evident then that God has something in mind for mankind. And if we juxtapose these verses alongside Ephesians 1:3-6, we can better appreciate the thought of Eph 1:3-6 (NIV) "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves." These verses are saying we have a destiny already laid out, already set even "before the creation of the world". We are to become holy and blameless and be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ. In other words, God wants to have a familial relationship with us, a father-son relationship.

Love Will Make It Work

Now, a relationship to work must have something in between the parties that do just that — make it work. And that something is a concept, again, we all can relate to. It is called love. We all have experienced it in various degrees depending on what kind of relationship we are into. We have experienced the love of our parents, of our siblings,

of our friends or of our colleagues. We have experienced the love of that special someone we call our spouses. So we know how it goes. Since we know that a family relationship has been in place before time as we know it began, the conclusion is that love has always been there. God the Father loves the Son. The Son loves the Father, that's why He came to do His will so that their plan for family expansion can be fulfilled. And that's why it is said in 1John 4:8 (NIV) "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." He is the embodiment of love. It is exactly what God expressed when He predestined us for adoption (Eph 1:4-5).

Originally there were 2. God wanted to expand this relationship to include us. And God wanted to have the same loving relationship with all of us. That is why we should learn to love, to be inclusive of others. It starts with the immediate family – husbands and wives, parents and children, sibling to sibling. It creeps into relatives – aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents. It flows to neighbors then the community at large then crosses geographical boundaries. It transcends ethnicity, social status and wealth. It would include our household helpers, our employees, our employers, our friends, even the beggars in the streets.

It's All About Relationship

The point we are driving at is – it's all about relationship – a relationship that is destined to last forever. All of the people we see, whether we directly interact with them or not, are future brothers and sisters in Christ. We will be spending eternity with them too. We will not start learning to love them there in the future but now, today. We cannot afford to delay. If we don't know how to love today or try to learn and really learn that, what is the guarantee that we will do that in the Kingdom of God? God wants us to learn and act on love because it cements relationships. It builds. It nurtures. It maintains. That's why the Bible talks about this subject so much. That's why the Bible has many admonitions that support or is related to this concept.

If we think about it, much of what the Bible teaches us is about relationship, precisely because that is what God has in mind when He created us. He wants a familial relationship with us. The Ten Commandments is about relationship, of putting in guidelines that will develop, maintain, nurture and strengthen relationships. The first 4 commandments are geared towards our relationship with God, serving Him only, revering His name, keeping His Sabbaths. They are about being faithful to the One who created us. They are about knowing who the true God is so we can know our true destiny, of the bright, wonderful, awesome eternity that awaits us. The last 6 commandments are geared towards our relationship with fellowman. They are about respecting what belongs to the other person, of maintaining a loving relationship among families. They are about protecting the life of another person. The last 6 commandments teaches us to maintain and nurture a loving relationship with others, precisely because that is what God has in mind when He offers to

everyone the opportunity to be part of His Divine Family. God is expanding His Family and since He is a God of love that is what is expected of His children. So we can now look at the Law from this perspective. The Law does not exist for its own sake. The Law will not appear restrictive to those who are saying it is restrictive if they understand it from the framework of relationship. The whole point of the Law is love as Paul says in Rom 13:10 (NIV) "Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." But just learning the Law or knowing it, is not enough. It has practical application in our relation towards God and fellowman. The Law exists to make our relationship with God and fellowman work. So you see, it is all about relationship. And it's not just any relationship. It's a loving relationship. It's a relationship where we also think of the other person's welfare, not just our own.

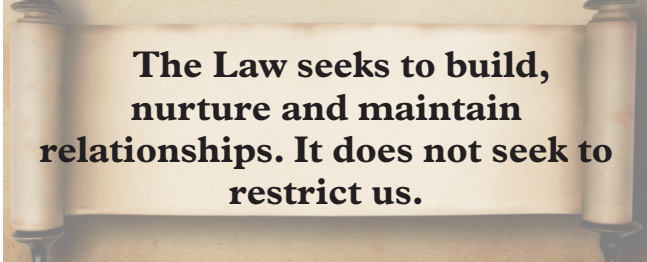
Now even the Feasts of God are about relationships. And if we approach the festivals of God from this point of view, we can learn more and appreciate the things God is doing for us. Take the Passover for instance. The Passover, as we know, pictures the sacrifice of Christ for all mankind. He is referred to as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). He came to die for all of us, for me, for you. Other people who are not observing the Passover may cynically ask, "Why would God allow that to happen?" or "Why would Christ die for sinners? It's not logical." Well, precisely that's our point. If we understand that Christ did not just die for anyone, but for a potential brother or sister (to borrow from our pastor), then we can understand and better appreciate why Christ did it. He died for a potential family member. It makes sense if we view it from this perspective. It has to be personal to Christ and God. They have to look at us as more than created beings. If you were Creator, would you die for any lower being? Maybe not. But in our case, it's different. We were created in God's own image and likeness. We are special to God. We are His potential children. That's why Christ was willing to die for us. That's why the Father was willing to take the risk to send His Only Son to save us, His children. If we understand this, then the promise of adoption as children of God is literal in its sense. We are not going to be figurative children of God. It's all about relationship you see. And it's not just any relationship. It is a loving and caring familial relationship. Perhaps you can use this framework to examine the other festivals of God found in Leviticus 23 and you will find the element of relationship in them.

