

The Passover Begins God's Master Plan

The great God of the universe created mankind for a stupendous, awe-inspiring purpose! That purpose was first revealed in the Garden of Eden. God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:26).

Your Bible reveals that God is reproducing Himself in man. God made mankind for the purpose of being fashioned into the very character "image" of God — ultimately to be born as spirit members in the universe-ruling Family of God. Previous ministudies have made this clear.

God has mapped out a plan by which He is fulfilling His awesome purpose for mankind. God's master plan is outlined in the form of seven annual festivals that Christians are to observe every year to keep themselves in the knowledge of His plan.

It was not until after the Israelites were delivered from Egypt that God revealed His annual festivals. Through Moses, God formally introduced these festivals to His nation Israel — His "church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38, Authorized Version).

God used the yearly agricultural harvests of Palestine as symbolic types of His spiritual "harvests" of mankind. In Palestine there is a spring harvest followed by a much larger fall harvest.

Today, we can understand from the teachings of Christ and the apostles that God intends the spring festivals to illustrate to His Church yearly that all those He has called to become His Spirit-begotten children since Christ's first coming are only the "firstfruits" (Jas. 1:18) — only the relatively small beginning of His great spiritual harvest of mankind into His spiritual Family. Later, as pictured by the festivals of the much larger autumn harvest season, God will call the rest of the billions of humanity to salvation and sonship in His glorious Family after Christ's return.

A summary of these annual festivals is

found in Leviticus 23. Let's commence this revealing seven-part study of God's annual festivals and learn exactly what they signify for Spirit-begotten Christians today.

1. Who does the Bible say instituted these annual festivals? Lev. 23:1-2, 4.

Notice that these are not the "feasts of the Jews" or "feasts of Moses," as some have falsely assumed. They are God's own feasts, which God originated and gave to His people to keep year by year.

2. What is the first festival to be observed each year? Lev. 23:5. When was the first Passover? Ex. 12:1-14, 21-27.

The Passover, the first of God's commanded annual festivals, is the beginning, the very first step, in God's great master plan of salvation for mankind.

Although the original Passover was to be a yearly memorial to remind Israel of God's intervention in delivering them from slavery in Egypt (a type of sin — Heb. 11:25-26), it also pictured, in advance, the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ, "our Passover" lamb (I Cor. 5:7, I Pet. 1:8-19), for the sins of mankind. The sparing of the Israelites' firstborn from the death angel through the shed blood of the first Passover lamb is a type of our being spared today from the eternal penalty of sin (Rom. 6:23) through Christ's sacrifice.

After Jesus' death, the Passover, celebrated with the new symbols of bread and wine, became a yearly memorial of His sacrifice, for Jesus became the reality that the Passover lamb had foreshadowed.

3. Did God command, before Sinai, that the Passover be kept forever? Ex. 12:14, 24. Did Jesus Christ observe the Passover? John 2:13, 23.

Jesus kept the annual festivals. He, as the God of the Old Testament, was the One who originally gave them to Israel.

4. Did Jesus observe the Passover with His disciples on the night before He was crucified? Matt. 26:17-20. What was one

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new command He gave them regarding the observance of the Passover? John 13:1-5.

5. Did Peter, at first, refuse to allow Jesus to wash his feet? Verses 6-8. Could Peter have any relationship with Jesus unless he allowed Him to wash his feet? Verse 8. Why did Jesus institute this new observance of foot washing during His last Passover meal? Verses 12-16.

Foot washing in Jesus' time was a menial task that only servants performed, when visitors entered a house. Open-toed sandals were the customary footwear of that time and feet would become dusty.

Jesus was illustrating to His disciples that He had come to earth to serve mankind. Shortly afterward, He proved the extent of His extreme service for this world when He gave His very life for the sins of all mankind. Foot washing depicts the attitude of humility and service to others that Christ desires every Christian to have.

6. Did Jesus plainly command His disciples to wash each other's feet? John 13:14-15. Were they to teach the world to do likewise? Matt. 28:19-20. Are those who obey Christ's words by partaking of this meaningful ceremony promised a special blessing? John 13:17, 14:23.

7. What completely new way of observing the Passover did Jesus institute shortly before His death, as He ate the Passover meal with His apostles? Luke 22:14-20, Matt. 26:26-29. What command did He give regarding this new manner of keeping the Passover? Luke 22:19, Matt. 28:19-20.

Jesus did not abolish the Passover — He merely changed the symbols used. Instead of shedding the blood of the lamb and eating the roasted body, we are now to use wine and unleavened bread. The Passover is now to be kept as an annual memorial of Christ's death. It reaffirms year by year "till He comes" (I Cor. 11:26) the true Christian's faith in the blood of "Christ, our Passover" (I Cor. 5:7) for the remission of sins, as symbolized by the drinking of wine.

Eating the broken bread symbolizes our faith in the body of Christ, broken for our physical healing. Jesus Christ allowed His body to be literally ripped open in dozens of places by scourging, until He could not even be recognized. He suffered this torture so we, through faith in His broken body for us, may have the forgiveness of our physical

sins — the healing of our bodies when we are sick (Isa. 53:5, I Pet. 2:24, Ps. 103:2-3, Jas. 5:14-15) — as well as the forgiveness of our spiritual sins through Christ's shed blood. And so the bread is a reminder to us that it is by "His stripes we are healed." (If you have not read it, send for our free booklet, *The Plain Truth About Healing*.)

As Christ Himself commanded, true Christians today should be observing the Passover on the eve of His death — on the 14th day of the first month of God's sacred calendar, in the evening, after the beginning of the day.

8. Did the apostle Paul teach New Testament Christians to keep the Passover by partaking of the new symbols of bread and wine, just as Jesus had done and commanded? I Cor. 5:7-8, 11:23-26.

The original true Church that Jesus built annually kept the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread — *not* Easter.

9. Will the Passover be kept by Christ and born-again Christians when He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth? Matt. 26:29, Luke 22:15-16. In the meantime, was the Passover to be kept by God's Church as a memorial of Christ's death? Review I Corinthians 11:25-26.

Jesus commanded His disciples to keep the Passover in remembrance of Him until He returns. The apostles did keep it, and today, God's true Church is still keeping the Passover.