

# God's Festivals

## in Scripture and History

**Part I: The Spring Festivals**

by

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# A PREVIEW OF THE BOOK

One of the casualties of the rapid pace of modern life is the reading of good books. Many people buy books hoping to find time to read them, but never get beyond the first few pages. Reading only a portion of a book often means missing what could be the most important part of its content.

Partly out of consideration toward those readers whose busy lifestyle makes it difficult to read through a book systematically to the end, and partly out of a desire to give at the outset an overview of the issues discussed, I have decided to give a preview of the content of the book at the beginning, instead of giving a summary of it at the end by way of conclusion. I hope this preview will help even those who intend to read the whole book by giving them an overview.

**The Story Behind the Book.** The inspiration to write this came from an invitation I received to speak on the Sabbath at the *Jubilee 95, Friends of the Sabbath* convention held near Los Angeles at the Dana Point Hotel Resort on May 28 and 29, 1995. The convention was organized by John Merritt, M. D., Medical Director of the Laguna Hill Hospital and a former board member of Ambassador University—an institution of the Worldwide Church of God.

The convention was well attended by leaders and members of half-a-dozen seventh-day Sabbathkeeping denominations. The aim of the gathering was to reexamine the validity and value of the Sabbath in the light of the action taken early in 1995 by the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God to make the Sabbath, the annual Feasts, and tithing part of the Old Covenant legislation, and consequently no longer obligatory for Christians today.

During the convention Dr. Merritt asked me if I would speak also on the annual Feasts. The request caught me by surprise for two reasons. First, I was not prepared to speak on this subject, which I had not adequately investigated. Second, I have argued in my book *The Sabbath in the New Testament* that the annual Feasts of Israel were part of the ceremonial services of the Temple that came to an end with the sacrifice of Christ at the cross. I felt that presenting

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such a view publicly would only alienate those who had come seeking for a word of reassurance on the continuity of the Feasts. For these reasons I declined to speak on this subject.

Dr. Merritt did not give up on me. He encouraged me to pursue the study of the Feasts and offered me the opportunity to share my conclusions at a similar convention to be held at the end of December 1995, in San Antonio, Texas. I accepted the challenge, fearing, however, that my conclusions would prove to be disappointing to those Christians who believed in the continuity and value of the Biblical Feasts. Being free from teaching commitments at Andrews University from June to December 1995, I devoted every spare moment of these seven months to writing the book you are now holding in your hands.

**Objectives of the Book.** This book represents the first of a two-volume project dealing with the annual Biblical Feasts and their relevance for Christians today. The general objective of the two volumes is to trace the meaning and observance of the Feasts in Scripture and early Christian history. The more specific objective is to determine the continuity or discontinuity of the Feasts in the Christian church. This study serves as a basis for proposing some concrete ways in which the Spring Festivals of Passover and Pentecost can be celebrated today.

This first volume deals with the Spring Festivals, focusing especially on Passover and Pentecost. The second volume, which is scheduled for publication by December 1996, will examine the Fall Festivals, namely, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonment, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The many requests I have received for an early release of this study have encouraged me to divide this project into two volumes.

**Surprising Discoveries.** This research has been full of surprising discoveries for me. A first surprise was to find considerable interest in the relevance of Israel's Feasts for Christians, not only among Messianic Jews who wish to retain their Jewish religious heritage, but also among those Christians who wish to rediscover their Jewish roots. An example of the latter is the book *Celebrate the Feasts in Your Home or Church* by Martha Zimmerman, a Lutheran educator. The author offers creative suggestions on how to celebrate the seven Feasts of Israel with a Christian perspective in a home or church.

A second surprise was to find a significant interest in the Feasts of Israel among Adventist members and scholars. In every church in which I presented my seminars during the latter half of 1995, I met some fellow believers who had been studying, and in some cases observing privately the annual Feasts. Similarly, at Andrews University I found several colleagues keenly interested



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in the study of the Feasts. In fact, some of them have been observing the Feasts privately.

In 1981 Dr. Abraham Terian, then Professor of New Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, conducted a seminar for doctoral students on the Feasts of Israel. Each student wrote a paper on one of the seven Feasts as part of the requirements for the course. These papers are informative not only because of their content but also because of their appreciation for the meaning and relevance of the Feasts for Christians today. One paper of 115 pages by Jon Paulien, now Professor of New Testament at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, reads like a dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Paulien, like other scholars, finds allusions to the seven Feasts in the visions of the book of Revelation.<sup>2</sup> In fairness I must say that none of the papers translates the appreciation for the theological meaning and relevance of the Feasts into concrete proposals for their observance today.

**Ellen White and the Annual Feasts.** A third surprise was to find supportive statements for the Feasts in the writings of Ellen White, co-founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. For example, she comments on Acts 20:6 (“We sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread”), “At Philippi Paul tarried *to keep the Passover*. . . . The Philippian were the most loving and truehearted of the apostle’s converts, and *during the eight days of the feast* he enjoyed peaceful and happy communion with them.”<sup>3</sup> Ellen White acknowledges also the importance of Pentecost for Paul when she writes that he shortened his stay at Ephesus, because “he was on his way to Jerusalem *to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost*.”<sup>4</sup> The implication of these statements is clear. Ellen White believed that Paul celebrated the Feasts of Passover and Pentecost.

In her book *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White devotes a whole chapter to “The Annual Feasts.” Reflecting on their value for Israelites and Christians today, she writes: “*Well would it be for the people of God at the present time to have a Feast of Tabernacles—a joyous commemoration of the blessings of God to them. As the children of Israel celebrated the deliverance that God had wrought for their fathers, and His miraculous preservation of them during their journeying from Egypt, so should we gratefully call to mind the various ways He has devised for bringing us out from the world, and from the darkness of error, into the precious light of His grace and truth.*”<sup>5</sup> In this statement Ellen White clearly recommends the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles by the church today.

**A Wrong Assumption.** A fourth surprise was to discover that I was wrong in assuming that the annual Feasts came to an end with the sacrifice of

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Christ, simply because they were connected with the sacrificial system of the Temple. I came to realize that the continuity or discontinuity of the Feasts is determined not by their connection with the sacrificial system, but by the scope of their typology. If the Feasts had typified *only* the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first Advent, then obviously their function would have terminated at the Cross. But, if the Feasts foreshadow *also* the consummation of redemption to be accomplished by Christ at His second Advent, then their function continues in the Christian church, though with a new meaning and manner of observance.

It came as a pleasant surprise to discover that the typology and function of the Feasts reach beyond the the Cross to the ultimate consummation of redemption. The typology of Passover, for example, was initially fulfilled when Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, was sacrificed to deliver us from the bondage of sin. Yet there is still a future and ultimate fulfillment of Passover at the End, when Christ will deliver His people from the great tribulation and invite them to participate in "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9). Christ Himself pointed to this future fulfillment of Passover when He said: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). In this statement Christ makes it clear that the ultimate fulfillment of Passover will be at the End with the establishment of God's kingdom.

Another example is the typology of Pentecost which was initially fulfilled, as noted in chapter 6, when Christ was resurrected as the first fruits of redeemed humanity and poured out the early rain of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost to launch the Christian mission. Yet, like Passover, Pentecost will be ultimately fulfilled at the End, when the Lord will pour out the Latter Rain of the Holy Spirit for the final harvest of the earth (Rev 14:15-16).

The principle of "fulfilled and yet-to-be fulfilled" applies to the Sabbath as well. Elsewhere I have shown that the Old Testament Sabbath typologies of rest and liberation were initially fulfilled at Christ's first Coming and will be ultimately fulfilled at the consummation of redemption to be accomplished at His second Coming.<sup>6</sup> In His inaugural address in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:18), Christ proclaimed Himself to be the fulfillment of the Sabbath typology of redemption (Luke 4:21). Yet Sabbathkeeping "remains for the people of God" (Heb 4:9), because the ultimate fulfillment of the Sabbath rest and liberation will take place at Christ's second Advent.

The realization that the typology of the Feasts, like that of the Sabbath, was initially fulfilled at Christ's first Advent, but will be ultimately realized at His second Advent, caused me to take a fresh look at the continuity and desirability of Israel's Festivals for the church today.

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This new inquiry was spurred also by the realization that the Feasts of Israel were organized in two cycles around the Spring wheat harvest and the Fall fruit harvest. The Spring Festivals of Passover and Pentecost foreshadow the redemption accomplished by Christ's first Advent. On the other hand, the Fall Festivals of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles point to the ultimate (eschatological) restoration to be realized at the second Advent. Since the Fall Festivals typify such End-time events as the preparation for the final judgment announced by the Feast of Trumpets, the final cleansing and disposition of sins accomplished figuratively on the Day of Atonement, and the final celebration of God's salvation by the redeemed at the Feast of Tabernacles, their meaning and function must of necessity continue, because their antitypical fulfillment still lies in the future. These considerations led me to reexamine the meaning, value, and relevance of the Feasts of Israel for the church today.

**A Way to Enrich Church Worship.** Let it be known at the outset that my concern is not to resurrect a legalistic observance of the annual Feasts according to outdated Jewish rituals, but to enrich church worship by proposing a church calendar that focuses during the course of the year on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first and second Advents. We cannot preach the whole Bible in one sermon. We cannot celebrate the whole story of redemption in one Sabbath. A church calendar patterned after the calendar of Israel can help us to do justice to all the important salvific acts of God.

Many pastors go for years without taking their congregation through the central truths of the history of redemption: the life, suffering, and death of Christ; His resurrection, ascension, inauguration of His heavenly ministry, and sending of the Holy Spirit; His pre-Advent judgment in heaven and His executive judgment on earth at the second Advent; the punishment of unpenitent sinners and the final restoration of this world. A church calendar patterned after the religious calendar of Israel challenges pastors and members every year to explore more fully each of these fundamental truths of the plan of salvation. It can also serve as a deterrent against the temptation to use the Sabbath religious services to promote various kinds of secular agendas.

At a time when many churches are seeking to bring about worship renewal by introducing into their church services jazzy music, drama, theatrical preaching, and loud-voiced congregational responses, a church calendar that focuses on the great truths of salvation challenges us to foster worship renewal by seeking for a deeper understanding and experience of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do for us. The celebration of the great saving acts of God commemorated by the annual Feasts can bring about worship renewal by making our worship experience God-centered rather than self-centered.

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**Value of Adopting the Biblical Calendar.** To develop a church calendar patterned after the Biblical calendar is not as difficult as one may think. With minor changes in scheduling, some of the current religious observances can be made to coincide with the date of the Biblical Festivals. For example, the Spring and Fall “Spiritual Emphasis Weeks” which Adventists observe at about the time of the Feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles could be made to coincide with the observance of these two important Biblical Festivals. On both occasions, our churches could be decorated with some of the produce of the season, as the Jews decorated their synagogues and homes. Seeing the fruits of the season in the church (not merely at the supermarket) as an object lesson for our worship experience during the Feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles can serve as a forceful incentive to thank God for His bountiful blessings.

The Spring “Spiritual Emphasis Week” could be observed during Pentecost and be called “Pentecost Renewal Week.” Connecting the Spring “Spiritual Emphasis Week” with the celebration of Pentecost would add to the week Biblical timing, authority, and meaning. The disciples’ preparation for Pentecost can serve as a model for the Pentecost Renewal Week by reminding us of the need to prepare our hearts as did the disciples of old. Today we sing, pray, preach, and talk about the need for a new Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Why not follow the example of the disciples, who spent ten days preparing themselves for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14) by spending at least a week seeking for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit?

In Bible times the Israelites brought their first fruits to the Temple both on the first and last days of Pentecost. On the first day, they brought a sheaf of barley to consecrate to God the harvest that was going to be reaped; on the last day, they brought their first fruits to express their gratitude for the harvest that had been gathered in. Like the Israelites of old, we too can bring to God at Pentecost a special thanksgiving offering for the material and spiritual blessings received. Traditionally, Adventists used to bring a special sacrificial offering at the conclusion of the “Spring Week of Prayer.” In some parts of the world the practice still persists.

The celebration of Pentecost provides a Biblical basis both for the Spring “Spiritual Emphasis Week” and the ensuing special offering. By celebrating at Pentecost the blessings of the agricultural Spring harvest and of the spiritual gifts God has bestowed upon us, we can find in the feast the theological incentive to express our gratitude to God for His material and spiritual blessings through a special thanksgiving offering.

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In the course of this study I will propose different ways in which the Biblical Festivals can be integrated into the church calendar. My proposals are not intended to be disruptive of church life, but rather to enrich the religious experience of members by celebrating during the course of the year the great redemptive acts of God. At a time when some Adventist churches are experimenting with “celebration” styles of worship, why not give theological substance to such styles, by taking time to study, proclaim and celebrate the great saving acts of God commemorated through the Biblical Festivals.

**Limited Hope.** It would be presumptuous on my part to assume that many Christians inside and outside my own Seventh-day Adventist church will be persuaded by this study to adopt the observance of the Biblical Festivals in addition to that of the weekly Sabbath. History teaches us that holy days cannot be easily changed or introduced without causing considerable controversy. It is not my intent to engender controversies, but rather to stimulate a new inquiry into the relevance of the Biblical Festivals for us today.

A new inquiry is needed because many Christian churches today still suffer from the radical anti-feast attitude of the Puritans who swept away all religious holy days except Sunday. The Puritans viewed the church calendar, which was filled with saints’ days and Marian feasts instituted by the Roman Catholic Church, as indicative of the apostasy into which the church had fallen. To rid the church of all the pagan superstitions which had become part of the popular piety, the Puritans did away with all the annual holy days. They believed that other days would compete with, rather than enhance, the observance of the Lord’s Day. The Festivals of the Old Testament, however, do not detract from the weekly Sabbath, but add importance to it, since they are patterned after it.

The effect of the Puritans’ rejection of all annual holy days, including Passover and Pentecost, was the secularization of the calendar. Gradually a new nationalistic calendar was developed which celebrates, not God’s saving acts, but national heroes or events: Washington’s Birthday, Independence Day, Mother’s Day, Labor Day, and Veterans’ Day. Even Thanksgiving, which is celebrated in November at about the same time as the harvest Festival of Tabernacles, is detached from its Biblical roots and viewed exclusively as an agricultural festival. By making our primary feasts nationalistic rather than theological, we have fallen into a cultural pattern which subordinates the Christian faith to nationalistic goals and aspirations.

We do not need to fear the agricultural Feasts of the Spring and Fall harvests of the Old Testament, because it is good and proper to thank the Lord of the harvest. Why should Thanksgiving be celebrated as a secular holiday

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when we have Biblical reasons for observing it as a sacred Holy Day? “Indeed,” to use the words of James Jordan, “how do we dare to keep it out of the Church?”<sup>7</sup>

More important still, we do not need to fear the soteriological cycle of the Biblical Feasts, because they provide us with a marvelous opportunity to rejoice in the specific works of God and Christ for our redemption. The fact that God’s calendar was perverted with the worship of saints, Mary, and pagan practices is not a valid reason for rejecting its proper use. For some Protestants, it seems more important to be unlike Rome than true to the Bible. To respect the soteriological cycle of the Biblical Feasts does not mean to fall into legalism, but to listen to the teachings of the Word of God.

**God Revealed in Human Time.** To appreciate the value of the Biblical Festivals for today, it is important to remember that the heart of the Biblical message is that God has revealed Himself in human time by creating, redeeming, and ultimately restoring His creatures to a harmonious relationship with Him. The Christian faith is rooted in the belief that God has acted in human history. The Biblical calendar recognizes this fact and seeks to relate all time to the redemptive purposes of God.

The major events of the first Advent of Christ are commemorated by the Spring Festivals and those related to the second Advent by the Fall Festivals. As the major redemptive accomplishments of Christ pass in review perennially during the course of the year, it keeps us constantly mindful of all that the Lord has done and is doing for our sakes. While it is true that God does not reserve the communication of His grace to specific days, it is also true that God uses time to reveal Himself. He invites us to make ourselves free and available for Him at certain times so that we can experience more freely and fully the awareness of His presence, peace, and grace in our lives. A church calendar is more than an annual cycle of recurring festivals. It provides an opportunity to experience afresh what God has done in the past, is doing in the present, and will do in the future. It enables us to take the time which God has created and offer it back to God through Jesus Christ who has redeemed it.

The redemptive acts of God are commemorated in the the Bible weekly through the Sabbath and annually through the Feasts. The latter fulfilled three basic functions which are still relevant for Christians today. First, the Feasts commemorated the *past* mighty works of God. Second, they anticipated the *future* divine deliverance. Third, they motivated the people to live in the *present* obediently before a holy God. These functions are still relevant for Christians today.

**Commemoration of the Great Works of God.** The Feasts offered to the Israelites an opportunity to commemorate specific saving acts of God which revealed unique attributes of His character. On the Sabbath, the Israelites acknowledged God as their *Creator* (Ex 20:11) and *Redeemer* (Deut 5:12-15). At Passover, they especially praised God as their *Deliverer* from Egyptian oppression (Deut 16:1; Ex 12:13). At Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), they thanked God for being their *Provider* of the material blessings of the harvest (Lev 23:10, 18, 19). At the Feast of Trumpets, they acknowledged God as their *Judge* who would decide their destiny ten days later on the Day of Atonement (Num 29:7; Lev 23:29). On the Day of Atonement, they would celebrate the fact that God was their *Vindicator* and *Restorer* who had forgiven and cleansed them of their sins (Lev 16:14-15, 21). At the Feast of Tabernacles, they rejoiced that God had been their *Protector* throughout their pilgrimage to the Promised Land (Lev 23:43).

The commemoration through the annual Feasts of the saving acts and attributes of God can enhance the worship experience of Christians today as it did that of ancient Israel. There is a prevailing skepticism today about God being the *Creator*, *Redeemer*, *Provider*, *Judge*, *Vindicator*, and *Restorer*. Many think that God is dead or at least indifferent to what is happening in this world. This prevailing skepticism could well have been facilitated by the widespread abandonment of the Sabbath and annual holy days.

Skepticism can be an outgrowth of forgetfulness. Neglecting the Sabbath, the memorial of creation, can lead people to become skeptical about their divine origin and destiny. Neglecting Passover, the memorial of redemption, can lead people to become forgetful and skeptical about God's provision of salvation through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Neglecting Pentecost, the memorial of the outpouring of the early rain of the Holy Spirit to launch the Christian mission, can lead people to become skeptical about the outpouring of the latter rain to complete the Christian mission.

Neglecting the Feast of Trumpets, the reminder that we must all appear before the judgment seat of God (2 Cor 5:10), can lead people to live morally irresponsibly. Neglecting the Day of Atonement, the reminder of the final redemptive act of Christ who will cleanse His people and dispose of their sins at His second Advent (Heb 9:28), can lead people to despair of any solution to the sin problem that affects mankind. Neglecting the Feast of Tabernacles, the reminder of God's past providential leading, can lead people to doubt God's ability to lead us to the Promised Land.

**Joyous Anticipation of the Future.** The celebration of the Feasts was for the Israelites also a joyous anticipation of future deliverance. For example,



the commemoration of the past Exodus at Passover served to nourish the hope and strengthen the faith in a future Exodus, when Israel will be finally and completely free (Is 43:15-21; 52:1-12; 55:12). At that time, the Lord will reign over all the nations who will go up in pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Zech 14:16-19).

The joy of that final pilgrimage to Jerusalem can be sensed by reading some of the “Psalms of Ascent” (cf. Ps 118; 122). “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then they said among the nations, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad” (Ps 126:1-3).

John the Revelator saw in vision the eschatological celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, when the countless multitude of the redeemed stood before God’s throne “with palm branches in their hands” (Rev 7:9), as at the Feast of Tabernacles, singing: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev 7:10). By reminding us of the consummation of redemption, the Feasts can help us experience in the present a joyous anticipation of the future.

**Motivation for Holy Living in the Present.** The Feasts were also designed to motivate the Israelites to live in the present obediently and uprightly before God. Even the Psalms of joy sung on occasion of the Feasts (Ps 81:3) reminded the people of their ethical relationship with God. “O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!” (Ps 81:13).

The ethical implications of the Feasts are especially evident in the Feast of Trumpets and Atonement. The “blast of trumpets” (Lev 23:23) on the first day of the seventh month ushered in a period of repentance which lasted ten days, that is, until the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27). During this period, the people were asked to “afflict” themselves (Num 29:7), that is, to repent and confess their sins. The outcome was the moral cleansing and elimination of sin through the ritual of the Day of Atonement, which restored the people to a new covenant relationship with God.

The prophets protested against the illusory security provided by the liturgy offered by unfaithful hearts: “I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies” (Amos 5:21; cf. Hos 2:13; Is 1:13). These rebukes were intended to appeal, not for the suppression of the Feasts, but for the moral reformation demanded by their true observance.

If the Feasts were needed in ancient Israel to constantly remind the people of their ethical relationship with God, they are also very much needed



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today when Christianity has become for many more of a profession than a practice. The Feast of Trumpets, for example, which summoned the Israelites to repent and confess their sins in preparation for the final judgment and cleansing of the Day of Atonement, can serve today to call upon Christians to “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come” (Rev 14:7).

The annual celebration of the Fall Feasts of the Trumpets and Atonement can give substance to our faith by reminding us that our relationship to God is based, not only on the profession, but also on the practice, of our faith. At the final judgment, Christ will invite into His kingdom “not every one who says to me ‘Lord, Lord, . . . but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt 7:21). By summoning us to prepare for the final judgment, these Feasts can give seriousness to our living. They remind us that our thoughts, words, deeds, and attitudes count for eternity. They teach us that the final judgment will reveal whether we have lived self-centered lives, ignoring God’s moral principles, or God-centered lives, reflecting His moral values. Christians today need to be reminded of the message of the final judgment, and the Fall Feasts of Trumpets and Atonement can effectively meet this need.

The Fall Feasts of Trumpets and Atonement should be of particular interest to Seventh-day Adventists, who believe in a pre-Advent judgment going on in heaven prior to Christ’s Return. The call of the first angel of Revelation 14:7 to “Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come” is in essence the eschatological fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets. As the ancient Israelites were summoned by the blast of the trumpets on the first day of the seventh month to prepare for the final judgment executed ten days later on the Day of Atonement, so God is calling us today to proclaim to all that “the hour of his judgment has come” in preparation for the final judgment to be executed by Christ at His coming.

The observance of the Feast of Trumpets can serve as a constant reminder of our mission to proclaim to the world that we are living in judgment time. Soon Christ “will appear a second time” (Heb 9:28), as the high priest appeared before the people of the Day of Atonement, “to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (Heb 9:28).

**Feasts Keyed to Seasons.** It is significant that though the Feasts of Israel were primarily theological, commemorating specific saving acts of God, they were keyed to the Spring and Fall harvest seasons. Passover could not be celebrated until at least some of the barley was ready to be harvested and waved before the Lord. If because of weather conditions or a failure to make the necessary intercalation at the end of the lunar year, no barley was ripe, the rabbinical authorities would inform the Jews that Passover would be observed

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a month later. When Passover was moved up one month, all the other Feasts were moved accordingly, because Passover marked the beginning of the religious calendar.

God placed the celebration of the annual Feasts in conjunction with the Spring and Fall harvests, because these seasons could fittingly represent great spiritual truths. Physical experiences are used by God to help us conceptualize and internalize spiritual realities. The physical rest of the Sabbath, for example, helps us to apprehend and experience the spiritual rest of the Savior. The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper enables us to symbolically accept the broken body and shed blood of Jesus.

One cannot help but appreciate divine wisdom in planning for Passover, the Feast of Redemption, to occur at springtime. The reviving of the earth at springtime provides the ideal setting to celebrate Passover, which commemorates the Springtime of Israel's history, when God delivered the people from Egyptian oppression, and the Springtime of grace, when Christ was sacrificed to deliver us from the bondage of sin. "Every year at Passover," writes Alfred Edersheim, "God reminds us of the new life that has come to us through Christ's death by setting before our eyes the spring when nature, which had been seemingly dead, bursts into bloom."<sup>8</sup>

Similarly the completion of the harvest season in the Fall, provides a fitting occasion to celebrate the Feasts of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles, all of which point to the future spiritual harvest of the redeemed that Christ will gather in at His second Advent. We can say that the Spring and Fall Festivals are like a compass whose needle always points to Christ.

Today, most people no longer live in an agrarian society like that of the ancient Israelites, yet all are still responsive to seasonal changes. Spring is still the time of new beginnings which can remind us through Passover and Pentecost of the new life that has come to us through the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first Advent. Similarly, the Fall is still the completion of the harvest season, which can remind us through the Fall Feasts of the consummation of redemption to be accomplished by Christ's second Advent. In His wisdom, God has keyed the unfolding of the plan of salvation to the Spring and Fall harvest seasons for pedagogical purposes. The beginning of the harvest in the Spring and the completion of the harvest in the Fall can serve as constant reminders of the redemption accomplished at the first Advent and yet to be consummated at the second Advent.

**Procedure and Style.** The procedure I have followed throughout the book consists of two major steps. First, I have traced Passover and Pentecost historically from the Old Testament into the New Testament and through the

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early Church. Second, I have used the survey as a basis for reflecting on the continuity and manner of observance of the Spring Festivals today. In formulating my conclusions I have tried to be sensitive to the witness of those early Christians who sought to be faithful to the teachings of the Word of God.

Concerning the style of the book, I have attempted to write in simple, nontechnical language. To facilitate the reading, each chapter is divided into major parts and subdivided under appropriate headings. A brief summary is given at the end of each chapter. Unless otherwise specified, all the Bible texts are quoted from the Revised Standard Version, copyright 1946 and 1952.

**An Overview of the Book.** Out of consideration for those readers who appreciate an overview of the structure and content of a book, I will briefly summarize the highlights of each chapter. The book consists of eight chapters, the first four devoted to Passover and the last four to Pentecost.

**Chapter 1,** “Passover in the Old Testament,” traces the evolution of Passover from a private family memorial of the deliverance from Egypt to an elaborate and solemn sacrifice of the paschal lamb at the Temple in Jerusalem. In spite of its evolution, the underlying theme of Passover remained the same: the supernatural deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, which brought freedom and new life. During times of foreign oppression, hope ran high at Passover that soon the Messiah would come to liberate His people, even as the Lord had delivered His people from the Egyptian bondage in days of old. The Messianic hope of future deliverance nourished by the Passover celebration helps us to appreciate why Christ in the New Testament is our “Paschal Lamb” sacrificed at the Passover season to deliver Jews and Gentiles alike from the bondage of sin.

**Chapter 2,** “Passover in the New Testament,” examines the *time*, *nature*, and *meaning* of the Last Supper that Jesus ate with the disciples. The *time* was the night before the official Passover. The Savior anticipated eating the Passover meal because He knew that He would suffer death as the true Paschal Lamb at the time of the slaying of the paschal lamb.

The *nature* of the Last Supper was a special Passover meal, eaten without the paschal lamb, because Jesus wanted to institute a new Passover meal to commemorate His redemption from sin through bread and wine, the new symbols of His own body and blood soon to be offered “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28).

The *meaning* of the Christian Passover is three dimensional. It points to the *past* by commemorating the suffering and death of Christ. It points to the *present* by confirming God’s covenant with His church. It looks forward to

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the *future* by nourishing the hope of the happy reunion with the Savior at the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

The *manner* of the observance of Passover is uncertain. The New Testament offers only indirect indications of the observance of Passover, apparently because its observance was taken for granted. This gap is filled by documents of the second century which trace back the observance of Passover to the apostolic church.

**Chapter 3**, “Passover in the Early Church,” addresses two questions. First, it examines the common arguments adduced to deny the continuity in the New Testament of Old Testament holy days, such as Passover. The study shows that such arguments are based on groundless assumptions. The sacrifice of Christ did not exhaust the typological function of Passover because Christ Himself said that its ultimate fulfillment will be realized at the final establishment of God’s kingdom (Luke 22:16). The discontinuity brought about by the coming of Christ is never interpreted in the New Testament in terms of abrogation of the Mosaic law, in general, or of holy days in particular. Rather, the meaning of discontinuity is defined in the light of the sense of continuity that is evident in the New Testament.

Second, the chapter examines the observance of Passover in early Christianity and notes the factors which contributed to the abandonment of the Biblical date of Passover (Nisan 14) and the adoption of Easter-Sunday. The study shows that this change affected not only the date of Passover but also its meaning and experience. In time, Easter became associated with numerous pagan practices and superstitions which are foreign to the meaning and experience of the Biblical Passover.

**Chapter 4**, “The Observance of Passover Today,” first brings into focus the findings of the previous chapters by summarizing the six major supportive evidences for the continuity of Passover in the Christian church. Second, the chapter addresses the question of whether Passover should be observed at the first full moon after the Spring equinox (Nisan 14) in accordance with the Biblical date and apostolic tradition or on Easter-Sunday in accordance with the tradition championed by the Church of Rome. The conclusion is that to respect the Biblical date, typology, and meaning of Passover, one must observe the feast in accordance with the Biblical date of Nisan 14, which corresponds to the first full moon after the Spring equinox.

Lastly, the chapter offers some practical suggestions on how to make the celebration of Passover an authentic Christian experience in the home or in the church.

**Chapter 5**, “Pentecost in the Old Testament,” examines the reckoning, meaning, and ritual of Pentecost in Old Testament times. The Feast was a joyous celebration of the Spring harvest that occurred seven weeks after Passover. By offering the first fruits of the harvest, the Israelites expressed their thanksgiving to God for His bountiful provisions. In time, Pentecost was transformed into a feast commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai which, according to Jewish tradition, occurred fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt. The few ceremonies associated with the Feast of Weeks were designed to express gratitude for the material blessings of the harvest and for the spiritual blessings of the Law, which provides principles of life and happiness for God’s people.

**Chapter 6**, “Pentecost in the New Testament,” reflects on the theological significance of the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost and examines the three New Testament references to Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:16), to establish whether the Apostolic Church observed Pentecost.

Pentecost is of fundamental importance to the origin and mission of the Christian. Chronologically and typologically, the Christian Pentecost is linked to the Old Testament Pentecost because it began on the very day of the Jewish feast as the spiritual harvest of the first fruits of Christ’s redemption. The Feast celebrates the crowning of Christ’s Paschal sacrifice in heaven, which was manifested on earth with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33)—the first-fruit of the spiritual harvest (Rom 8:23; James 1:18) procured by Christ’s redemptive mission. It commemorates the inauguration of Christ’s ministry of intercession in heaven and the founding of the Christian church on earth.

The few incidental references to Pentecost in the New Testament suggest that the feast was important for the Apostolic Church. Unfortunately, we are not told how it was observed. Later documents suggest that the Feast of Pentecost was observed by the Apostolic Church as a joyful celebration of the risen Christ who ascended to heaven as the first fruit in order to give the gifts of the Spirit to His Church.

**Chapter 7**, “Pentecost in the Early Church,” surveys the meaning of Pentecost and the manner of its observance in the early Church. The Feast was characterized by a mood of rejoicing during the fifty days following Passover. What made Pentecost a most joyous season were the events commemorated during that period, namely, the resurrection, the ascension, the promise of Christ’s Return, the inauguration of Christ’s intercessory ministry, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the Christian mission. To express

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their joy and gladness, Christians refrained from kneeling, fasting, and mourning during the fifty days of Pentecost. By standing for prayer and singing, Christians were honoring the resurrection of Christ as well as the future resurrection of all believers.

**Chapter 8**, “The Observance of Pentecost Today,” considers the continuity, time, meaning, and manner of observing Pentecost today. The study shows that Pentecost, like Passover, is a remarkable typological feast, which began in the Old Testament as the celebration of the blessings of the Spring harvest and continues in the New Testament as a celebration of the spiritual harvest of souls reaped by Christ’s redemptive ministry.

Pentecost still should be observed today as a season to be thankful for material and spiritual blessings. We can be thankful Christ arose as the first fruits of redeemed humanity (1 Cor 15:20). We can be thankful Christ ascended to heaven to begin a special intercessory ministry on our behalf. We can be thankful for the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are made available to us through the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.

We can express our thankfulness to God during the season of Pentecost in a variety of ways. Some may wish to follow the custom of the early Christians by standing rather than kneeling for prayer both at home and in church to honor the risen, exalted, and interceding Savior. Others may wish to express their thankfulness to God during the fifty days of Pentecost by singing songs of thanksgiving during their private and public worship. Others may wish to express the joy and gratitude of the Pentecost season by decorating their homes and churches with flowers.

During the seven Sabbaths from Passover to Pentecost, pastors could deliver a series of sermons focusing on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ’s first Advent. By taking time every year during the Pentecost season to deepen the understanding of vital aspects of Christ’s redemption, we can gain a greater appreciation, understanding, and experience of the great truths of the plan of salvation.

**Acknowledgments.** It is most difficult for me to acknowledge my indebtedness to the many persons who have contributed to the realization of this book. Indirectly, I feel indebted to the authors who have written on the Biblical feasts. Their writings have stimulated my thinking and broadened my approach to this subject.

Directly, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to church members, doctoral students, and colleagues at Andrews University who took time to share with me ideas and papers. Several ministers of the United Church of

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God who learned about this project graciously sent me books and papers dealing with the Feasts. To each one of them I wish to express my gratitude for their helpfulness and encouragements.

A special thanks to Dr. John Merritt for challenging me to undertake this research and for inviting me to share its findings at the *Jubilee 95* convention in San Antonio, Texas, on December 23-26. Had it not been for the inspiration and encouragement of Dr. Merritt, I doubt I would have ever undertaken this project.

Particular thanks to Joyce Jones and Madeline S. Johnston for correcting and improving the style of the manuscript. Both of them have worked many hours on this manuscript, reworking sentences so that they would sound more English and less Italian.

Last but not least, I need to express my special thanks to my wife, who has been my constant source of encouragement and inspiration for the thirty-four years of our married life. She saw little of me while I was researching and writing this book. Without her love, patience, and encouragement it would have been most difficult for me to complete this project in so short a time.



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**NOTES TO PREVIEW OF THE BOOK**

1. Jon Paulien, "Rosh Hashannah, The Feast of Trumpets and Its Application in the New Testament," Paper submitted to Dr. Abraham Terian in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the course NTST 689, Andrews University, 1981.

2. See Jon Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35 (1995), pp. 245-264. Among other scholars who see the Feasts represented in the vision of the book of Revelation, are: D. T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible* (New York, 1961), pp. 62-95; W. Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (1985), p. 114; Lucetta Mowry, "Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952), pp.75-84; Leonard Thompson, "Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John," *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969), pp. 330-350; M. D. Goulder, "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), pp. 342-367.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California, 1960), pp. 390-391. Emphasis supplied.

4. Ellen G. White, *Redemption: or the Teaching of Paul, and His Mission to the Gentiles* (Battle Creek, Michigan, 1878), p. 65.

5. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California, 1958), pp. 540-541.

6. See Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 19980), pp. 134-145.

7. James B. Jordan, *Christianity and the Calendar* (Niceville, Florida, 1988), p. 97.

8. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (London, 1874), pp. 178-179. Emphasis supplied.



# Chapter1

## PASSOVER

### IN THE

## OLD TESTAMENT

Passover is a fundamental symbol of redemption both in Judaism and Christianity. A study of the historical development of Passover from the Old to the New Testament offers a glimpse into the substance of the Jewish and Christian faiths. “Passover,” as Anthony Saldarini observes, “lives on in both the Jewish and Christian communities as a central ritual which expresses each community’s identity and nature. In Passover we meet Judaism and Christianity at their core, the same and yet different.”<sup>1</sup> No other religious ritual better reveals the organic relationship that exists between Judaism and Christianity than the Passover meal partaken of and transformed by Jesus into the very symbol of His redemption.

Passover began as a celebration of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and became the commemoration of Christ’s deliverance of all believers from the bondage of sin. To the early Christians Christ was the Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:7) who did for them what God had done in Egypt for the Israelites through the blood of the Passover lamb.

The Lord’s redemption of Israel from the bondage of Egypt and of all believers from the bondage of sin needed to be stamped indelibly on the minds and hearts of both literal and spiritual Israel. God intended that the experience of redemption should have a lasting effect upon His people of all ages. To impress upon His people the importance of remembering their redemption, God chose not only to record the event in His Word but also to institute a ceremony that would appeal to the senses of every person in every generation.

Written records capture the interest only of the scholarly. In time, words can lose their meaning, but a simple ceremony that appeals through the senses to each person of every generation enables people to conceptualize and internalize the experience of past redemption. As we use object lessons to teach little children today, so God used simple object lessons to appeal to our sensory perceptions to teach us His holy truths.

**Objective of the Chapter.** This chapter surveys the origin and development of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the Old Testament. The two feasts are studied together under the heading of Passover because Biblically and historically the Feast of Unleavened Bread has been an integral part of the Passover celebration. The chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part we trace the historical and theological development of Passover during the course of Biblical history. In the second part we attempt to establish whether Passover was a ceremonial and temporary feast, limited to the Jews, or whether it was meant to be a universal and permanent feast, applicable to the Christians.

