

God's Holy Days: The Plan of Salvation Revealed

Passover: The Meaning Behind the Death of Jesus

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The Passover is about human destiny. It's about why you exist. It's about your future, and the future of mankind.

The Passover is also about God's love. It is about God's love toward us and about our love toward God, and about the love we may have toward one another through God's Holy Spirit.

The Passover is the first of seven annual festivals God commands to be kept by his people. Like all of the commanded festivals, there are lessons pertaining to God and our relationship with God to be learned and reminded of in keeping the Passover. To learn the lessons intended by the Passover, it's important that it be observed at the right time. And it's even more important that it be observed in the right manner and spirit and with the proper understanding.

In this article I will discuss the Passover, what it means, and how it relates to God's plan of salvation.

Have you ever stopped to think that God's nature can be summed up in one word? What is the word? The apostle John wrote, "...for God is love" (I John 4:8). The Greek word translated "love" here is *agape*.

As William Barclay points out in his book, *New Testament Words*, *agape* is a word little used outside of the Bible. And the Bible gives the word a new meaning. *Agape* is divine love, love that so characterizes God's nature that John wrote "God is love."

It is a kind of love which originates with God, and which human beings can have only through God's power. It's the love which the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: "has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Romans 5:5).

God the Father and Jesus Christ personified and shared the divine love from eternity. Jesus in prayer said to the Father: "Father, ...You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Jesus said to his disciples, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31, ESV). In this verse the tense is present for the word translated love (*ἀγαπάω*; *agapao*), which implies an abiding, continuing love.

Jesus Christ wants us to have and abide in that same love as he and the Father do. Doing so requires keeping God's commandments. "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9-10).

In understanding why faithful converted Christians should observe the Passover it's very important that we keep in mind the love of God, the love that epitomizes the very nature of God. As Scripture teaches the Father and Jesus Christ shared divine love from before the

foundation of the world. The Bible implies that from eternity itself **it was in God's mind to develop a family with which to share eternal life**. Paul wrote of “the **eternal purpose** that he [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11, ESV). Or it might be better translated, “the eternal purpose that he **realizes** in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The eternal purpose of God is ongoing, and is in the process of being realized through time eternal.

Eternal life is not the same as the life you and I possess physically. As William Barclay also points out in his book, *New Testament Words*, in discussing the meaning of the Greek word *aionios* (eternal) as used in the New Testament, “*Aionios* is the word which describes nothing less and nothing other than the life of God” (p. 35). He goes on to say correctly, “**The ultimate destiny of the Christian is a life which is none other than the life of God himself**” (*ibid.*). Eternal life belongs to God alone, and to those to whom he chooses to give it. “...the **gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**” (Romans 6:23, KJV).

The promise and gift of eternal life, **God life**, comes with knowing and having faith in God through Jesus Christ. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that eternal life is a gift given to us from God through Jesus Christ.

Eternal life is linked to belief or faith in Jesus Christ, and it has to do with him being “lifted up,” a reference to his **crucifixion and death, which is symbolized by the Passover**. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life**” (John 3:14-16).

The Passover then has to do with eternal life, which is salvation. The festivals of God are designed to teach us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the plan of salvation. They have to do with how and why God offers human beings the gift of eternal life -- which is the message of the gospel. **The message of salvation, the message of the true gospel, and the message inherent in the meanings of the festivals of God are one and the same.**

Jesus Christ has the power to give us eternal life. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And **I give them eternal life**, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:27-28).

Eternal life has to do with coming to **know God**. “Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: ‘Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should **give eternal life** to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they **may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent**’” (John 17:1-3).

Knowing God in the way Jesus meant comes through God **dwelling in us** by his **word and Spirit**. “At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and **I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them**, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and **manifest Myself to him**” (John 14:20-21). The Greek word translated “manifest” is ἐμφανίζω (*emphanizo*), which in this context means to manifest, reveal, or **make known** (cf. *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*).

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, **he will keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and **make Our home with him**" (John 14:23).

The Spirit of God is given to those who **obey God** (Acts 5:32). As one keeps God's word, his understanding deepens. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; **A good understanding have all those who do His commandments**" (Psalms 111:10). Jesus said, "If you **abide in My word**, you are My disciples indeed. And **you shall know the truth**, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

As one studies and applies the teachings of the Bible, God's Spirit works in conjunction with God's word to reveal more clearly God's purpose and plan. "But as it is written: 'Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man **The things which God has prepared** ["makes ready," Concordant Version] for those who love Him.' But God has revealed ["God reveals," Concordant Version] them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Knowing God through his word and Spirit goes hand in hand with the gift of eternal life. Knowing God, as the Bible reveals, is more than just acquiring intellectual knowledge. That certainly is included. **But to really know God is to become like God.**

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that **when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is**" (I John 3:1-2).

The Scripture says when God is revealed -- and the full revelation will not be made until the resurrection -- that those who have been converted and remained faithful in this age, will see and know God as he is because they will be like him. **Salvation has to do with sharing God's eternal life (as we have seen), and his glory, and being partakers of his divine nature.** God, "...will render to each one according to his deeds' eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for **glory, honor, and immortality**" (Romans 2:6-7).

"Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the **knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord**, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (II Peter 1:1-4).

Notice again that these Scriptures tell us that **salvation has to do with sharing God's eternal life (as we have seen), and his glory, and being partakers of his divine nature.** What a wonderful destiny God has in store for his children.

In building his family, however, God had to deal with the issue of **sin**. The Scripture clearly reveals how God has chosen to deal with sin in respect to us, his potential sons. We should have no trouble comprehending why God wants to rid his family of sin, once we understand the nature and effects of sin. Sin may be gratifying or pleasurable for a time, as the Scripture says (Hebrews 11:25). But in the final analysis sin is evil, it is destructive, it destroys property, it destroys relationships, it destroys people. Just take a look at the world around you, and you can readily see the destructive effects of sin.

Sin is the transgression of God's holy law. "...sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). **The law of God is based on the principle of love.** "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?' So he answered and said, "'You shall **love the Lord your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and "**your neighbor as yourself.**" And He said to him, 'You have answered rightly; do this and you will live'" (Luke 10:25-28).

The law of God is an expression of his nature, and **obedience** to it is linked to inheriting eternal life. "Though He [Jesus] was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of **eternal salvation to all who obey Him.**" (Hebrews 5:8-9).

Specific laws of God tell us **how to love** in specific ways, and how to avoid behavior which violates the principle of love. "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." (Romans 13:8-10, ESV).

Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). The Apostle John wrote, "**For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.** And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

But through disobedience to the commandments of God, we have all sinned. The gift of God to the obedient is eternal life. But the penalty of sin is death. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Unless the death penalty is removed, we can have no hope of eternal life. But from the foundation of the world a sacrifice sufficient to remove from our heads the penalty of death had been provided.

When God had determined to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the Egyptian Pharaoh refused repeated warnings to let them go, backed up by plagues God sent on the land as he refused. Finally, God exacted the death penalty, claiming the lives of all the firstborn in Egypt, except those whose homes were protected by the blood of a lamb slain in accordance with God's instructions (see Exodus 11 and 12). The death angel "passed over" the homes of those protected by the blood of the Passover lamb. This experience is a type, or forerunner, of God forgiving of sin and removing the death penalty from the heads of those whose sins

are forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ, who gave his life that salvation from eternal death might be possible.

Jesus Christ is referred to in Revelation 13:8 as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the type of the Passover lamb. He is “our Passover,” who “was sacrificed for us” (I Corinthians 5:7).

The Apostle Peter wrote, “...you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (I Peter 1:18-21).

By his sacrifice Jesus Christ bore the penalty for our sins and makes possible our reconciliation with God. “...Christ also suffered for us.... Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls”(I Peter 2:21, 24-25). Jesus was qualified to pay the penalty for our sins, because he “committed no sin” (I Peter 2:22; cf. Hebrews 4:15; I John 3:5).

Without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for our sins, there would be no path to redemption. His sacrifice, and our faith in believing in Christ as Savior and repenting of our sins, are the first steps on the road to salvation.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Passover, to be observed each year on the anniversary of the first Passover in Egypt (Abib 14) according to the sacred calendar, is a remembrance and a witness of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ by the shedding of his blood in payment for our sins. Paul rehearsed instructions concerning the Passover service under the New Covenant, writing to the predominately Gentile Church in Corinth: “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night [Abib 14] in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.” (I Corinthians 11:23-26).

In keeping the Passover, we are to remember **how Christ died and why**. In order to accomplish that its important that we **keep the Passover as instructed by Jesus Christ**. "The earliest Christians celebrated the Lord's Passover at the same time as the Jews..." (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Christianity, The Church and Its History, Church Year, History of the Church Year, Easter," Multimedia Edition, 1998). Actually it was on the night the fourteenth of Abib (or Nisan), the first month of the sacred calendar (Exodus 12:6). For more information

on the timing of the Passover see our publication *When Is the Biblical Passover?*, available online at our website cogmessenger.org or in print by request.

But by the middle of the second century most Churches in the Roman world had begun celebrating a Sunday festival linked to the vernal equinox, which they called "Passover," but gradually came to emphasize not Jesus' death, but his resurrection. Thus the Greek word *pascha*, which is a transliteration of the Hebrew word *pesach*, and which means "Passover," subsequently came to be associated with a supposed Sunday resurrection.

Abandoning Passover and substituting "Easter" Sunday (as it's referred to in English and a similar word in some other languages) has obscured for millions of people the full meaning of Christ's death, why it was necessary, and how it relates to the fulfilling of God's purpose as revealed through the cycles of the annual festivals of God. "A good understanding have all those who do His commandments" (Psalms 111:10). Keeping the Passover according to God's command is an important step in clearly understanding God's plan of salvation, and how it can be accomplished in your life.

It is important that converted and properly baptized Christians observe the Passover at the time and in the manner and spirit Scripture instructs. There are many vital lessons relating to salvation that we can learn from this commanded festival of God. Passover, along with the other festivals of God, can help us understand and remember What and Who God is, what he is doing with us and for us, and how, and why.

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