Anything That Destroy Relationships Is Prohibited

Now, using the framework of relationships, we can now also better appreciate why some things are prohibited by God. Many think God is harsh, strict, restrictive with so many don'ts. But if we just pause and put things into perspective using the framework of having good relationships, we can understand why this is so. Why is unwarranted anger prohibited? Why is hatred discouraged? Why should we not envy? Why should we

not slander or gossip or tell lies or be unfaithful to our spouses? And why should we not bow down to idols or slander God's name or break His Sabbaths and other laws? Why indeed? There can be no anger, hatred, envy, malicious talk, slander, lies, unfaithfulness because they destroy relationships with our fellowman. Idolatry, Sabbath breaking, using God's name in vain are prohibited because they destroy our relationship with God. And these are the very things the enemy wants to exploit so we are removed from having a good relationship with God and fellowman. The Law sees to it, therefore, that we are informed of the things that destroy relationships so we can altogether avoid them. The Law seeks to build, nurture and maintain relationships. It does not seek to restrict us. This should now be very clear to us.

And whatever things that build up relationships, these are the things the Bible encourages us to dwell on and to make part of our very beings. That is why emphasis is put on faith, hope, honesty, integrity, forgiveness, being joyful, being patient and most of all on love. These are the things that will serve us in good stead in God's Kingdom. These are the things that will bond us together as God's children, for all eternity. We are being encouraged to be positive in our outlook in life because a positive person has a lot to bring into a relationship. It is infectious in a positive way. It brightens one's day. It uplifts someone who is down. It inspires others to do the same. That is why we are admonished to think about positive things in Philippians 4:8 (NIV) "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." If we maintain that positivity, we will become positive influences. We can show other people that this is how it is for those who believe God and obey His commandments,



**The Law seeks to build,
nurture and maintain
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restrict us.**

that we are people who can be trusted, that we are worthy of anyone's trust, that we seek to build up others not put them down, that we are honest and seek the good of everyone else. This is proclaiming the good news to them that they too can take part in this wonderful relationship with God if they so choose. Someone has just to show them. And that someone is supposedly us, true Christians. And what better way to proclaim that when we live by the standard God has set for us.

God Wants a Personal Relationship With Us Today and For Eternity

By this time, this one thing should now be clear to us:

God wants a personal relationship with us. You and I have a place in the grand scheme of things that God has planned. You and I were thought of by God in that wonderful plan. And we should understand that this personal relationship would only be "complete" if we finally see Him face to face, talk to Him face to face, laugh with Him in His literal presence. That is the reason why a change in composition is necessary, so we can see Him as He is, talk to Him, be with Him, laugh with Him. He wants to enjoy our (now how do we say this?) literal presence too. The only way for that to happen is if we are changed from mortal to immortality. Now, doesn't that make the resurrection concept a little bit more understandable or more personal for us? The resurrection is not some far off concept that we cannot understand. If we view it from this perspective, then it holds personal meaning for us. Why do we have to be resurrected at all or for those who will not die, to be changed? The answer is really simple and understandable. Paul said it in 1 Corinthians 15:50 (NIV) "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." What is he saying? For us to finally inherit God's Kingdom and therefore see Him as He is, we must be changed from mortal to immortality. We also read in 1 Corinthians 15:53 NIV "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." Don't these verses now hold more meaning for us? The promise of eternal life now even becomes clearer. God promises us eternal life precisely because He wants that loving family relationship with you and me and the rest of mankind to last forever. God is eternal and by necessity, we must live on for eternity too.