## PART I PASSOVER IN JEWISH HISTORY

**The Origin of Passover.** Israel's religious calendar opens with the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Originally, these two feasts were quite distinct from each other. The observance of Passover began on the 14th day of the first month, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commenced on the 15th, lasting seven days until the 21st day of the month (Ex 12:15).<sup>2</sup> Because of their close connection, the two feasts came to be regarded as one in both the Old and New Testaments (Deut 16:1-8; Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:1). Thus, we examine them together in this chapter.

The name "Passover" (*Pesah* in Hebrew) derives from the event it commemorates, namely, God's "passing over" the Hebrew houses that had smeared blood on doorposts when He smote the land of Egypt: "The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see blood, I will *pass over* you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt" (Ex 12:13).<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, the name was given to the paschal lamb that was to be sacrificed every year to commemorate the event.

Passover is the most important Jewish festival because it celebrates the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian domination and oppression which resulted in their national and religious independence. To this day, the Jews celebrate Passover as the Feast of Redemption. All the other observances of the Jewish calendar revolve around this important historical event. Even the Sabbath is a reminder that "you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (Deut 5:15). In a sense, the Sabbath celebrates on a smaller scale the Feast of Redemption which is celebrated at Passover on a larger scale.

So important is Passover that all other feasts are dated with reference to the month of Passover which God declared “the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you” (Ex 12:2). Prior to the Egyptian deliverance, the new year began in the autumn. This is indicated by the reference to the Feast of Ingathering as occurring “at the year’s end” (Ex 34:22), though according to the religious calendar the feast fell on the 15th day of the seventh month (Lev 23:34). The Exodus deliverance caused the new year to be moved to the spring to coincide with the month of Passover.

Passover is the first of the three feasts on which all males in Israel were to appear before the Lord at a place He would choose. The other two feasts were the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles (Ex 23:14; 34:18-23; Lev 23:4-22; Deut 16:16).

**A Prophetic Feast.** Passover has not only a historic meaning but also a prophetic significance since it fulfills the promise God made to Abraham. He said: “Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possession” (Gen 15:13-14).

Passover represents the fulfillment of this Abrahamic covenant God repeated to Moses: “I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwell as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians . . . And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord’” (Ex 6: 2-6).

In this light, Passover is a remarkable typological feast which celebrates the past fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant at the Exodus, and yet it points to the future fulfillment of the Messianic ingathering of all the nations. In his classic study, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services*, Alfred Edersheim points out the typological and prophetic significance of Passover and the other festivals. “Every reader of the New Testament knows how frequent are such allusions to the Exodus, the Paschal Lamb, the Paschal Supper, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And that this meaning was intended from the first, not only in reference to the Passover, but to all the feasts, appears from the whole design of the Old Testament, and from the exact correspondence between the

types and the antitypes. Indeed it is, so to speak, impressed upon the Old Testament by a law of internal necessity. For when God bound up the future of all nations in the history of Abraham and his seed, He made that history *prophetic*; and each event and every rite became, as it were, a bud, destined to open in blossom and ripen into fruit on that tree under the shadow of which all nations were to be gathered.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus, *nature, history, and grace* combined to give to Passover a rich typological and prophetic meaning. Edersheim explains the role of each of these three elements: “It was the feast of spring; the springtime of nature, when, after the death of winter, the scattered seeds were born into a new harvest, and the first ripe sheaf could be presented to the Lord; the springtime of Israel history, too, when each year the people celebrated anew their national birthday; and the springtime of grace, their grand national deliverance pointing forward to the birth of the true Israel, and the Passover sacrifice to that ‘Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.’”<sup>5</sup>

One cannot help but appreciate divine wisdom in planning for the Feast of Redemption to occur at springtime, when nature itself springs into new life. Every year at Passover, God reminds us of the new life that has come to us through Christ’s death by setting before our eyes the spring when nature, which had been seemingly dead, burst into bloom. It is noteworthy that the feasts of Israel are bunched together in two groups, one occurring in the spring and the other in the fall. We shall see that the chronology of these feasts reveals the unfolding of the plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

**The Egyptian Passover.** A study of the Passover texts in the Old Testament reveals certain differences between the celebration of the first Egyptian Passover and what the rabbis have termed the “Permanent Passover.”<sup>6</sup> The story of the first Passover is found in Exodus 12 and 13. There the instructions for its celebration are given in the context of the description of the events which led to the dramatic Exodus from Egypt.

Briefly stated, Passover began as a home festival during which Hebrew families gathered around the table for a meal that was to become the epic symbol of past redemption and future hope. At the first Passover, the head of each Jewish household was commanded to select a perfect lamb less than a year old on the 10th day of the month and to kill it on the afternoon of the 14th, literally, “between the two evenings” (Ex 12:5; Lev 23:5). Its blood was to be sprinkled with hyssop on the lintel and doorposts of the house. Then the whole animal was to be roasted without breaking a bone and, while standing, the members of the family were to eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. All of this was to symbolize the haste of their deliverance and the bitterness of their bondage.

Small families were to join a neighboring family for the meal. Only the circumcised were to partake of the meal (Ex 12:43-45), and participants were to be dressed for travel with their staffs in their hands. Whatever part of the Lamb was not consumed by the morning was to be burned on the spot (Ex 12:1-13).

This Passover ritual, like that of the other feasts, was designed to place the individual in contact with the event, not merely through its symbolism but primarily by recreating in the believer the same attitude as that of those who experienced the event. In other words, the Passover ritual enabled the believer to internalize, personalize, and relive the historical event. This is clear even in the ritual (*haggadah*) of the Jewish Passover today. Note the recitation: "It was not only our ancestors whom he delivered, but when he delivered them he delivered us with them, because it was not one enemy alone who rose up against us to crush us. The Holy One--blessed be he--rescues us from their hand."<sup>7</sup>

**Passover: God's Object Lesson.** God used Passover as an object lesson to teach vital truths to His people. Each family had to single out from their flock the handsomest, healthiest-looking yearling lamb on the 10th day of the first month and watch it carefully for four days to make sure it was healthy and perfect. During this time the lamb must have won the affection of the family members, especially the children. Then they had to watch the head of the household plunge the knife into their lovely lamb in order to draw its blood to protect their homes.

What a painful lesson! God's justice demands atonement for sin; but His mercy provides the means of atonement. The innocent Passover lamb foreshadowed the One who centuries later would be sent by God to be our Pascal Lamb to atone for our sins. The lamb was to be "without blemish" (Ex 12:5) because Jesus "offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:14) to purify us and to present us "without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing" (Jude 1:24). The family members watched the Passover lamb to see that it was perfect. In the same way, Jesus was watched by His people during the three-and-a-half years of His ministry and was found to be perfect in word and deed. Even Pilate found no fault in Him (John 19:4). Christ was tested in all points as we are, yet without sinning (Heb 4:15).

Each Israelite needed to take a lamb (Ex 12:3) and eat it (Ex 12:8), because salvation is an individual acceptance of the grace provided by God. The cross in and of itself saves no one. Each individual must accept the sacrifice of Christ. God planned that each household should experience salvation. That is why He prescribed a lamb for each family. By believing in Christ, we become members of the household of faith (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19). Salvation for a household is available to all who believe in Christ (Acts 15:15,

31; 18:8). Not a bone of the Passover lamb was to be broken (Ex 12:46). John interprets this detail as a prophecy of Jesus' death (John 19:36). The Roman soldiers did not break Christ's legs as they did the legs of the two men crucified beside Him.

The lamb was "a *male* a year old" (Ex 12:5) because Jesus is the *Son* of God who died for our redemption in the fullness of His manhood. The lamb was to dwell with the family members (Ex 12:6) because Jesus wants to dwell in our homes. The blood of the lamb was placed on the two door posts and lintel of the house (Ex 12:7) as a guarantee of divine protection. This reminds us that we have been redeemed "not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18-19).

All the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten; nothing was to be left until the morning (Ex 12:4). Similarly, Christians must assimilate completely the life of Christ, the Paschal Lamb. This means entire identification with Christ and reflection of His character.

The lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread (Ex 12:8), and only unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days following Passover (Ex 12:15-20). In eating unleavened bread, the Israelites were reminded of their haste in leaving Egypt (Ex 12:34). Since they could not wait to bake the bread, they carried the dough in their bread trough and baked their bread as they travelled. The lesson is deeper than just the hasty departure from Egypt. Leaven in the Bible is often a symbol of sin.<sup>8</sup> The removal of leaven and the eating of unleavened bread are a picture of the new pure life of those who have been cleansed and redeemed by God's lamb.

Leaven represents evil and false doctrines, as exemplified in the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 16:6, 12; Mark 8:15). The leaven of the Pharisees is greed (Matt 23:14), false zeal (v. 15), misconception of spiritual values (vv. 16-22), omission of justice and mercy (v. 23), formalistic obedience (v. 24), hypocrisy (vv. 25-28), intolerance (vv. 29-33), and cruelty (vv. 34-36). Similarly, the leaven of the Sadducees is skepticism (Matt 22:23) and their lack of understanding the Scriptures and the power of God (v. 29).

Paul speaks of leaven as "malice and evil" and urges believers to "cleanse out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump [a new person], as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7-8). For Paul, the "unleavened bread" represents the believer, who has been cleansed from sin through the sacrifice of Christ, our Paschal Lamb. Consequently, we are called to celebrate Passover, not merely by eating unleavened bread for seven days (symbol of completeness), but primarily by

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being ourselves “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:8). Ceil and Moische Rosen remark: “Paul described the *unleavened* bread as sincerity and truth. The Hebrew word *matzo* (unleavened) means ‘sweet, without sourness.’ The unleavened bread typified the sweetness and wholesomeness of life without sin.”<sup>9</sup>

Only those who were of the household of faith could participate in the Passover celebration of redemption (Ex 12:43-45). If Gentile visitors or servants wanted to share in the memorial of redemption, they must first become part of the covenant community by being circumcised. As the Israelites needed to be circumcised to be able to celebrate the memorial of their redemption from Egypt, so God’s people today need to submit to the circumcision of the heart “by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11), in order to have part in the greater redemption provided by Christ.

**The Permanent Passover.** The account of the Passover meal in Exodus 12 describes what the Israelites did in Egypt and gives instructions for the future observance of the feast. The Israelites were instructed in how to keep Passover when they came into the land the Lord promised them and how to explain the meaning of the feast to their children. “You shall observe this rite as an ordinance for you and your sons for ever. And when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he slew the Egyptians but spared our houses’” (Ex 12:24-27; see also 13:8-10; 13:14-16). The obligation of the *pater familias* to explain the meaning of the Passover to the children shows the close relationship that exists between the past deliverance from Egypt and the present experience of Israel.

The settlement of the Israelites in Canaan and the centralization of worship in Jerusalem modified some of the ancient rules regarding Passover. For example, the smearing of blood on the doorposts was replaced by the sprinkling of the blood on the altar at the Temple (see 2 Chron 30:16; 35:11). The lamb was no longer slain at one’s own house but at the temple in the presence of the priests who collected the blood and tossed it at the base of the altar. Similarly, the rule requiring the eating of the lamb in one’s own home was, according to the Talmud, changed to homes in Jerusalem only.<sup>10</sup>

Passover went through a long evolution from a simple family sacrifice memorial of the deliverance from Egypt into a grandiose and elaborate sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem. After the rebuilding of the Temple and



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the reorganization of its worship, Passover became the first and most important day of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. Eventually both feasts came to be regarded as one (Ex 45:21). As the centuries passed and the celebration developed, the importance of Passover grew and became the most beloved and central feast of the Jewish calendar. Its only rival was the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall, which remained the most festive and joyous of all the feasts but never attained the national importance of Passover.

The evolution of Passover through Old Testament times teaches us the importance of adapting our faith and practices to changing situations. We live today in the fastest-changing age of all time. Our challenge is to choose between the security of past traditions and the insecurity of adapting our faith and practices to our changing times. History teaches us that the survival of any religious movement is largely determined by its capacity to make its beliefs and practices relevant to the constantly changing times.

**Importance of Passover.** The few references in the Old Testament to Passover point to the importance of its celebration. These are usually connected with major events in the history of Israel. For example, Numbers 9:1-5 records the first anniversary Passover that was kept in the wilderness of Sinai “in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt” ( Num 9:1). This appears to be the only Passover observed in the wilderness. Presumably, its function was to lead the Israelites into a covenant renewal with God after their apostasy at the foot of Mount Sinai.

The next mention of Passover is in the book of Joshua after the Israelites had crossed the Jordan and entered the Promised Land. The lapse probably was due to the problem of circumcision. Joshua 5:5 suggests that circumcision was suspended during the wilderness journeys, presumably because of the danger of infection in the difficult desert conditions.

When the Hebrews first came into the Promised Land, the first thing the Lord commanded Joshua to do was to circumcise all the males born in the wilderness ( Jos 5:7-9). After the people recovered from the circumcision, they celebrated the Passover “on the fourteenth day of the month at evening in the plains of Jerico. And on the morrow after the passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain” (Jos 5:10-11). On this historical occasion Passover reminded the people of how God delivered them from Egypt and brought them to the promised land. “It also served as a ritual transition from wandering to residence in the land which they had been promised.”<sup>11</sup>

Centuries later, King Josiah (c. 639-c. 609 B. C.) initiated a religious reform by purging the country of the high places, destroying the Baal altars



and other pagan vestiges (2 Chron 34:3-7). At the climax of this reform, Josiah first solemnly proclaimed the renewal of the Covenant and sealed this proclamation by summoning the people to celebrate Passover: “ ‘Keep the passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant.’ For no such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the Lord in Jerusalem” (2 Kings 23:21-23). The author apparently meant that no Passover had been celebrated in Jerusalem as a nation, the way the people did at Gilgal with Joshua. Celebrations of Passover are mentioned once during the reign of Solomon (2 Chron 8:13) and again under Hezekiah (2 Chron 30:15). The celebration of Passover under Josiah represents and climaxes the return to the faithful worship of God.

During the Babylonian exile, religious leaders were anxious to keep alive the religious consciousness of the people, even though their country and temple had been destroyed. To this end, Ezekiel issued a series of regulations regarding the proper keeping of festivals when the Temple would be restored. Concerning Passover he wrote: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall celebrate the feast of the passover, and for seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten” (Ez 45:21). It is in this text that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread first are smoothly joined together.

Some fifty years after the destruction of the Temple, Cyrus the Persian, conquered the Babylonian Empire. In an effort to win the sympathy of his subjects, he allowed the Jews to return to Judea to rebuild their Temple. When the Temple finally was completed amidst many difficulties, the first feast celebrated was Passover. It is evident that for the returned exiles, Passover was the most appropriate feast to celebrate God’s deliverance from captivity.

Ezra recounts the joyful celebration of Passover and connects it with the feast of Unleavened Bread. “On the fourteenth day of the first month the returned exiles kept passover. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they killed the passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves; it was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the pollutions of the people of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy; for the Lord had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezr 6:19-22).

These examples illustrate that Passover served to celebrate significant turning points in the history of the Israelites. Being the Feast of Redemption, it fittingly could serve to celebrate not only the past historical deliverance from Egypt but also the present divine intervention on behalf of His people. “At various moments in the history of the Chosen People when a restoration was to reaffirm or seal once again the Covenant which they had so often endangered by their infidelities, the reformers naturally thought of the Passover and not of the feast of Tents as the occasion for covenant renewal and restoration.”<sup>12</sup> In a sense, the Passover celebration, or the neglect of it, functions as the gauge of the spiritual condition of the children of Israel.

**Passover in Temple Days.** Passover became most important to the Jews during the intertestamental period (c. 400 B.C. to A. D. 50), when they experienced persecution and oppression by their Gentile conquerors. These conditions spurred them to renewed spiritual fervor. During the period of Roman occupation, the Messianic hope flared up and the Jews believed that deliverance from Roman oppression would occur miraculously at Passover as had their past deliverance from Egypt.

Hayyin Schauss notes that “The Jews began to believe that the Messiah would be a second Moses and would free the Jews the selfsame eve, the eve of Pesach [Passover]. So Pesach became the festival of the second as well as the first redemption; in every part of the world where Jews lived, especially in Palestine, Jewish hearts beat faster on the eve of Pesach, beat with the hope that this night the Jews would be freed from the bondage of Rome, just as their ancestors were released from Egyptian slavery.”<sup>13</sup>

This belief helps us understand why Passover brought more pilgrims to Jerusalem than any other feast. “Jerusalem was never so crowded as during the Pesach [Passover] holiday. Every inn was filled to overflowing, and whoever had a bit of room in his house made it available to the visiting pilgrims, never accepting any payment. It was customary, however, for the pilgrims to offer their hosts the skins of the animals they had sacrificed in the Temple. Many of the pilgrims set up tents in the squares and open places of town, living there during the entire pilgrimage. Jerusalem was so crowded at this period that the very fact that everybody was able to find accommodation somehow, somewhere, was declared to be one of the miracles of God.”<sup>14</sup>

By this time, the Passover ritual had evolved into a compromise between the original Passover that was observed in the home and the later Passover that was observed in the Temple. The observance was divided into two main parts, one celebrated at the Temple and the other at home. In the afternoon of the fourteenth day, the paschal lamb was slaughtered with

elaborate ceremonies in the Temple. Then, it was taken home, roasted, and eaten during the course of the night. However, they were no longer in haste. Instead, they ate in a leisurely fashion while reclining on the softest cushions. The Greco-Roman civilization, with its luxuries and comforts influenced the Jews to observe their feasts in a richer, more luxurious style.

**Passover: A Sacrifice.** To appreciate the typological meaning of Passover, one must recognize its sacrificial characteristics. Passover was a sacrifice. Several details reveal the sacrificial character of the Passover in the Old Testament. For example, the selection of a year-old lamb without blemish (Ex 12:5), the sprinkling of the blood with hyssop (Ex 12:22), and the disposal of the remains of the meal (Ex 12:10) all testify to the sacrificial character of Passover. An even clearer indication is Moses' declaration, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover" (Ex 12:27).

A similar indication of the sacrificial nature of Passover is found in Numbers 9:6-7, where the keeping of Passover stands in synonymous parallelism with "offering the Lord's offering." In verse 13, a severe penalty is announced on the person who "refrains from keeping the passover . . . because he did not offer the Lord's offering at its appointed time." Here the paschal Lamb is viewed clearly as a sacrificial offering presented to God. In fact, it is a unique offering among the Jewish sacrifices because, as Antony Saldarini explains, "only the private individuals performed the act of sacrifice. The priests tossed the blood of the animals at the base of the altar in the court above and offered the fat of the animal on the altar as they did with other sacrifices, but the heads of the household who brought the animals performed the ritual act of slaughter. The lamb had to be a year old (interpreted by some to mean in its first year) and in a perfect condition. No blemished or defective animal could be associated with the worship of God."<sup>15</sup>

Passover is a sacrifice simply because a lamb had to be sacrificed so that its blood smeared on the doorposts could protect the home from the destroying angel. The substitutionary function of the sacrifice of the lamb is abundantly clear. "The blood shall be a sign for you, upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt" (Ex 12:13).

By sacrificing the lamb and sprinkling the blood upon the doorposts, the head of the family confessed that he and his family stood in danger and needed God's provision of salvation. In a sense, to use the words of Alexander Maclaren, "The Passover is a gospel before the gospel." Maclaren continues by noting: "We are sometimes told that in its sacrificial ideas Christianity is still dressing in 'Hebrew old clothes.' We believe, on the contrary, that the

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whole sacrificial system of Judaism had for its highest purpose to shadow forth the coming redemption. Christ is not spoken of as ‘our Passover’ because the Mosaic ritual had happened to have that ceremonial; but the Mosaic ritual had that ceremonial mainly because Christ is our Passover, and by His blood shed on the cross and sprinkled on our conscience, does in spiritual reality that which the Jewish Passover only did in outward form. All other questions about the Old Testament, however interesting and hotly contested, are of secondary importance compared with this. Its chief purpose is to prophesy of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

**Passover: A Festival of Hope.** More than any other festival, Passover has kept alive the hope of redemption in the hearts of God’s people in Old Testament times. At times of oppression and tribulation, Passover challenged God’s people to look forward to future liberation and restoration. Passover served as a constant reminder of the tension that exists in this world between suffering and joy, oppression and liberation, evil and good, past tribulation and future redemption.

In his book, *What Christians Should Know about Jews and Judaism*, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein keenly observes: “Passover bids us to affirm the indissoluble link between slavery and redemption, between our tribulations and our joys. To lose sight of either dimension of this dialectic, or of the tension that affirming both necessarily involves, is to miss the mark. . . . For this reason, explain the rabbis, we begin the Seder [Passover ritual] with deprecating remarks of how our ancestors were once slaves in Egypt, but conclude it by praising God for delivering us from our suffering. Passover bids us to remember the good and the bad, our joys and our tribulations, our past suffering and our hopes for the world’s future redemption.”<sup>17</sup>

Rabbi Eckstein continues: “More and more Christians today are conducting Seders [Jewish festival rituals] today and celebrating the Passover holiday in their own way, motivated by a desire to reclaim the Jewish roots of their Christian faith and the Jewishness of Jesus. Certainly, the links between suffering and joy, and death and resurrection, are not foreign to them. Christians, like Jews, affirm that darkness will be followed by light, oppression by redemption, and death by resurrection.”<sup>18</sup>

Passover, as a festival of hope, unites Jews and Christians in a common hope of redemption. There is, however, a difference in the nature of hope. For the Jews, the hope of redemption is a future possibility dependent upon the coming of the Messiah as the Paschal Lamb to deliver His people. For Christians, the hope of redemption is a present reality based upon the Paschal Lamb who has already been sacrificed for the redemption of His people. At

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Passover, Jews look forward to the Messiah to come; Christians look back to the Messiah who has come to establish the Kingdom of Grace and look forward to His return to inaugurate the Kingdom of Glory.

## PART II

### PASSOVER: TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT ?

**Passover: Temporary or Permanent?** The sacrificial nature of Passover raises the question of whether the feast was ceremonial, temporary and limited to the Jews, or meant to be universal, permanent, and applicable to the Christians. To prove the universal application and continuity of Passover in Christian history, some wish to deny its sacrificial nature. For example, the book *God's Festivals and Holy Days*, published by the Worldwide Church of God, argues that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread “existed before the law of Moses” and were “ordained and established for ever” because “these days were not instituted for the purpose of the sacrifices as some have supposed.”<sup>19</sup>

In *Christianity and the Calendar*, James B. Jordan takes the argument a step further by arguing on the basis of Genesis 1:14 that the annual festivals, like the Sabbath, are a creation ordinance. He interprets the term “season” (*mo'ed* in Hebrew) in Genesis 1:14 as referring to the special appointed times of the annual festivals and concludes that the “annual festivals regulated by sun and moon are a creation ordinance, every bit as much as the weekly Sabbath day.”<sup>20</sup>

This conclusion, though supported by other authors,<sup>21</sup> is rightly challenged by Henry Ross Cole. He notes that the plural term “seasons” (*mo'edim* in Hebrew) “does not always refer to appointed holy days, but can also refer to specific aspects of the natural cycle, as in Jeremiah 8:7. Accordingly, given the creation setting of Genesis 1:14, the purpose of the marking of the *mo'edim* [seasons] is surely to establish a calendar to govern every aspect of the lives of plants, animals, and humans alike, and not merely to designate special times of worship.”<sup>22</sup>

Cole's argument is supported by the fact that Genesis is a book of *origins* and not a book of *laws*. The function of the creation story is not to regulate the civil and religious life of God's people but to tell us how planet earth with its human and subhuman life came into existence. None of the ten commandments is mentioned in Genesis, though observance of all is assumed (Gen 17:9; 26:3). Even the seventh day is mentioned in the creation story, not as a divine commandment for human beings to observe, but as God's approval

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of His perfect creation. The rest of God on the seventh day in Genesis 2:2-3 is a *rest of cessation*, as indicated by the use of the verb *shabat*, which means “to stop, to desist, to cease from doing.” Its function is *cosmological*; that is, it explains how God felt about His creation: He regarded it as complete and perfect, and to acknowledge its completion—God stopped.

To find civil and religious ordinances, we need to go to the book of Exodus, which in a sense is a second creation story—the creation of a people brought out of bondage into freedom. There God gives to His people *principles of life* in the form of civil and religious commandments and *provision of grace* in the form of a sacrificial system. Regarding the Sabbath, it is noteworthy that in the Fourth Commandment the rest of God is no longer a *rest of cessation* (Gen 2:2-3). Rather, it is a *rest of relaxation*, as indicated by the verb used *nuah* (Ex 20:11) which means “to relax, to be refreshed.” The reason for the change is that in Exodus the function of God’s rest is *anthropological*; that is, it explains how mankind should rest in accordance with God’s pattern of work-rest established at creation.<sup>23</sup>

In the light of the above observations, it is futile to look for the origin of festivals such as Passover in the creation story in order to prove their universal applicability. The religious calendar of ancient Israel came into existence with the birth of their nation. In fact, some of the festivals, such as Passover and the Unleavened Bread, are clearly linked to the historical event of the Exodus. It is inconceivable that the patriarchs would celebrate Passover before the occurrence of the Exodus event that gave birth to the feast.

**The Witness of the New Testament.** The attempt to establish the perpetuity of the annual feasts such as Passover and Unleavened Bread by divorcing them from the sacrificial system and by tracing them back to creation, is based on the assumption that feasts linked to sacrifices were ceremonial and typological, that is, of temporary nature, and came to an end when Christ, the Antitype, died on the Cross. This assumption has prevailed in much of Christian history and is still popular today. In spite of its antiquity and popularity, this assumption is based on a one-sided interpretation of Scripture. This study aims to show that the temporary or permanent nature of Old Testament feasts is determined not by the dates of their origins, pre- or post-Moses, nor by the degree of their association with the sacrificial system, but rather by the extent to which their typology carries over with new meaning beyond the Cross. Ultimately, the criterion to determine the termination or continuity of the Old Testament feasts is the witness of the New Testament itself, validated by the testimony of the primitive church.

Passover is a case in point. The New Testament unequivocally speaks

of Passover in sacrificial terms. “Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). Does the fact that Christ was sacrificed as our Paschal Lamb render the celebration of Passover unnecessary? The answer is “no!” As we shall see, the New Testament infuses into the feast a new meaning and ritual. The new meaning is the commemoration of deliverance from the bondage of sin through Christ’s death and the proclamation of His future deliverance at His coming (“you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” 1 Cor 11:26). The new ritual consists of only two elements of the Passover meal, the bread and the wine. Christ fulfills the sacrificial typology of the Passover, not by terminating its observance but by transforming the festival into the fitting symbol of His redemption.

**Internal Indicators.** Cole seeks to establish the extent of the applicability of the Old Testament feasts to Christianity on the basis of internal indicators found in the texts themselves. Regarding Passover, Cole finds two major indicators which limit its applicability to the Jews. The first indicator is in Exodus 12:43-49, where the participation in the Passover meal is restricted only to those who are circumcised. The second indicator is in Number 9:1-14, where Passover “appears to be inextricably linked with the sacrificial system.”<sup>24</sup> On the basis of these indicators, Cole concludes that Passover (as well as the other annual feasts) has a “limited applicability,” that is to say, it applies primarily to the Jews.

Since I have just commented on the second indicator, I limit my comments to the first indicator regarding the restricted participation in the Passover meal to circumcised Israelites. Cole acknowledges that such restriction is understandable because Passover celebrates the Egyptian deliverance that gave the Israelites their identity as God’s chosen people. Consequently, it would have been inappropriate for the Israelites to invite those who did not share their common origin. For Cole, this limitation represents an indicator of the limited applicability of the feast.<sup>25</sup> To put it differently, since the participation in the Passover meal was restricted to circumcised Israelites, then the feast was obviously meant to be observed by Jews only and not by Christians.

The problem with this reasoning is that it assumes that the indicators found, for example, in the various Old Testament Passover accounts determine the extent of the applicability of the feast for the rest of redemptive history. This is the literalistic method of interpretation used by Dispensationalists today. They read the Old Testament as if Christ had never come and as if the New Testament had never been written. For example, they interpret God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would inherit “all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8; cf. 12:7; 13:15)



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as an indicator of the limitation of God's territorial promise to Jews. On the basis of this internal indicator, they conclude that the fulfillment of such promise began for the first time in 1948 with the dramatic recovery of part of Palestine by the Jews.

Such a literalistic interpretation of the Old Testament ignores the witness of the New Testament where territorial promises made to Abraham are fulfilled, not through a repossession of Palestine by the Jews, but through the inheritance of the *whole renewed earth* by believers of all nations (Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5; Rev 21:1-8). The land of Canaan becomes the world and the offspring of Abraham become all the believers who live by faith like Abraham (Gal 3:17, 28-29).

Since all the believers are part of the new Israel, the participation to the paschal meal in the New Testament is restricted no longer to ethnic purity but to moral purity. Paul warns, "Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27).

These observations lead me to conclude that it is futile to look for internal indicators in the Old Testament texts to determine the extent of the applicability of Israel's feasts to Christians today. We must never forget that the Old Testament is primarily the story of God's dealing with His Chosen People. This means that all the institutions of the Old Testament relate primarily to the life and history of the Israelites.

Even the Sabbath, though blessed and sanctified at creation (Gen 2:3), becomes known as a commandment in connection with the birth of God's Chosen People. Thus we find that the Sabbath becomes inextricably linked with the socio-economic-religious life of the Israelites, as evidenced by the references in various Sabbath texts to the manservant, maidservant, cattle, sojourner, plowing time, harvest time, covenant, and sacrifices (Ex 20:10; 23:12; 34:21; 31:13-14; Num 28:9-10). Critics have used these internal indicators to argue that the Sabbath is a Jewish institution and is not applicable to Christians. I have dealt with their arguments in my Sabbath books. The truth of the matter is that though the Sabbath is clearly linked to the socio-economic-religious life of the Israelites in the Old Testament, Christ clearly declares in the New Testament that "The sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27), not merely for the Jews. Ultimately, it is the New Testament witness that determines the applicability to Christians of the Sabbath, or of any other Old Testament institution.

**Conclusion.** In Old Testament times, Passover went through an evolution from a private family memorial of the deliverance from Egypt to an



elaborate and solemn sacrifice of the paschal lamb at the Temple in Jerusalem. With the passing of time, customs and traditions were added to embellish the Passover celebration, which became the central, most important feast of the Jewish calendar (rivaled only by the Day of Atonement). Passover became the first and most important day of the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread. Eventually its name was used for both feasts. In spite of its evolution, the underlying theme of Passover remained the same: the supernatural deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage which brought freedom and new life.

The memory of their miraculous deliverance filled the people's minds and hearts at Passover. During times of oppression, hope ran high at Passover that soon the Messiah would come to vanquish the Roman oppressor, even as the Lord had delivered His people from the Egyptian bondage in days of old. The Messianic hope of future deliverance nourished by the Passover celebration helps us to appreciate why Christ in the New Testament is our "Paschal Lamb" sacrificed at the Passover season to deliver Jews and Gentiles alike from the bondage of sin.

The universal application and continuity of Passover in Christian history cannot be established by divorcing the feast from the sacrificial system or by tracing it back to creation, because the religious calendar of ancient Israel came into existence with the birth of their nation, not before. The criterion to determine the temporary or permanent nature of Old Testament feasts, such as Passover, is not the dates of their origins, pre- or post-Mosaic, nor the degree of their association with the sacrificial system, but rather the extent to which their typology carries over with new meaning beyond the Cross.

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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 1**

1. Anthony J. Saldarini, *Jesus and Passover* (New York, 1984), p. 4.
2. Initially the first month was called “Abib” (Deut 16:1), which means “month of the ears,” an obvious reference to the ripening of the ears of barley. After the exile, the Babylonian name “Nisan” was substituted (Neh 2:1; Esth 3:7).
3. Emphasis supplied.
4. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (London, 1874), pp. 178-179. Emphasis supplied.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
6. *Mishnah, Pesah* 9, 5.
7. Cited in Thierry Maertens, *A Feast in Honor of Yaweh* (London, 1965), p. 109.
8. In one instance (Matthew 13:33), leaven is used as a symbol of the growth and expansion of God’s kingdom.
9. Ceil Rosen and Moishe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover* (Chicago, 1978), p. 30.
10. *Pesahiym* 9, 12.
11. Anthony J. Saldarini (note 1), p. 13.
12. Thierry Maertens (note 7), p. 112.
13. Hayyim Schauss, *Guide to Jewish Holy Days: History and Observance* (New York, 1962), pp. 46-47.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.
15. Anthony J. Saldarini (note 1), pp. 30-31.
16. Alexander Maclaren, *Exposition on the Holy Scripture, The Book of Exodus* (New York, 1906), p. 41.
17. Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *What Christians Should Know about Jews and Judaism* (Waco, 1984), pp. 101-102.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
19. *God’s Festivals and Holy Days* (Worldwide Church of God, Pasadena, California, 1992), p. 9.

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20. James B. Jordan, *Christianity and the Calendar: A Syllabus* (Niceville, Florida, 1988), p. 81.

21. The term “season” (*mo’ed*) is interpreted as referring to religious festivals by Solomon Gandz, “The Calendar of Ancient Israel,” in *Homenaje a Millás-Valligrosa* (Barcelona: 1954), I:645; Paul Beauchamp, *Création et separation: Étude exégétique du chapitre premier de la Genèse*, Bibliothèque de Sciences religieuses (Aubier Montaigne: 1969), p. 114; Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 21; and Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas, 1987), vol. I, p. 23.

22. Henry Ross Cole, “The Sacred Times Prescribed in the Pentateuch: Old Testament Indicators of the Extent of Their Applicability,” Doctoral Dissertation, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan 1995), p. 59. I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Cole for his willingness to provide me with the first draft of his doctoral dissertation, which is subject to modification and revision. The page numbers from this first draft most likely will not correspond to those of the final version.

23. For a discussion of the function of the rest of God in the creation story, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1994), pp. 66-67.

24. Henry Ross Cole (note 20), pp. 114-116

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116.

## Chapter2

# PASSOVER

## IN THE

# NEW TESTAMENT

Passover has great value for Christians because the New Testament writers place the account of Jesus' death and resurrection within the Passover festival. More importantly, they explain the meaning of Christ's atoning death by means of Passover typology. The hope of redemption which was nourished by the Passover ritual finds its realization in the sacrifice of Christ, the true Paschal Lamb. Thus, the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross at the time when Passover lambs were sacrificed links inextricably Jewish and Christian Passovers. His death represents the fulfillment of Jewish Passover and the inauguration of Christian Passover.

The death and resurrection of a human being means little by itself, unless there is an explanation that gives meaning to it. An explanation of the meaning of Christ's death is provided by the sacrificial system of the Temple, in general, and by the Passover sacrifice, in particular. The earliest Christians were Jews. They were familiar with Jewish institutions, including Passover, and explained especially the meaning of Christ's death by means of Passover symbolism and allusions.

**Objectives of the Chapter.** This chapter has two objectives which divide it into two natural parts. The first is to examine the time, nature, and meaning of the last Paschal Supper that Jesus ate with His disciples. This study aims to determine whether the Last Supper was a genuine Passover meal during which Christ instituted the new Passover to commemorate His death or whether it was a farewell fellowship meal during which Christ instituted the Holy Communion as a brand-new rite unrelated to Passover.

The second objective is to study the indirect New Testament references to the observance of Passover and the ethical implications of Passover for the Christian life-style. Our ultimate concern is to ascertain whether Passover continues as a Christian festival with a new meaning and ritual or whether it ended with the death of Christ.

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**PART I**  
**THE NATURE AND MEANING**  
**OF THE LAST SUPPER**

**The Date of the Last Supper.** During His ministry, Christ participated in several Passovers, the last being the occasion in which He instituted the Lord's Supper and offered Himself as the true Paschal Lamb for our redemption. A problem exists as to the date of the Last Supper, the exact date of which affects the nature of the meal. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Christ ate the Passover meal with His disciples on the day when "they sacrificed the passover lamb" (Mark 14:12; cf. Luke 22:7; Matt 26:17), which is Nisan 14. He was crucified the following day, Nisan 15. This means that the Last Supper was most likely a Passover Supper since it was partaken at the time the Jews ate their Passover meal.

However, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus was crucified on the day the Passover lamb was sacrificed (John 19:14; 18:28), Nisan 14. This means He ate the Last Supper with His disciples the day before the official Passover meal. In this case, Jesus' meal with His disciples may have been either a specially arranged Passover meal or a farewell fellowship meal unrelated to Passover, because it was partaken of the evening before the official Passover.

