



Volume 10 Issue 5

West Suffolk Epistle West Suffolk Baptist Church



May 2023

Thoughtfully Reformed - Redemptively Relevant

Why Did Jesus Institute the Lord's Supper on the Passover?

As the book of Exodus begins, Israel has been in Egypt for more than four hundred years (Exodus 12:40). They are now in bondage under an oppressive Pharaoh. The early chapters of Exodus describe the calling of Moses to be the one who will lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt. He comes before Pharaoh demanding that Israel be allowed to go and worship the Lord, but Pharaoh refuses. God then sends a series of increasingly severe plagues on Egypt. Pharaoh's stubbornness in the face of the first nine plagues results in God's pronouncement of a final plague that will result in Israel's redemption from slavery. God warns that He will go into the midst of Egypt and that every firstborn in the land will die. It is in the context of the warning of this final plague that we find God's instructions regarding the Passover in Exodus 12.

God begins with a statement indicating that the Passover and Exodus will mark a new beginning for the nation of Israel. The month of Abib (late March and early April) is to be the first month of the year for God's people. This emphasizes the fact that the exodus from Egypt is a key event, a turning point, in redemptive history. So central is the event that from this point forward, God is frequently described in reference to the exodus (Exodus 20:2; Leviticus 11:45; Numbers 15:41; Deuteronomy 5:6; Joshua 24:17; Judges 6:8; 1 Samuel 10:18; 2 Kings 17:36; Psalm 81:10; Jeremiah 11:4; Daniel 9:15; Hosea 11:1; Amos 2:10). He is identified as the One who redeemed His people from slavery.

In later years, the observation of the Passover would involve the priesthood (Deuteronomy 16:5–7), but on the night of the original Passover, the responsibility for this ceremony falls to the head of each household. The head of every household is commanded to take a male lamb that is one year old and without any blemishes. This substitutionary lamb must be a symbol of perfection. As such, it foreshadows the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who was uniquely without blemish (1 Peter 1:19). At twilight, the lamb for each household is to be killed.

The Lord then reveals what the Israelites are to do with the slain lambs and why they are to do it. Each head of a household is to take the blood of the lamb and put it on the doorposts and lintel of his house. God explains that the blood will be a sign. When He sees the blood on the door, He will pass over that house, and the firstborn in it will be spared from the coming judgment that is to fall on Egypt. After the lambs are killed by the head of the household, they are to be roasted and eaten with the people dressed and prepared to leave on a moment's notice. Since the Passover is a "sacrifice" (Exodus 12:27; 34:25; Deuteronomy 16:2), the eating of the lamb is a sacrificial meal like that associated with the peace offering described in Leviticus 3 and 7. In such meals, the body of the sacrificial victim is offered to believers to eat after the sacrifice is made (Leviticus 7:15).

In Exodus 12:14–20, God reveals the way future generations of Israelites are to observe the Passover. The exodus from Egypt is to be commemorated in the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which will be commenced with the Passover observance. The people are always to remember their slavery in Egypt and God's act of redemption in freeing them from this bondage. The Passover, therefore, is to be observed throughout their generations.



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Exodus 12:21–28 contains Moses' instructions to the people regarding the Passover and the people's response. Moses instructs the people to mark the doors using hyssop, a plant that will later be used in connection with various purification rituals (Leviticus 14:49–52; Numbers 19:18–19). Although some scholars have denied that the Passover is a sacrifice, Moses specifically refers to it as such in Exodus 12:27. Although no specific sin is mentioned, the blood of the lamb turns away the wrath of God. Here again the Passover foreshadows the redemptive work of Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7). The tenth and final plague comes on Egypt just as God warned through Moses and Aaron, and the firstborn throughout the land are struck dead. Only those covered by the blood of the lamb are spared. As a result of this final plague, Pharaoh finally relents and commands Moses and the Israelites to go. The beginning of the exodus itself is described in Exodus 12:33–42. The reason for God's instructions to be prepared to leave in haste now becomes clear. The Egyptians want the Israelites out immediately and urge them to depart. The Israelites plunder the Egyptians of their silver and gold, and after 430 years, they begin the journey out of Egypt and toward the promised land.

Our brief survey of Exodus 12 reveals several important facts about the Passover. The blood of the Passover lamb distinguished the people of God from the unbelieving Egyptians, and observation of the Passover was a sign of faith in God. The Passover also marked Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt. It commemorated her birth as a nation. Throughout all of Israel's generations, the Passover was to be a memorial of God's great redemptive act. It was also to be a teaching opportunity for Israelite parents, who were to explain its significance to their children.