The relationship framework also explains why we hold on to our faith with fervor, why we believe and act on the commandments of God, why we observe the Sabbath, why we keep the annual festivals of God, why we adhere to the tithing law, why we keep the food laws and all other commandments of God with faith and conviction. We understand the implication of that relationship with God the Father and His Son. We can always say, "My Father will never leave me. My elder brother Jesus Christ will never abandon me. I know because He died for me." It really gets personal. It gives us strength to carry on with life even if we face adversity or persecution. We do because we know we can rely on God's promises. We know because of one thing we are holding on to – that of a family relationship. As a matter of fact, we know human families stick it out, no matter what. How much more then with God and His Son? Therefore, we have this confidence that whatever happens, God is there for us. It's because we have this close Father-child relationship. We are family to Him. It's all about relationship you see. And it's not just any relationship. It is a loving familial relationship that will never end. And that is something we should all look forward to with great anticipation because it will soon become reality. We will all be in God's Kingdom, born into His Family – you and me. **AG**

John Chapter 11:

The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus

by Rene D. Corpuz

It's a straightforward account of the resurrection of a man who's been dead 3-4 days. While the Lord Jesus will use this as a very convincing proof of His power over life and death, and of God the Father's support and approval of Him as the Anointed—the Messiah, but there is more to it than meets the eye. The apostle John gave us sufficient information to pick up a few important lessons about life in general and of our future.

Three Important Lessons

First Lesson:

How Jesus Responds to Prayers

Martha, Mary and Lazarus had faith. They believed and trusted in the Lord. What would be going on in their minds as Lazarus lay sick, feeling the reality of death? (Imagine yourself in Lazarus' place, or of the sisters Martha and Mary.) With a friend like Jesus whom they knew loves Lazarus, and had the power to heal and save him from death, where is He in this time of need? After all, they'd known Jesus to have healed those He had met for the first time and barely knew (from their perspective), and thinking surely, the Lord would come for his beloved friend Lazarus! And yet, the Lord did not come as they would have expected, nor simply “spoke the word” as they would have known and might have witnessed that He has demonstrated before.

Jesus loves Martha, Mary and Lazarus, with the kind of love that is genuine, the very expression of true love, of a Creator. But this time, Lazarus and his sisters will have to learn to deal with and accept a delayed response to their prayer. And the response is not quite according to how they wanted it to be. And while they were waiting for the Lord's response, they will (and actually did) experience “real pain and suffering.” The prayer of Martha and Mary will be answered, not just in the “usual way.”

Mary and Martha knew Jesus could do something about their brother's 'life-and-death' situation. They are aware that Jesus only needed to say the word for Lazarus to be healed. Jesus had demonstrated in time past that He can see, and sense people's conditions and thoughts even though they were not necessarily in His immediate presence. The sisters have witnessed that Jesus responds to requests for healing with an immediate yes, at times an immediate no, a later, and a “convince-me-first,” and this time, theirs will be a “yes-but-first-you-will-experience-pain-suffering-and-tears-before-joy.”

Even though Jesus said, this sickness is not unto death, he did not mean Lazarus will not die, because he will actually allow for Lazarus to die. But He did mean that Lazarus' death will be temporary, just 3-4 days. Jesus knew and understood the pain of losing a loved one, even though He knew it's only temporary. And though Jesus planned to bring Lazarus back to life, He was emotionally touched by the tears of Mary and He wept with her!

Martha and Mary will have their prayers answered, but not without going through a temporary period of pain and suffering. And for many of us in this time and age, there will be similar occasions. Jesus loved the sisters, even as the Father and the Lord loves us. And there will be those time in our lives where before God steps in to grant us what we ask for, that we would have to go through some painful experiences and sufferings.

Second Lesson:

A Lesson on How To Respond When God Delays Answer to Prayers

The Response of Mary and Martha is quite exemplary of being true disciples of the Lord. While Mary and Martha were hurting, and in grief, yet they harbored no ill feelings or hatred toward Jesus, that tells us a lot of Martha and Mary's character. They believed that had Jesus been there sooner, Lazarus would not have died. They also understood and accepted that Jesus might not, and in fact didn't, come on time, and might not, and did not, heal Lazarus in time. Having already buried Lazarus, and almost not wanting to re-open the tomb tells us that Martha and Mary had already accepted that they have lost their brother and their hope of seeing their brother again would be at the 'resurrection at the last day.'