Countless attempts have been made to reconcile the chronology of the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) with that of John. Some have tried to resolve the difficulty by presupposing the existence of two dates for Passover, one to suit the calendar of the Pharisees and the other that of the Sadducees. From Qumran literature, we know considerable dissent existed over calendars and dates of feasts.<sup>1</sup> In her widely acclaimed study, *La Date de la Cène*, Anne Jaubert argues that the discrepancy in the Gospels stems from the existence of two different calendars: an old sacerdotal calendar based on the solar system and the official calendar based on a lunar system in force at the time of Christ. According to the solar system, Passover would always fall on a Wednesday while, according to the lunar system, Passover day varied from year to year. Jaubert suggests that the synoptics follow the sacerdotal solar calendar while the Gospel of John follows the official lunar calendar.

The fundamental problem with these theories is that they assume that the synoptics and John are not thinking of the same Passover, but of two different paschal celebrations conducted according to two different dates. Such an assumption cannot be legitimately supported by the Gospels' account of the Passover. It is hard to prove that the synoptics and John are thinking of two different Passovers celebrated according to two different calendric systems.<sup>2</sup>

**An Early Passover Meal.** A plausible resolution of the discrepancy is to assume that the Last Supper was a special paschal meal eaten the evening before the official Passover meal. The anticipation of the paschal meal could have been motivated by the fact that Jesus knew He would suffer death at Passover in fulfillment of the type provided by the slaying of the paschal lamb on Nisan 14. He knew He could not possibly eat of the paschal lamb at the usual time and Himself be sacrificed as the true Paschal Lamb when the lambs were slain.

It was more important that Christ's death should synchronize with the death of the Passover lambs than that His eating of the Passover meal synchronize with the official time of the Passover meal. In view of this legitimate concern, Jesus anticipated His eating of the Passover with His disciples to the evening before the official Passover so that the types of the slaying of the lamb and the offering of the first fruits would be fulfilled "not only as to the event, but as to the time."<sup>3</sup>

Support for this assumption can be found in the time references to Passover in Matthew 26:2, 18 and John 13:1. In Matthew 26:2, Jesus says to the disciples: "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified." Clearly this indicates that Christ knew that His death would occur at Passover which was two days away. Christ's awareness that His death would occur on Passover day could have caused Him to anticipate His last paschal meal with His disciples a day earlier.

Christ could not have instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover at the official time (Nisan 14) when He had just informed them that He would be crucified at that time. This explains the sense of urgency in the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples: "Go into the city to a certain one, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, *My time is at hand*; I will keep the passover at your house with my disciples'" (Matt 26:18).<sup>4</sup> The phrase "My time is at hand" presumably refers to the short time left to Passover when the "Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified." Because of such shortness of time, hasty arrangements had to be made for a special Passover meal.

A similar conclusion can be drawn from John 13:1, which functions as a prologue or title to the story of the Last Supper in the Upper Room. As translated by the RSV, it reads: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." Norval Geldenhuys argues that this translation, followed largely by the A. V. and N. I. V. among others, is misleading because it completely detaches the Last Supper from Passover. He suggests that the expression "before the feast"

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should be connected with the verb “knowing” (*eidos*). Thus the translation would read: “Knowing (already) before Passover that His hour had come to depart out of this world unto his Father, Jesus, he who loved his own in this world, loved them unto the end (or ‘to the uttermost’).”<sup>5</sup>

According to this translation (which is followed by Weymouth, Knox, Moffatt and others), John does not wish to detach the events of the Last Supper from the Passover. Rather he gives a reason for their occurrence, namely, Jesus knew in advance of His impending death at Passover and, consequently, He showed His love toward His disciples by arranging for an early paschal supper, at which, among other things, He washed His disciples’ feet.

John often attributes to Christ’s foreknowledge the reason for His actions (see John 12:7, 23; 13:3, 11, 18; 18:4; 19:28). In this case it was the foreknowledge of the occurrence of His death at the very time of the slaying of the Passover lambs (Nisan 14) that could have led Jesus to arrange for an early paschal meal with His disciples.

It must be granted that “there is no historical evidence of anyone else having ever eaten the Passover early,”<sup>6</sup> but there is also no historical evidence of anyone else who ever foreknew that he would be crucified on Passover day as the antitype of the paschal lambs being sacrificed at the Temple. Christ’s actions cannot be evaluated strictly on the basis of cultural norms, because often He acted on the basis of His divine wisdom and foreknowledge.

Our proposal that Jesus anticipated His eating of the Passover meal to the night before the official eating of Passover because He knew that He would suffer death as the true Paschal Lamb at the time of the slaying of the paschal lamb on Nisan 14, provides a simple solution that reconciles the two accounts of the Passover: John was right in placing the crucifixion on “the preparation of the passover” (John 19:14), that is, Nisan 14, because the official Passover began on Friday night; the synoptics are right in calling the Last Supper a Passover supper, for the Last Supper was a special paschal meal eaten a day early.

**Last Supper in the Synoptic Gospels.** The question of whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal has implications for the continuity of Passover as a Christian festival. If the Last Supper was simply a farewell fellowship meal during which Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, then the latter is not linked to the Passover festival, but is a brand-new rite instituted by Christ to commemorate His death. In this case, Passover came to an end when Jesus died on the cross as the true Paschal Lamb, and the Lord’s Supper must be seen as a new institution totally unrelated to Passover.



On the other hand, if the Lord's Supper was instituted in the context of a Passover Supper, anticipated a day early on account of Christ's death at Passover, then the Lord's Supper is inextricably connected to the Passover festival. In this case, Passover continues as a Christian festival with a new ritual and meaning. In the light of this dilemma, it is important to determine the connection between the Last Supper and Passover.

The synoptic Gospels consistently and repeatedly speak of the Last Supper as "the Passover." The disciples ask Jesus, "Where will you have us to go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" (Mark 14:12; cf. Matt 26:17; Luke 22:7-9). In Luke 22:15, Jesus Himself declares: "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." The phrase "*to eat the passover,*" which occurs again in Jesus' instructions to His disciples (Mark 14:15; Matt 26:18; Luke 22:11), refers exclusively to the Passover meal, which was the essence of the celebration of the festival. The eating of the Passover meal was a sign of unity with God and dependence on divine care. It served to establish a bond of unity between God and His people.

**Passover Fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.** It is important to note that in Luke, Jesus gives the reason for His earnest desire to eat Passover with His disciples before His death, namely, "for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). Two significant points should be noticed in this statement. First, the phrase "I shall not eat it until" implies that Christ expected the eating of the Passover to continue during His absence until He would partake of it again at the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). The Passover that Christ expects to eat again consists of the emblems of His sacrifice, since the following verse says, "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the wine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:18).

Second, the phrase "until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" implies that for Christ the ultimate fulfillment of Passover was still in the future. If Jesus viewed Passover as being completely fulfilled with His death, He would not have spoken of its future fulfillment in the kingdom of God. Leon Morris points out: "The reference to fulfillment *in the kingdom of God* indicates that the Passover had typological significance. It commemorated a deliverance indeed, but it pointed forward to a greater deliverance, which would be seen in the kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup>

Christ's statement gives us a crucial criterion to determine whether or not Old Testament festivals such as Passover continue beyond the Cross. Is their typology ultimately fulfilled at the Cross or at the Return of Christ? In the case of Passover, Christ made it clear that the feast will be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. All of this goes to show that Christ viewed His Last Supper

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with His disciples as a Passover meal whose observance would continue until His Return. The present observance of Passover alimts our hope and faith in the future Passover Supper that we will celebrate with Christ at the consummation of God’s kingdom.

Several other positive indications in the synoptics substantiate that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. In his commentary on *The Gospel of Mark*, William L. Lane offers a concise summary of such indications: “The return to Jerusalem in the evening for the meal [Mark 14:17; cf. Matt 26:18; Luke 22:10] is significant, for the paschal meal had to be eaten within the city walls (M. *Pesachim* VII.9). An ordinary meal was taken in the late afternoon, but a meal which begins in the evening and continues into the night reflects Passover practice (Ex 12:8; Jubilees 49:12). The reference to reclining (Mark 14:18) satisfies a requirement of the Passover feast in the first century when custom demanded that even the poorest man recline for the festive meal (M. *Pesachim* X. 1). While a normal meal began with the breaking of bread, on this occasion Jesus broke the bread during the meal and following the serving of a dish (Mark 14:18-20, 22). The Passover meal was the one occasion when the serving of a dish preceded the breaking of bread. The use of wine was generally reserved for festive occasions and was characteristic of the Passover (M. *Pesachim* X. 1). Finally, the interpretation of the elements of the meal conform to Passover custom where the haggadah (or interpretation) is an integral part of the meal. The cumulative evidence supports the claim made in verses 12, 14, and 16 [of Mark 14] that the disciples prepared a Passover meal and that the external forms of the Passover were observed at the meal itself.”<sup>8</sup>

**The Last Supper in the Gospel of John.** In the Gospel of John only few details of the Last Supper are given, because, as Geldenhuys explains, “He assumes that his readers are quite aware of the fact that this meal was the paschal repast which the Lord celebrated with His disciples on the evening before His crucifixion, and that He then instituted the Holy Communion. For this reason he merely refers to it by the single word *deipnon* [supper] without stating expressly what precise meal it was. He knew that the first three Gospels and also the Epistles of Paul gave a full account of the celebration of the paschal repast and the institution of the Holy Communion. Consequently he does not repeat the same facts, but mentions a few supplementary occurrences that took place during the meal, as they made a great impression on him and had not been described in the other Gospels.”<sup>9</sup>

Though John does not explicitly designate the Last Supper as a Passover meal for the reasons just mentioned, there are indications that he also regarded the meal shared by Christ with His disciples as a paschal meal. The meal takes

place within Jerusalem even though the city was thronged with pilgrims (John 12:12, 18, 20; 13:2; 18:1; cf. Mark 14:17). During His last stay in Jerusalem, Jesus regularly left the holy city in the evening and went to Bethany (Mark 11:11,19; Luke 19:29; 21:37), but at the time of the Last Supper, He remained in the overcrowded city. Why? Because, as mentioned earlier, it was a rule that the paschal lamb had to be eaten within the gates of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup>

The supper is held in the evening and lasts into the night (John 13:30; cf. Mark 14:17). The ordinary supper was not held at night, but in the late afternoon.<sup>11</sup> The Last Supper began in the evening and lasted into the night because, as Joachim Jeremias explains, “the Passover had to be eaten at night ever since its institution.”<sup>12</sup>

The meal was religious in character, and the participants reclined at the table (John 13:12, 23, 25, 28; cf. Mark 14:18). At an ordinary meal, diners sat down to eat, as indicated by rabbinical sources.<sup>13</sup> At the Last Supper, however, Jesus and His disciples did not sit; they reclined, because “at the Passover, as a symbol of liberty, it was the ritual duty of the people present to recline at the table even—as is expressly stated—for ‘the poorest man in Israel.’”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, after the meal Jesus did not return to Bethany as He had done the preceding nights. He walked to the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:1-2). The reason is that custom dictated that “the night of Passover had to be spent in Jerusalem (contemporary exegesis derived this command from Deut. 16:7). In order to make possible the observance of this command, the city district had been enlarged to include Bethphage. Bethany, however, lay outside the enlarged city district.”<sup>15</sup> The above indications suggest that John, like the synoptic writers, regarded the Last Supper that Jesus shared with His disciples as a Passover meal.

**The Ordinance of Foot-washing in John.** John mentions an important detail of the Passover meal which is left out in the Synoptic accounts, namely, the foot-washing service that Jesus rendered to His disciples. Jesus “rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then 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 13:4-5).

After performing this service, Jesus explained to His disciples that He wanted them to follow His example: “Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you” (John 13:12-15).

The foot-washing service is generally called “the ordinance of humility,” implying that its primary purpose is to teach humility by requiring His followers to perform the menial task of washing someone else’s feet. This service, however, is much more than a lesson in humility. It represents the spiritual cleansing that Christ offers to those who accept His atoning sacrifice for their sins by partaking of the emblems of the bread and wine.

This meaning is implied in Christ’s answer to Peter’s request to be washed all over. Jesus said: “A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean” (John 13:10, NIV). A person who is bathed is clean, but walking on dusty roads cause open-sandaled feet soon to become dusty and in need of washing again. Similarly, the disciples were clean (“you are clean,” John 13:10) because their sins had been washed away through baptism, but as they walked on the miry soil of sin, they had been tempted to nourish pride and jealousy; thus they needed Christ’s grace to cleanse their hearts again from selfishness and pride.

The spiritual cleansing typified by foot-washing could well be the Christian counterpart to the removal of all leaven from the Jewish homes before Passover. This interpretation would provide an additional indication of the paschal nature of the Last Supper. The correspondence is brought out in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*: “Custom demanded that in celebrating the Passover Jewish families remove all leaven, sin, from their homes before the first day of the Week of Unleavened Bread (Ex 12:15, 19, 20). So believers must confess and repent of all sin—including pride, rivalry, jealousy, resentful feelings, and selfishness—before they can be in the right spirit to have communion with Christ at this deepest level. To this end Christ instituted the ordinance of foot-washing. . . . This ordinance, preceding the Lord’s Supper, fulfills the injunction that all should examine themselves so as not to participate in that meal ‘in an unworthy manner’ (1Cor 11:27-29).”<sup>16</sup>

The meaning of the foot-washing appears broader than an invitation to a preparatory cleansing prior to the reception of the Lord’s Supper. It includes also the reassurance of cleansing resulting from partaking of the emblems of Christ’s atoning death. This is suggested by the fact that the foot-washing took place either during or after the Lord’s Supper. Textual evidence is divided on whether John 13:2 should read “supper being ended” or “while supper was in progress.” In either case, the spiritual cleansing of the foot-washing would be the result of partaking of the emblems of Christ’s atoning death. In this case, foot-washing could be both an invitation to cleanse our hearts in preparation for the Lord’s Supper and a reassurance of the cleansing from sin God offers us as we participate in the Lord’s Supper.

**The Last Supper and the Paschal Lamb.** My conclusion that the Last Supper was an early Passover meal, eaten a day earlier on account of Christ's death at Passover, poses a problem: How could the disciples prepare the Passover meal with a lamb a day before the actual slaying of the lambs in the afternoon of Nisan 14 at the Temple? Was there a provision for slaying lambs on the day before? Or did the disciples prepare a special Passover meal without the lamb?

Some scholars argue that in the year of Christ's crucifixion the slaying of the lambs could have began a day earlier, that is, on Thursday afternoon. Their reasoning is that when Nisan 14 fell on a Friday the slaying of the lambs would presumably begin on Thursday. Otherwise, all the paschal lambs could not be killed and roasted before the Sabbath began. This made it possible for some (presumably the Pharisees) to keep Passover on Thursday evening, and for others (presumably the Sadducees) to keep it on Friday evening.<sup>17</sup> A major objection to this view is that "there is some evidence<sup>18</sup> that in the time of Jesus the slaughter of them [lambs] began soon after noon [when Nisan 14 fell on a Friday], in which case there was time for the completion of all the necessary preparation before the Sabbath commenced."<sup>19</sup>

The problem I see with this objection is that it assumes that by anticipating the beginning of the slaughtering of the paschal lambs by about two hours, that is, moving it up from about 3:30 p. m. to 1:30 p. m., there would have been ample time to slay all the lambs in the Temple court before the Sabbath began.<sup>20</sup> Such an assumption does not take into consideration the actual number of lambs slaughtered in the Temple court and the procedure that was followed there.

Josephus informs us that the Syrian Governor Cestius Gallus requested the high priest to take a census of Jerusalem to convince Nero of the importance of the city and of the Jewish nation. The method used by the high priest was to count the number of lambs slain at Passover, namely, 256,500. Then he multiplied that number by 10, the average number of persons served by each lamb. At the lowest computation of ten persons per lamb, this would give a population of 2,565,000 or, as Josephus himself puts it, 2,700,200 persons.<sup>21</sup> On an earlier occasion, Josephus computed the number of Jews present in Jerusalem at Passover to be not fewer than 3,000,000.<sup>22</sup>

**Time Needed to Sacrifice Passover Lambs.** How long would it take to slaughter a quarter-million lambs in the restricted area of the Temple court? The slaughtering took place in the so-called Court of the Priests and the Court of Israel. The combined surface area of the two courts was less than 10,000 square feet. "The Court of Israel was 135 cubits long and 11 cubits wide. Next

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was the Court of the Priests of the same size as the Court of Israel.”<sup>23</sup> Since a cubit corresponds to about 20 inches, each court was approximately 225 feet long and 18 feet wide. Allowing 2 1/2 feet per person, the Court of Israel could accommodate at most a hundred Jews at a time lined up shoulder to shoulder with their lambs.

To estimate how long it would take for a hundred Jews to sacrifice their paschal lambs in the Temple Court, one must understand the elaborate ritual that was followed. Edersheim offers us an informative description of the ritual. “Each division [group of Jews allowed in the Temple Court at one time] must consist of not less than thirty persons (3x10, the symbolic number of the Divine and of completeness). Immediately the massive gates were closed behind them. The priests drew a threefold blast from their silver trumpets when the Passover lamb was slain. Altogether the scene was most impressive. All along the Court up to the altar of burnt-offering priests stood in two rows, the one holding the golden, the other silver bowls. In these the blood of the Paschal lambs, which each Israelite slew for himself (as representative of his company at the Paschal Supper), was caught up by a priest, who handed it to his colleague, receiving back an empty bowl, and so the bowls with the blood were passed up to the priest at the altar, who jerked it in one jet at the base of the altar. While this was going on, a most solemn ‘hymn’ of praise was raised, the Levites leading in song, and the offerers either repeating after them or merely responding. . . . This service of song consisted of the so-called ‘Hallel,’ which comprised Psalms 113 to 118. . . . Next, the sacrifices were hung up on hooks along the Court, or laid on staves which rested on the shoulders of two men (on Sabbath they were not laid on staves), then flayed, the entrails taken out and cleansed, and the inside fat separated, put in a dish, salted, and placed on the fire of the altar of burnt-offering. This completed the sacrifice. The first division of offerers being dismissed, the second entered, . . . the service being in each case conducted in precisely the same manner.”<sup>24</sup>

Assuming that it took only ten minutes to fulfill this elaborate sacrificial ritual (a rather conservative estimate), means that in one hour only six groups of a hundred Jews could be admitted in the Temple Court. Thus only six hundred lambs could be slain per hour. Since on Friday the slaying began earlier, at about 1:30 p. m., and lasted until about 6:00 p. m., fewer than 3,000 lambs could be slain in the Temple court in four-and-a-half hours. If the figure given by Josephus of 256,500 lambs slaughtered at Passover in the Temple Court is correct, it would take over 417 hours (over 17 days) nonstop to slaughter that many lambs. Obviously, this could not be accomplished in one afternoon.

We have reason to believe that the figures given by Josephus are highly inflated; Jerusalem simply could not accommodate and supply food to 3,000,000 people. Supposing the actual number of lambs slain at Passover was only one tenth of Josephus' figure, that is, only 25,000, it would still take over 41 hours to slaughter that many lambs in the Temple court at the rate of six hundred lambs per hour. Obviously, again, even 25,000 lambs could not be slain in one afternoon. These factual observations strongly support the contention that in the year of Christ's crucifixion, the slaying of the lambs could have begun on a Thursday afternoon since Nisan 14 fell on a Friday. In that case, Jesus and His disciples could have eaten their paschal meal with the lamb on Thursday evening. This would have been done because Christ knew that He would suffer death at Passover in fulfillment of the type provided by the slaying of the paschal lamb on Nisan 14.

**Passover Meal Without the Lamb.** So far I have argued that the Last Supper was part of a *real* Passover meal with the lamb, though it was partaken of a day earlier because Jesus knew His crucifixion would take place at the time of the slaying of the paschal lambs. I have suggested that such a meal could have been eaten a day earlier with a lamb, because the slaughtering of the lambs most likely began a day earlier when Nisan 14 fell on a Friday.

Without discounting this conclusion, we should consider another possibility, namely, that the Last Supper was a special Passover meal not only because it was partaken of a day earlier, but also because the item which gave the most significance to the meal, the paschal lamb, was lacking. Prior to the destruction of the Temple in A. D. 70, it was unthinkable for a Jew to celebrate Passover without the lamb, because it was the blood of the lamb, the symbol of divine deliverance from Egyptian bondage, that gave meaning to the feast. For Christians, however, the paschal lamb is not needed to celebrate Passover, because Jesus Himself is the true Paschal Lamb whose blood delivers us from the bondage of sin.

Possibly Jesus wanted His last Passover Supper with His disciples to be eaten without the lamb to impress upon them the fact that He was their Paschal Lamb. Therefore, He could have planned that they celebrate Passover not by eating the flesh of a lamb and pouring out its blood at the Temple's altar, but by partaking symbolically of His own flesh and blood, their true Paschal Lamb.

Support for this view stems from the fact that no mention is made of the paschal lamb in either the Gospels or the Pauline accounts of the Last Supper, possibly because the paschal lamb was missing. Maybe Jesus instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover meal without the lamb because He wanted to impress upon them that He Himself was their Paschal Lamb that would be



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sacrificed the next day. He wanted to institute a new Passover to commemorate deliverance from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of Himself, the true Paschal Lamb. As such, there was no need of a roasted lamb for the new Passover meal. The bread and wine, symbols of His body and blood, were sufficient.

**The Emblems of the Christian Passover.** The symbolic partaking of the body and blood of Jesus through the elements of the bread and wine (Mark 14:22-24) can be understood best as the replacement of the paschal lamb. Until that moment, Passover had been celebrated by eating a lamb and pouring out his blood at the foot of the altar. Now the new Passover was to be celebrated symbolically by partaking of the very body and blood of the Messiah, the true Paschal Lamb.

Jacob Jocz rightly observes that “The reference in John 6 to eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of the Messiah has sense only in the context of the Passover meal. Let us remember that a sin offering was never eaten by the worshipper himself, though it would sometimes be eaten by the officiating priest. Even as a metaphor, it would make little sense and appear outrageous to Jewish ears (cf. John 6:60), apart from a reference to the Passover Meal where the blood of the Lamb was a recognized symbol of salvation. John 6 read in conjunction with the Last Supper completes the pattern of his message: just as the Israelites were saved by the blood of the Passover and participated in the first Exodus, so the believers in the Messiah are saved by the sacrifice on the Cross to participate in the second and greater Exodus—from the slavery of sin to the freedom of the children of God.”<sup>25</sup>

On the basis of these observations, Jocz supports D. Chwolson’s suggestion that “Jesus did in fact celebrate the Passover *before* the feast was due, but it was an incomplete meal, for the Paschal Lamb was missing.”<sup>26</sup> I would add that the paschal lamb was intentionally missing because Jesus wanted to institute a new Passover in which His followers would celebrate redemption from sin, not through the flesh and blood of a lamb, but by partaking, through the symbolic elements of the bread and wine, of His own body and blood, the true Paschal Lamb (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29; 1 Pet 1:19).

In the light of the preceding discussion, we can conclude that the Last Supper was indeed a Passover Supper, though unique in two major ways. First, it was celebrated a day earlier because Jesus knew that He Himself would be sacrificed as the true Paschal Lamb on Passover day. Second, most likely it was celebrated without the paschal lamb, because Jesus wanted to institute a new Passover meal to commemorate His redemption from sin, not

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through the flesh and blood of a lamb, but through bread and wine, the new symbols of His own body and blood, soon to be offered “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). There was no need of a lamb because the Lamb of God was there in Person, giving Himself as food and offering for the sins of the world.

Why did Jesus choose the bread and wine instead of the flesh and blood of a lamb as the emblems of the new Passover? Presumably, He wanted to impress His disciples with the truth that He was the Lamb “who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). His followers no longer needed to sacrifice a lamb at Passover; their Passover Lamb “had been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross brought to an end the sacrifice of all animals, including that of the Passover lamb.

Had Christ chosen flesh and blood from a lamb to represent His atoning sacrifice, He would have perpetuated the sacrificial system which was designed to come to an end with His death on the Cross (Matt 27:51). By choosing instead the bread and wine (nonsacrificial elements of the Passover meal) as the emblems of His atoning death, Jesus detached the new Passover from the sacrificial system and transformed it into a fitting memorial of His redemption. This radical transformation can be seen also, for example, in the *cup of blessing* of the paschal meal which becomes the *cup of salvation*: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). By these few words, Paul shows that though some of the elements of the Jewish Passover survive, their meanings have changed. The sacrifice of Jesus is the new reality commemorated by the remaining ancient signs.

**The Meaning of the Christian Passover.** At His Last Supper, Jesus instituted a simple but profoundly meaningful ceremony to celebrate His atoning sacrifice for sin. He instructed His disciples to celebrate Passover henceforth by partaking of unleavened bread and wine in remembrance of His body and blood. The four texts that give us the account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Mark 14:22-25; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:15-20, 27-30; 1 Cor 11:23-26) suggest *three theological meanings*.

The Christian Passover *looks back* at what has already happened. It is *a proclamation of the death of Jesus* (1 Cor 11:26), a death which took place for all participants. The fruit of salvation wrought by Christ’s death is granted to all who symbolically partake of His broken body and shed blood. Through the emblems of the bread and wine, we appropriate the benefits of Christ’s death as a death suffered for us. It is a memorial feast of the Person and substitutionary work of the Messiah.

The *remembrance* goes beyond historical events and becomes a proclamation and appropriation by the believer of the benefits of Christ's death. In many ways this was true also of the Israelite Passover. Through the feast, the people reenacted and reexperienced the events on which their existence as an independent nation was based. Year-by-year, Israel called out of the past into the present the experience of the Exodus deliverance and reentered into the covenant with its blessings and obligations. Parents were to take time during the Passover meal to recount to their children the events of the Exodus deliverance, so that the original meaning and potency of the event would remain continually active (Ex 12:24-27).

In the same way the Christian Passover is an act of remembrance: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:24). We remember Jesus as the Paschal Lamb who was sacrificed for us by partaking of the emblems of His broken body and shed blood. This simple and yet dramatic ritual enables the believer not only to conceptualize but also to internalize and appropriate the reality of Christ's vicarious death.

This truth can be understood best through the typology of the substitutionary sacrifice of the paschal lamb, in particular, and of the sin-offerings, in general. Through the vicarious death of sacrificial animals, the Israelite accepted the provision of forgiveness and salvation. Similarly, through the vicarious death of Christ, the Christian accepts the provision of His redemption. As the blood of the Passover lamb kept God from killing the firstborn of the Hebrews, so the blood of Jesus shed on the Cross keeps God from punishing with death the penitent sinner.

The Christian Passover points to the *present*. Each celebration is a *new confirmation of God's covenant with His church*. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). The covenant is God's commitment to love and save His people: "The Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands" (Deut 7:7-9). The covenant is at the core of the Passover account. On the eve of the Exodus, God revealed Himself as the God who remembered His Covenant to the Fathers (Ex 2:24; 3:15). The Passover lamb whose blood was struck with a bunch of hyssop over the lintel and doorposts of the houses (Ex 12:7, 22) represented the outworking of God's covenant to protect and deliver the Israelites.

Similarly, on the eve of His Crucifixion, Christ reaffirmed His covenant by His willingness to shed His blood. At the Lord's Table, believers enter into fellowship with the exalted Lord. Paul describes this fellowship as "a participation in the blood . . . [and] body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). The benefits

of Christ's atoning death are mediated to believers in the *present* when they partake of the emblems of His blood and body. Thus the Christian Passover reaffirms the eternal Covenant that God promised to the fathers (Jer 32:40; 50:5; cf. Is 55:3; Ez 16:60) and seals it in the blood of the Messiah (Heb 13:20).

The Christian Passover looks toward the *future*. It is an *anticipation of the future messianic banquet*. This eschatological expectation is expressed in the Gospels by Christ's words: "I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine *until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God*" (Mark 14:25; cf. Matt 26:29; Luke 22:16, 18).<sup>27</sup> In Paul's letter to the Corinthians the eschatological expectation is expressed by the phrase "you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (1 Cor 11:26).<sup>28</sup> This expectation gives a sense of joy and jubilation to the Christian Passover and is reflected even in the daily breaking of the bread in the homes of the early Christians, who "partook of food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46).

As Christians we joyfully partake of the Lord's Supper, because for us it represents the redemption that Christ has already provided. While for Jews the deliverance from Egypt foreshadows the final Messianic redemption,<sup>29</sup> for Christians Messianic redemption is already an accomplished fact. Furthermore, while the historic Exodus was limited to the experiences of one people; the Christian Exodus is open to all the peoples of the world. The Christian Passover is the beginning of a joyful journey leading to a happy reunion with the Savior at the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

**Passover Symbolism in the Book of Revelation.** The eschatological meaning of Passover appears also in the book of Revelation, especially through the prominent symbolic figure of Christ as the Lamb who was slain. In the vision of the throne, the Lamb is praised as worthy to open the scroll of human destiny, "for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9). The Lamb slain to redeem people of all nations calls to mind the Passover lamb slain to redeem the Israelites out of Egypt. In both instances divine deliverance came after great tribulation. The Israelites were delivered from Egyptian oppression; the redeemed "come out of the great tribulation" (Rev 7:14). The Israelites smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on the door posts; the redeemed "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14).

Revelation uses the very imagery of the epic struggle with Egypt to depict the final conflict and deliverance of God's people. When the angels pour out the vials of God's wrath (Rev 16:2-21), the plagues are unleashed and, like the Egyptians of old, the enemies of God's people are scourged with

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hail, fire, darkness, locust, ulcers, bloody waters, and frogs. Such a chain of events leads up to a New Exodus of a great multitude out of all nations who “sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:3). The song of Moses was sung after the victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea. The redeemed sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb in a similar setting as they stand on the banks of the sea of glass which is mingled with fire, seemingly representing the Red Sea experience of the redeemed.

The first deliverance from Egypt, which marked the institution of Passover, foreshadowed the final deliverance of God’s people “who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). This joyous eschatological Paschal Banquet represents the consummation of the hopes and expectations of God’s people of all ages. A foretaste of the joy of that Paschal Banquet can be experienced even now by responding to Christ’s knocking at the door of our hearts: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev 3:20).

## PART II THE OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

**Passover Taken for Granted.** The New Testament makes frequent use of Passover imageries and typologies, but offers only indirect indications of the Christian observance of Passover. The oldest accounts of the actual observance of Passover come down from the second century. These documents, as we shall see in the next chapter, clearly trace the origin of Passover back to the apostolic period.

The lack of explicit information in the New Testament regarding the time and manner of observance of Passover could imply that its observance was taken for granted. In the next chapter we note the many ways the life of the apostolic church was still regulated by the Jewish liturgical calendar.

In *Biblical Calendars*, Van Goudoever rightly observes that “in order to understand the origin of Christian festivals, we must realize that in the first part of the first century Christians and Israelites shared the same religious tradition. They even worshipped together in the same synagogue. Christianity was in its earliest stage a ‘sect’ or group among the Israelities. . . . Part of this general tradition is formed by the festivals and the calendar. Of all parts of the liturgy the feasts are perhaps the most enduring: it is practically impossible to change the date and form of old festivals . . . We shall see that in general Christianity continued to observe the old feasts.”<sup>30</sup>

**Indirect Indications of Passover’s Observance.** An indirect indication of the Christian observance of Passover is John’s frequent use of the phrase “The Passover of the Jews was at hand” (2:13; 6:4; 11:55). John’s concern to inform the reader that he is referring to the Passover *of the Jews* suggests that, to use Joachim Jeremias’s words, “he obviously distinguishes the Jewish Passover from the Christian.”<sup>31</sup>

Luke offers another example of the observance of “old feasts” when he reports that Paul and his travelling companions “sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 20:6). Luke does not tell us why Paul postponed his departure until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The reason could be, as Howard Marshall points out, that “he [Paul] was celebrating the Christian Passover with the church at Philippi.”<sup>32</sup>

*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* offers a similar comment on Acts 20:6: “Paul seems to have stayed intentionally at Philippi because of the Jewish feast. The Passover season must have continued to be fraught with great religious sentiment for Paul, a Jew and a Pharisee (ch. 23:6). Perhaps also Christians were beginning to think of the Passover time as the anniversary of Christ’s death and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 5:7-8).”<sup>33</sup>

Ellen G. White concurs with this conclusion. She writes: “At Philippi Paul tarried *to keep the Passover*. . . . The Philippian were the most loving and true-hearted of the apostle’s converts, and *during the eight days of the feast* he enjoyed peaceful and happy communion with them.”<sup>34</sup> It is evident that, according to Ellen White, Paul did observe the feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread with the believers at Philippi.

Indirect support for the Christian observance of Passover is provided by Paul’s exhortation to “celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:8). In this passage, the apostle emphasizes the behavioral implications of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Just as the Jews before Passover clear out all traces of leaven from their dwelling, so the Corinthian believers must remove from their midst the leaven of evil in order to live up to the true meaning of the feast of Unleavened Bread. They, too, have a paschal victim, Christ, who was sacrificed once and for all. Consequently, as F. W. Grosheide puts it, “We are obliged to *keep the feast*, i. e. the feast of unleavened bread (cf. vs. 7). . . . The feast must be kept but must be done in a special way. They must *keep the feast* by leaving aside all iniquity, by parting with all sin even as the ancient Israelites did with their leaven.”<sup>35</sup>

Is Paul’s emphasis on the behavioral implication of the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread derived from the actual observance of such feasts?

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Several scholars believe this to be the case. For example, in his article on “Passover” in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Joachim Jeremias writes: “Behind this [1 Cor 5:7-8] there probably stands a primitive Christian Passover liturgy.”<sup>36</sup>

Paul did not divorce himself from the religious festivals of Judaism, because he found in them profound meaning for Christians. This point is brought out by Thomas J. Talley in *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 5:7, he writes: “Paul writes around A. D. 55 from Ephesus in Asia Minor, a city with whose synagogue he had an extended relationship (Acts 19:8). Writing, possibly, from around the time of Passover, he tells the Corinthians that he intends to remain in Ephesus until Pentecost (1 Cor 16:8). His references to Passover and Pentecost show that these times were significant for him, and he seems to assume that they have a definite meaning for the Corinthians to whom he writes. While in this year he made no attempt to observe either festival in Jerusalem, at a later time Acts 20:16 shows him ‘hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.’ All this suggests that Paul had by no means cut himself off from the liturgical festivals of Judaism. Nothing tells us how he observed Passover in Ephesus around the time of his writing of 1 Corinthians 5:7, but it is clear that already the festival had for him a new meaning established on the Cross.”<sup>37</sup>

**Passover and the Lord’s Supper.** The meaning and ritual of the Christian Passover was similar to that of the Lord’s Supper observed during the course of the year. The main difference, as we shall see in chapter 3, is that during the course of the year the Lord’s Supper was celebrated as *part* of a religious service, while at Passover the Lord’s Supper was *the main part* of the service, being celebrated at dawn as the climax of an all-night vigil of fasting.

A connection between Passover and the Lord’s Supper may be present in 1 Corinthians. In their commentary on *1 Corinthians* of the *Anchor Bible*, William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter view Paul’s exhortation to keep Passover in 1 Corinthians 5:8 as an anticipation of his discussion of the observance of the Lord’s Supper in chapter 11, where he deals with the unworthy participation of some.<sup>38</sup> In other words, Paul’s exhortation in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 to keep Passover by living uprightly is closely linked to his warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27 against partaking of the Lord’s Supper in “an unworthy manner.”

In his classic study on *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, W. D. Davies also notes a possible connection in 1 Corinthians between Passover and the Lord’s Supper. He writes: “It seems a justifiable assumption that 1 Corinthians was written before the Passover season and it is natural that the Passover ritual



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should be in the forefront of Paul's thought, and there is considerable evidence that this was so. Thus in 1 Corinthians 15:23, Christ is called the first-fruits, an element in the Passover ritual, and there is a more specific reference still of course in 1 Corinthians 5:7. Perhaps it is strictly incorrect to claim that Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7 is thinking of the Eucharist [Lord's Supper] as the Christian equivalent of the Jewish Passover. . . . Nevertheless, *we believe that Paschal ideas dominate his view of the Eucharist* [Lord's Supper]. We have previously pointed out that the thought of Christianity as a New Exodus, with its New Torah, was constantly in Paul's mind and is fully consonant with this that the Last Supper should be regarded by him as the inauguration of the New Covenant."<sup>39</sup>

One could wish to know how Paul related the Passover Supper with the Lord's Supper discussed in 1 Corinthians 11. Undoubtedly, both constituted for him a proclamation of the "Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). It is clear, however, that for Paul the memorial of Christ's death is to be observed not only once a year at Passover but "as often as" the Lord's Supper is celebrated (1 Cor 11:26).