In the later prophetic books of the Old Testament, the exodus would be viewed as the paradigmatic act of redemption. When the prophets looked toward God's future work of redemption, they compared it to the original exodus and spoke of it in terms of a new and greater exodus. We see such language, for example, in Isaiah 52:11–12, where God commanded Israel to depart from Babylon using language reminiscent of that used in connection with the original exodus from Egypt. At the close of the Old Testament, the Israelites were looking forward to a new and greater exodus.

When the Gospels open, it is no coincidence that numerous parallels are seen between Jesus and Moses and between Jesus and Israel. Jesus was even taken down into Egypt only to return after the death of Herod. This is said to have occurred "to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (Matthew 2:15). Herod's decree to kill all the male children in Bethlehem is a gruesome echo of Pharaoh's decree to kill all the male children of the Israelites (Matthew 2:16; Exodus 1:15–22). Commentators discuss even more parallels, but the point of the parallels is to communicate to the reader that the long-awaited time of redemption was at hand. The prophesied new exodus was near.

Why, then, did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper on the Passover the night before His crucifixion? In the *first* place, it is because He is the fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed by the Passover lamb. His blood, the blood of the new covenant, averts the wrath of God for those who place their faith in Him. *Second*, it is because the Last Supper was the eve of the prophesied greater new covenant act of redemption—the promised act of redemption that the prophets described in terms of a new exodus—and just as the first exodus was preceded by the institution of the Passover, the greater new exodus was preceded by the institution of the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on this night to signify that this new exodus was about to begin. This act indicated that the time of redemption had come. ~ *Dr Keith A. Mathison*



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Apostasy and How It Happens

I can still recall the conversation although it took place more than three decades ago. A shocked friend asked, “Have you heard that Sarah is no longer a Christian?” What was so alarming to my friend was that Sarah had been one of the most influential, and apparently fruitful, members of her Inter-Varsity group. What would those who had been influenced by her witness to Christ say, or do? Would they be shaken to the core and now doubt their own Christian faith? After all, the person who had pointed them to Christ no longer trusted Him.

On occasion we wonder if an individual really has been converted. And sometimes we have an inexplicable, ill-defined sense that something is missing. But we cannot read the heart. Even so, we hear of friends—whose faith we never doubted—turning away from Christ.

Apostasy is the old, vigorous word to describe this abandonment of Christ. The New Testament church was familiar with it. It was a major concern of the author of Hebrews. That is why he wrote the often-discussed words of Hebrews 6:4–6:

Those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance.

Some in the early church thought that the phrase “*restore them again*” meant that those who stumbled could not be received back into fellowship. But our author does not have the penitent in mind. Rather, he is thinking of those whose hardness of heart blocks the way to the cross and proves irreversible.

It has been said that there is no more powerful or detailed description of the true Christian in the New Testament than in the words of Hebrews 6:4–6. That is surely a breathtaking statement in the light of what is said about the first readers a few verses later. The author is confident of something “better” in them—the very things that accompany salvation (Hebrews 6:9). The implication is that, however powerful the experiences described in 6:4–6 may be, these are not the definitive marks of a Christian. They may be present when genuine faith is absent. In fact, Hebrews is telling us that which is possible to experience without actually being a Christian.

Something must be missing therefore from this list of influences and experiences. What Hebrews has already said about an earlier generation brings it to light: “*the gospel was preached . . . to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith*” (Hebrews 4:2, NKJV). There was no real trust in Christ, the crucified, risen, and reigning Savior.

The truth and the power of the gospel were experienced. But “experience” in itself is not regeneration unless gospel grace penetrates into the heart. Hebrews 6:4–6 makes no mention of the crucified One being trusted and sin being rejected. Rather, despite rich spiritual experiences, heart unbelief and rejection of Christ, crucifying Him ourselves, are grimly possible.

The solemn fact is that none of us can tell the difference between the beginning of backsliding and the beginning of apostasy. Both look the same. So what are the tell-tale signs of this sickness unto death? Are there early symptoms that might alert us to our spiritual danger?



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Apostasy and How It Happens *Continued from Page 3*

Hebrews 6:8–12 suggests *three* things we should look out for. **First**, we should look for the presence of “thorns and thistles” (v. 8). Here Hebrews echoes the words of our Lord in the Parable of the Soils. In some soils (hearts) the good seed of the Word is planted and seems to take root. But in fact the soil is infested with weeds that strangle the fruit of the good seed. *“The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful”* (Mark 4:19, NKJV).

Second, we should look for the absence of *“things that [always] accompany salvation”* (Hebrews 6:9). What are these things? They are, surely, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–24). Paul interestingly contrasts verbally the fruit of the Spirit with the works of the flesh. These marks of grace are the natural outcome of regeneration. Furthermore, the cross has a central place in such a life, for *“those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Galatians 5:24, NKJV).