Yet, having experienced the reality of their brother's death, they believed the Lord and followed His instructions to open the tomb. And their trust would be well-rewarded! They would have covered their noses, along with the rest of the community that went with them, as the foul smell spread when the tomb was opened. By this time, Lazarus' body had begun to decay. Those who were there, would become witnesses, not only of the reality of resurrection, but of the state of a decomposing body. This is no mere stage play. Lazarus wasn't 'playing dead,' the stench of his dead body is undeniable and revolting. Believing and trusting in the Lord has real rewards and benefits. And for Mary and Martha, that unfailing faith brought their brother back from the world of the dead. And that's because they did not harbor ill

feelings toward their beloved friend—the Lord Jesus, despite their pain and suffering!

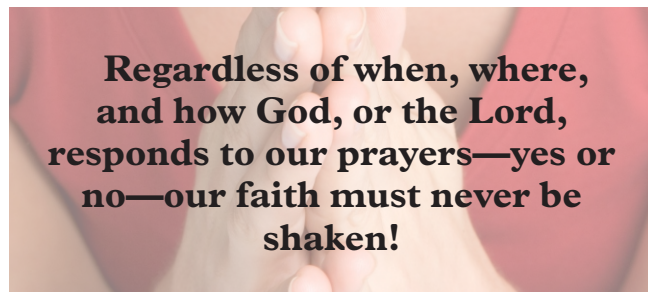
‘I believe,’ Martha said, ‘you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world...’ We’ve had plenty of prayers that were left unanswered, heartfelt requests that weren’t granted. But that should never change our faith and trust in the Lord and Our Father. If we truly believe that God knows best, and that His Will is what must be done, then we must fully trust and commit to His Will. Regardless of when, where, and how God, or the Lord, responds to our prayers—yes or no—our faith must never be shaken!

Third Lesson:

A Lesson and Hope in the Resurrection

In Jesus’ days, many Teachers of the Law, the Pharisees and the Priests are hypocrites, not all, but most are. However, they still teach the truth when it’s not against their favor or they have no personal interests in the matter. And they taught the truth about the resurrection well enough, Martha understood it well. The dead ‘temporarily’ coming back to life is not new to Jews and Israelites, their prophets of old are known to have raised people from the dead. And Martha is well aware that Jesus is well favored by God and grants His request of raising the dead back to life. She might have even been a witness, once or twice, thus her statement ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died...’ Interestingly, Martha is very familiar with a resurrection in “the last day”, a likely reference to Daniel 12:2-3.

We know we can die at any time, though hopefully not anytime soon. But if we remain faithful to the end and have absolute faith in the Lord, we are very much ‘guaranteed,’ of the promise of a resurrection. Jesus intended to use this occasion to demonstrate His power to the disciples, so that they “may believe,” encouraged, and their faith strengthened.



Jesus openly prayed ‘for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me...’ It is also for our benefit, that we may believe that the Lord Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph, born two thousand years ago, is one whose words and promises we can completely trust. We can fully entrust our lives to Him, and no matter what happens to us in this life, we have a guarantee that we shall be raised from death!

We Can't Please Everyone, Corruption of in High Places.

It is true in Jesus’ time, and it is true in our time. What Jesus did was real, it was extraordinary, a very powerful miracle, and one that merits gratitude and praise. Yet, despite all the good that it represents, there will always be those who will not be happy. There will even be those who would set their hands against or in opposition to a good deed. While many are glad and thankful that Lazarus is raised from the dead, there are those who wished he had remained dead! Envy and lust for power distorts logic or reason. There will be people who are ungrateful. Remember the prophet Daniel’s experience? While Daniel was instrumental in the saving of the lives of the King of Babylon’s “wise men,” those whom he helped save constantly plotted against him and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.

The Priests and the Pharisees keep God’s Laws, they “observe God’s festivals,” but they’re also a gang of murderers, power-grabbers, schemers, thieves, hypocrites! And these are supposed to be the ‘righteous’ political leaders, “teachers of the law,” serve in the very Temple of God and in the synagogues! We are seeing not just one or two persons conspiring, who were supposed to be outstanding and upright citizens, we are looking at a Council of Elders!

This is why an upright character is important to God. We must be trustworthy and of high moral integrity. Psalms 5:4-6 warns us:

“For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with You. The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You hate all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.”

God will destroy those He is displeased with, and tells us what character we must have if we desire to enter His kingdom in Psalms 15.

**1 A Psalm of David. LORD, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill?
2 He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;
3 He who does not backbite with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor does he take up a reproach against his friend;
4 In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the LORD; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;
5 He who does not put out his money at usury, Nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.**

The resurrection of Lazarus gives us hope, and evidence of our hope. It also gives us the sad realization that we cannot always trust the people who are supposed to lead us into achieving that hope. To enter the kingdom of God, we must do the right thing, and doing the right thing also means that we have to do it ourselves... **AG**

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