The phrase "as often as" suggests that the Apostolic Church sensed the need to celebrate their new Passover more frequently than once a year. The fundamental importance attached to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus made it imperative for the primitive church to celebrate the memorial of His death not only annually at Passover but periodically during the course of the year. "The salvation of men," writes Ellen White, "depends upon a continual application to their hearts of the cleansing blood of Christ. Therefore, the Lord's supper was to be observed more frequently than the annual Passover."<sup>40</sup>

We do not know how frequently the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the Apostolic Church. Paul is very specific regarding the meaning and manner of observance of the Lord's Supper but very vague regarding the time of its observance. Four times he repeats the expression "when you assemble . . ." (1 Cor 11: 18, 20, 33, 34). Elsewhere I have argued that the reason for Paul's indefinite references to the time of the Christian evening gatherings for the celebration of the Lord's Supper was most likely the fact that such gatherings were prohibited by the Roman legislation which outlawed evening gatherings of illegal societies. To avoid a search by the Roman police, Christians apparently often changed the place and time of their evening Lord's Supper meals.<sup>41</sup>

The observance of Passover differed from that of the Lord's Supper especially in the length of the celebration. While the Lord's Supper was part of an evening religious gathering (which in time was anticipated to the

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morning because of the Roman legislation prohibiting such gatherings), Passover, as we shall see in chapter 3, was an all-night fasting vigil which terminated at dawn with celebration of the Lord's Supper and an *agape* meal.

**The Influence of Passover on the Christian Life.** Passover, being a feast that celebrates Christ's redemption from sin, is a powerful symbol that influences the Christian life. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul challenges his converts to adhere to correct moral behavior because "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). This incidental reference to Christ as the Passover sacrifice is remarkable because the church in Corinth was heavily Gentile. This suggests that the existential meaning of Passover was well known and accepted even among the Gentiles, presumably because they observed the feast.

The Corinthian church was plagued with factional and moral problems. To bring its members back to proper Christian behavior, Paul appeals to the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread as a model for what Christians should be. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:6-8).

This passage suggests that for Paul the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread have profound ethical implications for the Christian life-style. As Anthony Saldarini points out, "The Christian community which celebrates Passover with Jesus as the Passover sacrifice must engage in behavior appropriate to the Passover festival. Contact with Christ as Redeemer at Passover demands a new way of life. The old, the sinful must be cleaned out of the community the way the old leaven is removed from Jewish homes before Passover begins. The new period initiated by Passover demands new, unleavened, pure bread. Similarly, the new Christian community is *really unleavened*, but it must act that way. The nature of the community which celebrates Passover coincides with the nature of Passover. If the community at Corinth has allowed the man living with his stepmother to continue as a member of the community, it has allowed old, leavened, evil behavior to continue. And this 'leaven of malice and evil,' even though it is only 'a little leaven, leavens the whole lump.' Just as Temple rituals must be celebrated in a state of ritual purity, Christian life must be lived in a state of moral purity."<sup>42</sup>

Passover serves as a model for the Christian life-style because Jesus is the Passover Lamb who is constantly present as Victim and Savior. Christians who participate in Passover celebrate not merely past deliverance from

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Egyptian slavery but, primarily, present redemption from all evil and sins. This allusion is also found in 1 Peter, where the Apostle urges believers to live holy lives because “You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things, such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Pet 1:18-19).

Christians have been ransomed not with the ordinary medium of exchange, gold and silver, but with the precious blood of Christ who is compared to a “lamb without blemish or spot.” The preeminent lamb which saved the Israelites is obviously the Passover Lamb. Christ, as the spotless Paschal Lamb, has power to deliver us from our past sinful ways and to empower us to live upright and holy lives.

The above examples suffice to show how the richness of the Passover imagery is effectively used in the New Testament to portray the redemptive accomplishments of Christ and the behavioral implications for those who accept Christ as their Paschal Lamb.

**Conclusion.** Our study of the time, nature, and meaning of the Paschal Supper that Jesus ate with the disciples has shown that the Savior anticipated eating the Passover meal the night before the official Passover meal because He knew that He would suffer death as the true Paschal Lamb at the time of the slaying of the paschal lamb.

We found that during the Passover meal, Christ instituted the new Passover to commemorate His death by the emblems of His broken body and shed blood. By stating “I shall not eat it [Passover] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16), Christ revealed His intent for the observance of Passover to continue until its fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

Essentially, the Christian Passover points to the *past*, *present*, and *future*. It points to the *past* by commemorating the suffering and death of Christ. It points to the *present* by confirming God’s covenant with His church. It looks forward to the *future* by nourishing the hope of the happy reunion with the Savior at the celebration of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

The New Testament offers only indirect indications of the observance of Passover, apparently because its observance was taken for granted. This gap is filled by documents of the second century which trace back the observance of Passover to the apostolic church.

In the New Testament, the observance of Passover served as a model for the Christian life-style by challenging believers to clean out the sinful ways, just as the Jews removed leaven from their houses before the feast, and to live a new (unleavened) life of sincerity and truth.

## NOTES ON CHAPTER 2

1. See, for example, M. Black, *The Scrolls and the Christian Origins* (New York, 1961), pp. 199ff.

2. For an analysis of the weaknesses of the theory, see George Ogg, *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament* (London, 1965), pp. 82ff.

3. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California, 1950), p. 399.

4. Emphasis supplied.

5. Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 657.

6. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1956), vol. 5, p. 536.

7. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 305.

8. William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, 1982), pp. 497-498.

9. Norval Geldenhuys (note 5), pp. 659-660.

10. For documentation and discussion, see Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Oxford, England, 1995), pp. 15-16.

11. See Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2, 8, 5.

12. Joachim Jeremias (note 10), p. 18.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

16. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Washington, D. C., 1988), p. 196.

17. This view was first presented by Derenbourg in the Dutch journal *Orientalia* in 1840. It was later developed by D. Chwolson in *Das letzte Passamahl Christi und der Tag seines Todes*, 1892. For a discussion see George Ogg, "The Chronology of the Last Supper" in *Historicity and Chronology in the New Testament* (London, 1965), pp. 78-79.

18. Philo, *De Septenario* 18.

19. George Ogg (note 17), p. 78.

20. Edersheim himself assumes this in his authoritative study on *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (London, 1874), p. 190. Speaking of the crowd leading their sacrificial lambs up the Temple-mount, he writes: “Already the evening sacrifice had been offered. Ordinarily it was slain at 2:30 p. m. and offered at about 3:30. But on the eve of the Passover, as we have seen, it was killed an hour earlier; and if the 14th of Nisan fell on a Friday—or rather from Thursday at eve to Friday at eve—two hours earlier, so as to avoid any needless breach of the Sabbath.”

21. Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 6, 9, 3.

22. *Ibid.*, 2, 14, 3.

23. W. F. Stinespring, “Temple: Jerusalem,” *The Interpreters’ Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, 1962), vol. 4, p. 554.

24. Alfred Edersheim (note 20), pp.191-193.

25. Jacob Jocz, *A Theology of Election* (New York, 1958), p. 37.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Emphasis supplied.

28. Emphasis supplied.

29. D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1956), p. 191.

30. J. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), p. 151.

31. Joachim Jeremias, “Pasha”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), vol. 5, p. 901,

32. I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1980), p. 325.

33. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1957), vol. 6, p. 386.

34. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California, 1960), pp. 390-391. Emphasis supplied.

35. F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983), p. 126.

36. Joachim Jeremias (note 31), vol. 5, p. 901, note 41.

37. Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York, 1986), p. 4.

38. William F. Orr and James A. Walther, *1 Corinthians* (New York, 1976), p. 151.

39. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London, 1955), pp. 250-251.

40. Ellen G. White, "The Passover," *The Signs of the Times* (March 25, 1880), p. 9.

41. My discussion of the Roman *hetaeriae* legislation is found in *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 95-99.

42. Anthony J. Saldarini, *Jesus and Passover* (New York, 1984), p. 82

# Chapter 3

## PASSOVER

### IN THE

## EARLY CHURCH

The importance of Passover in the early church is evidenced by the controversies that erupted regarding the time and manner of its observance. In fact, the Passover controversy became so intense in the second half of the second century that it threatened to split Christian churches. Viewing it as the Feast of Redemption, the most important feast of the Christian calendar, the early Christians were keen to observe it at the right time and manner.

The study of the observance of Passover in the primitive church is vital to our investigation because it validates what we found in the New Testament regarding its meaning and continuity. While early Christian traditions are not always a safe guide for determining religious practices today, because the mystery of iniquity was already at work in apostolic time (2 Thess 2:7), they do provide a valuable insight into how Biblical teachings and practices such as Passover were understood and observed within different Christian communities. To be true to our Christian heritage, we need to be sensitive to the witness of those Christians who have sought to be true to the teachings of the Word of God.

**Objectives of the Chapter.** This chapter has two objectives, which divide it into two parts. The first part addresses three common arguments adduced to deny the continuity in the New Testament of the Old Testament Holy Days. Essentially, these are the same arguments used to deny the continuity of the Sabbath. An analysis of these arguments is most important because it exposes the fallacies of the prevailing misconceptions and encourages a more objective study of the relevance of Old Testament festivals for Christians today.

The second part of the chapter examines the observance of Passover in early Christianity and notes the factors which contributed to the abandonment of the Biblical date of Passover (Nisan 14) and the adoption of Easter-Sunday.

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The study shows that this change affected not only the date of Passover but also its meaning and experience. In time, Easter became associated with numerous pagan practices and superstitions which are foreign to the meaning and experience of the Biblical Passover.

## PART I ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE OBSERVANCE OF HOLY DAYS

**Christ, the Fulfillment of the Holy Days?** A first argument against the Christian observance of Holy Days such as Passover or the Sabbath is the belief that they have been replaced by the new existential reality brought about by Christ's redemption. Some allege that Christ fulfilled the redemptive typology of Passover and the Sabbath by being sacrificed as the Paschal Lamb and by offering us the salvation rest. Consequently, Christians no longer need to observe these days, since the Messianic redemption to which they pointed has come.<sup>1</sup>

This argument is based on the faulty assumption that the coming of Christ fulfilled so completely the typological meaning of the Passover and of the Sabbath that their observance has become obsolete. Such reasoning ignores the clear witness of the Scripture. In regard to Passover we saw in chapter 2 that Christ explicitly said: "I shall not eat it [Passover] until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16). The words of Jesus make it clear that there is still a future fulfillment of Passover that will be realized with the establishment of God's kingdom. Similarly, regarding the Sabbath, Scripture says, "There remains a sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb 4:9).<sup>2</sup>

The typology of Passover, like that of the Sabbath, reaches beyond the Cross to the eschatological consummation of redemption. The deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian oppression foreshadowed the deliverance of the redeemed "out of the great tribulation" (Rev 7:14). The first deliverance from Egypt marked the institution of Passover, so the final deliverance of God's people will be celebrated by "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9).

It is important to note that some Old Testament institutions, like Passover, have three meanings: *historical*, *typological*, and *eschatological*. *Historically*, Passover commemorates the divine deliverance from Egyptian oppression. *Typologically*, Passover represents the spiritual deliverance from the bondage of sin. *Eschatologically*, Passover points forward to the final deliverance of God's people at the Return of Christ. This means that while the typological sacrificial rituals of Passover terminated at the Cross when Christ our Paschal Lamb was sacrificed, the eschatological function of Passover



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continues through the new typological ritual instituted by Christ to commemorate His *passion* and *parousia*. The observance of Passover enables us to conceptualize and internalize the new spiritual realities which it represents. It invites us to commemorate the suffering and death of Christ and to look forward to a happy reunion with the Savior at His coming (Rev 19:9).

To retain Passover merely as a symbol of the existential reality of salvation while denying its actual observance is a flagrant contradiction. How can Christians experience the existential reality of salvation represented by Passover, when its actual observance, which forms the basis of such an experience, is renounced or denounced? To do away with the observance of Passover means to deprive Christians of a most effective vehicle given by God to understand and experience the reality of salvation.

### **The Alleged Discontinuity Between the Old and New Testaments.**

A second argument against the observance of Holy Days such a Passover is the lack of explicit instructions in the New Testament regarding the time and manner of their observance. This is interpreted as proof of their termination with the death of Christ. This prevailing view rests on the gratuitous assumption that the coming of Christ brought about a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments, Law and Grace, Judaism and Christianity. The abandonment of the Old Testament Holy Days is seen as the most obvious evidence of this radical discontinuity.

This dualistic and antagonistic understanding of the Old and New Testaments as being mutually exclusive has plagued Christianity during much of its history. It can be traced back to the gnostic Marcion (about A. D. 150), who rejected the Old Testament and its institutions as products of an evil god. Its influence is still evident today in the dispensational theology which views Israel and the Church as two separate peoples, with two different origins and destinies.

According to the dispensational construct, the earliest converts who accepted Christ as their Messiah immediately perceived themselves as “the New Israel,” with a New Moses, a New Faith and a new liturgical calendar. Supposedly, they immediately recognized that the dispensation of the Law had passed and now they were living in the dispensation of Grace. To give expression to their new faith, the earliest Christians immediately felt the urgency to establish, among other things, new places of worship, namely, Christian churches, and new Holy Days, namely Sunday, Easter-Sunday, and Christmas.

This conception of Christian origins is grossly inaccurate and misleading. The New Testament recognizes that Christ’s coming brought about a

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certain discontinuity by fulfilling Old Testament typological institutions, but this discontinuity is never interpreted in terms of abrogation of the Mosaic law, in general, or of Holy Days, in particular. The meaning of the discontinuity must be defined in the light of the sense of continuity that is evident in the New Testament. I have shown elsewhere how this continuity is present in various books of the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> In this context, I limit my remarks to the writings of Luke.

**Continuity in Luke.** Luke emphasizes the continuity between Judaism and Christianity in a variety of ways. A good example is provided in his portrayal of the apostolic church. Again and again he reports the mass conversion of thousands of Jews (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 9:42; 12:24; 13:43; 14:1; 17:12; 21:20). To a modern reader, “conversion” implies a radical change in life-style and/or religion. This, however, was not necessarily the case with the earliest converts. The “many thousands” of Jews who “believed” (Acts 21:20) did not view their acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as their expected Messiah as representing a breaking away from their Jewish religion and a joining to a new religion—Christianity. They simply viewed themselves as “believing Jews.”

Jews could be converted by the thousands, because their acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as their expected Messiah meant to them not a rejection of their religion, but the realization of their Messianic expectations. Luke describes the thousands of Jewish converts as “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). Paul is described in his speeches as a “Pharisee” (Acts 23:6) who believes everything written in the law and the prophets (Acts 24:14) and who has done nothing “against the law of the Jews, nor against the Temple” (Acts 25:8; and 28:17). To prove that he lived “in observance of the law,” Paul agreed to undertake a ritual purification at the Temple (Acts 21:24-26) during his last visit to Jerusalem, about A. D. 58.

Repeatedly, Luke speaks of “the law of Moses” (Luke 2:22; 24:44; Acts 13:39; 28:23), which he calls “the living oracles” (Acts 7:38). Jacob Jervell notes that “there is no conflict with the law in Jesus’ attitude as described in many disputes about the Sabbath. Luke records no less than four disputes and he is concerned to show that Jesus acted in complete accordance with the law, and that the Jewish leaders were not able to raise any objections.”<sup>4</sup>

**The Jerusalem Council.** The Jerusalem Council generally is considered the watershed in the history of the apostolic church when a definite break was made in principle with the law. The exemption from circumcision granted to the Gentiles is interpreted as representing the abandonment of the rest of the Old Testament laws, including Holy Days. This interpretation is

inaccurate because the council's final court of appeal is Moses himself: "For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues" (Acts 15:21).

Jervell rightly notes that "No matter how the complicated passage, Acts 15:21, is to be interpreted in detail, the function of the verse is to validate the decree, and to call upon Moses as witness. Everyone who truly hears Moses knows that the decree expresses what Moses demands from Gentiles in order that they may live among the Israelites."<sup>5</sup> The Jerusalem Council does not exempt the Gentiles from the observance of the whole Mosaic law, but only from the law of circumcision. How could the Council have rejected the authority of Moses when its decree that the Gentiles must observe four ritual laws (Acts 15:20, 29) is based upon the Mosaic legislation regarding the stranger living with the Israelites (Lev 17-18)?<sup>6</sup>

**The Places and Times of Christian Gatherings.** The sense of continuity can also be seen in Luke's frequent references to the Temple, the synagogue, prayer, and preaching all of which suggest that Christian worship was viewed as a continuation and reinterpretation of the Jewish religious services. The synagogue is the place of worship most frequently mentioned. Paul met in the synagogue regularly with "Jews and Greeks," and even Apollo met with the believers at Ephesus in the synagogue (Acts 18:24-26).<sup>7</sup>

After the martyrdom of Stephen, Paul went searching for Christians in the synagogues at Damascus (Acts 9:2; 22:19), presumably because they still met there. Later in his own ministry, the apostle, "as was his custom" (Acts 17:2), met regularly on the Sabbath in the synagogues, in the open air, and in homes, both with the Jews and with the Gentiles (Acts 13:14; 17:2; 18:4; 13:44; 16:13). Paul kept the days of Unleavened Bread at Philippi (Acts 20:6) and was eager to be in Jerusalem "on the day of Pentecost" (Acts 20:16). All of this suggests that the life of the Apostolic Church was still regulated by the Jewish liturgical calendar.

The earliest converts were predominantly Jews and God-fearers who were very zealous in the observance of the law (Acts 21:20). They saw in Christ the fulfiller of the law in the sense of the One who clarified its meaning and realized its promises. Gradually, they perceived that certain aspects of the law, such as those relating to the Levitical ministry and sacrifices, had become obsolete by the coming of Christ. No indication exists, however, that this perception led Christians to doubt or to negate the value and validity of Holy Days such as Sabbath or Passover.

**Paul and the Law.** The two arguments above, often used to negate the continuity of the Holy Days in the New Testament, are surpassed in impor-

tance by the third argument, which appeals to Paul in defense of the abrogation of the Old Testament law, in general, and of the Holy Days, in particular. In view of the immense importance attributed to Paul's comments regarding the law and the Holy Days, I examined this subject at great length in two of my Sabbath books.<sup>8</sup> Interested readers are referred to these studies. In this context I limit myself to a few basic observations regarding Paul's attitude toward the law, in general, and the Holy Days, in particular.

Recent studies show that Paul has a "double concept" of the law, "sometimes saying that it is good and has been fulfilled in Christ and sometimes that it is bad and has been abolished in Christ."<sup>9</sup> In Ephesians 2:15, Paul speaks of the law as having been "*abolished*" by Christ, while in Romans 3:31 he explains that justification by faith in Jesus Christ does not overthrow the law but "*establishes*" it. In Romans 7:6, he states that "now we are discharged from the law," while a few verses later he writes that "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good" (7:12).

In Romans 10:4, Paul writes that "Christ is the end of the law," while in 8:3-4, he explains that Christ came "in the likeness of sinful flesh . . . in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us." Paul maintains in Romans 3:28 that "a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law"; yet in 1 Corinthians 7:19, he states that "neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but keeping the commandments of God." In 2 Corinthians 3:7 Paul designates the law as "the dispensation of death" while in Romans 3:2, he views it as part of the "oracles of God" entrusted to the Jews.

How can Paul view the law both as "*abolished*" (Eph 2:15) and "*established*" (Rom 3:31), unnecessary (Rom 3:28) and necessary (1 Cor 7:19; Eph 6:2, 3; 1 Tim 1:8-10)? A popular explanation says that Paul's negative statements refer to the Mosaic, ceremonial law, while the positive ones refer to the moral law of the Ten Commandments. Such an explanation, however, is based on an arbitrary distinction between moral and ceremonial laws which cannot be found in Paul's writings.

The correct explanation is to be found in the different contexts in which Paul speaks of the law. When he speaks of the law in the context of salvation (justification—right standing before God), he clearly affirms that law-keeping is of no avail (Rom 3:20). But when Paul speaks of the law in the context of Christian conduct (sanctification—right living before God), he maintains the value and validity of God's law (Rom 7:12; 13:8-10; 1 Cor 7:19).

Central to Paul's understanding of the law is the Cross of Christ. From this perspective, he both negates and affirms the law. Negatively, the apostle repudiates the law as the basis of justification: "If justification were through

the law, then Christ died to no purpose” (Gal 2:21). Positively, Paul teaches that the law is “spiritual, good, holy, just” (Rom 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Tim 1:8), because it exposes sin and reveals God’s ethical standards. Thus, he states, Christ came “in order that the just requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us” through the dynamic power of His Spirit (Rom 8:4).

The failure to distinguish in Paul’s writing between his moral and soteriological usages of the law has led many to fallaciously conclude that Paul is an antinomian who rejected the value and validity of the law as a whole. Such a view is totally unwarranted, because *Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct.*

**Paul and Holy Days in Colossians 2:16.** Historically, many have believed and still believe that Paul taught that Christians are under no obligation to observe the Old Testament law, in general, and Holy Days in particular. This conclusion is based on three Pauline texts, namely, Colossians 2:14-17, Galatians 4:8-10, and Romans 14:5-6, where reference is made to the observance of days. Of the three references, greater importance has been attached to Colossians 2:14-17, inasmuch as the passage warns against paying heed to regulations regarding several things: “Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (2:16-17).

The statement “Therefore, let no one pass judgment on you . . .” has been interpreted as a Pauline condemnation of the observance of Old Testament Holy Days. In spite of its antiquity and popularity, this interpretation is totally wrong, because in this passage Paul is not warning the Colossians not against the observances of the five mentioned practices (eating, drinking, feasts, new moon, and Sabbaths), but against “anyone” (*tis*) who passes judgment on how to observe them.

Note should be taken of the fact that *the judge who passes judgment is not Paul, but the Colossian false teachers* who impose “regulations” (2:20) on how to observe these practices in order to achieve “rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body” (2:23).

D. R. De Lacey, writing in the symposium *From Sabbath to Lord’s Day*, rightly comments: “The judge is likely to be a man of ascetic tendencies who objects to the Colossians’ eating and drinking. The most natural way of taking the rest of the passage is not that he also *imposes* a ritual of feast days, but rather that he *objects* to certain elements of such observation.”<sup>10</sup> Presumably the “judge,” that is, the false teachers, wanted the community to observe these practices in a more ascetic way (“severity to the body”—2:23, 21); to put it

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crudely, the false teachers wanted the Colossian believers to do less feasting and more fasting.

By warning against the right of the false teachers to “pass judgment” on how to observe Holy Days, Paul is challenging not the validity of the Holy Days as such, but the authority of the false teachers to legislate on the manner of their observance. The obvious implication is that Paul in this text is expressing *not a condemnation but an approbation of the mentioned practices*, which included Holy Days.

It is noteworthy that De Lacey reaches this conclusion in spite of his view that Paul did not expect Gentile converts to observe the Holy Days. He writes: “Here again (Col 2:16), then, *it seems that Paul could happily countenance Sabbathkeeping . . .* However, we interpret the situation, Paul’s statement ‘Let no one pass judgement on you,’ indicates that *no stringent regulations are to be laid down over the use of festivals.*”<sup>11</sup> In the light of these observations, we conclude that in Colossians 2:16, Paul expresses not a condemnation but an implicit approbation of the observance of Holy Days.

**Condemnation of Perversion.** Paul gives us only a few hints of how false teachers promoted the observance of food and festivals. He mentions that they insisted on “self-abasement and worship of angels,” “rigor of devotion . . . severity to the body” (2:18, 23), and that they taught: “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” (2:21). These catch phrases indicate that the regulations did not derive from the Levitical law, since nowhere does the latter contemplate such an ascetic program. Though the nomenclature of the festivals is Jewish, the motivation and manner of their observance stems from syncretistic ideologies.

In the ancient world, there was a widespread belief that ascetism and fasting enabled a person to come closer to a deity and to receive divine revelation.<sup>12</sup> In the case of the Colossian “philosophy,” the dietary taboos and the observance of sacred times were apparently regarded as an expression of subjection to and worship of the cosmic powers (elements) of the universe (Col 2:8, 10, 15, 20).

Paul’s warning against the “regulations” of the false teachers can hardly be interpreted as a condemnation of Mosaic laws regarding food and festivals, since what the apostle condemns is not the teachings of Moses but the perverted use of them promoted by the Colossian false teachers. *A precept is not nullified by the condemnation of its perversion.*

**Shadow of the Reality.** Paul continues his argument, saying: “These are the shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17).

To what does the relative pronoun “these” (*ha* in Greek) refer? Does it refer to the practices mentioned in the previous verse or to the “regulations” (*dogmata*) regarding these practices promoted by the false teachers?

Most likely it refers to the latter. First, because in verse 16, Paul is warning not against the merits or demerits of the Mosaic law regarding food and festivals, but against the “regulations” regarding these practices advocated by the false teachers. Thus, it is more plausible to take “the regulations” rather than the actual practices as the antecedent of “these.”

Second, because in the verses that immediately follow, Paul continues his warning against the deceptive teachings, saying, “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement . . .” (2:18); “Why do you submit to regulations, ‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’” (2:20-21)? Since what precedes and what follows the relative pronoun “these” deals with the “regulations” of the Colossian false teachers, we conclude that it is the latter that Paul describes as “a shadow of what is to come” (2:17).

Presumably, the proponents of the false teachers maintained that their “regulations” represented a copy which enabled the believer to have access to the reality (“fulness,” Col 2:9). In such a case, Paul is turning their argument against them by saying that their regulations “are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (2:17). By emphasizing that Christ is the “body” and the “head” (2:17, 19), Paul indicates that any “shadow” cast by the regulations has no significant value.

In the light of the above indications, we conclude that what Paul calls a “bygone shadow” is not the Holy Days but the deceptive teachings of the Colossian false teachers which promoted dietary practices and the observance of sacred times as auxiliary aids to salvation.

**Paul and the Holy Days in Romans 14:5.** In Romans 14, Paul distinguishes between two types of believers: the “strong” who believed “he may eat anything” and the “weak” who ate only “vegetables” and drank no wine (Rom 14:2, 21). The difference extended also to the observance of days, though it is not clear which of the two esteemed “one day as better than another” and which esteemed “all days alike” (Rom 14:5).

Many have maintained that the Old Testament Holy Days come within the scope of this distinction respecting days. They presume that the “weak” believers esteemed the Holy Days better than other days, while “the strong” treated the Holy Days like the rest of the weekdays.

Can the Old Testament Holy Days be legitimately read into this passage? In my view, this is impossible for at least three reasons. First, the



conflict between the “weak” and the “strong” over diet and days can hardly be traced back to the Mosaic law, because nowhere does the Mosaic law prescribe strict vegetarianism, total abstinence from wine, or a preference over days presumably for fasting.

That the Mosaic law is not at stake in Romans 14 is also indicated by the term “*koinos*—common,” which is used in verse 14 to designate “unclean” food. This term is radically different from the word “*akathartos*—impure” used in Leviticus 11 (Septuagint) to designate unlawful foods. Apparently the dispute was over meat which, per se, was lawful to eat but because of its association with idol worship (cf. 1 Cor 8:1-13) was regarded by some as “*koinos*—common,” that is, unfit for human consumption.

The whole discussion in Romans 14 is not about freedom to observe the law versus freedom from its observance, but concerns “unessential” scruples of conscience dictated not by divine precepts but by human conventions and superstitions. Since these differing convictions and practices did not undermine the essence of the Gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect in this matter.

Second, Paul applies the basic principle “observe it in honor of the Lord” (14:6) *only* to the case of the person “who observes the day.” He never says the opposite, namely, “the man who esteems all days alike, esteems them in honor of the Lord.” In other words, with regard to diet, Paul teaches that one can honor the Lord both by eating and by abstaining (14:6), but with regard to days, he does not even concede that the person who regards all the days alike does so to the Lord. Thus, Paul hardly gives his endorsement to those who esteemed all days alike.

Third, if, as generally presumed, the “weak” believer was the one who observed the Holy Days, Paul would classify himself with the “weak,” since he observed the Sabbath and other Jewish feasts (Acts 18:4, 19; 17:1, 10, 17; 20:16). Paul, however, views himself as “strong” (“we who are strong”—15:1); thus, he could hardly have been thinking of Holy Days when he speaks of the preference over days.

The preference over days in Romans presumably had to do with fast days rather than feast days, since the context deals with abstinence from meat and wine (Rom 14:2, 6, 21). Support for this view is provided by the *Didache* (ch. 8) which enjoins Christians to fast on Wednesday and Friday rather than on Monday and Thursday as did the Jews.

Paul refuses to deliberate on private matters such as fasting, because he recognizes that spiritual exercises can be performed in different ways by

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different people. The important thing for Paul is to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Rom 14:19).

If the conflict in the Roman church had been over the observance of Holy Days, the problem would have been even more manifest than the one over diet. After all, eating habits are a private matter, but Holy Days are public celebrations. Any disagreement on the latter would have been not only noticeable but also inflammatory.

The fact that Paul devotes 21 verses to the discussion of food and less than two verses (Rom 14:5-6) to that of days suggests that the latter was a very limited problem for the Roman church, presumably because it had to do with private conviction on the merit or demerit of doing certain spiritual exercises such as fasting on some specific days.

**Paul and the Holy Days in Galatians 4:10.** In Galatians, Paul mentions that some Christians had themselves circumcised (Gal 6:12; 5:2) and had begun to “observe days, and months, and seasons, and years” (Gal 4:10). Some interpret this passage as a Pauline condemnation of the observance of sacred festivals. This interpretation ignores that the Galatians’ observance of sacred times was motivated not by the Old Testament feasts but by superstitious beliefs in astral influences. This is indicated by Paul’s charge that their adoption of these practices was tantamount to a return to their former pagan subjection to elemental spirits and demons (Gal 4:8-9). Apparently, on account of their pagan background, the Galatians, as Willy Rordorf points out, “could discern in the particular attention paid by the Jews to certain days and seasons nothing more than religious veneration paid to stars and natural forces.”<sup>13</sup>

In many respects, the polemic in Galatians 4:8-11 is strikingly similar to that of Colossians 2:8-23. In both places, the superstitious observance of sacred times is described as slavery to the “elements.” In Galatians, however, the denunciation of the “false teachers” is stronger. They are regarded as “accursed” (Gal 1:8, 9) because they were teaching a “different gospel.” Their teaching that the observance of days and seasons was necessary to justification and salvation perverted the very heart of the Gospel (Gal 5:4). By conditioning justification and acceptance with God to such things as circumcision and the observance of days and seasons, the Galatians were making salvation dependent upon human achievement. This, for Paul, is a betrayal of the Gospel: “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4).

It is within this context that Paul’s denouncement of the observance of days and seasons must be understood. If the motivations for these obser-

vances would not have undermined the vital principle of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, Paul would have recommended only tolerance and respect (as he does in Romans 14), even if some ideas were foreign to Old Testament teaching. The motivations for these practices, however, adulterated the very ground of salvation. Thus, the apostle has no choice but strongly to reject them. In Galatians, as in Colossians, then, it is not the observance of Holy Days that Paul opposes; rather, it is the perverted use of pagan cultic observances to promote salvation as a human achievement rather than as a divine gift of grace.

In the final analysis, Paul's attitude toward Holy Days must not be determined on the basis of his denunciation of heretical and superstitious practices, but on the basis of his overall attitude toward the law. The failure to understand that Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation, but upholds it as a moral standard of Christian conduct, has been the root cause of much misunderstanding of Paul's attitude toward the law, in general, and toward Holy Days, in particular.

## PART II PASSEVER IN THE EARLY CHURCH

**Passover Kept as a Night Vigil.** The New Testament does not offer us a clear picture of how Passover was observed by the apostolic church. The picture becomes clearer when we come to the second century. Several documents inform us regarding the meaning, manner and time of the observance of the Christian Passover. According to these documents, Christians celebrated Passover at the same time as Jewish Passover, beginning at sundown of Nisan 14 and continuing their vigil until the next morning. For this reason, they are called "Quartodecimans," the Latin for "fourteeners."

Christians did not eat the Passover lamb, but fasted in memory of Jesus' death and possibly in reparation for the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. They read and expanded the Passover story in Exodus 12 by applying it to the suffering and death of Jesus. They engaged in prayers, singing, and exhortations until dawn, when they broke their fast by partaking of the Lord's Supper and an *agape* meal.

The earliest account of Christian Passover is in the Ethiopic version of the apocryphal *Epistle of the Apostles*, probably written in Asia Minor around A. D. 150. Chapter 15 contains the following address of the risen Christ to the apostles: "And you therefore celebrate the remembrance of my death, i. e. the passover; then will one of you, who stands besides me, will be thrown into prison for my name's sake, and he will be very grieved and sorrowful, for

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while you celebrate the passover he who is in custody did not celebrate it with you. And I will send my power in the form of my angel, and the door of the prison will be open, and he will come out and come to you to watch with you and rest. And when you complete my remembrance and my Agape at the crowing of the cock, he will again be taken and thrown in prison for a testimony, until he comes out to preach, as I have commanded you.”<sup>14</sup>

The deliverance of Peter alluded to in this passage makes for a real “Passover story.” This “deliverance” of Peter took place in the Passover night, the night of watching. Here, Passover is kept as a night vigil in remembrance of the death of Jesus. The vigil extended to the early morning of the 15th day when the fast was broken with “my remembrance and my Agape,” a clear reference to the Lord’s Supper and the love feast.

The extension of the fasting to the early morning is mentioned in several other documents and seems to be a characteristic that distinguished the Christian observance from the Jewish. The reason for this extension of the fasting appears to be twofold. On the one hand, Christians chose to postpone their rejoicing until after the termination of the Passover feasting of the Jews, which ended at about midnight. On the other hand, the time prior to dawn had an eschatological meaning in relation to the expectation of the Return of Christ. While the Jews expected the coming of the Messiah on Passover night, the Christians awaited the Return of Christ before dawn. Jerome calls it an apostolic tradition to extend the Passover vigil until past midnight because of “the expectation of the Advent of Christ (*expectantes adventum Christi*).”<sup>15</sup>

The passage in the *Epistle of the Apostles* continues with the disciples asking Christ: “O Lord, have you then not completed the drinking of the passover? Must we then do it again?” Jesus responds to the apostles, saying: “Yes, until I come from the father with my wounds.”<sup>16</sup> The question posed by the disciples reflects the author’s awareness of a dispute over the necessity for Christians to observe Passover. Presumably, some Christians felt no need to observe Passover because they viewed it as a Jewish feast. The dispute may have arisen, as Thomas Talley suggests,<sup>17</sup> as a result of the influx of Gentiles who were reluctant to observe a feast previously unknown to them. This view is supported by a significant testimony of Epiphanius, who, as we shall see, asserts that the controversy over Passover erupted after A. D. 135, when the Jewish-Christian bishops of Jerusalem were replaced by Gentile bishops as a result of Hadrian’s edict which forbade Jews and Jewish-Christians to enter the city.

**A Passover Homily.** Another informative document of the Christian observance of Passover is the *Sermon on the Passover* (dated about A. D. 165)

by Melito, Bishop of Sardis. In a highly rhetorical fashion, Melito explains how the old Passover has found fulfillment in Christ. It is significant that the Biblical setting is still the Exodus story (Ex 12:11-30), which the author reads and expands as in the Jewish Passover *haggadah* (narration, ritual). “Therefore hear ye beloved: Thus the mystery of Passover is new and old, eternal and transient, corruptible and incorruptible, mortal and immortal. It is old according to the Law (of Moses), but new according to the Word; transient according to the world, but eternal through grace; corruptible as to the slaughter of the sheep, incorruptible because of the Life of the Lord; mortal because of the burial of the Lord, immortal because of the Resurrection from the dead.”<sup>18</sup>

This sermon makes it incontrovertibly clear that Christians in Asia Minor observed Passover at the same time as the Jews, using the same story and metaphors of the Jewish Passover. The difference is that they did not sacrifice a lamb, because their Passover Lamb was already slaughtered. They did not commemorate deliverance from Egypt, but celebrated instead their deliverance from the bondage of sin. They did not expect the coming of the Messiah on Passover night, but awaited on that night the Return of Christ. The Exodus story was read, but a new Christian meaning was attached to it. “For led as lamb and slaughtered as a sheep, he [Jesus] ransomed us from the ruin of the world as from the land of Egypt, and freed us from slavery of the devil as from the hands of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls with his own spirit and the members of our bodies with his own blood . . . This is he who rescued us from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, from oppression to an eternal Kingdom and made a new priesthood and a chosen people. He is the true Passover, he it is who in many men suffered many things.”<sup>19</sup>

Melito’s paschal homily clearly reveals that the primitive Christian Passover focused primarily on the suffering and death of Jesus rather than on His resurrection. Though he makes few passing references to the resurrection, it is clear from the context that these function as the epilogue of the passion drama. The Easter-Sunday celebration of the resurrection widely observed today represents a significant departure from the date and meaning of the primitive Christian Passover. The suffering and death of Jesus is the recurring theme of Melito’s sermon and the very definition he gives to the term “Passover”: “What is Passover? Indeed, its name is derived from that event—to celebrate the Passover [*pascha*] is derived from ‘to suffer’ [*paschein*]. Therefore, learn who the sufferer is and who he is who suffers along with the sufferer.”<sup>20</sup>

The explanation that “Passover–*pascha*” derives etymologically from “to suffer–*paschein*” is unfounded, since in Hebrew the term “Passover–*pesah*” means “passing over,” or “sparing.” Though erroneous, this defini-

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tion reveals the Christian view of Passover, namely, the commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ.