The **third** thing is perhaps the most alarming: The failure to show *“diligence”* and a tendency to become *“sluggish”* (Hebrews 6:11–12, NKJV). Earlier the writer had warned how easy it is just to *“drift away”* (Hebrews 2:1). But this drifting happens slowly, and it often goes unnoticed.

Yes, apostasy happens. Sometimes the catalyst is flagrant sin. The pain of conviction and repentance is refused, and the only alternative to it is wholesale rejection of Christ. But sometimes the catalyst is a thorn growing quietly in the heart, an indifference to the way of the cross, a drifting that is not reversed by the knowledge of biblical warnings.

So perhaps a personal health check is in order. And today would be the wisest time to do it. ~ **Dr. Sinclair Ferguson - Ligonier Ministries teaching fellow, vice-chairman of Ligonier Ministries, and Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology at Reformed Theological Seminary.**

The Privilege of Being a Christian

Paul wrote Romans from the house of his friend Gaius during a stay in Corinth. Neither Paul nor the Christians in Rome knew how soon they would need the comfort of Romans 8.

Opinion varies, but many scholars estimate that Romans was written in AD 57-58. Within a decade, many of the Roman Christians to whom the letter was addressed were brutally slaughtered in the Roman amphitheaters. The original readers of Romans faced a terrible dilemma: they could deny Jesus or profess Him knowing that, if they did, they faced certain death. Tacitus’ account, written half a century later, and with unmeasured contempt for Nero, is often cited: *“Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered in the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or doomed to the flames.”*

Think about it: Paul initially wrote Romans 8 for Christians who had to face the possibility of unspeakably brutal deaths.



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The Privilege of Being a Christian *Continued from Page 4*

- Some were crucified in mockery of their faith in Jesus.
- Some were mauled to death by wild beasts.
- Some were covered in tar and set ablaze.

Paul himself was killed outside the city at Tre Fontane. As a Roman citizen, he was spared the horror of crucifixion, being thrown to wild animals, or being burned alive. Most likely, he was beheaded with a sword. *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall . . . [the] sword?”* (Romans 8:35, emphasis added).

No, a sword did not sever Paul from the love of Jesus Christ. Nothing could come between the apostle and the certainty of heaven that awaited him.

The same promise was given to every Roman Christian who died in these appalling circumstances. They knew a love that would not let them go—the love of the Father and of the Son made known by the Holy Spirit, a love that did not spare Jesus.

As a Christian, I am not only *“in Christ,”* but Christ is *“in me”* (Galatians 2:20). This means, *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5). Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, *“I am convinced that there is no aspect of Christian truth that has been so sadly neglected in this century.”*

Oh, the privilege of being a Christian. Can you imagine anything greater than this—that you have been loved from eternity; that *“in Christ”* you are loved right now? ~ **Dr. Derek Thomas**

Witnessing His Glory

The book of James has an unusual sentence construction that links the word glory with the name of Jesus: *“My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality”* (James 2:1). In this verse the words *“Lord of glory”* have alternate renditions. Some translations read, *“Our glorious Lord.”* Still another possible translation reads, *“Jesus Christ, who is the glory.”*

B. B. Warfield, in his book *The Lord of Glory*, says, that Jesus was the glory of God, the shekinah. According to the Old Testament, the shekinah was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The shekinah was a radiant cloud or brilliant light within a cloud that signaled the immediate presence of God. For Jesus to be identified with the shekinah was to be equated with the presence of God Himself. In Jesus we see the full manifestation of the majesty of God.

That the New Testament writers ascribed glory to Jesus was a clear indication of their confession of His full deity. Glory, in the sense it is used with reference to Jesus, is a divine attribute. It is the glory of God that He refuses to share with any man. ~ **Dr. R.C. Sproul, Sr.**



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If you have a birthday or anniversary in May that is not posted here or is listed in error or you do not want to be published in this newsletter, please contact Walt or e-mail him at gwlcf10415@gmail.com.

Birthdays and Anniversaries Corner May 2023

Birthdays

Elyse T. (1)
Patrick D. (2)
Mike M. (22)

Jackson T. (22)
Jonathan K. (25)
John H. (30)

Anniversaries

Nic and Katie G. (22)
Tom and Marci S. (22)
Ben and Charlene S. (25)

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on the cross!” (Philippians 2:4–8, NIV).

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9–11, NIV).

Though the form of servanthood covered Jesus and His life was marked by a willing humiliation, nevertheless there were moments in His ministry where the glory of His deity burst through. It was these moments that provoked John to write, *“And we beheld His glory”* (John 1:14).



***West Suffolk Baptist Church
Leadership***

The West Suffolk Epistle is a monthly publication of West Suffolk Baptist Church.

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