**The Passover Controversy.** The importance of Passover in the religious life of the early Christians is indicated by the controversy which flared up in the second century over the date for the celebration of the Passover. This became a major controversy in the latter half of the second century that threatened to split Christian churches. Our primary source of information for this controversy is the historian Eusebius (ca. A. D. 260-340) and the letters preserved by him in the fifth book of his *Church History* (chapters 23-25). For the purpose of this study, we briefly consider only the basic issues of the controversy.

The two protagonists of the controversy were Bishop Victor of Rome (A. D. 189-199) on the one side and Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus on the other. Bishop Victor championed the observance of Easter-Sunday, that is, the observance of Passover on the Sunday following the date of the Jewish Passover. He demanded the convocation of councils in various provinces to codify Easter-Sunday. Eventually, he excommunicated the recalcitrant Christian communities of the province of Asia for refusing to adopt Easter-Sunday.

Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus and representative of the Asian churches strongly advocated the traditional Passover date of Nisan 14, commonly known as “Quartodeciman (from the Latin fourteenth) Passover.” In accordance with Victor’s instructions, Polycrates summoned the church leaders of his Asian province to consider Victor’s request. The Asian bishops, however, unanimously agreed to remain true to the apostolic tradition transmitted to them by the apostles Philip and John and refused to be frightened into submission by the threats of Victor of Rome. Polycrates concluded his reply to Victor by saying: “I, therefore, brethren, who have lived sixty-five years in the Lord, and have met with the brethren throughout the world, and have gone through every Holy Scripture, am not affrighted by terrifying words. For those greater than I have said, ‘We ought to obey God rather than man.’”<sup>21</sup>

Upon receiving this letter, Victor issued letters to all the churches excommunicating the entire province of Asia. Such an impulsive and ill-advised action precipitated the reaction of many bishops, including Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyon (from ca. A. D. 176), who intervened as peacemaker in the controversy. In his letter to Bishop Victor, Irenaeus urged the Roman Bishop to be more tolerant because the predecessors of Soter (A. D. 165), namely, “Anicetus, and Pius, and Hyginus and Telesphorus, and Xystus, . . .” though “they did not observe it, they were nonetheless at peace with those from the dioceses in which it was observed.”<sup>22</sup>

Unfortunately, Irenaeus does not explain what it is that some “observed” and some “did not observe.” It has been commonly held that the object of the verb “observe” is the (Quartodeciman) Passover kept on Nisan 14, which Soter’s predecessors did not observe because they observed Easter-Sunday. This popular explanation has been challenged by a number of reputable scholars, who appeal to Irenaeus’s assertion that the difference between the bishops of Rome and the Quartodecimans was more severe prior to Soter than it was in the time of Victor. This assertion, as Thomas Talley explains, “has led several important writers in this century to the more radical conclusion that prior to Soter the annual Pascha was not celebrated by the Roman church at all. Irenaeus’ references to those who ‘observe’ does mean, indeed, those who observed the Pascha on the traditional date of Passover. Those who did not ‘observe,’ however, did not observe the Pascha on the traditional date of Passover *or at any other time.*”<sup>23</sup>

This explanation clarifies Irenaeus’ account of the meeting that took place in Rome (about A. D. 154) between Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna and Bishop Anicetus of Rome to discuss among other things the question of Passover. Irenaeus tells us that Anicetus was unable to persuade Polycarp “not to observe what he had always observed with John the disciple of our Lord, and the other apostles with whom he had associated,” and Polycarp was unable to persuade Anicetus to observe as he had, the Roman Bishop declaring that “he ought to follow the custom of the presbyters that had preceded him.”<sup>24</sup>

The meaning of this passage becomes clear, if, as Thomas Talley explains, “we accept the position of Holl and so recognize that the discussion between Polycarp and Anicetus had to do not with *when* one should observe the Pascha, but *whether* one should observe it. That, as Irenaeus suggested to Victor, was a more serious difference than the question of the day on which the fast should be terminated, whatever pastoral difficulties that might present. The disagreement between Anicetus and Polycarp represented yet another dimension of the still resolving difference of attitude toward Jewish roots held by the then-dispersed Jerusalem community, on the one hand, and the Gentile mission, on the other. It was simply the question of the importance of Christians continuing to observe Passover, the very question, incidentally, that the writer of *Epistula Apostolorum* 15 [the *Epistle of the Apostles*] put on the lips of the apostles and to which they received the Lord’s affirmative reply.”<sup>25</sup>

**The Origin of Easter Sunday.** The foregoing interpretation of Irenaeus’ letter suggests that Easter-Sunday was introduced at Rome by Bishop Soter around A. D. 165. This, however, was not the time of the origin of Easter-



Sunday. The actual introduction of Easter-Sunday appears to have occurred earlier in Palestine after Emperor Hadrian ruthlessly crushed the Barkokeba revolt (A. D. 132-135) and rebuilt on the ruins of Jerusalem a new Roman city, *Aelia Capitolina*. At this time, Hadrian promulgated the most repressive legislation, prohibiting the practice of Judaism, in general, and Jewish festivals, in particular. Jews and Jewish-Christians were expelled from the city and categorically forbidden to reenter it.<sup>26</sup>

Eusebius informs us that as a result of Hadrian's edict, the Jewish-Christian members and bishops of Jerusalem were replaced with Gentile Christian members and leaders: "The Church there was now composed of Gentiles, the first one to assume the government of it after the bishops of the circumcision was Marcus."<sup>27</sup> This replacement suggests that a clear distinction was made at that time between Jewish-Christians and Gentile-Christians. Presumably, this distinction was not limited to the racial factor alone, but included also a new theological orientation, especially toward characteristic Jewish festivals such as Passover.

This hypothesis is supported by the Palestinian historian Epiphanius (ca A. D. 315-403), who in his lengthy report over the Passover controversy states: "The controversy arose after the exodus of the bishops of the circumcision [A. D. 135] and it has continued until our time."<sup>28</sup> Epiphanius clearly says that the fifteen Jewish-Christian bishops who administered the Jerusalem Church until A. D. 135 had observed Passover on Nisan 14 in accordance with the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions*, where the following rule is given: "You shall not change the calculation of the time, but you shall celebrate it at the same time as your brethren who came out from the circumcision. With them observe the Passover."<sup>29</sup>

The fact that the Passover controversy arose when Emperor Hadrian adopted new repressive measures against Jewish religious practices suggests that such measures influenced the new Gentile hierarchy to change the date of Passover from Nisan 14 to the following Sunday (Easter-Sunday) in order to show separation and differentiation from the Jews and Jewish-Christians. Elsewhere, I have argued that the same factors contributed to the abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday.<sup>30</sup>

Thomas Talley suggests that the Gentile bishops who caused the Passover controversy by introducing Easter-Sunday had not observed Passover prior to that time (A. D. 135). Their introduction of Easter-Sunday would then represent an accommodation "to the vestiges of the observance of the annual festival by the Jerusalem community."<sup>31</sup> This may well be true. On the other hand, it would seem more likely that the accommodation of the Gentile

hierarchy was based on their past observance of Passover at the traditional date of Nisan 14. It is difficult to imagine why they would accommodate the traditional Passover date if they had never observed it before. At any rate, Easter-Sunday was soon adopted by many Gentile-Christian churches, especially by the Church of Rome that became the champion of the new practice.

**Easter-Sunday and Anti-Judaism.** As long as Jewish Christians had influence in the church, the Biblical typology and experience of Passover were maintained by the church. But as Gentile Christians gained control of the church and promoted Easter-Sunday, the Biblical Passover themes began to wane, being replaced by pagan symbols and myths that, as we shall see, became part of the Easter celebration.

Donna and Mal Broadhurst rightly observe that “Gentile Christians usually came from a background devoid of Scriptural knowledge. They did not have a natural appreciation for, allegiance to, or comprehension of the Scriptures, especially the Law and Prophets which they misunderstood, overlooked, or actually discarded in the early church struggle to break free from erroneous legalizers. They found it easy to disregard Passover and other major institutions of the Mosaic Covenant.”<sup>32</sup> The problem with Gentile Christians was not only their lack of familiarity with Scripture, but also their excessive fascination with their Greek philosophical speculations, which conditioned their understanding of Biblical truths. While Jewish Christians often erred in the direction of legalism, Gentile Christians often erred in the direction of philosophical speculations which sundered Christianity from its historical roots.

The detachment of Gentile Christians from their Jewish roots was influenced by the repressive policies adopted by Roman emperors against the Jewish people and religion as well as by the defamatory campaign waged by Jews against the Christians. These factors encouraged Gentile Christians to develop a “Christian” theology of contempt toward the Jews as a people and toward Judaism as a religion. A whole body of *Against the Jews* literature was produced by leading Fathers who defamed the Jews as a people and emptied their religious beliefs and practices of any historical value.<sup>33</sup> Two major casualties of the anti-Jews campaign were Sabbath and Passover. The Sabbath was changed to Sunday and Passover was transferred to Easter-Sunday.

Scholars usually recognize the anti-Judaic motivation for the repudiation of the Jewish reckoning of Passover and adoption of Easter-Sunday instead. Joachim Jeremias attributes such a development to “the inclination to break away from Judaism.”<sup>34</sup> In a similar vein, J. B. Lightfoot explains that Rome and Alexandria adopted Easter-Sunday to avoid “even the semblance of Judaism.”<sup>35</sup>

**Nothing in Common with the Jews.** Perhaps the most explicit and forceful expression of anti-Judaism for the repudiation of the traditional Passover dating is found in the letter that Emperor Constantine formulated at the Council of Nicea in A. D. 325. In desiring to establish a religion completely free from any Jewish influence, the emperor wrote regarding Passover: “It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. . . . *Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd:* for we have received from our Savior a different way. . . . Strive and pray continually that the purity of your soul may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the custom of these most wicked men. . . . All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, *avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews.*”<sup>36</sup>

The Council of Nicea (A. D. 325) put an end to the controversy over the date of Passover by decreeing that it should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring. To ensure that Easter-Sunday would never be celebrated at the same time as the Jewish Passover, the council decreed that if the 14th of Nisan fell on a Sunday, then Easter was to be celebrated on the following Sunday.

Nicea represents the culmination of the Passover controversy initiated two centuries earlier and motivated by strong anti-Judaic feelings. Unfortunately, the controversy was “settled” at Nicea, not Biblically but politically. It was settled by suppressing the traditional observance of Passover and by adopting instead Easter-Sunday as championed by the church of Rome.

“As far as Christian Passover is concerned,” write Donna and Mal Broadhurst, “the beginning of the Dark Ages can be set at 325 A. D. with the Council of Nicea. Along with turning their back on Jews, the Gentiles turned their back on the Jewish Scripture. They disallowed Jewish input to their faith, life-style, and worship. They became persecutors of the Jews. In place of the Exodus Passover story to inspire a sense of justice and freedom for all men, the Gentile church had the words and example of power-hungry leaders who taught oppression. It took a major reformation centuries later to begin to undo the horror and destruction the church brought on the world when the Gentiles at Nicea formally adopted the policy of having ‘nothing in common with the Jews.’”<sup>37</sup>

**Easter-Sunday and Pagan Symbolism.** The change from the primitive observance of Passover to that of Easter-Sunday was not only a change of dates from Nisan 14 to the following Sunday, but also a change of meaning

and experience. The primitive Christian Passover, as we have seen, followed in many ways the Jewish Passover. Both celebrated the drama of redemption, though the focus of the Christian Passover was not the deliverance of God's people from Egyptian bondage, but their deliverance from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of the true Paschal Lamb.

The waning influence of Jewish Christians and the growing influence of Gentile Christians led not only to the adoption of a new date, Easter-Sunday, in order to have "nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd," but also to the acceptance of pagan speculations and fertility myths, which are foreign to the Biblical meaning of Passover.

In his scholarly book *The Bible and Liturgy*, the renowned Jesuit scholar Jean Daniélou examines in chapter 17 the meaning of "Easter" in the thought of the Fathers (a term used to refer to church leaders of the first five centuries). What is conspicuous in his survey is the attempt of Gentile church leaders to explain the meaning of Easter on the basis of philosophical speculations about cosmic mythologies, rather than on the basis of the Biblical Passover story. In this study, we can cite only a few examples. In his *Treatise on Easter*, the historian Eusebius explains that Easter is celebrated in Spring because this is the time when "the sun begins to run the first part of his course, and the moon at his side, in its full brilliance, transforms the whole course of the night into a luminous day. Ended are the furies of the storms of winter, ended the long nights, ended the floods."<sup>38</sup>

Eusebius continues arguing that Easter is observed in Spring also because it is the anniversary of creation: "This time was that very one which appeared at the moment of the first creation of the world, when the earth brought forth shoots, and the stars appeared; it is at this time that the Lord of the whole world celebrated the mystery of His own feast and, like a great star, appeared to light up the whole world with rays of religion and thus to bring back the anniversary of the cosmos."<sup>39</sup>

Similar philosophical speculations on the cosmic significance of Easter are frequent in the writings of the Fathers. A good example is found in the *Paschal Homily* of Gudentius of Brescia (about A. D. 400), who says: "The Lord Jesus decreed that the blessed feast of the Passover should be celebrated at a suitable time, after the fog of autumn, after the sadness of winter, and before the heat of summer. For, indeed, Christ, the Sun of Justice, was to scatter the darkness of Judaism and the ice of paganism before the heat of the future judgment by the peaceful light of His Resurrection, and bring back to the peaceful state of their origin all things which had been covered with obscurity by the prince of darkness."<sup>40</sup>

In spite of the imaginative rhetoric, these arguments are foreign to Biblical thought and derive from pagan speculations about Spring and the sun cycle. Nowhere does Scripture appeal to the ideal time of Spring as the reason for the date of Passover. In the Bible, the date of Passover is linked not to cosmic speculations but to a historical event, the night God delivered His people from Egyptian bondage.

**Easter-Sunday and Philosophical Speculations.** One could wish that the Fathers would have used their rational skills to help Christians understand and accept more fully the drama of redemption typified by the substitutionary sacrifice of the paschal lamb. Unfortunately, they failed to do so because their understanding of redemption was conditioned by their philosophical (gnostic) thinking, which viewed salvation more as metaphysical deification through special knowledge than a moral transformation through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

This helps us understand why many Fathers sought for the meaning of Easter in philosophical speculations about springtime, the spring equinox, numerical symbolism, and the conflict between light and darkness.<sup>41</sup> Their concern was to attain salvation through secret knowledge of mysteries to be found in the Bible and in cosmic cycles. Thus, the five days which separated the choice of the lamb on Nisan 10 from its immolation on Nisan 14 had for the Fathers a mysterious allegorical meaning, namely, that they represented the five ages of the world. This is brought out, for example, in the *Paschal Homilies* of Pseudo-Chrysostom: “This space of the five days is a figure of the whole time of the world, divided into five periods, from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to the coming of Christ, and from the coming of Christ until now. During all this time salvation by the holy Victim was presented to men, but the Victim was not yet immolated. It is in the fifth epoch of history that the true Pasch was immolated and that the first man, saved by it, came out in the light of eternity.”<sup>42</sup>

Speculations abound even on the symbolism of the 14th day of the lunar cycle on which Passover was to be celebrated.<sup>43</sup> Being the day on which the moon is full, it is interpreted by some of the Fathers as the triumph of light over darkness. This interpretation is surprising since they no longer observed Passover on the 14th of Nisan. Gregory of Nyssa brushes aside this incoherence in his *Sermon on the Resurrection*, simply by saying that the spiritual significance was more important than the literal observance.<sup>44</sup>

In the mysterious cosmic speculations of the Fathers, we find, as Jean Daniélou himself acknowledges, “the incorporation into the Christian mystery of a whole solar mythology. The conflict of light with darkness is

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expressed by the myth of Ormuzd and Ahriman, of Apollo and Poseidon. But Christ is the sun of the new creation. He rose at the time of the Incarnation: His name is Orient, the Dawn in the East, He attacked the power of darkness, and, on the day of His Resurrection, He completely scattered the darkness of death and of sin. So Christianity disengages the cosmic symbols from the pagan myths . . . and incorporates them as figures of the mysteries of truth. This line of thought shows that we are in the fourth century, at the time of the decline of paganism, *when Christianity began to cloth itself in its garments.*"<sup>45</sup>

**Easter: Anglo-Saxon Spring Goddess.** The process which led Christianity to clothe itself in the garments of paganism began when Gentile Christians gained control of the Church, and it continued during the Middle Ages when hordes of Barbarians entered the Church with their superstitious beliefs.

Passover was renamed "Easter," which derives from *Eostre, Eastur, Ostara, Ostar*, terms used by the Norsemen (ancient Scandinavians) to refer to the season of the rising sun. According to Bede (ca. A. D. 673-735), the "Father of English History," the word "Easter" is derived from *Eastre*, an Anglo-Saxon spring goddess to whom sacrifices were offered at the vernal equinox (March 21).<sup>46</sup> "This pagan festival probably gave way to the Christian celebration of the resurrection."<sup>47</sup>

Donna and Mal Broadhurst point out, "It is probable that Eostra/Ostara is the Anglo-Saxon version of Ishtar, the Sumerian goddess of love and war who in Canaan evolved into a moon goddess and wife of Baal. According to Sumerian lore, Ishtar was the wife of the Sumerian god, Tammuz. Both are spoken of in the Bible—Tammuz in Ezekiel 8:14 and Ishtar, called Ashtoreth and Queen of Heaven, in Judges 2:13, Judges 10:6, Jeremiah 44:17, and elsewhere.

"When Tammuz died, Ishtar followed him to the underworld, leaving the earth deprived of its fertility. She and Tammuz were rescued from death when the Queen of the Dead allowed a heavenly messenger to sprinkle them with the water of life. This allowed them to return to the light of the sun for six months of each year. For the other six they had to return to the land of death.

"The worship of Ishtar as a nature goddess had spread throughout the ancient world. In Phoenicia and Syria her name had become Astarte. Her husband earlier called Baal, and known as Tammuz farther east, became Adon and Adonai in Phoenicia and Syria. In Greece, Ishtar and Tammuz became Aphrodite and Adonis; in Asia Minor they became Cybele and Attis. Diana of the Ephesians (Acts 19:27) probably traces to Ishtar."<sup>48</sup>

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What makes these cults the forerunners of Easter is the fact that most of them had their annual festival at the vernal equinox, the Easter season, during which they celebrated the cycle of death and resurrection. In his book *Easter: Its Story and Meaning*, Alan W. Watts discusses the relationship of these pagan cults to Easter and notes that “their universal theme—the drama of death and resurrection—makes them the forerunners of the Christian Easter and thus the first ‘Easter services.’ As we go on to describe the Christian observance of Easter we shall see how many of its customs and ceremonies resemble these former rites.”<sup>49</sup>

**Lent from Pagan Cults.** One example of the former rites is the fast of Lent, which begins forty days before Easter. This practice most likely derives from the fast practiced among various ancient cults. A Lent of forty days was observed by the worshippers of the Babylonian Ishtar and by the worshippers of the great Egyptian mediatorial god Adonis or Osiris. The rape of the goddess Proserpine also was commemorated among the Romans by forty nights of wailing. Among the pagans, this Lent period seems to have been an indispensable preliminary to the great annual (usually spring) festivals commemorating the death and resurrection of their gods.<sup>50</sup>

Lent, with the preceding revelries of carnival, was entirely unknown in the earliest Christian Passover celebration. Christians fasted, as we have noted, the night of Passover until dawn, when they broke their fast with the Lord’s Supper, which commemorated Jesus’ expiatory suffering and death. The extension of the fast to forty days was apparently borrowed from pagan spring festivals.

Another example of pagan influence in the Easter celebration is the service of light, which is still part of the Catholic Easter liturgy. For this service, the priest and his assistants come with a candle to a wood fire in front of the church. After a greeting and a short introduction, the priest blesses the fire which he uses to light a candle. The priest then leads a procession with the lighted Easter candle to the church altar for the blessing and lighting of all the candles.<sup>51</sup>

The service of light, according to some liturgists, “is of Frankish origin and seems intended from the beginning as a sacrament of the Church that would replace the fires lit in spring by the pagans in honor of Wotan or some other heathen divinities to assure good crops.”<sup>52</sup> Alan Watts derives the lightening of the Easter candle from the great fire lighted by the devotees of Attis as they stood around his grave on the night of the spring festival celebrating his resurrection.<sup>53</sup> Though there is disagreement over which pagan practice influenced the origin of the Easter blessing of the fire and candles, there is ample consensus as to the pagan derivation of such practice.



**Easter Bunny and Eggs.** Pagan influence can also be seen in the replacement of the Passover symbolism of the lamb with that of the Easter hare. The Easter hare was once a bird which the goddess Eostre changed into a four-footed creature. The hare, or rabbit, became a symbol of fertility, presumably because rabbits are notably prolific. The hare laid eggs which became the symbol of the abundant new life of spring. Thus, the Easter egg is the production not of some mystical bird but of a rabbit or hare.

The origin of the Easter egg is traced back to the ancient civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, Phoenicia, and Greece, where the universe is said to have been born from a mighty world egg. “The ancient peoples of Egypt, Persia, Greece, Rome, and China exchanged eggs at their spring fertility festivals. In Babylonia, eggs were presented to the goddess of fertility, Astarte (Eostre).”<sup>54</sup>

Hyginus, the Egyptian historian who was the curator of the Palatine library in Rome at the time of Augustus, wrote: “An egg of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the river Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves having settled upon it, and hatched it, out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian Goddess [that is, Astarte].”<sup>55</sup> The egg became one of the chief symbols of Venus or Astarte. In Cyprus, one of the chief centers of the worship of Venus, an egg of a wondrous size was represented on a grand scale before her Temple.<sup>56</sup>

Christians adopted eggs for their Easter celebration because the egg was a popular pagan symbol of death and life. It was a symbol of death because the shell is like a tomb that imprisons the life-germ inside. It was a symbol of life insofar as it contains the source of a new creature.

Innumerable European folk customs are found in connection with Easter eggs. Eggs were elaborately painted with symbols, often Roman crosses and swastikas. Egg hunting in gardens was a favorite Easter game for children. In my country, Italy, eggs are blessed by the priest on Easter-Sunday with holy water when he goes from home to home. The “blessed” Easter eggs are then sold on the market with the promise of miraculous power, very much as sacrificial meat was sold on the market of ancient Rome (1 Cor 8:1-6). With the advent of the industrial era, Easter eggs were transformed into chocolate and sugar, wrapped in tin foil, or even trimmed with real gold and jewels, as was the custom among the wealthy in czarist Russia.

“Eggs laid on Good Friday are credited with miraculous powers. There is the belief that if such an egg is kept for a hundred years its yolk will turn into a diamond, or that if it is cooked on Easter Sunday it will work as a powerful amulet against sudden death or as a charm for fruitful trees and crops.”<sup>57</sup>

**Reformers and Easter.** The above survey of some of the pagan practices and superstitions associated with Easter helps us understand why the Reformers were generally opposed to the observance of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. “Calvin considered the annual church feast of Easter so paganized that at one point he did not observe it.”<sup>58</sup> Though Calvin tolerated the observance of Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas, he viewed their institution as a superstition, because God alone can institute a festival.<sup>59</sup> Luther shared the same view. In his *Treatise on Good Works*, he wrote: “And would to God that in Christendom there were no holy days except Sunday.”<sup>60</sup> Martin Bucer also opposed the many holy days because they often had pagan origin and appeared to be consecrated to the devil rather than to the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

The Reformers viewed the multitude of saints’ days and Marian feasts instituted by the Catholic Church as indicative of the apostasy into which the church had fallen. To rid the church of all the pagan superstitions which had become part of the popular piety, the Reformers did away with most of the annual holy days, retaining only Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. Even these were tolerated rather than promoted.

The position of Luther was based not only on his reaction against the superstitious observance of the host of holy days established by the Catholic Church, but also on his radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments. In the *Large Catechism* (1529), Luther explains that the holy days are “altogether an external matter, like other ordinances of the Old Testament, which were attached to particular customs, persons, and places, and now have been made free through Christ.”<sup>62</sup>

Luther chose to retain Sunday, not as a Biblical institution but as a convenient day “ordained by the church for the sake of the imperfect laity and the working class,”<sup>63</sup> who need “at least one day in the week . . . to rest and . . . to attend divine service.”<sup>64</sup> It is regrettable that in his efforts to cleanse the church from pagan superstitions and legalistic tendencies, Luther rejected even those Old Testament institutions which can help believers understand and experience the very “righteousness by faith” which he passionately taught.

Calvin rejected Luther’s radical distinction between the Old and New Testaments, emphasizing instead the basic unity between the two. For Calvin, as Winton Solberg explains, “the scheme of redemption unfolds in one unbroken sequence throughout the two Testaments. One covenant unites the people of God; it varies only in the mode of administration, not in substance. The Christian Church rather than the Jewish Nation is the society adopted by the Lord, and both were federally connected with him by the same law and

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doctrine. Using the same exegetical method as that of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Calvin Christianized the Old and Judaized the New Testament in order to make them appear as one unified covenant.”<sup>65</sup>

The respect that Calvin had for the Old Testament is reflected in the spiritual lessons which he finds in the annual festivals of Israel. Their function was to teach the people to trust in God and to be grateful for His goodness to them. By these festivals, the Jews were compelled to recognize that their prosperity depended upon God’s blessings and not on their own efforts. In spite of the valuable spiritual lessons that Calvin found in the Old Testament feasts, he rejected their observance because he viewed them as part of Jewish ceremonial laws abolished by Christ.<sup>66</sup>

Calvin attached great spiritual importance to Passover, which he saw as a monument of the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt as well as a symbol of the Christian deliverance from sin. He believed that though Passover was abolished as a ceremony, it should still be observed spiritually in order to be reminded constantly of the incomparable power and mercy of God.<sup>67</sup>

Calvin’s attempt to retain the spiritual observance of the Sabbath, Passover, and other annual holy days while rejecting their literal observance, poses an unresolved contradiction. How can Christians gain spiritual enrichment from holy days which they are not supposed to observe? How can Passover be celebrated spiritually as a memorial of our deliverance from the bondage of sin through Christ, our Paschal Lamb, while its literal observance is rejected? Do not Christians need as much as Jews the aid of the actual observance of Passover to experience the spiritual deliverance commemorated by the feast?

It is regrettable that though Calvin recognized the basic unity between the Old and New Testaments and the spiritual value of the annual holy days, he made no attempt to restore their true meaning and observance for Christians. Calvin and the other Reformers were so preoccupied with cleansing the church from the superstitious observance of the multitude of holy days which lacked scriptural warrant and occasioned pagan revelry that they ignored the need to restore those Biblical holy days which can help Christians conceptualize and experience the reality of salvation.

**The Puritans and Easter.** The moderate anti-feast attitude of the Reformers became radicalized by the Puritans, who swept away all religious holy days except Sunday. In England, the Puritan Parliament struck Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost from their calendar. In America also, the Puritans did not celebrate these feasts, which they regarded as part of the apostate church they had left behind in the old world. J. P. Walsh notes: “The Puritans

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rested on the Sabbath in order to keep it holy; they worked on December 25 in order to strip it of its sanctity.”<sup>68</sup>

The Puritans were familiar with the Exodus story, which they often quoted and applied to their own political situation. Like the Israelites, they believed they had been delivered by God’s hand from the oppression of the established church. They found the meaning of Passover in their sufferings and deliverance. They rejected the paganized Easter but made no effort to restore the Biblical observance of Passover. Their influence was so strong that hardly anyone in colonial America celebrated Easter or Christmas. The exceptions were places such as Louisiana and Maryland which had been settled by Catholics.<sup>126</sup>

The situation changed as new waves of Catholic immigrants brought to America their Easter customs, which were soon adopted by the American people. Mardi Gras, a carnival period climaxing on Shrove Tuesday before Lent, became popular in certain cities. The Easter parade, Easter bonnets, chocolate eggs, Easter baskets, and cute Easter bunnies, have all become part of the American Easter tradition. Still, some American churches with a strong Biblical commitment do not participate in the Easter customs with origins from pagan fertility cults.

**Conclusion.** Our examination of three common arguments adduced to deny the continuity in the New Testament of Old Testament Holy Days, such as Passover, shows they are based on groundless assumptions. The sacrifice of Christ did not exhaust the typological function of Passover, because Christ Himself said that the ultimate fulfillment of Passover will be realized at the final establishment of God’s kingdom (Luke 22:16).

The discontinuity brought about by the coming of Christ is never interpreted in the New Testament in terms of abrogation of the Mosaic law, in general, or of Holy Days, in particular. Rather, the meaning of discontinuity is defined in the light of the sense of continuity that is evident in the New Testament.

Our study of relevant Pauline passages shows that Paul’s attitude toward Holy Days must be determined not on the basis of his denunciation of heretical and superstitious practices, but on the basis of his overall attitude toward the law. The failure to understand that Paul rejects the law as a *method* of salvation but upholds it as a *moral standard* of Christian conduct has been the root cause of much misunderstanding of Paul’s attitude toward the law and toward Holy Days.

The earliest Passover documents clearly show that Christians observed Passover as a night vigil, beginning at sundown on Nisan 14 and continuing until the next morning. They celebrated Passover as their annual commemoration of the suffering and death of Christ. They engaged in prayer, singing, reading of Scripture, and exhortations until dawn, when they broke their fast by partaking of the Lord's Supper and an *agape* meal.

As Gentile Christians gained control of the church, they adopted and promoted Easter-Sunday instead of the traditional Passover date. The change was influenced by the repressive policies adopted by Roman emperors against the Jewish people and religion, as well as by the defamatory campaign waged by Jews against Christians. As a result, the Biblical Passover themes were gradually replaced by pagan symbols and myths, which became part of the Easter celebration. In time, Easter became associated with numerous pagan practices and superstitions which are foreign to the redemptive meaning and experience of the Biblical Passover.

In conclusion, Passover was observed in the early church as a commemoration of the suffering and death of Jesus by many faithful Christians who were committed to be true to the teaching of the Scripture regarding the date and meaning of the feast. Their example serves as a basis for reflecting in the next chapter on how we should observe Passover today.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

1. My analysis of this argument is found *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 53-56.

2. My analysis of Hebrew 4:9 is found in *The Sabbath in the New Testament* (Berrien Springs, Michigan, 1985), pp. 72-77.

3. See chapter 2, "The Continuity between Judaism and Christianity," in my book *The Sabbath in the New Testament* (note 2), pp. 28-40. For an extensive and perceptive analysis of how Luke emphasizes the Christian continuity with Judaism, see Jacob Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis, 1972), pp. 41-74, 133-152.

4. Jacob Jervell (note 3), p. 140.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

6. For an analysis of the Mosaic basis of the four ritual laws, see H. Waitz, "Das problem des sogenannten Aposteldekrets," *Zeitschreift für Kirchengeschichte* 55 (1936): 277-279.

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7. See my discussion of Luke's references to the places and times of Christian gatherings in *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 135-142.

8. See the appendix in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, pp. 339-369. Also chapters 6 and 7 in *The Sabbath in the New Testament*.

9. See Lloyd Gaston, "Paul and the Torah" in *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity*, ed. Alan T. Davis (New York, 1979), p. 62. Gaston provides a most perceptive analysis of Paul's attitude toward the law.

10. D. R. De Lacey, "The Sabbath/Sunday Question and the Law in the Pauline Corpus," *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 182.

11. *Ibid.*, emphasis supplied.

12. For texts and discussion, see G. Bornhamm, "Lakanon," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1967), vol. 4, p. 67; J. Behm also writes in the same *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV, p. 297: "The Greeks and Romans knew that abstention makes receptive to ecstatic revelations."

13. Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 133.

14. Edgar Hennecke and W. Schneemelcher, eds. and trans., *New Testament Apocrypha* (Philadelphia, 1963), vol. 1, p. 199.

15. Jerome, *Commentationum in Evangelium Matthaei* 25:6, *Patrologiae Latina* 26, 184.

16. Edgar Hennecke (note 14), p. 200.

17. Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York, 1986), p. 7.

18. Campbell Bonner, trans., *Melito of Sardes, the Homily on the Passion, with Some Fragments of Ezekiel*, *Studies and Documents* 12 (Philadelphia, 1940), p. 1.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Eusebius, *Church History* 5, 24, 7, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979), second series, vol. 1, p. 242.

22. Eusebius, *Church History* 5, 24, 14.

23. 82. Thomas J. Talley (note 17), p. 22. Among the scholars who defend this view are Karl Holl, "Ein Bruchstück aus einem bisher unbekanntem Brief des Epiphanius," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte. II: Der Osten* (Tübingen, 1927), pp. 204-224; Hans Lietzmann, *A History of the Early Church* (New York, 1961), pp. 135f.; Marcel Richard, "La question paschal au IIe siècle," *L'Orient Syrien* 6 (1961), pp. 179-212; A. Hamman, "Valeur et signification des renseignements liturgiques de Justin," *Studia Patristica* XIII.ii TU 116 (Berlin, 1975), pp. 364-374.

24. Eusebius, *Church History* 5, 24, 17.

25. Thomas J. Talley (note 17), p. 23.

26. See my discussion of the Hadrianic anti-Judaic legislation in *From Sabbath to Sunday* (Rome, 1977), pp. 159-164.

27. Eusebius, *Church History* 4, 6, 4, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979), second series, vol. 1, p. 178.

28. Eusebius, *Adversus haereses* 70, 10, *Patrologiae Graeca* 42, 356.

29. Ibid.

30. My analysis of the sociopolitical factors which contributed to abandonment of the Sabbath and the adoption of Sunday is found in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, (Rome, 1977), pp. 159-164, 198-234.

31. Thomas J. Talley (note 17), p. 25.

32. Donna and Mal Broadhurst, *Passover: Before Messiah and After* (Carol Stream, Illinois 1987), p. 142.

33. See my analysis of "Anti-Judaism in the Fathers" in *From Sabbath to Sunday*, (Rome, 1977), pp. 213--235.

34. Joachim Jeremias, "Pasha", *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Friedrich, ed., (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), vol. 5, p. 903, note 64.

35. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers* (New York, 1885), vol. 2, p. 88.

36. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3, 18-19, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979), second series, vol. 1, p. 524-525. Emphasis supplied.



37. Donna and Mal Broadhurst (note 32), p. 149.

38. Eusebius, *Treatise on Easter*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 23, 696D, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1956), p. 289.

39. Ibid.

40. Gaudentius, *De Paschate Sermones*, *Patrologiae Latina* 20, 844-845, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 38), p. 292.

41. For patristic texts, see Jean Daniélou (note 38), pp. 287-302.

42. Pseudo-Chrysostom, *De Paschate Sermones*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 59, 724, cited and trans. by Jean Daniélou (note 38), p. 295. The same allegorical interpretation of the five days which separated the choice of the lamb from its immolation is found in the writings of Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine. For patristic texts, see Jean Daniélou (note 38), pp. 294-295.

43. For patristic texts, see Jean Daniélou (note 38), pp. 296-298.

44. Gregory of Nyssa, *De Resurrexione Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 46, 628C-D.

45. Jean Daniélou (note 38), p. 299. Emphasis supplied.

46. Bede, *De Ratione Temporum* 15.

47. J. C. Connelly, "Easter," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 2, p. 180.

48. Donna and Mal Broadhurst (note 32), p. 156.

49. Alan W. Watts, *Easter: Its Story and Meaning* (New York, 1950), p. 58.

50. Ibid., pp. 59-65. See also Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Babylon* (London, 1853), p. 93; James Wilkinson, *Egyptian Antiquities* (London, 1837), p. 278; Edwin H. Landseer, *Sabean Researches* (London, 1823), p. 112; Arnobius, *Adversus Gentes* 5 (Paris, 1836), p. 403.

51. For a description and historical survey of the Easter blessing of the fire and of the candles, see Mario Righetti, *L'Anno Liturgico, Manuale di Storia Liturgica* (Milano, 1969), pp. 255-264.

52. Adolf Adam, *The Liturgical Year, Its Meaning, and Its History after the Reform of the Liturgy*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York, 1981), pp. 77-78. Adam quotes from L. Eisenhofer, *Handbuch der katholischen Liturgik* (Freiburg, 1932), vol 1, p. 536.

53. Alan W. Watts (note 49), pp. 64-65.

54. Donna and Mal Broadhurst (note 32), p. 157.

55. Hyginus, *Hygini Fabulae* (Leipsig, 1856), pp. 148-149.

56. Edwin H. Landseer (note 50), p. 80.

57. Alan W. Watts (note 49), p. 65.

58. Donna and Mal Broadhurst (note 32), p. 159.

59. John Calvin, Sermons on Deuteronomy, *Joannis Calvinis operae quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum and others (Brunswick, 1883), vol. 27, pp. 364-365.

60. Martin Luther, *Treatise on Good Works*, in *Selected Writings of Martin Luther*, ed. by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia, 1967), vol. 1:153d.

61. Martin Bucer, *Grund and Ursach*, in *Martin Bucers deutsche Schriften*, ed. R. Stupperich (Gutersloh, 1960), vol. 1, pp. 262-263.

62. *Concordia or Book of Concord, The Symbols of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (St. Louis, Missouri, 1957), p. 174.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 154b.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

65. Winton U. Solber, *Redeem the Time* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1977), p. 17.

66. For a discussion of Calvin's attitude toward the annual Jewish festivals, see Daniel Augsburger, "Calvin and the Mosaic Law" (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Strasbourg, 1976), pp. 268-275.

67. See Calvin's discussion of Exodus 12 in *The Commentaries of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, n.d.), vol. 1, pp. 286-295.

68. J. P. Walsh, "Holy Time and Sacred Space in Puritan New England," *The American Quarterly*, 32 (Spring 1980), p. 81.

69. For a discussion of the Puritans' attitude toward church-ordained feasts, see Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1982), pp.93-123; also Horton Davies, *The Worship of American Puritans, 1629-1730* (New York, 1990), pp. 51-76.

# Chapter 4

## THE OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER TODAY

The preceding survey of Passover in Scripture and history is intended to provide a basis for determining if the feast was meant to be an exclusive typological Jewish feast that terminated with the sacrifice of Christ, the antitypical Paschal Lamb, or whether its observance continues, though with new meaning and ritual, in Christian history. The conclusion of this survey is unambiguous: Passover is the feast of redemption that spans both the Old and New Testaments. Its observance continues in the Christian church with a new meaning and ritual established by Christ Himself at His last Paschal Supper.

**Objectives of Chapter.** This chapter has three objectives which divide it into three parts. First, we bring into focus the findings of our study by summarizing the six major supportive evidences for the continuity of Passover in the Christian church. Second, we address the question of the date of the observance of Passover today. Should Passover be observed at the first full moon after the Spring equinox (Nisan 14) in accordance with the Biblical date and apostolic tradition, or should it be observed on Easter-Sunday in accordance with the tradition championed by the Church of Rome? Third, we make some suggestions on how Passover could be observed today. My aim is not to provide a normative guide to a Christian celebration of Passover, but rather to propose ways in which we can make the celebration of Passover an authentic Christian experience.

### PART I

#### THE CONTINUITY OF PASSOVER IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

**A Prophetic Festival.** A first indication of the continuity of Passover in the Christian church is the prophetic nature of the festival which celebrates the past, present, and future deliverance of God's people. We have found that Passover is a remarkable typological feast which celebrates the past fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant at the Exodus, and yet it points to the future

fulfillment of the Messianic ingathering of all the nations. The deliverance from Egyptian bondage celebrated by the Jewish Passover was a type of the Messianic redemption from the bondage of sin which, in turn, is a promise of the final deliverance of the redeemed from all the nations of the earth.

We could say that Passover is *commemorative*, *typical*, and *prophetic*. It is *commemorative* of the historic deliverance of God's people from Egyptian bondage. It is *typical* of the Messianic deliverance of God's people from the bondage of sin. It is *prophetic* of the final deliverance of the great multitude of the redeemed out of all nations who "sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev 15:3).

The prophetic nature of Passover is evident in the New Testament's frequent allusions to the Exodus, the Paschal Lamb, the unleashing of the plagues, the song of Moses, and the marriage supper of the Lamb. These imageries show that the typology of Passover carries over from the Old to the New Testament because the meaning and function of the feast did not terminate with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as the true Paschal Lamb. On the contrary, by offering up Himself on the Cross as the true Paschal Lamb at the very time when the Passover lambs were slaughtered, Christ gave a new realism to the feast. He made Passover commemorative, not merely of the Israelites' deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, but primarily of mankind's deliverance from the bondage of sin. Being a commemoration of the Lamb that was slain to "ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev 5:9), the Christian Passover has a prophetic function to nourish the hope and to strengthen the faith in the final deliverance of God's people. The fact that the ultimate fulfillment of Passover still lies in the future, shows that Passover, like the Sabbath, still remains for the people of God.

**A Sacrificial Festival.** The second indication of the continuity of Passover in the Christian Church is the sacrificial nature of the feast. Feasts like Passover which are linked to the sacrificial system have been viewed historically as ceremonial and typological, that is, of a temporary nature that came to an end when Christ, the Antitype, died on the Cross. This view is based on a one-sided interpretation of Scripture. Our study shows that the temporary or permanent nature of Old Testament feasts is determined not by the degree of their association with the sacrificial system, but by the extent to which their typology carries over with new meaning beyond the Cross.

Passover is a sacrificial feast that continues in the New Testament because Christians eat their Passover sacrifice as do the Jews. The difference is that Christians do not need to sacrifice a lamb to eat their Passover because "Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). Instead, Chris-

tians partake of the emblems of Christ's sacrifice, the bread and wine. In other words, in the Jewish Passover, the people ate the lamb which they had sacrificed; in the Christian Passover, believers, through the emblems of the bread and wine, partake of the Paschal Lamb that has already been sacrificed.

Christ's sacrifice as our Paschal Lamb, however, does not render the celebration of Passover unnecessary. Christ Himself gave to the feast a new meaning and ritual. The new meaning is the commemoration of deliverance from the bondage of sin through Christ's death and the proclamation of His future deliverance at His coming ("you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" 1 Cor 11:26); and the new ritual consists of the two elements of the Passover meal, the bread and wine. Christ fulfilled the sacrificial typology of the Passover, not by terminating the observance of the feast, but by transforming it so that the festival could fittingly celebrate His redemption from sin.

**The Paschal Nature of the Last Supper.** A third indication of the continuity of Passover in the Christian church is the paschal nature of the Last Supper. The Last Supper was not simply a farewell fellowship meal; it was a special Passover meal during which Jesus instituted a new Passover to commemorate His sacrificial death.

The synoptic Gospels consistently speak of the Last Supper as "the Passover." Jesus Himself declares: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15 ). The phrase "*to eat the passover,*" which occurs again in Jesus' instructions to His disciples (Mark 14:15; Matt 26:18; Luke 22:11), refers exclusively to the Passover meal, which was the essence of the celebration of the festival. We noted several positive indications both in the Synoptics and in the Gospel of John which show that the Last Supper was a Passover meal, even though it was unique in two major ways. First, it was celebrated a day earlier because Jesus knew that He would be sacrificed as the true Paschal Lamb on Passover day. Second, most likely it was celebrated without the paschal lamb because Jesus wanted to institute a new Passover meal to commemorate His redemption from sin. Instead of using the flesh and blood of a lamb, He used bread and wine, the new symbols of His own body and blood, soon to be offered "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:28). There was no need of a lamb because the Lamb of God was there in Person, giving Himself as food and offering for the sins of the world.

If Christ had chosen the flesh and blood of the Passover lamb to represent His atoning sacrifice, He would have perpetuated the sacrificial system which was designed to come to an end with His death on the Cross (Matt 27:51). By choosing the bread and wine (nonsacrificial elements of the

Passover meal) as the emblems of His atoning death, Jesus detached the new Passover from the sacrificial system and transformed it into a fitting memorial of His redemption.

The continuity of Passover is clearly envisaged by Christ's statement that He desired to eat Passover with His disciples before His death, "for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16, NIV). The statement "*I will not eat it again*" suggests that Christ expected people to be eating the Passover meal during His absence until the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). Then He would partake of it again with the redeemed. The implication is clear. Christ viewed His Last Supper with His disciples to be a Passover meal whose observance would continue until His Return. The present observance of Passover aligns our hope and faith in the future Passover Supper that we will celebrate with Christ at the consummation of God's kingdom.

**The Ethical Implications of the Christian Passover.** A fourth indication of the continuity of Passover in the Christian Church is the ethical implications of the feast for the Christian life which presuppose its actual observance.

In the New Testament, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread have profound ethical implications for the Christian life-style. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul challenges the members to correct moral behavior by reminding them of the Feasts. "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:6-8).

This incidental reference to Christ as the Passover sacrifice is remarkable, because the church in Corinth was heavily Gentile. This suggests that the existential meaning of Passover was well known and accepted even among the Gentiles, presumably because they observed the feast. Its observance, however, did not consist in the removal of the old leaven from the homes and in the sacrifice of a lamb. Rather it was to be in the removing of the leaven of malice and evil from their lives, replacing them with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Celebrating Passover is not only a matter of celebrating the feast of redemption from the bondage of sin, but also of experiencing the deliverance of the Paschal Lamb from our sinful ways.

**The Observance of Passover in the Apostolic Church.** A fifth indication of the continuity of Passover in the Christian Church is the continuity between Judaism and Christianity which presupposes its obser-

vance. This presupposition is supported by several indirect indications of the observance of Passover in the New Testament.

A prevailing assumption has been that the earliest converts who accepted Christ as their Messiah immediately perceived themselves as “the New Israel” with a New Moses, a New Faith, and a new liturgical calendar. To give expression to their new faith, the earliest Christians immediately felt the urgency to establish, among other things, new places of worship, namely, Christian churches, and new Holy Days, namely, Sunday, Easter-Sunday, and Christmas.

This conception of Christian origins is grossly inaccurate and misleading. The New Testament recognizes that Christ’s coming brought about a certain discontinuity by fulfilling Old Testament typological institutions, but this discontinuity is never interpreted in terms of abrogation of the Mosaic law, in general, or of Holy Days, in particular.

The “many thousands” of Jews who “believed” (Acts 21:20) as a result of the Messianic proclamation did not view their acceptance of Jesus of Nazareth as their expected Messiah as representing a breaking away from their Jewish religion and a joining to a new religion—Christianity. They simply viewed themselves as believing Jews, still “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). The frequent references to the temple, the synagogue, the hour of prayer, the Sabbath, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost suggest that the religious life of the apostolic church was still regulated by the Jewish liturgical calendar.

Regarding Passover in the New Testament, we found only a few indirect indications of its observance, presumably because it was taken for granted. John frequently says: “The Passover of the Jews was at hand” (2:13; 6:4; 11:55). This presupposes that, to use Joachim Jeremias’s words, “He obviously distinguishes the Jewish Passover from the Christian.”<sup>1</sup>

Another indirect indication of the Christian observance of Passover is Luke’s report that Paul and his travelling companions “sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread” (Acts 20:6). Paul postponed his departure from Philippi until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread presumably because he wanted to celebrate the Passover season with the church at Philippi. Ellen White and several scholars support this view.

That the Passover season still had special significance for Paul is also suggested by his exhortation to “celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:8). Paul’s emphasis on the behavioral implication of the feasts



of Passover and Unleavened Bread presupposes the actual observance of these feasts. Paul did not divorce himself from the religious festivals of Judaism, because he found in them profound meaning for the Christian life.

The meaning and ritual of the Christian Passover apparently were similar to those of the Lord's Supper, the latter being an extension of the former. Undoubtedly, both constituted a proclamation of the "Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). It is clear, however, that for Paul the memorial of Christ's death is to be observed not only once a year at Passover, but "as often as" the Lord's Supper is celebrated (1 Cor 11:26).

The fundamental importance attached to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus made it imperative for the primitive church to celebrate the memorial of His death not only annually at Passover but periodically during the course of the year. Postapostolic documents indicate that the main difference between the two was that at Passover the Lord's Supper was celebrated at dawn after an all-night vigil of fasting.

**The Observance of Passover in the Postapostolic Church.** A sixth indication of the continuity of Passover in the Christian church is its widespread observance in the immediate postapostolic period. Several documents of the second century clearly attest that Christians observed Passover in accordance with the apostolic tradition.

We have found that Christians celebrated Passover at the same time as Jewish Passover, beginning at sundown on Nisan 14 and continuing their vigil until the next morning. For this reason, they are called "Quartodecimans," the Latin for "fourteeners." They did not eat the Passover lamb but fasted in memory of Jesus' death and, possibly, in reparation for the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. They read and expanded the Passover story in Exodus 12, applying it to the suffering and death of Jesus. They engaged in prayers and singing until dawn, when they broke their fast with the Lord's Supper, commemorating Jesus' expiatory suffering and death.

A clear indication of the importance of Passover in the religious life of the early Church is the controversy which flared up in the second century over the date for celebrating Passover. We noted that this major controversy in the latter half of the second century threatened to split Christian churches.

The two protagonists of the controversy were Bishop Victor of Rome (A. D. 189-199) and Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus. Bishop Victor championed the observance of Passover on the Sunday following the date of the Jewish Passover (Easter-Sunday). He tried to enforce the adoption of this date on the Christian church at large.

Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus and the leaders of the Asian churches strongly advocated the traditional Passover date of Nisan 14, transmitted to them by the Apostles Philip and John. They refused to be frightened into submission by the threats of Victor of Rome and eventually were excommunicated by the Roman bishop.

Our study suggests that two significant factors contributed to the abandonment of the Biblical Passover date of Nisan 14 and to the adoption of Easter-Sunday, namely, anti-Judaism and paganism. Anti-Judaism influenced the abandonment of the traditional date of Passover (Nisan 14) in order for Christians to distance themselves from the Jews. Paganism influenced the adoption of pagan cosmic speculations and myths to make Easter-Sunday attractive to Christians coming from a pagan background.

Anti-Judaism reached a high point when Emperor Hadrian ruthlessly crushed the Barkokeba revolt (A. D. 135), rebuilt a new Roman city, *Aelia Capitolina*, on the ruins of Jerusalem, and promulgated the most repressive anti-Judaic legislation prohibiting the practice of Judaism, in general, and Jewish festivals, in particular. Jews and Jewish-Christians were expelled from Jerusalem, and only Gentile Christians were allowed to settle in the city.

The new Gentile Christians who settled in Jerusalem after A. D. 135 apparently differed from the Jewish-Christians not only ethnically but also theologically. According to the Palestinian historian Epiphanius (ca A. D. 315-403), they stirred up the Passover controversy by adopting and promoting Easter-Sunday. This action was apparently motivated by a desire to show separation and differentiation from the Jewish religion that at that time was considered illegal.

The change from the primitive observance of Passover to that of Easter-Sunday was not merely a change of dates; it was also a change of meaning and experience. Essentially it was a change from the celebration of the drama of redemption through Biblical symbols to the celebration of death and resurrection through a host of pagan symbols and myths which, as we have seen, became part of the Easter celebration.

Passover, like other Biblical institutions, was corrupted first by philosophical speculations and then by barbarian superstitions. The Fathers, most of whom were imbued with Greek philosophies, tried to explain the meaning of Easter on the basis of philosophical speculations about springtime, the Spring equinox, numerical symbolism, and the conflict between light and darkness. Later, when hordes of barbarians entered the church, they added to the Easter celebration such superstitious practices as carnival, Lent, the blessing of the fire with the lighting of candles, the Easter bunny, and Easter eggs.

The Reformers tried to rid the church of all the pagan superstitions which had become part of the popular piety by doing away with a host of saints' days and Marian feasts instituted by the Catholic church. They tolerated only Easter, Pentecost, and Christmas. The Puritans went a step further and swept away all religious holy days, including Easter, Pentecost and Christmas. They retained only Sunday. It is regrettable that the Reformers and the Puritans were so preoccupied with cleansing the church from superstitious observance of the multitude of holy days which occasioned pagan revelry that they ignored the need to restore those Biblical holy days which help Christian conceptualize and experience the reality of salvation.

**Conclusion.** Passover is the feast of redemption that lives on both in Judaism and Christianity. It began as a *commemoration* of the historic deliverance of God's people from Egyptian bondage. It became a *type* of the Messianic deliverance of God's people from the bondage of sin. It still serves as a *prophetic* reassurance of the future fulfillment of the Messianic ingathering of all the nations to celebrate the marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

## PART II THE DATE FOR THE OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER TODAY

Having established the continuity of Passover in the Christian Church, we now address the question of the time and manner of its observance today. Regarding the date of Passover, we already have noted that two different dating methods developed in early Christianity. The first, known as Quartodeciman, consisted in celebrating Passover at the same time as the Jews, namely, from the evening of Nisan 14 to the dawn of the 15th. This date usually corresponded with the first full moon after the Spring equinox. The Quartodeciman practice is traced back to the apostolic church. The focus of the Quartodeciman Passover was the commemoration of redemption through the suffering and death of Christ.

The second method, known as Easter-Sunday, consisted in observing Passover on the Sunday following the Jewish Passover. This dating method apparently was introduced by Gentile Christians in the early part of the second century, when the Hadrianic anti-Judaic legislation prohibited the practice of the Jewish religion. The focus of the Easter-Sunday celebration was primarily the resurrection of Christ.

Which of the two dating methods should Christians follow today? Should Passover be observed today at the first full moon after the Spring equinox, irrespective of the day of the week, or on the Sunday following the

full moon? To answer this question, it is important to understand how the Jewish lunar calendar affected the determination of Passover, both for Jews and Christians.

**The Jewish Lunar Calendar.** Christians wishing to observe Passover today in accordance to the Biblical date of Nisan 14 may be surprised to discover that the date may fall in March one year and in April another. The reason is that, contrary to the Sabbath that recurs every seven days irrespective of any astronomical cycles, the date of Passover (Nisan 14) is based on two factors: the full moon and the Spring equinox. The first full moon after the Spring equinox of March 21 corresponds to Nisan 14, but since the appearance of the full moon varies from year to year, the date of Passover is movable.

The problem was even more complex in Bible times because the Jews followed a lunar year consisting of twelve months, each of which began with a new moon. Since the moon completes its orbit around the earth in about twenty-nine-and-a-half days, Jewish months varied from twenty-nine to thirty days alternatively, in order to compensate for the half-day. The twelve months of the Jewish year made up 354 days, eleven-and-a-quarter days short of a solar year. Had this discrepancy not been rectified in some way, the feasts and seasons constantly would be sliding with reference to the solar year. If in one year Nisan 14 coincided with March 1, the following year coincided with March 12, and so on.

To remedy this problem, every two or three years an additional month was added to the last month (Adar) and was designated Veadar. This new month was intercalated when it was evident that the month of Nisan would terminate before the Spring season, that is, before the barley needed for the ceremonial oblation of the first fruits was in ear.

The problem with this Jewish lunar calendar was that the intercalation of months was based, not on strict astronomical observations and calculations but upon the good pleasure of the rabbinical authorities. The Jews were not good astronomers. The Talmud preserves a remarkable letter written by Rabbi Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, to the Jews in Babylon and Media: "We herewith inform you that we, in conjunction with our colleagues, have deemed it necessary to add thirty days to the year, since the doves [to be offered in sacrifice] are still too tender, and the lambs [for the Passover] too young, and the time of Abib [the barley harvest] has not arrived."<sup>2</sup>

This arbitrary determination by rabbinical authorities on when to intercalate a month and when to begin the month Nisan (dependent on an official spotting of the new moon) created considerable uncertainty on the date of the Passover from year to year. It is not surprising that in Christ's time

different sectarian calendars were used to determine the dates of the feasts.<sup>3</sup> The normative calendar of the Temple, which most Jews followed, was published from year to year.

**Quartodeciman Dating of the Passover.** Most of the earliest Christians were Jewish converts accustomed to the Jewish calendar. Consequently they observed Passover at the same time as the Jews, irrespective of the day of the week. Like the Jews, they began their celebration of Passover on the evening of Nisan 14 and continued until the early morning of the 15th. But, unlike the Jews, who spent their Passover night “feasting” on their Paschal meal of the roasted lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and other ceremonial foods, the Christians fasted during the night until dawn when the fast was broken with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

The question of the Passover date arose when the Christian church became separated from the Jewish synagogues and the influence of rabbinical authorities that determined the dates of the feasts. Some Christians sought to determine the Passover date of Nisan 14 according to their own solar Julian calendar. Sozomen, a fifth-century historian, notes that the Montanists (a popular charismatic movement of the latter half of the second century) of Asia Minor set the date of Passover on April 6, which for them was the 14th day of Artemisios, their first month of Spring.<sup>4</sup> By this method they identified the 14th day of their first Spring month with Nisan 14. Of course, by this arrangement they disregarded the lunar cycle. Nisan 14 was the day of the full moon, but Artemisios 14 only rarely coincided with the full moon.

By the third century, another attempt was made to equate Nisan 14 in the year of Christ’s passion with March 25, the accepted date of the Spring equinox. Epiphanius reports that some Quartodeciman Christians in Asia Minor took March 25 to be the true date of Christ’s death. Consequently, they always celebrated Passover on that date. This date seems to have enjoyed some popularity, since it is mentioned in other documents and is challenged by Apollinaris of Hierapolis and Clement of Alexandria.<sup>5</sup>

The attempts to identify Nisan 14 with either March 25 or April 6 of the solar Julian calendar reflect the concern of those Christians who wanted to respect the Biblical date and typology of the Passover, while at the same time simplifying the method for determining the Passover date by making Nisan 14 a fixed date in their solar calendar. By doing so, however, they disregarded the fact that Nisan 14 is not a fixed date but a movable date that coincides with the first full moon after the Spring equinox. This explains why the attempts to fix the date for Passover have never succeeded.

A common concern of all the Quartodeciman Christians was to respect the Biblical date and typology of Passover reflected in the Gospel of John, where Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) crucified on Nisan 14, the very time when the paschal lambs were sacrificed at the Temple (John 18:28). For these Christians, it was important to celebrate Passover on Nisan 14 when Jesus was crucified, because for them Passover was primarily the commemoration of Christ's death, which occurred in accordance with the time and typology of the feast.

**Sunday Dating of the Passover.** The attitude of the Gentile Christians toward the Biblical date and typology of Passover was much different. We already have noted that Gentile Christians lacked familiarity with Scripture and appreciation for Biblical institutions such as Passover. Their excessive fascination with Greek philosophical speculations contributed to the sundering of Christianity from its historical Jewish roots.

This process was encouraged also by the repressive policies adopted by Roman emperors against the Jewish people and religion. These policies influenced Gentile Christians to distance themselves from the Jews by changing the Sabbath to Sunday and Passover to the Sunday following the Jewish Passover (which became known as Easter-Sunday).

At first, Gentile Christians depended on the Jewish date of the Passover to determine their own Easter-Sunday date, because apart from that Jewish date they could not know which was the first month. Thus, they waited for the Jews to determinate the date of the Passover; then they fixed their date for the Sunday following the Jewish date.

In time, such a dependence on the Jews was considered humiliating, especially when Gentile Christians were trying to differentiate themselves from the Jews. Thus, the bishops of Rome and Alexandria developed their own computations for the date of Easter based on the Spring equinox and the day of the full moon. Easter, therefore, was to be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the Spring equinox (after March 21).

The Council of Nicea (A. D. 325) put an end to all the controversy over the date of Easter by decreeing that all Christians should follow the Church of Rome by observing Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon of Spring. To ensure that Easter would not be celebrated at the same time of the Jewish Passover, the council decreed that if the Jewish Passover fell on a Sunday, then Easter was to be celebrated the following Sunday.

The anti-Judaic motivation for the repudiation of the Jewish reckoning of the Passover and the adoption of Easter-Sunday instead is clearly expressed

in Emperor Constantine's Nicene letter quoted above. The Emperor urged Christians to adopt the Easter-Sunday dating, in order to " *have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.*"<sup>6</sup> In spite of the attempt of the Council of Nicea to divorce Christianity from Judaism, the fact remains the Easter still retains a connection to the Jewish date of the Passover, namely, the first full moon after the Spring equinox. In other words, the date for Easter, like the Jewish Passover, is still governed by the movable lunar phases rather than by a fixed date.

The abandonment of the Biblical dating of the Passover in favor of Easter-Sunday dating affected the meaning and manner of observance of Passover. The primitive Christian Passover was a one-day celebration of the drama of redemption which focused primarily on the sacrifice of Christ, the true Paschal Lamb. It respected the time and the typology of the Jewish Passover.

Easter-Sunday became a week-long celebration which culminated with the celebration of Christ's resurrection. Its theological meaning was largely derived from philosophical speculations about springtime, the Spring equinox, numerical symbolism, and the conflict between light, and darkness. Some of its rituals such as carnival, Lent, Easter bunny, Easter eggs, blessing of the fire and lighting of the candles, were derived from pagan myths and fertility cults, all of which are foreign to the Biblical meaning of Passover.

**Passover on Easter-Sunday?** The foregoing survey of the Quartodeciman and Easter-Sunday dating of the Passover raises a question for Christians wishing to observe Passover today. Should Passover be observed on Easter-Sunday, when most of the Christian world celebrates Christ's Resurrection? Or should Passover be observed on Nisan 14, at the first full moon after the Spring equinox (March 21), irrespective of the day of the week on which it occurs?

The Easter-Sunday tradition is attractive for two major reasons. First, it does not disrupt the work schedule, because it places the celebration of the feast on Sunday when most people are free from work. The observance of Passover on the first full moon after the Spring equinox can be disruptive to the work schedule of most people, because the day of the week and date of the month changes from year to year.

For example, in 1996 Passover falls on Wednesday, April 3. This means that Christians wanting to observe Passover in 1996 have to ask permission of their employers to have Wednesday off. Such permission may not be granted easily, especially if several workers in the same company ask for the same day off to celebrate Passover in the middle of the work week. For small companies, this disruption can even cause interruption of their production.



The second advantage of the Easter-Sunday date is the possibility it offers to commemorate Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on the actual days of the week on which these events occurred. In fact, this was a factor that influenced Gentile Christians to change the Passover date from Nisan 14 to the following Sunday. Such a change made it possible for them, not only to distance themselves from the Jews, but also to commemorate Christ's death on Good Friday, His burial on Holy Saturday, and His resurrection on Easter-Sunday.

Some readers who believe that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday afternoon and that He was resurrected on Saturday afternoon will undoubtedly question my acceptance of the traditional chronology of the Friday crucifixion/Sunday resurrection. I am fully aware of their doctrinal position and have examined it at great length in my book *The Time of the Crucifixion and Resurrection*, written largely as a result of a dialogue with the Church of God (Seventh Day), one of several seventh-day Sabbathkeeping churches that believes in the Wednesday crucifixion/Saturday afternoon resurrection. My research shows that the cumulative witness of the Gospels and of history supports the traditional chronology of the Friday crucifixion and Sunday resurrection of Christ.

**Problems with Passover on Easter-Sunday.** Despite its popular acceptance and the advantages mentioned above, the date of Easter-Sunday fails to meet the criteria for a Biblical observance of Passover today for three major reasons.

First, the date of Easter-Sunday is not the date of the Biblical Passover. As we have seen, it was a date adopted in order to “*have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd.*”<sup>77</sup> To observe Passover at Easter-Sunday would be like observing the Sabbath on Sunday. In both instances, what Christians observe on Sunday and Easter-Sunday is not the Biblical Sabbath or Passover, but an ecclesiastical institution which lacks Biblical authority, meaning, and experience. In *From Sabbath to Sunday*, I have investigated the interplay of political, social, pagan, and religious factors that contributed to the abandonment of the Sabbath and Passover and to the adoption of Sunday and Easter-Sunday. To observe Passover at Easter-Sunday would mean to sanction and perpetrate the anti-Judaic and pagan motivations that prompted the change of these dates in the first place.

Second, to celebrate Passover at Easter-Sunday would destroy “the mystical connection,”<sup>78</sup> that is, the historical and typological unity that exists between Jewish and Christian Passover. Christ instituted the new Passover in His blood within the context of the Jewish Passover. He was sacrificed as our

Paschal Lamb at the very time when the Jews sacrificed their Passover lambs at the Temple. This means that the Christian Passover is inextricably linked to the Jewish Passover both in time and typology. If God planned for Christ to fulfill the Passover types “not only as to the event, but as to the time,”<sup>9</sup> then it is incumbent upon us as Christians to celebrate the feast of our redemption in accordance with God’s plan.

Third, to celebrate Passover at Easter-Sunday would mean to commemorate primarily Christ’s resurrection rather than His death. This was the difference in the early Church between the Quartodeciman and Easter-Sunday traditions. The former “laid greater emphasis on the redemptive death of Christ,” while the latter “stressed more the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.”<sup>10</sup>

The focal point of Passover is the commemoration of “Christ’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26) through the emblems of his broken body and shed blood. Of course, the resurrection is part of the drama of redemption. In fact, the resurrection of Christ is the touchstone of the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls with the reality of Christ’s resurrection from death. The apostle Paul states unambiguously that “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain and your faith is vain” (1 Cor 15:14). Yet, neither Paul nor any other apostle ever suggests that Christ’s resurrection should be celebrated liturgically on a weekly Sunday or annual Easter-Sunday. In the New Testament, Christ’s resurrection is celebrated, not liturgically by a special day of worship, but existentially by living victoriously through the power of the risen Christ (Rom 6:1-5).

Nowhere does the New Testament command or suggest that Christ’s resurrection should be commemorated on a weekly Sunday or annual Easter-Sunday. In fact, in the New Testament, Sunday is never called “Day of the Resurrection,” but consistently “first day of the week” (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2,9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1,19). If Jesus had wanted the day of His resurrection to be commemorated weekly or annually, He would have instructed His disciples to do so.

Biblical institutions such as the Sabbath, baptism, Lord’s Supper, and foot-washing, all trace their origin to a divine act marking their official establishment. The ideal time for an official institution of a memorial day of Christ’s resurrection would have been the very day the event occurred. If Christ wanted the day of His resurrection to be memorialized, presumably He would have told the women or the disciples when He appeared to them. He could have used words similar to those He uttered at the Passover Supper when He instituted a memorial of His death (Luke 22:15), namely, “I have

earnestly desired to celebrate this day of my resurrection with you before I go to the Father.” Instead, He told the women, “Go tell my brethren to go to Galilee” (Matt 28:10). Later to His disciples He said, “Go . . . make disciples, teach, baptize” (Matt 28:19-20). All the utterances of the risen Lord presuppose that He regarded the day of His resurrection a regular working day, rather than a special commemorative day of His resurrection.

**Passover on the Full Moon.** To respect the Biblical date, typology, and meaning of Passover, one must observe the feast in accordance with the Biblical date of Nisan 14, which corresponds to the first full moon after the Spring equinox. To determine the Passover date in our solar calendar is relatively easy, because most calendars indicate the various phases of the moon during the course of the month. One simply has to look at the calendar for the first full moon after the Spring equinox of March 21.

Observing Passover by the full moon certainly is not as practical as observing it by a fixed date. As we noted earlier, the date of Passover varies from year to year, both as to the day of the week and that of the month. This variation entails some inconvenience in the work schedule of most people. On the other hand, being an annual celebration, the inconvenience is experienced only once a year. Most people take some days off work during the course of the year to attend special events, meetings, or family celebrations. To take time out once a year to celebrate the festival of our redemption would show in a tangible way our appreciation for God’s gracious provision for our salvation.

If we observe Passover in accordance with the Biblical date of Nisan 14, we commemorate God’s redemption at the time when type met antitype. For centuries, the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross as the Paschal Lamb who takes away the sin of the world had been foreshadowed by the slaying of the Passover lamb on the 14th day of the first month. Christ as the antitypical Lamb died on the Cross the very day and time of day that God ordained the Passover lamb to be slain. He also came forth from the dead the same day of the month that the first fruits had been waved for centuries. The date ordained by God for the celebration of these festivals was prophetic of the *time* when type would meet its antitype.

In her delightful book *Celebrate the Feasts of the Old Testament in Your Own Home or Church*, Martha Zimmerman writes, “God sacrificed the Lamb on the altar of the Cross. Those wooden beams became the doorpost of the world’s home. God promises to *pass over* us with His judgment of death as we are willing to stand under its protection. This is what we remember and celebrate at Passover (Ex 12:13).”<sup>11</sup>

By respecting the Biblical Passover date, we are able to retain the typological integrity and prophetic continuity of the feast. The deliverance from the bondage of sin at the Cross is typologically rooted in God's deliverance of the Israelites from physical slavery in Egypt. To respect the typological integrity and connection of the two events, one must observe Passover on the day when both the physical and spiritual deliverances occurred.

The redemptive work of Christ typified by Passover extends prophetically down through the ages until the final deliverance of God's people (Rev 7:14), who "sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb" (Rev 15:3). The first deliverance from Egypt, which marked the institution of Passover, foreshadowed the final deliverance of God's people, "who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:9). Passover is truly the feast of redemption, the day to remember God's past and future deliverance of His people.

### PART III THE MANNER OF THE OBSERVANCE OF PASSOVER

It is very difficult to describe how the Christian Passover should be observed today. In fact, the New Testament gives us no specific information on how Passover was celebrated during apostolic times. We are told that Paul kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread at Philippi (Acts 20:6), but we are not informed how he celebrated the Passover season with the believers. In 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, Paul mentions the behavioral implications of the celebration of Passover, but he says nothing about its actual observance.

This gap is filled by the accounts of the Quartodeciman Christians, for the sources do inform us that they observed Passover according to the apostolic tradition. But even in these accounts we do not find a Passover *Seder*, that is, the order and ritual of the Passover service. In view of the limited information available on the actual observance of Passover in primitive Christianity, I do not attempt to propose a standard order of service for the Passover celebration today. Instead, I limit myself, first, to summarizing what we know about the observance of Passover in the early church, and, second, to suggesting a tentative guide to a Christian observance of Passover that reflects the teachings of the Scripture and the example of the early church.

**Christian Passover Similar to Jewish Passover.** The two earliest documents mentioning the observance of Passover are *The Epistle of the Apostles* (about A. D. 150) and Melito's *Paschal Homily* (A. D. 165). These sources clearly indicate that in many ways, Christians observed Passover as

did the Jews. They observed it at the same time, on the night of Nisan 15th, and by the date rather than the day. They read the same Exodus story, used the same metaphors, and observed the same fast.

At first, some Christians celebrated Passover not only at the *same time* but also in the *same manner*—by eating the paschal lamb in a solemn feast.<sup>12</sup> Most Christians, however, objected to eating the lamb. They believed that Christ was their Paschal Lamb and, consequently, no longer was there any need for them to sacrifice and eat the lamb. Apollinaris, Bishop of Hierapolis (about A. D. 170), refutes those who ate the paschal lamb at the same time and manner as the Jews, saying: “The 14th of Nisan is the true Passover of the Lord, the great Sacrifice; instead of the lamb we have the Son of God.”<sup>13</sup> This view prevailed and eventually led to the abandonment of the Jewish paschal feast and to the adoption of fasting instead. “Unfortunately,” as Joachim Jeremias observes, “we do not know exactly when the festival was radically reconstructed, and the paschal vigil replaced the Passover meal.”<sup>14</sup>

Essentially, the Christian Passover consisted of a night vigil during which Christians commemorated the suffering and death of Christ by fasting, praying, singing, reading appropriate Scriptures from the Old and New Testaments, and listening to the exposition and application of the Scripture readings. The vigil extended until early morning (cockcrow), when the fast was broken with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, followed by a fellowship (*agape*) meal.

**Expectation of Christ’s Return.** The paschal vigil was designed to prepare the community to receive the soon-coming Lord. While the Jews were awaiting the coming of the Messiah on Passover night, the Christians were expecting the Return of Christ. “The expectation of the *parousia* [Return of Christ],” writes Jeremias, “lay at the heart of the primitive Christian festival, and this soon came to have a profound effect on its course.”<sup>15</sup> The expectation of Christ’s Return on Passover night was influenced not merely by the Jewish expectation of the Messiah, but primarily by Christ’s pledge: “for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16, NIV). The two focal points of the Christian Passover were the *passion* and the *parousia*, that is, the commemoration of Christ’s death and the expectation of His Return.

Jeremias points out that the paschal vigil shows “how strongly the expectation of the *parousia* controlled the life of the Church in the earliest period.”<sup>16</sup> Apparently, Christians felt that the best way for them to be waiting and watching on Passover night for the Return of their Lord was by fasting, rather than by feasting. They were reminded of the words of Jesus that “the days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they

will fast in that day” (Mark 2:20). They fasted also on behalf of the Jews who might repent for causing Christ’s death. Epiphanius, for example, writes: “When they [the Jews] feast, we should mourn for them with fasting, because in that feast they fastened Christ on the Cross.”<sup>17</sup>

**Christ the Paschal Lamb.** There were some fundamental differences between the Jewish and Christian Passover. Christians did not sacrifice a lamb, and they did not commemorate the deliverance from Egypt under Moses. These events had received a new meaning. Melito reveals this in his *Paschal Homily*: “For led as lamb and slaughtered as a sheep, he [Jesus] ransomed us from the ruin of the world as from the land of Egypt, and freed us from slavery of the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls with his own spirit and the members of our bodies with his own blood. . . . This is he who rescued us from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, from oppression to an eternal Kingdom and made us a new priesthood and a chosen people. He is the true Passover.”<sup>18</sup>

A striking parallelism exists between this passage and a similar one in the Mishnah: “In every generation a man must regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt. . . . He [the Lord] brought *us* from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a great light, and from servitude to redemption.”<sup>19</sup> The background of both passages is the Passover ritual. Both the Church and the Synagogue found in the Exodus deliverance a promise of redemption to be celebrated in the present.

In the Christian celebration of Passover, the lamb played a most important role, because the lamb was Jesus. As Van Goudoever points out, “The lamb was not a type of Jesus, but Jesus was indeed the lamb. The Christians therefore did not sacrifice the lamb, because their Passover lamb was already slaughtered. This was a part of the theology of Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians he writes, ‘Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival’ (1 Cor 5:7). In John’s Gospel, Jesus is also conceived of as the lamb for the Passover. Therefore ‘no bone of him shall be broken’ (John 19:36). It is possible that the Passover celebrated by Paul and John contained these new elements.”<sup>20</sup>

**The Lord’s Supper and the Agape.** The paschal vigil terminated in the early morning (cockcrow, about 3:00 a. m.) with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which was followed by a fellowship meal, known as *agape* (love feast). *The Epistle of the Apostles* (about A. D. 150) specifically mentions that Christians terminated their vigil with the Lord’s Supper and the *agape*: “And when ye have accomplished the memorial which is made for me, and the *agape*. . . .”<sup>21</sup> In this text, the Lord’s Supper is called “the memorial,” obviously because it is a commemoration of Christ’s death.

The Lord's Supper was celebrated not only at Passover but periodically throughout the year because of the fundamental importance attached to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Unfortunately, we do not know how frequently the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the Apostolic Church. We observed earlier that Paul is very specific regarding the meaning and manner of observance of the Lord's Supper, but very vague regarding the time of its observance. Four times he repeats the expression "when you assemble . . ." (1 Cor 11: 18, 20, 33, 34) and once "as often as" (1 Cor 11:26). Both phrases suggest no specific time was set for the celebration of the Lord's Supper during the course of the year.

At Passover, the Lord's Supper assumed a greater importance, because it was celebrated in the context of the actual anniversary of Christ's death. During the year, the Lord's Supper was celebrated as *part* of a religious service; at Passover it was *the most important part* of the celebration. The preceding all-night vigil heightened the importance of the Lord's Supper, which functioned as the climax of the Passover celebration.

The commemoration of Christ's death at Passover entails more than a remembrance of the historical events leading to the crucifixion of Jesus. By partaking of the emblems of Christ's broken body and shed blood, we appropriate the benefits of Christ's death as a death suffered for us. This simple yet dramatic ritual enables believers not only to conceptualize but also to internalize and appropriate the reality of Christ's vicarious death.

At the Lord's Table, believers enter into a special fellowship with the exalted Lord. Paul describes it as "a participation in the blood . . . [and] body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). The bond of fellowship and unity in the body of Christ celebrated formally through the Lord's Supper found informal expression in the ensuing *agape* feast. We are not told why the *agape* feast came after, rather than before, the Lord's Supper. We may surmise that one major reason was to protect the most sacred institution of the Church from the kind of abuses that occurred at Corinth.

**Separating the Lord's Supper from *Agape*.** Christ instituted the Holy Communion in the context of a Passover Supper. At first, Christians followed Christ's example by celebrating the Lord's Supper in the context of an evening fellowship meal. Unfortunately, this practice led to abuses which Paul had to address in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:20-22). Some Christians were more interested in eating and drinking than in partaking of the Lord's Supper. They began eating before all the other members had arrived and failed to share their food with the less privileged. Such abuses desecrated the Lord's Supper.



To remedy this problem, the regular Lord's Supper eventually was detached from an evening supper meal and moved to the morning church services. We do not know when this separation took place. Presumably, it occurred before the end of the first century because Pliny, the Governor of Bithynia, states in a letter he wrote to the Emperor Trajan in A. D. 112 that Christians had given up their evening religious meal after the publication of the imperial edict which prohibited evening fraternal meals.<sup>22</sup> Earlier we mentioned this imperial legislation in conjunction with Paul's indefinite time references to the Lord's Supper. Apparently, this legislation caused Christians first to stagger the time and place of their evening Lord's Supper, and later to transfer it to the morning services altogether.

By the middle of the second century, we have the explicit testimony of Justin Martyr that the Lord's Supper was celebrated at the conclusion of the morning church service: "When our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons."<sup>23</sup>

While the regular Lord's Supper became separated from the *agape* meal on account of abuses and of the imperial legislation prohibiting evening fellowship meals, the special annual Passover Lord's Supper remained associated with the *agape* meal, which, however, was eaten *after* the Lord's Supper. With this arrangement, the social fellowship meal would not detract from the Holy Communion. In fact, the love-feast offered a practical opportunity to express and experience gratitude for the sacrificial love of Christ just commemorated through the emblems of His broken body and shed blood. The fellowship meal remained associated with the Paschal Lord's Supper, presumably because the essence of Passover is a sacred commemorative meal. By partaking of a fellowship meal in conjunction with the Holy Communion, it was possible to retain a vital aspect of the traditional Passover meal.

**Christian or Jewish Passover?** The preceding description of the early Christian observance of Passover provides a basis for reflecting on how Passover should be celebrated today. While early Christian traditions are not always a safe guide for determining religious practices today because the mystery of iniquity was already at work in apostolic times (2 Thess 2:7), they do provide us with valuable insight on how Biblical teachings and practices such as Passover were understood and observed within different Christian communities. To be true to our Christian heritage, we need to be guided by the teachings of Scripture and by the witness of those Christians who have sought to be true to the teachings of the Word of God.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency to ignore the past witness of faithful Christians when defining Christian beliefs and practices. A case in point is the several books published in recent years on how Christians can celebrate Old Testament feasts, such as Passover.<sup>24</sup> The authors are to be commended for their efforts to make the annual feasts of Israel meaningful and spiritually enriching to Christian today. The problem I see in the books I have read is their lack of sensitivity to the witness of the New Testament and of the primitive church. Much of what is presented is largely based on Jewish traditional observance of the feasts. These books seem to aim to teach Christians how to celebrate Passover and the other feasts according to Jewish tradition rather than an authentic Christian perspective. Some minor Christian variations are suggested, but no attempt is made to understand how the early Christians understood and observed Passover.

For example, in her creative book *Celebrate the Feasts of the Old Testament in Your Home or Church*, Martha Zimmerman lists nine items needed for a Christian Passover meal. These include a pair of candles, an order of service (*haggadah*) for all participants, a large plate containing a hard-boiled egg, roasted lamb-bone, a small bowl of salt water, greens such as parsley and celery, bitter herbs such as horseradish, and *charoseth*, “a special nut, apple, wine or grape juice mixture.”<sup>25</sup> Other items needed are a plate with unleavened bread (*matzoth*), wine, a common cup for the family to pass and to share the wine, the cup of Elijah, a pillow for father’s chair, a bowl of water, a towel for handwashing, and a special dinner for the whole family.<sup>26</sup>

The items mentioned in this list are essentially those used by the Jews in the celebration of their Passover meal. In fact, the meaning given to each item relates primarily to the Egyptian experience of the Israelites. For example, the *charoseth* “is a mixture of coarsely chopped fruits and spices which resembles, in color, the clay or mortar that the Israelites made in Egypt.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, “The hard-boiled egg represents the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart. The salt water symbolizes the tears of the Hebrew slaves under Egypt’s bondage.”<sup>28</sup>

While the author is to be commended for educating Christians on the rich ritual and symbols of the Jewish Passover, she ignores two facts when she tries to make the same elements the core of the Christian Passover. First, Christ selected only two elements from the Jewish Passover, the unleavened bread and the wine, to institute the paschal meal commemorative of His atoning death. Second, for Christians, Passover is the celebration of the deliverance, not from the physical bondage of Egyptian oppression, but from the spiritual bondage of sin. The latter is celebrated through the emblems of

the Lord's Supper, not through all the ingredients of the Jewish Passover meal. Surprisingly, Martha Zimmerman and others who claim to provide a guide to the celebration of the *Christian* Passover omit altogether any reference to the Lord's Supper. Yet, as we have seen, the Lord's Supper was the climax of the early Christian celebration of Passover.

**Elements of a Christian Passover.** At this juncture I make no attempt to provide a normative guide to a Christian celebration of Passover. I must confess I have never celebrated an annual Passover in my life. I have grown up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in which there is no annual Passover celebration, only a quarterly Holy Communion service. Prior to this research, I had not understood the continuity and relevance of Old Testament feasts, such as Passover, for our Christian life today.

Lacking the practical experience of celebrating Passover, I only venture some suggestions derived from the above study of Passover in Biblical and early Christian history. My concern is not to spell out details as to how Passover should be celebrated today. Rather, I prefer to propose ways in which we can make a celebration of Passover authentically Christian.

**Reflecting on the Lamb.** Preparation is indispensable for a meaningful and successful celebration of a Holy Day. This is true of the weekly Sabbath as well as of annual festivals. Preparation also should be an essential component of the Passover celebration. By preparing our minds and our homes for the arrival of Passover night, we predispose ourselves to receive the blessings mediated to us through the feast.

The Jews began their preparation for Passover on the 10th day of the month by selecting an unblemished, year-old male lamb, which they kept in their homes for four days before sacrificing him for the redemption of all the family members (Ex 12:3-6). Keeping a perfect, white, woolly lamb for four days in their home gave the Israelites the opportunity to become attached to him and to love him before offering him as a sacrifice for the redemption of their family members.

As Christians, we do not need to select a real lamb, because Christ is our Paschal Lamb who already has been sacrificed for our redemption (1 Cor 5:7-8). Yet it might be helpful to place a little stuffed, fuzzy lamb on the table where the family gathers for meals. This could serve as the centerpiece of the table and of the conversation for a few days before Passover. The presence of the stuffed lamb may encourage us to reflect and talk about the meaning of the forthcoming Passover. We could read together Exodus 12:1-6 and talk about some of the spiritual object lessons of the story.

For example, each Israelite needed to take a lamb (Ex 12:3) and to eat it (Ex 12:8), because salvation is an individual acceptance of the grace provided by God. God's plan was that all households experience salvation. Thus He prescribed a lamb for each family. By believing in Christ, we become members of the household of faith (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19). Salvation for a household is available to all who believe in Christ (Acts 15:15, 31; 18:8).

The chosen lamb was to be "without blemish" (Ex 12:5), because Jesus "offered himself without blemish to God" (Heb 9:14), to purify us and to present us "without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing" (Jude 1:24). The lamb was "a male a year old" (Ex 12:5) because Jesus, the *Son* of God, died for our redemption in the fullness of His manhood. The lamb was to dwell with the family members (Ex 12:6) because Jesus wants to dwell in our homes. The lamb was loved before it was sacrificed, just as Jesus was loved by some before He was sacrificed.

The blood of the lamb was placed on the two doorposts and lintel of the house (Ex 12:7) as a guarantee of divine protection. This can remind us that we have been redeemed "not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet 1:18-19). "It was not enough that the paschal lamb be slain," writes Ellen White; "its blood must be sprinkled upon the doorposts; so the merits of Christ's blood must be applied to the soul. We must believe, not only that He died for the world, but that He died for us individually. We must appropriate to ourselves the virtue of the atoning sacrifice."<sup>29</sup> Reflections such as these upon the meaning of the Passover lamb can predispose us for the celebration of the festival by reminding us that Christ is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

**Cleaning the Home.** Another important aspect of the preparation for the Passover celebration is cleaning the home. As we clean our home weekly to welcome the Lord of the Sabbath as the invisible guest of honor, so it would be well to springclean our home annually before Passover to welcome our Savior, the Paschal Lamb, who has been sacrificed for our redemption. A clean home and a neat outward appearance challenges us to purify our hearts and mind as we prepare to commemorate Christ's sacrifice for us.

Cleaning the home is still an important part of the Jewish preparation for the celebration of Passover. Ceil and Moishe Rosen write: "The Jewish housewife tackles her spring cleaning with holy zeal! This is because Passover comes in the spring, in the month of Nisan, also called Abib. She is preparing to obey the command in Exodus 12:19: 'Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses.' Do the walls need paint, carpet need

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shampooing, cupboards need rearranging? Wait until before Passover! The straw broom of ancient days has given way to the vacuum cleaner; and instead of the city dump, we have garbage disposals. The means are different, but the end result is still the same.”<sup>30</sup>

Spring cleaning our Christian homes also can be inspired by the approach of Passover. The thought that we are cleaning our homes to make them ready to celebrate the feast of our redemption can give a religious purpose and zeal to what otherwise would be an ordinary chore.

Cleaning a Jewish home also involves the removal of all food articles that have gone through the leavening process. This means that every scrap of bread, cookies, yeast, baking powder and other leavening agents must go. On the night before Passover (Nisan 13), after the house is hospital clean, there is the ceremonial search for leaven, called *Bedikat Chametz*.

During the search, the head of the house takes with him a child, along with a candle, a wooden spoon, a feather, and a piece of linen cloth. They search together for the piece of leavened bread that the housewife has intentionally placed in a visible spot. Once they find the leaven (bread), the father sets the candle down by the leaven and sweeps it into the wooden spoon with a feather. Then, without touching the leaven, he wraps together the spoon, feather, and bread in the linen cloth, pronouncing the ancient formula: “Now I have rid my house of leaven.” The next morning (Nisan 14), he joins other Jewish men at a designated place for a ritual bonfire where they toss their bundles of leaven and return home to complete the preparation for Passover.

As Christians, we are not bound to observe the ritual of the Jewish ceremonial removal of the leaven, but we can learn some valuable spiritual object lessons. The removal of leaven from the home and the burning of it outside the home reminds us of Christ who destroyed sin “outside the camp” (Heb 13:11, 13) to make freedom from sin possible for those who believe in Him. Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn is the need to prepare for Passover by cleaning not only our homes, but also our hearts.

Commenting on the removal of leaven from the Jewish homes before Passover, Ellen White says, “In like manner the leaven of sin must be put away from all who would receive life and nourishment from Christ. So Paul writes to the Corinthian church, “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump. . . . For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Cor 5:7, 8).”<sup>31</sup>

This spiritual preparation applies not only to the annual Passover but also to the periodical Lord's Supper celebration. Paul admonishes believers to "examine" themselves before partaking of the emblems of Christ's sacrifice, because "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27-28).

It used to be customary to encourage church members to prepare for the Lord's Supper during the preceding week by reconciling differences and confessing known sins. Unfortunately, this spiritual preparation is largely neglected today. Sometimes members go to church without even knowing that they will be participating in the Lord's Supper. Moreover, chances are that even the sermon preceding the Holy Communion fails to prepare the participants to receive the emblems of Christ's sacrifice, because it deals with a subject totally unrelated to the occasion. The result is that members go through the ritual without experiencing the reassurance of forgiveness and cleansing they need.

If preparation is needed for the periodic Lord's Supper, it is needed even more for the annual Paschal Supper which celebrates the actual anniversary of Christ's atoning sacrifice. The preparation for this event should involve not only the external cleaning of our dwellings but also the internal purification of our souls. Passover challenges us in a special way to "cleanse out the old leaven . . . of malice and evil," so that we can celebrate the festival "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:6-8).

In practical terms, we can "cleanse out the old leaven . . . of malice and evil" in the days preceding Passover by searching our hearts to see if we cherish evil thoughts or deeds that need to be confessed and cleansed before our special encounter with our Savior. The approaching of Passover affords us an opportunity to seek in a special way the enabling grace God to deliver us from besetting sins so that we can truly celebrate Passover as the feast of *our* deliverance from sin.

**A Night Vigil.** The external and internal preparation sets the stage for the actual celebration of Passover which, in the Biblical and early Christian traditions, consisted of a night vigil to remember redemption. The instruction in the Old Testament is clear: "Because the Lord kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the Lord for the generations to come" (Ex 12:42, NIV). In the New Testament, we have the example of Jesus who instituted the memorial of His death in the evening and then retreated with the disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he urged them to "watch and pray" while He poured out His soul to the Father (Mark 14:32-38).

Both the Jews and the early Christians celebrated their redemption at Passover as a night vigil. The vigil consisted of a fast followed by the paschal meal. The Jewish fast was rather modest, beginning at the time of the sacrifice of the lamb at the Temple in the early afternoon and extending to nightfall when it was broken with the eating of the Passover.<sup>32</sup> The Christian fast lasted longer, extending past the midnight conclusion of the Jewish festivities until cockcrow (3. a. m.) when it was broken with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, followed by an *agape* feast. Apparently, the fasting was inspired by the words of Jesus: "The days will come, when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day" (Mark 2:20).

How should we as Christians today spend the Passover night vigil? Let us consider first of all the Lord's Supper and the *agape* meal, which were the most important ritual of the vigil. Should we celebrate the Lord's Supper and the *agape* meal in the evening to begin the Passover vigil or at dawn to close it? No hard and fast rule can be laid down because both practices can be defended with valid arguments. We briefly consider each option.

**Evening Lord's Supper and *Agape* Meal.** The first option is to begin the Passover vigil with an evening celebration of the Lord's Supper and an *agape* meal. This option respects the Biblical Passover legislation, which is reflected in the Jewish practice of spending the Passover night eating a ceremonial meal designed to commemorate the divine deliverance from Egypt. To a large extent, Jesus followed the Passover ritual of His times, though He transformed it by choosing only two elements of the meal, the bread and wine, to institute the new Paschal Supper to commemorate the new covenant in His blood.

We have learned that some of the early Christians followed the Jewish tradition by eating their Passover at the *same time* and in *same manner* as the Jews. The majority of Christians, however, abandoned the evening paschal meal, because they felt that in good conscience they could not commemorate Christ's death while sharing in the festivities of the Jews who caused Christ's death. Thus, they transferred the Lord's Supper and the fellowship meal to the early hours of the morning, since by then the Jews had finished their feasting.

The reasons for transferring the Lord's Supper and the fellowship meal from the evening to the early hours of the morning are not as compelling today as they were in the early church. First, there is no need today for Christians to distance themselves from the Passover festivities of the Jews. We can no longer blame the Jews for causing the death of Christ, because we recognize that as sinners all are ultimately responsible for His death. Second, an evening Lord's Supper celebration followed or preceded by a decorous love feast, can only enhance the commemoration of Christ's death.



This means it would be appropriate for Christians today to begin their Passover vigil with an evening celebration of the Lord's Supper, followed by an *agape* meal. One must remember that in the Old Testament, the essence of the Passover feast is a sacred commemorative meal partaken of within the home. Small families invited neighbors or relatives for the special Passover meal (Ex 12:4). By partaking of an *agape* meal in conjunction with the Paschal Supper, one could retain a vital aspect of the sacred commemorative meal.

The idea of having a love feast after the celebration of the Lord's Supper is derived from the order followed by the early Christians. Apparently, experience taught them that a risk was involved in having a love feast prior to the Lord's Supper. It could lead to the kind of abuses Paul addressed in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 11:20-22). To minimize the risk, they decided to have the love feast after the sacred celebration of the Holy Communion. We can learn from the experience of the early Christians by following the same order. One merit of this arrangement is that the love feast can serve as an opportunity to express gratitude for the sacrificial love of Christ just commemorated through the emblems of His broken body and shed blood.

**Early Morning Lord's Supper and *Agape* Meal.** The second option is to conclude the Passover vigil at dawn with the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the *agape* meal. This practice was followed by early Christians. They viewed the paschal vigil as a time to commemorate Christ's death and to await His Return. While the Jews were awaiting the coming of the Messiah on Passover night, the Christians were expecting the Return of Christ. They felt that the best way to be waiting and watching for His appearance was by fasting rather than by feasting. They spent the night praying, singing, reading Scriptures, and listening to an exposition of Biblical passages and exhortations. They concluded their vigil at dawn with the Lord's Supper and the *agape* meal, apparently because dawn was associated with the *parousia* (Return of Christ).

The practice of postponing the Lord's Supper and the *agape* meal until dawn has some merit, since these meals provide a fitting conclusion to the Passover vigil. The religious exercises of the preceding hours could prepare believers for a fuller appreciation of the memorial of Christ's death and of the ensuing love feast. The fellowship meal can serve as a fitting conclusion to a night spent together celebrating the *passion* (death) and *parousia* (coming) of the Lord.

From a practical perspective, however, this format could prove less than ideal; by dawn most people are half-asleep (if not fully) and thus not in the best mental and physical conditions to participate meaningfully in the Lord's

Supper and *agape* meal. This is especially true when young children or older people are present. The experience of Peter, James, and John, who fell asleep during the Passover night vigil (Mark 14:37, 40), is not unusual. To prevent the Passover vigil from becoming a “slumber feast,” it may be advisable to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and the *agape* meal in the evening rather than at dawn. Furthermore, it may be advisable to limit the length of the paschal vigil, perhaps until midnight, in consideration of those who find it difficult to stay awake all the night. God is not delighted by the sight of sleeping saints.

**A Family Celebration..** The proposal to begin the Passover vigil with an evening celebration of the Lord’s Supper and an *agape* meal poses some interesting questions. Should the Lord’s Supper and the *agape* meal be celebrated privately at home or publicly at church? If at home, can the head of the household legitimately preside over the celebration of the Lord’s Supper? What Scriptures, songs, prayers, and devotional thoughts are most appropriate for the paschal vigil?

Some may be surprised to learn that among the seven annual feasts described in Leviticus 23, Passover is the only one that does not require a “holy convocation.” The reason is simple. Passover began and largely remained a family celebration at which the father acted as the priest of the home. Even when the sacrifice of the paschal lamb was transferred from the home to the Temple, the lamb was still slain by the head of the household. The eating of the Passover, with all its commemorative ritual, was still done in private homes. Of all the sacrifices, only the Passover lamb could be slain at the Temple by the head of the household; priests were responsible for the slaying of all other sacrifices.

The lesson here can hardly be missed. Ellen White points out, “The father was to act as the priest of the household. . . . This is a symbol of the work to be done in every family. Parents are to gather their children into the home and to present Christ before them as their Passover. The father is to dedicate every inmate of his home to God, and to do a work that is represented by the feast of the Passover. It is perilous to leave this solemn duty in the hands of others.”<sup>33</sup>

At a time when many parents neglect the religious education of their children, Passover reminds us that God still wants fathers to be the spiritual priests of their families. Of course, this is a daily responsibility. At Passover, however, in Old Testament times, the father acted in an official priestly role by sacrificing the lamb, sprinkling his blood on the lintel and doorposts of his house, and leading out in the Passover *seder*, that is, in the ritual commemorating the deliverance from Egypt. Fathers today are still the spiritual priests

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of their homes. They no longer need to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle the blood on the doorposts of their houses to protect their families, but they still need to present Christ before their family members as their Passover.

In Bible times, families were large, often including the members of the extended family of grandchildren and relatives. Today families are smaller, often consisting of a single parent—in most cases the mother—and children. In such instances, several families can join together for the Passover celebration, as Moses instructed the Israelites to do under similar circumstances (Ex 12:4). Passover can offer a unique opportunity for smaller Christian families to join together in one home to celebrate the feast of redemption. Children who have no father figure in their home will benefit on Passover night by becoming part of an extended family in which a father leads out in a unique religious service.

Some may prefer their Passover celebration to be at their church rather than at home. They may feel that it is well for the church as a whole to come together for the celebration. This releases fathers from their responsibility of leading out in the service at home. Historically, the trend has been to transfer religious services from private “home churches” to public church buildings where Christians became spectators rather than participants. Of course, it is not wrong for the whole congregation to celebrate Passover together at the church. Where a church consists of only few families, this may be the best plan. Generally, however, it would be well to respect the Biblical tradition by keeping Passover as a family celebration. Even in a church setting, it would be well for family members to be seated together at the same table so that the head of the household can still lead out in some aspects of the service.

**The Paschal Supper.** When planning a Passover celebration at home or at church, one must keep in mind that its aim is to commemorate our redemption through the suffering and death of Jesus. This means that the selection of songs, Scripture readings and exposition, devotional comments, explanation of the emblems, and prayers should all focus on the Good News of Christ’s redeeming love, manifested in His willingness to suffer and die to redeem us from the power and punishment of sin.

To accomplish this objective, I propose an order of Passover service that can be adapted or changed according to personal preferences or circumstances. As the family or families gather on Passover evening, the head of the home or the pastor (if the celebration takes place in the church) should welcome all the participants to the celebration of Passover by reminding them of the significance of the feast. Here is a suggestion of how to introduce Passover.

“Welcome to our Passover celebration. We have gathered together tonight as a family (or as an extended family) to celebrate the feast of our redemption. This feast began over 34 centuries ago as a celebration of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and became the commemoration of Christ’s deliverance of all believers from the bondage of sin. The purpose of the Passover feast is twofold. On the one hand, it is designed to help us internalize and experience the reality of redemption accomplished through the sacrifice of Christ, our Paschal Lamb. Tonight we shall appropriate the reality of Christ’s redemption by partaking of the emblems of His broken body and shed blood and by experiencing the spiritual cleansing typified by the footwashing ceremony.

“On the other hand, Passover offers us tonight an opportunity to express our thankfulness and gratitude to God for His redemption. We shall do this by singing, praying, reading, and meditating about Christ’s suffering and death for us. The love feast that follows the Holy Communion will offer us an opportunity to give thanks to the Lord for His marvelous provision of salvation.”

Introductory remarks such as these are important because they set the stage for the Passover celebration by reminding each participant of the significance of the occasion. At this point, the leader can proceed by outlining the order of service. The following is a suggested order of service for a Passover celebration that can be adapted or changed according to personal preferences.

## PASSOVER SERVICE

1. **Welcome to Passover.** A few introductory remarks should explain the meaning and importance of celebrating Passover as the Feast of Redemption.
2. **Paschal Opening Prayer.** The prayer should express gratitude for the opportunity to celebrate another Passover, when we can show anew our gratitude to Christ for His willingness to be sacrificed as the Paschal Lamb for our redemption.
3. **Paschal Hymns.** A selection of hymns or choruses focusing on the suffering and death of Jesus. These hymns can be sung between Scripture readings. Some examples of suitable hymns are:

*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*  
*O Sacred Head Now Wounded*  
*The Old Rugged Cross*

*Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?  
At the Cross, at the Cross, Where I First Saw the Light  
Amazing Grace*

4. **Paschal Readings and Reflections.** A selection of passages from the Old and New Testaments should focus on redemption. These passages can be read by different family members between hymns and can be followed by brief comments on some relevant points. A sample of appropriate readings and brief comments are.

***Feasting for Freedom: Exodus 12:1-27. Some points to ponder:***

- \* Passover was the beginning of months (v. 2). Likewise receiving Jesus is the beginning of a new life.
- \* The lamb was to be without blemish (v. 5). Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), was without spot or blemish (1 Pet 1:18-20).
- \* A lamb for each house (vv. 3-4). Jesus offers salvation to every member of the family (Acts 16:15, 31; 18:3,8).
- \* The lamb must be eaten (vv. 8-10). We partake of the body and blood of Jesus through the emblems of the bread and wine (Mark 2:22-24) and by feeding on His words (John 6:63).

***The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53. Some points to ponder:***

- \* “Who has believed what we have heard?” (v. 1). The story of the Savior’s selfless love, humiliation, suffering, and vicarious death is truly unbelievable. It is the greatest Good News.
- \* “He had no form or comeliness” (v. 2). Christ did not attract people by the display of his supernatural glory but by the beauty of His righteous life.
- \* “A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (v. 3). By taking our human nature Christ became sensitive to all our pains, sorrows and disappointments. What a comforting thought!
- \* “He was wounded for our transgressions” (v. 5). Nine times Isaiah emphasizes in verses 4-6 that Christ suffered and died for us. “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves.”<sup>34</sup>

- \* “All we like sheep have gone astray” (v. 6). Our human condition without Christ is like that of lost sheep, lost without knowing it.
- \* “[He shall] make many to be accounted righteous” (v. 11). By His vicarious suffering and death, Christ is able to offer us His righteousness, which is the greatest human need.

### ***Agony in Gethsemane: Matthew 26:36-46. Points to ponder:***

- \* “My soul is very sorrowful” (v. 38). It is impossible for us to understand the intensity of our Savior’s anguish caused by His awareness that He was bearing the sins of the world.
- \* “Watch with me” (v. 38). This is Christ’s plea for human sympathy in His struggle with the powers of darkness. Tonight we are here to watch, that is, to appreciate and appropriate the Savior’s suffering and death for us.
- \* “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me” (v. 39). In His supreme agony, Christ submitted Himself to the will of the Father. What a perfect example for us to follow!
- \* “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation” (v. 41). Instead of reproving His disciples for failing to support Him, He showed sympathy for their weaknesses and concern for their ability to endure the test which would come upon them.

### ***Trial and Crucifixion: John 18:28-40; 19:1:30. Points to ponder:***

- \* The composure of Jesus (18:19-38). Amidst the shouts and false accusation, Jesus retained His composure before the high priest and Pilate. He bore insult and mockery without retaliation.
- \* Christ’s concern for Pilate (18:34, 36, 37). Jesus took time to answer Pilate’s questions because He knew that Pilate desired to know the truth. But Pilate chose expediency rather than truth.
- \* The duplicity of Pilate (18:38-40; 19:4, 15,16). Repeatedly, Pilate acknowledged the innocence of Christ, and yet he handed Him over to be crucified. “Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life.”<sup>35</sup> We all face similar choices.

- \* The flogging of Jesus (19:1). Jesus, who was moved with compassion when He saw the multitude (Matt 9:36), was scourged to elicit sympathy from the multitude. What a contrast of attitudes!
- \* “We have no king but Caesar” (19:15). To destroy Christ, the Jews professed loyalty to the ruler they hated. “By choosing a heathen ruler, the Jewish nation had withdrawn from the theocracy.”<sup>35</sup>
- \* Jesus’ concern for His mother (19:26-27). In His dying hour, Jesus remembered His mother and entrusted her to John, His loving disciple. Jesus gave us a perfect example of filial love.
- \* “It is finished” (19:30). It is a cry of satisfaction, not of desperation. Creation was finished with the Sabbath rest of God and redemption was finished with the Sabbath rest of the Savior in the tomb.

**5. Paschal Thanksgiving Prayers and Testimonies.** After reading and meditating about Christ’s vicarious suffering and death, it would be well to take time to express our gratitude to the Savior for His willingness to suffer and die for our redemption. This can be done through a season of prayer followed by personal testimonies of how different members of the family (or congregation) have experienced divine deliverance from sin.

**6. The Paschal Cleansing: John 13:3-20.** Passover invites us to prepare ourselves to receive Christ, our Paschal Lamb, not only by spring-cleaning our homes but also by cleansing our hearts.

\* **The Jewish Ritual.** The Jewish Passover meal begins with the consecration (*kiddush*) of the first cup of wine, which is followed by the ceremonial *washing of the hands*. A pitcher of water, a basin, and a towel are brought to the table for the head of the house to wash and dry his hands. This imitates the priests who washed before entering the Holy Place.

\* **The Christian Ritual.** Jesus used this occasion to institute the foot-washing service (John 13:12-15), which contains an *invitation* and a *promise*. The *invitation* is to “examine” ourselves (1 Cor 11:27) and cleanse our hearts before we receive the emblems of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The *promise* is that just as the water washes our feet, so Christ washes away our sins as we accept the



provision of His salvation. As family members participate together in the foot-washing service, they can experience mutual reconciliation and cleansing.

**7. The Paschal Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.** After the cleansing of the foot-washing service, the family or families gather around the table for the Holy Communion and the Love Feast. The table can be set with both the bread and wine of the Holy Communion and the *agape* meal, so that the two meals can follow in smooth succession.

\* **Reflections on the Emblems.** In teaching us the truth of His salvation, Christ did not leave us to grapple with abstraction. He took two elements of the Passover meal, the unleavened bread and wine, to represent the sacrifice of Himself for our redemption. He told the disciples not just to look at the emblems of His sacrifice, but to eat them (1 Cor 11:24-25). *At the Holy Communion salvation is not only taught, but caught by eating it.* This is a dramatic way to help us internalize and appropriate the reality of Christ's vicarious death.

\* **Consecration of the Emblems.** The prayer of consecration of the emblems should express thanksgiving for Christ's willingness to be sacrificed as our Paschal Lamb, and our willingness to accept His forgiveness and cleansing.

\* **Distribution of the Emblems.** Before partaking of the unleavened bread and wine, each participant should remember that through these emblems Christ is symbolically mediating to us the benefits of His atoning death (1 Cor 10:16) and is inviting us to fellowship with Him (Rev 3: 20).

**8. The Paschal Commitment.** A fitting conclusion to the celebration of Passover is a commitment to live in the *present* the new way of life that Passover demands while awaiting for the *future* Paschal Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). The paschal commitment is typified by the eating of unleavened bread for seven days after Passover. As expressed by Herbert Armstrong in his booklet *God's Festivals and Holy Days*, "Every spring the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread is a time when Christians symbolically renew their resolve to live in harmony with God's way of life."<sup>36</sup> The closing prayer could be an appeal to renew our *behavioral* and *eschatological* commitment.

\* **The Behavioral Commitment.** Our behavioral commitment in the closing Passover prayer can be expressed as follows: “Thank you, Father, for granting us the opportunity on this Passover night to celebrate the cleansing from sin (old leaven) offered to us through the sacrifice of Christ, our Paschal Lamb, *and* to commit ourselves to live a new life, described in Thy Word as “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:6-8). May the unleavened bread we ate tonight and that we shall be eating for the next seven days, impress upon our minds the truth that You have called us to live a new life of sincerity and purity because we have cleansed and redeemed by the Paschal Lamb.”

\* **The Eschatological Commitment.** Jews still conclude their

Passover with the following prayer:

Holy One, who dwells in our hearts  
 Restore the countless congregation.  
 Speedily lead the children of Thy people  
 Redeemed, to Zion in joyful song.  
 Next year in Jerusalem.

Our Christian eschatological commitment can be expressed in the closing Passover prayer as follows: “Tonight we are reminded of the promise Christ made at the Last Supper that He will eat Passover again with the redeemed of all the ages when He comes to establish His kingdom. We look forward to the fulfillment of Christ’s promise and we pray that this Blessed Hope may inspire each one of us to live upright and godly lives while we are awaiting His glorious appearing and invitation to participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

**9. Paschal Closing Hymn.** Jesus concluded the Paschal Supper with His disciples by singing a hymn: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt 26:30). An appropriate closing hymn can be:

God be with you till we meet again;  
 By His counsels guide, uphold you,  
 With His sheep securely fold you:  
 God be with you till we meet again.

**The Agape Meal.** Following the Paschal Supper, the early Christians partook of a fellowship meal known as *agape*, that is, love feast. We, too, can follow this arrangement since the love feast provides an opportunity to express our gratitude for the sacrificial love of Christ commemorated through the emblems of His broken body and shed blood.

Since Passover is the Spring festival, celebrated with the unleavened bread from the first wheat of the new harvest, it seems fitting that the love feast should consist especially of natural produce such as fruits, nuts, salad, vegetables, unleavened bread, cheese, and, possibly, soup; but this is only a suggestion. What is important to keep in mind is that the primary purpose of the love feast is not the eating and drinking, but the expressing of gratitude to the Lord by partaking with thankful hearts of the produce of the earth. A simple meal made up mostly of natural produce can more effectively remind us of the thanksgiving purpose of our fellowship.

The conclusion of the celebration of Passover marks the beginning of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. While Passover typifies how God has delivered us from the bondage of sin through the sacrifice of His Son, the Feast of Unleavened Bread represents how we accept God's provision of salvation by living new lives of purity and sincerity. In a sense this Festival points to the heavenly ministry of Jesus, who is actively working in our behalf to cleanse us from the presence and power of sin (Heb 7:25). The Feast of Unleavened Bread assures us that God is still setting His people free from the bondage of sin, just as He freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

**Conclusion.** Our survey of Passover in Scripture and history has found compelling indications of the continuity of its observance in the Christian church, even though a new meaning and ritual were established by Christ Himself at His last Passover Supper. Christ clearly envisaged the continuity of Passover when he said, "For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16, NIV). The statement suggests that Christ expected His followers to continue eating of the Passover during His absence until its eschatological fulfillment at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9), when He would partake of it again with the redeemed. The fact that the ultimate fulfillment of Passover still lies in the future shows that Passover, like the Sabbath, remains for the people of God. Its observance can aliments our hope and strengthen our faith in the future Passover Supper that we will celebrate with Christ at the consummation of God's kingdom.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Joachim Jeremias, “Pasha,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968), vol. 5, p. 901.

2. As quoted by Heinrich Kellner, *Heortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from Their Origin to the Present Day* (London, 1908), pp. 49-50. See also E. J. Bickerman, *Chronology of the Ancient World* (London, 1968), p. 26.

3. For a discussion on the sectarian calendars at the time of Christ, see J. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), pp. 71-123.

4. Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 8, 18. For an analysis of this text and of the April 6 Passover dating, see August Strobel, *Ursprung und Geschichte des fruchristlichen Osterkalenders* (Berlin, 1977), p. 373; Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York, 1986), pp. 7-12.

5. The date of March 25 appears in Hyppolitus’ table for the computation of Passover. See “Pâques,” *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, ed., Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq, (Paris, 1950), vol. 6, pp. 2423-2426; *Chronicon Paschale ad exemplar Vaticanum recensuit Ludovicus Dindorfus*, I (Bonn, 1832), p. 13; Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 8, 18. The challenge of Apollinaris of Hierapolis and Clement of Alexandria to the March 25 dating of the Passover are mentioned in the *Chronicon Paschale*, pp. 13-14.

6. Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 3, 18-19, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan 1979), second series, vol. 1, p. 525. Emphasis supplied.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Heinrich Kellner (note 2), p. 57.

9. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California, 1954), p. 399.

10. Adolf Adam, trans., Matthew J. O’Connell, *The Liturgical Year: Its History and Its Meaning after the Reform of the Liturgy* (New York, 1981), p. 59.

11. Martha Zimmerman, *Celebrate the Feasts of the Old Testament in Your Own Home or Church* (Minneapolis, 1981), p. 56.

12. See *Chronicon Paschale*, *Patrologia Graeca* 92, 79D; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 72:1. For a discussion of these and other documents, see Joachim Jeremias (note 1), p. 902, note 49; also Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome, 1980), pp. 243-244, 307.

13. *Chronicon Paschale*, *Patrologia Graeca* 92, 82.

14. Joachim Jeremias (note 1), p. 902.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 903.

17. Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 70, 11, *Patrologia Graeca* 42, 359-360. See also *Didascalia Apostolorum* 10, 2; *Apostolic Constitutions* 5, 13, 3.

18. Campbell Bonner, trans., *Melito of Sardis, the Homily on the Passion, With Some Fragments of Ezekiel*, *Studies and Documents* 12 (Philadelphia, 1940), pp. 67-68.

19. *Pesachim* 10, 5, *Mishnah*, trans. Danby ( ), p. 151.

20. J. Van Goudoever (note 3), p. 156.

21. *The Epistle of the Apostles* 15, *The Apocrypha of the New Testament*, trans. M. R. James (Oxford, 1924), p. 489.

22. *Epistles of Pliny* 10, 34. The text is quoted in full and examined at length in F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* (Grand Rapids, 1958), p. 169-172.

23. Justin Martyr, *The First Apology* 67, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed., Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 1, p. 186.

24. See, for example, Bruce J. Lieske, *A Guide to the Celebration of a Christian Passover* (St. Louis, 1980); idem, *Passover Haggadah for Christians* (St. Louis, 1981); Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Times* (Baltimore, 1993); Edward Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* (Shippenburg, Pennsylvania, 1994); Ceil and Moïshe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover* (Chicago, 1978); Mitch and Zhava Glaser, *The Fall Feasts of Israel* (Chicago, 1987); Martha Zimmerman, *Celebrate the Feasts of the Old Testament in Your Home or Church* (Minneapolis, 1981).

25. Martha Zimmerman (note 10), p. 60.

26. *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

28. Ibid.

29. Ellen G. White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, California, 1958), p. 277.

30. Ceil and Moishe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover. Why Is This Night Different?* (Chicago, 1978), p. 65.

31. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (note 29), p. 278.

32. Babylonian Talmud, *Pesachim* 99b.

33. Ellen G. White, "Is the Blood on the Lintel?" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (May 21, 1895), p. 2.

34. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 25.

35. Ibid., p. 738.

36. Herbert W. Armstrong, *God's Festivals and Holy Days* (Pasadena, 1992), p. 7.

# Chapter 5

## PENTECOST

### IN THE

## OLD TESTAMENT

Pentecost is the second of the three great pilgrimage feasts of Israel that lives on in the Christian church with new meaning and function. The first pilgrimage feast was Passover and the third was the Feast of Tabernacles. All three festivals are associated with agricultural harvest. Passover coincides with the barley harvest, the first grain harvest in Palestine. Pentecost is the wheat harvest festival which occurred seven weeks later. Both of these festivals are Spring first fruits harvests which came before the final fall harvest celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles, the fruit harvest. Since harvest in the Scripture typifies the ingathering of the redeemed, we shall see that these festivals were designed to reveal the unfolding of salvation history.

The term “Pentecost” is not found in the Old Testament. The feast was variously called the “Feast of Weeks” (Ex 34:22; Deut 16:9-10), because it was celebrated seven weeks after the offering of the barley sheaf; the “Feast of the Harvest” (Ex 23:16), because it came at the end of the wheat harvest; and the “Feast of the First Fruits” (Ex 34:22; Num 28:26), because it marked the beginning of the time the first fruits of the wheat harvest were offered at the Temple. In the New Testament, the feast is known as “Pentecost,” a term derived from the Greek *pentekoste* (meaning “fiftieth”), which was widely used in Hellenistic Judaism.<sup>1</sup>

Pentecost was basically the Spring wheat harvest festival, a day of joy and thanksgiving when the Jews offered to God the first fruits the land had produced. This festival could typify effectively the first harvest of the Christian church that occurred on the day of Pentecost when, as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, three thousand Jews accepted Jesus as their expected Messiah (Acts 2:41). As the sacrifice of the paschal lamb and the Exodus from Egypt foreshadowed the redemption from sin by the sacrifice of the true Paschal Lamb, so the offering of the first fruits at the Feast of Weeks pointed typically to the first fruits of the spiritual harvest of Christ’s redemption that occurred on the day of Pentecost.



**Objective of Chapter.** This chapter examines the reckoning, meaning, and ritual of Pentecost in Old Testament times. Attention is given to the significance of the offering of the first fruits and to its prophetic fulfillment. Consideration also is given to the possible meaning of counting seven weeks as a symbol of remission.

## PART I THE RECKONING OF PENTECOST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In ancient Palestine, the grain harvest lasted seven weeks, beginning with the barley harvest right after Passover and ending with the wheat harvest seven weeks later. The time of the Palestinian barley harvest was the key to the Jewish religious calendar, because Passover could not be observed until at least some of the barley was ready for harvest. The offering of the first barley sheaf took place on the day after Passover. This meant that if no barley was ready for harvest, the celebration of Passover had to be delayed by intercalating a month in the lunar calendar. Since barley ripens a few weeks before wheat, the ceremony of the barley wave-sheaf offering the day after Passover marked the starting point of the fifty days countdown to Pentecost.

**Counting from the *Omer*.** The term “Feast of Weeks,” while used to designate the special festival day on which the first fruits of the wheat harvest were presented before the Lord, actually refers to the entire period of the grain harvest of about seven weeks, from the first cutting of barley to the completion of the wheat harvest. This is implied by the very name “Feast of Weeks,” that is, a feast extending over seven weeks. However, only the beginning and the end of the fifty days were marked by a wave-offering (a *tenuphah*). This entire period was of special significance to the Israelites, who were called to recognize God as the source of the early and latter rain that made the Spring and Fall harvests possible (Jer 5:24)

The date of the Feast of Weeks was reckoned by counting seven weeks from the first putting of the sickle to the barley: “You shall count seven weeks: begin to count the seven weeks from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain [barley]” (Deut 16:9). The problem was to determine on which day the first sheaf of barley, known as *omer*, was to be cut and presented as a wave-offering before the Lord.

This determination was based on the instructions given in Leviticus 23:15-16: “And you shall count *from the morrow after the sabbath*, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven full weeks

shall they be, counting fifty days to the morrow after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a cereal offering of new grain to the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> According to this text, the ceremony of the wave-sheaf offering took place on “*the morrow after the sabbath.*” From this Sabbath, seven weeks were counted to the Feast of Weeks. Since the term “Sabbath” is used to refer both to the seventh day of the week and to the annual Feasts mentioned in the same chapter (Lev 23:8, 21, 23, 32, 34), the question is, What is the meaning of “Sabbath” here, seventh day of the week or festival day?

**Two Methods of Reckoning.** This question became an outstanding point of contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees interpreted the “Sabbath” as the festival day of Passover, Nisan 15, which was also the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Thus, they waved the first sheaf of barley on the following day, Nisan 16, and from that day they counted the fifty days to Pentecost. The chief support for this interpretation comes from the Greek version (Septuagint) of Leviticus 23:11: “The priest shall wave the *omer* on the morrow after the first day [of Unleavened Bread].” But in verse 15 of the same chapter we read, “You shall count from the morrow after after the Sabbath.” The word “Sabbath” in Greek, when used by itself, can mean only the seventh day of the week, or the week as a whole, but not an annual feast.

In the Targum of Jerusalem we find the same interpretation for Leviticus 23:11, “After the first festal day of Passover.” Philo and Josephus support the same tradition. Philo writes: “Within the Festival of Unleavened Bread there is another festival following directly after the first day.”<sup>3</sup> In a similar vein, Josephus writes: “From the second day of Unleavened Bread”<sup>4</sup> they count fifty days.

Indirect support for this interpretation is also found in Joshua 5:11: “And on the morrow after passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. And the manna ceased on the morrow, when they ate of the produce of the land.” The “parched grain” was obviously the fresh grain from the Spring harvest that could be eaten only after the offering of the first sheaf of barley. This suggests that the offering of the wave sheaf was made on the day after Passover, Nisan 16, which marked the beginning of the fifty days to the Feast of Weeks. This has been the normative Jewish tradition that has continued to our days.

The Sadducees, however, supported by the Boethusians, the Karaites, and the Samaritans, took the word “Sabbath” to mean literally the first Sabbath that fell during the week of Unleavened Bread. Support for this

interpretation comes from the fact that the word “Sabbath” by itself is never used in the Bible to refer to an annual feast. The Day of Atonement was designated by the compound expression *shabbath shabbathon*, usually translated as “a sabbath of solemn rest” (Lev 23:32; 16:31). This means that they counted the fifty days from the first Sunday after Passover. Consequently, Pentecost for them always fell on the same day of the week, namely, Sunday.

This method has the advantage of finding its counterpart in the Christian day of Pentecost, which occurred on a Sunday because it fell fifty days after Christ’s resurrection on the first day of the week (Mark 16:2; Acts 2:1). In spite of this advantage, I concur with Alfred Edersheim: “The testimonies of Josephus, of Philo, and of Jewish tradition, leave no room to doubt that in this instance we are to understand by the ‘Sabbath’ the 15th of Nisan, on whatever day of the week it might fall.”<sup>5</sup> This means that Pentecost was celebrated by most Jews fifty days after Passover, on whatever day of the week it fell.<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the particular year of Christ’s death and resurrection, the two different methods of reckoning concurred on the date of Pentecost. This is because, according to the Johannine chronology of the passion which we defended in chapter 2, Passover (Nisan 15) fell on a Sabbath, and the offering of the wave sheaf on Sunday (Nisan 16). This fulfilled the Pharisaic interpretation of Leviticus 23:15, which counted the fifty days from the day after Passover (Nisan 16). Amazingly, it also fulfilled the Sadducean interpretation, which counted the fifty days from the first Sunday after Passover. Pentecost described in Acts 2 fell on a Sunday by both systems of computation. Perhaps it is providential that Christ fulfilled both interpretations in the year of His death and resurrection.

**The Wave Sheaf-Offering.** The countdown to Pentecost began with the offering of the first barley sheaf (known as *omer*) on the day after Passover. The ceremony was called *sfirat haomer*, that is, “the Counting of the *Omer*,” because on that day the Jews began counting the fifty days to Pentecost.

The purpose of the wave-sheaf offering was to consecrate and inaugurate the Spring grain harvest which lasted about seven weeks until Pentecost. The ritual of this offering is described in Leviticus 23:9-14: “Say to the people of Israel, when you come into the land which I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, that you may find acceptance; on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb

a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the Lord. . . . And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.”

The cutting of the first barley sheaf entailed a lively ceremony. The sheaf was cut in the evening, put into baskets, and held until the next day, when it was brought to the Temple (formerly perhaps local sanctuaries) to be ceremonially waved by the priests.<sup>7</sup> The Talmud states that a priest would meet a group of pilgrims on the edge of the city and from there lead them to the Temple mount singing and praising God. Together with a priest they proclaimed: “A wandering Aramaen was my father; and he went down into Egypt . . . and the Lord brought us out of Egypt . . . into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which thou, O Lord, hast given me” (Deut 26:5, 8, 9,10).

When they arrived at the Temple, the priest would take the sheaves, lift some in the air and wave them in every direction to acknowledge God’s sovereignty over the whole earth.<sup>8</sup> Before the offering of the sheaves, no reaping of the harvest for personal use could be done (Lev 23:14). A portion of the wave-sheaf was placed on the altar and the rest was eaten by the priest. A male lamb was sacrificed as a burnt offering (Lev 23:12).

## PART II THE MEANING AND RITUAL OF PENTECOST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

**Significance of the Sheaf of First Fruits.** The Bible attaches special significance to the offering of the first fruits or firstborn. Everything on the earth, including man and beast, was to be presented before the Lord as first fruits to Him (Ex 13:2; 22:29). The first barley sheaf was offered in the course of the paschal week (Lev 13:10-14), and the first fruit of the wheat harvest at Pentecost (Ex 34:22; Lev 23:17).

The offering of the first fruits represented a human expression of thanksgiving to divine generosity. This meaning is clear in Deuteronomy 26:10 where the Israelites are instructed to bring some of the first fruits of the harvest to the priest and publicly to confess: “Behold, now I bring the first of the fruits of the ground, which thou, O Lord, has given me.” The gift from God calls for a gift from His people.

In his treatise *On Special Laws (De Specialibus Legibus)*, so valuable for our knowledge of the Jewish cult at the time of Christ, Philo of

Alexandria deals with the different feast days. He explains the meaning of Pentecost with these words: “This feast is called the feast of the first fruits because before the year’s grain is used by man, the first produce of the new harvest and the first fruits are to be presented as first fruits—for indeed it is right and just, when we have received prosperity from God as the greatest gift, not to enjoy the most necessary food, which is at the same time the most useful and delightful, and not to appropriate it entirely to ourselves before having offered the first fruits to Him Who has given it to us; not that we give Him anything, for all things, riches and gifts belong to Him—but because, by this humble sign, we show an attitude of thanksgiving and of piety towards Him Who is not sparing with His graces, but Who extends them continually and liberally.”<sup>9</sup>

The consecration of the first fruits sanctifies the whole harvest, since the part stands for the whole. As Paul puts it, “If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump” (Rom 11:16). By the symbolic gesture of consecrating the first fruits, the whole of the harvest was consecrated to God. The same principle applies to the consecration of the Sabbath time, which represents the consecration of our total life to Him.

The idea that the consecration of a part exercises a sanctifying influence on all is applied in the Bible to the plan of salvation. “Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest” (Jer 2:3; cf. Hos 9:10), because it was called by God to exercise a sanctifying influence on all nations. Similarly, as Christians, we are “a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (James 1:8), because we are called to be a sanctifying influence in the world. Those who arose from the dead at the time of Christ’s resurrection became the first fruits, that is, the pledge of all those who will rise at the time of Christ’s Return (Matt 27:52-53; Eph 4:8; 1 Thess 4:13-18). The 144,000 saints who follow the Lamb are “the first fruits for God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4), because they represent the glorious destiny that awaits the redeemed of all ages.

**The Prophetic Fulfillment of the First Fruits.** More important still is the prophetic fulfillment of the first fruits offering by the resurrection of Christ. Paul specifically calls Christ’s resurrection the first fruits of those who will rise from the dead. “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the *first fruits* of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the *first fruits*, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:20-23).<sup>10</sup>

In this passage, Paul speaks of Christ twice as “*the first fruits*,” not only to indicate that He was the first to rise bodily from the grave, but also that by so doing He fulfilled the offering of the first fruits. We noted that the first sheaf of the barley harvest was waved before the Lord by the priest as a pledge of the full harvest that would follow. The ceremony was performed on the day after Passover, that is, Nisan 16 (Lev 23:10-11). “The wave sheaf of the first fruits of the harvest was a type of Christ, the ‘first fruits,’ or pledge, of the great harvest that will follow when all the righteous dead are raised at the second coming of Jesus (see 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 4:14-16). Christ rose from the dead on the very day that the wave sheaf was presented in the Temple (see on Lev 23:14; Luke 23:56; 24:1). As the first sheaf was a pledge and assurance of the ingathering of the entire harvest, so the resurrection of Christ is a pledge that all who put their trust in Him will be raised from the dead.”<sup>11</sup>

It is noteworthy that the priest did not present before the Lord just one head of grain, but a whole sheaf of barley. Similarly, Christ did not come forth from the grave alone, for “many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised” (Matt 27:52). Paul tells us that when Christ “ascended on high he led a host of captives” (Eph 4:8). Those who were raised at Christ’s death and came “out of the tombs after his resurrection” (Matt 27:53) ascended with Christ to heaven as trophies of His power to resurrect all who sleep in the grave. As the offering of the first sheaf of barley was a pledge of the coming harvest, so the saints that Christ raised at the time of His death are a pledge of the countless multitude that Christ will awaken from the dust of the earth at His Second Advent.

**Pentecost: A Symbol of Remission.** The meaning of Pentecost is found not only in the offering of the first fruits which took place on the first and the fiftieth day, but also in the fact that it lasts fifty days, that is to say, seven times seven weeks, plus one day. From this characteristic the usual titles are derived, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (fiftieth). This lends support to Van Goudoever’s insistence that “the counting of seven times seven days is more than just an agricultural custom.”<sup>12</sup> The grain harvest in Palestine could hardly have been completed every year precisely between Passover and Pentecost. There must be a reason for the Biblical instruction to count seven weeks between the beginning and end of the Spring grain harvest.

The reason is found in the meaning of the seventh-day Sabbath, which is the basis for the seven-weeks structure of time. The Sabbath provided release and liberation from the hardship of life and social inequalities, not only every seven days but also every seven years (sabbatical year—Lev

25:4) and every seven weeks of years (jubilee year–Lev 25:8). At these annual institutions the Sabbath became the liberator of the oppressed in the Hebrew society. The land was to lie fallow to provide free produce for the dispossessed and animals. The slaves were emancipated if they so desired, and debts owed by fellow citizens were remitted (Lev 25:4-55).

Van Goudoever points out: “In Leviticus 23 and 25 there is a strong parallelism between the counting of seven times seven days and the counting of seven times seven years. Just as we may suppose a relation between the seventh day (Sabbath) and the seventh year (the sabbatical year), so we may suppose a relation between the Feast of Weeks and the Year of Jubilee (the 50th year)”<sup>13</sup> As the Jubilee year concluded the preceding period of 49 years, so the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost) concluded the preceding 49 days. As in the Jubilee year the land was to lie fallow to provide free produce for the poor, so at the Feast of Weeks the poor and strangers were to be invited to a special fellowship meal, and the borders of the fields were to be left unreaped “for the poor and the stranger” (Lev 23:22).

The common denominator between the seven weeks of days and the seven weeks of years is the number 50, which was the symbol of remission (*aphesis*) of debts. Philo offers us an explicit application of the meaning of remission to the feast of Pentecost: “The feast of the sheaf is a kind of preparatory feast, if one may say so, for still a greater feast. Indeed, beginning from this day, we calculate the fiftieth day (*pentekoston*), at the end of seven weeks, the *sacred number of remission (aphesis)* sealed by the monad, which is the image of the incorporeal God.”<sup>14</sup>

This text shows the connection not only between the offering of the wave sheaf and that of the first fruits, the first being the beginning of the second, but also between the seven weeks of Pentecost and the idea of remission. We shall see in chapter 7 that this symbolism is found in early Christian writers. In the light of this symbolism, Pentecost represents the celebration not only of the blessings of the harvest but also of the blessings of redemption.

**The Ritual of the Feast of Pentecost.** Pentecost was a joyous feast that afforded an opportunity to the Israelites to express their thanksgiving for the completion of the Spring harvest. It was a holy convocation which called for abstention from ordinary work (Lev 23:21). Through its male representatives, the whole community of Israel presented itself before the Lord.

As with other great feasts, a special offering was made in addition to the daily burnt offering. The main offering of the day was the special



cereal offering consisting of “two loaves of bread” (Lev 23:17) which were made with flour milled from the new wheat crop and baked with leaven. The loaves were presented as a wave offering on behalf of all the people. None of the bread was placed on the altar because it was baked with leaven. Instead, the leavened bread was eaten by the priests. Along with the two loaves, two lambs were offered as a wave offering.

It is significant that while no leaven was permitted (Ex 12:15, 19-20; Lev 2:1, 4-5) at Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the regular meal offerings, at Pentecost, the two loaves of bread presented as a wave offering were baked with leaven. The reason given by Edersheim<sup>15</sup> and others<sup>16</sup> is that while the Paschal Lamb and the unleavened bread represented the death of Christ, who was without sin and gives power to overcome sin, the two loaves offered at Pentecost represented Israel’s response to the blessing of salvation. Though Israel was called by God to be holy unto Him, sin still existed in the lives of the people. This explains why at Pentecost the loaf offerings were accompanied by sin offerings.

As the first wave-sheaf at the Passover season marked the period when new grain could be used in the land, so the presentation at Pentecost of the wave-loaves marked the beginning of the use of the new flour for the meat-offerings in the sanctuary. The feast was concluded by eating the communal meals to which the poor, the strangers, and the Levites were invited. Thus, the feast served not only to honor the God of Israel, but also to recognize the bond of unity that existed among the members of the covenant community.

Pentecost was also the Feast of First Fruits (Num 28:26). After the offering of the loaves, individual worshippers could present their own personal first fruits. These private offerings were accompanied by a moving recital of thanksgiving for the miraculous way God delivered Israel from slavery and brought it to the Promised Land (Deut 26:1-11). Thus, Pentecost celebrated not only the blessings of the grain harvest but also the blessings of redemption and restoration.

**The Giving of the Law.** With the destruction of the second Temple (A. D. 70) and the forced separation of the Jewish people from their land, the centrality of the harvest motif of Pentecost diminished. Instead, the feast was gradually transformed into a feast of covenant renewal commemorating the giving of the Law at Sinai. The association of Pentecost with the giving of the Law at Sinai was fairly easy to make because, historically, God’s revelation on Mount Sinai took place approximately fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt (Ex 19:1-16). As Eduard Lohse

explains, “Since we read in Exodus 19:1 that in the 3rd month after the exodus the Israelites came into the wilderness of Sinai, it was possible to count 50 days from the Passover celebrating the exodus to the giving of the Law and thus to celebrate Pentecost as the day when the Law was given.”<sup>17</sup>

It should be pointed out that the exact day on which the Law was given at Sinai is not mentioned in Exodus 19. What we are told is that the Israelites reached the wilderness of Sinai “on the third new moon” (Ex 19:1), which is the first day of the third month, since each month began with a new moon. The first day of the third month would be about 45 days after the Exodus, since they left Egypt on Passover night, which is the 15th of the first month.

When the Israelites reached the wilderness of Sinai, “they encamped before the mountain” (Ex 19:2). After the people had encamped, Moses went up to the mountain where God instructed him to prepare the people for His extraordinary manifestation on Sinai (Ex 19:7-9). Moses descended from the mountain and instructed the people to wash themselves and their clothes and to be ready in two days because on the third day they would witness the most spectacular manifestation of God they had ever seen (Ex 19:11).

On the third day, Moses went up to receive the Ten Commandments while the people trembled at the thunders, lightning, and thick cloud covering the mountain (Ex 19:16-17). If we allow two days for the people to encamp and for Moses to go up the first time to the mountain, and if we add to these two days the three days of preparation, we have a total of five days. Adding these five days to the 45 days it took the Israelites to reach the wilderness of Sinai, we come up with 50 days between the Exodus and the giving of the Law.

This simple calculation suggests that it is altogether possible that the giving of the Law took place 50 days after Passover. The Jews clearly understood this possibility. In fact, as Edersheim explains, “Jewish tradition has it, that on the 2nd of the third month, or Sivan, Moses had ascended the Mount, that he communicated with the people on the 3rd, reascended the Mount on the 4th, and that then the people sanctified themselves on the 4th, 5th, and 6th of Sivan, on which latter day the Ten Commandments were actually given them. Accordingly the days before Pentecost were always reckoned as the first, second, third, etc., since the presentation of the omer.”<sup>18</sup>

The counting of the days from the presentation of the wave-sheaf (*omer*) to Pentecost was a way for the Jews to express their eagerness to

celebrate not merely the completion of the harvest (which may not always have been completed by Pentecost), but especially the anniversary of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. Maimonides (A. D. 1135-1204), a famous Jewish philosopher, beautifully observed: “Just as one who is expecting the most faithful of his friends is wont to count the days and hours to his arrival, so we also count from the omer of the day of our Exodus from Egypt to that of the giving of the Law, which was the object of our Exodus, as it is said: ‘I bore you on eagle’s wings, and brought you unto myself.’ And because this great manifestation did not last more than one day, therefore we annually commemorate it only one day.”<sup>19</sup>

Edersheim notes a historical and theological connection between Passover and Pentecost and brings out its application for Christianity. He writes: “As the dedication of the harvest, commencing with the presentation of the first *omer* on the Passover [season], was completed in the thank-offering of the two wave-loaves at Pentecost, so the memorial of Israel’s deliverance [Passover] approximately terminated in that of the giving of the law—just as, making the highest application of it, the Passover sacrifice of the Lord Jesus may be said to have been completed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.”<sup>20</sup>

The meaning of Pentecost as the anniversary of the giving of the Law became very popular among the Jews. For example, Rabbi Eleazar ben Pedath (about A. D. 270) expressed the common conviction of his time when he said: “Pentecost is the day when the Torah [Law] was given.”<sup>21</sup> The Midrash, which is a rabbinical commentary on the Scripture, says that when God gave the Torah on Sinai, His thundering voice reverberated “in seventy languages, so that all the nations should understand.”<sup>22</sup> It is easy to make a connection between the tradition of the giving of the Law in seventy languages and the proclamation of the Gospel on the day of Pentecost in many languages as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

**From Physical to Spiritual Liberation.** The counting of the days from the offering of the *omer* to Pentecost became for the Jews a way to recount their pilgrimage from their Passover deliverance to their encounter with God at Sinai. In a sense, it was a pilgrimage from physical liberation to spiritual redemption.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein points out that “by counting the forty-nine days between Pesach [Passover] and Shavuot [Pentecost] and linking them thereby, the Jew declares that man does not attain complete freedom through physical liberation alone. The Exodus from Egypt was incomplete without a spiritual redemption. The agricultural motif of bringing

the barley omer to the Temple for each of the forty-nine days between Pesach and Shavuot was, in short, infused with the new meaning of linking our physical liberation with our spiritual freedom and birth as a people.

“That we are to strive toward a higher spiritual purpose in life was actually expressed by Moses, as well, when he declared to Pharaoh, ‘Let my people go so that they might worship me.’ For the ultimate purpose of the Jews’ freedom and salvation lies in the fact that they are then able to serve God. The Exodus was incomplete without Israel’s acceptance of the Torah.”<sup>23</sup>

This is indeed the Biblical view, that true freedom is to be found in serving God by living in accordance to His revealed will (Ps 1:1-3). The ultimate deliverance is not from the external physical oppression of Egypt, but from the internal spiritual bondage of sin.

**Few Ceremonies.** Julius H. Greenstone notes: “Unlike the other festivals of the Jewish calendar, the Shabuot [Feast of Weeks] developed but few ceremonies. Apart from the liturgy in the synagogue, which differs little from that of the other festivals, and the prohibition of labor, no distinctive observances were associated with the day in ancient times.”<sup>24</sup>

One of the few traditional ceremonies has been the reading of the Book of Ruth during the services. Its harvest setting and Ruth’s decision to become a member of the Jewish people made the Book of Ruth an appropriate reading for the day commemorating the harvest. Greenstone explains: “This idyllic prose-poem, in which a picture is drawn of ancient Hebrew life in times of peace and plenty, describing in such beautiful detail the harvest season in ancient Judea, was appropriately chosen to be read on the day commemorating the harvest. This was primarily the significance of Shabuot [Feast of Weeks], as its designation in the Bible as *Hag ha-Kazir*, the festival of the harvest, indicates. The notable event of that little book, the attachment of Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and her famous declaration whereby she professed her desire to become a member of the Jewish people and an adherent of the Jewish religion, was interpreted as conversion to Judaism, and this was the additional reason given for the reading of this story on Shabuot when it assumed the second significance, that of commemorating the revelation at Mount Sinai.”<sup>25</sup>

In keeping with the rejoicing over the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, the custom arose of reading portions of the Pentateuch, especially Exodus 19-20, for Pentecost’s eve. This custom, as we note in chapter 7, was adopted by the early Christians. Traditional Jews show their love for the Law by staying up the night of Pentecost’s eve to study it. Special

hymns dealing with the wonders of the revelation of the Law are sung during the festival. Many synagogues customarily hold confirmation services at Pentecost for those teenagers who have completed the study of the Torah.

A practical way to show appreciation for the Law during Pentecost can be seen in the ancient Jewish custom of eating dairy products and cakes made with milk and cheese. Since the Law is often compared in the Old Testament to milk and honey, “Jewish housewives have developed some delectable dishes prepared with dairy products, as well as cakes and pastries made with milk and cheese, which are served during the festival.”<sup>26</sup>

The harvest aspect of the feast is kept alive with the floral decorations in synagogues and homes. “It was customary to spread grass over the floor of the synagogue and also on the window sills in the homes, and otherwise decorate the homes and the synagogues with plants and flowers.”<sup>27</sup> This custom probably derives from the first fruits brought to the Temple by pilgrims from all over Palestine. The baskets of fruit that were carried in procession from the remotest corners of the land to the Temple were decorated with leaves and flowers. This ceremony apparently inspired the later custom of decorating synagogues and homes with plants and flowers for Pentecost. This custom reminds the Jews that Pentecost was first and foremost a harvest festival and that today, too, they are called to express their gratitude to God for their material blessings.

**Conclusion.** The Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament was a joyous celebration of the Spring harvest that occurred seven weeks after Passover. By offering the first fruits of the harvest, the Israelites expressed their thanksgiving to God for His bountiful provisions. In time, Pentecost was transformed into a feast commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai which, according to Jewish tradition, occurred fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt. The few ceremonies associated with the Feast of Weeks were designed to express gratitude for the material blessings of the harvest and for the spiritual blessings of the Law, which provides principles of life and happiness for God’s people.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

1. Emphasis supplied.

2. See 2 Maccabees 12:32; Tobit 2:1; Philo, *The Decalogue* 160; *Special Laws* 2, 176; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 3, 252; 14, 334; 17, 254; *Jewish Wars* 1, 253; 2:42; 6, 299.

3. Philo, *On Special Laws* 2, 162, 176.

4. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3, 250-252; *War of the Jews*, 2, 42.

5. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple and its Services* (London, 1874), p. 233.

6. This is also the conclusion of Eduard Lohse, "Pentecoste," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 6, p. 46.

7. See *Mishna, Menach* 8, 1. 2.

8. For a detailed description, see Alfred Edersheim (note 5), pp. 222-225.

9. Philo, *On Special Laws* 2, 179-181, cited by Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and Liturgy* (Notre Dame, Indiana, 1966), p. 322.

10. Emphasis supplied.

11. *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary* (Washington, D. C., 1957), vol. 6, p. 804.

12. J. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), p. 16.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

14. Philo, *On Special Laws* 2, 176, cited by Jean Danielou (note 9), p. 325, emphasis supplied.

15. Alfred Edersheim (note 5), p. 230 .

16. See Edward Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1994), p. 87.

17. Eduard Lohse (note 6), p. 49.

18. Alfred Edersheim (note 5), p. 226.

19. Quoted in John Kitto, *A Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature* (Edinburgh, 1869), vol. 3, p. 468.

20. Alfred Edersheim (note 5), pp. 225-226.

21. *Pesachim* 68b.

22. *Exodus Rabbah* 5:9.

23. Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism* (Waco, 1984), p. 107.

24. Julius H. Greenstone, *Jewish Feasts and Fasts* (New York, 1946), p. 249.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

27. *Ibid.*



# Chapter 6

## PENTECOST

### IN THE

## NEW TESTAMENT

Pentecost began as the celebration of the Spring wheat harvest in ancient Israel and became the celebration of the first spiritual harvest of souls that marked the founding of the Christian church as an institution. Pentecost is the festival that celebrates the birth of the Christian church, because it was on that day that Christ's followers were consolidated into a new messianic community, the Church.

Christ revealed His intent to establish His Church by calling and training His disciples. However, He did not form a separate synagogue, nor did He start an independent movement. In spite of the constant conflicts with Jewish leaders, Christ did not break in any outward way with either the Temple or the synagogue. His disciples formed an open fellowship within the Jewish religious communities whose only distinguishing mark was their commitment to their Master.

Even after Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples, now numbering 120, still believed in the restoration of the Jewish theocracy (Acts 1:6) and waited on God for divine direction. The situation changed dramatically on the day of Pentecost. Something extraordinary happened on that day that transformed the apostles into men of conviction and courage and provided them with a spiritual impetus that enabled the Christian movement to expand rapidly into the major cities of the Roman Empire.

**Objective of Chapter.** This chapter has two objectives. The first is to reflect on the theological significance of the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost. The second is to examine the three New Testament references to Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 1 Cor 16:8; Acts 20:16) in order to establish whether the Apostolic Church observed Pentecost.

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**PART I**  
**THE MEANING OF THE CHRISTIAN PENTECOST**

**The Timing of Pentecost.** The meaning of the Christian Pentecost depends partly upon its connection to the Jewish Pentecost. In the case of the Christian Passover, we found that its meaning grew out of the typology of the Jewish Passover. This is also true of Pentecost, though the New Testament offers fewer explicit connections between the Jewish and Christian Pentecost.

One of the explicit connections is the timing of the first Christian Pentecost given by Luke. Time references in Acts are few and far between, but in introducing the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost, Luke says: “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (Acts 2:1, KJV). Literally translated, the Greek verb “*sumpleroustai*” means “was being fulfilled.” This awkward verb seems to be intentionally chosen by Luke to make the point that the momentous events associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred at the very time when the celebration of Pentecost was in progress, perhaps to indicate the morning hours. There is no question, then, that whatever is the meaning of the events, they occurred while the Jewish Pentecost was in progress.

It is evident that for Luke it is significant that the events associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred not before, not after, but on the very day of Pentecost. One wonders, Why was Christ sacrificed as true Paschal Lamb on the very day when the Jews sacrificed their Passover lambs? Also, Why did God pour out the Holy Spirit to harvest the first fruits of the spiritual harvest procured by Christ’s redemptive mission on the very day when the Jews celebrated Passover? The answer is to be found in God’s concern to prove that Christ was indeed the fulfillment of the hopes of redemption that had been typified and nourished by the celebration of these annual feasts. By timing Christ’s redemptive acts in accordance with the feasts that foreshadowed them, believers could more easily recognize and accept the reality of salvation that had been accomplished by Christ’s death, resurrection, and inauguration of His heavenly ministry.

**The Manner of Pentecost.** The manner in which the coming of the Holy Spirit manifested itself on the day of Pentecost is also significant, because it resembles the extraordinary phenomena that occurred on Mount Sinai at the giving of the Law. In chapter 5 we noted that Pentecost became for Jews a feast of covenant renewal commemorating the giving of the Law at Sinai.

Luke reminds us of God’s cataclysmic manifestation at Sinai when he describes the phenomena of the day of Pentecost as “a sound . . . like the rush

of a mighty wind,” and “there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them,” and all “began to speak in other tongues , as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4).

It is not difficult to see a parallel to the phenomena which heralded the giving of the Law from Sinai. In the course of time, Jewish traditions embellished these phenomena (Ex 19:16-25; Heb 12:18) and added such particulars as that at Sinai “God’s voice, as it was uttered split up into seventy voices, in seventy languages, so that all the nations should understand . . . .”<sup>1</sup> The notion of seventy languages is derived from the number of the seventy children of Israel that came out of Egypt (Ex 1:1-5; Deut 32:8) which is interpreted to represent all the nations of the world.

In *The Midrash Says*, Rabbi Moshe Weissman explains the rabbinical interpretation of the supernatural phenomena accompanying the giving of the Law, saying: “In occasion of the giving of the Torah, the children of Israel not only heard the Lord’s voice but actually saw the sound waves as they emerged from the Lord’s mouth. They visualized them as a fiery substance. Each commandment that left the Lord’s mouth travelled around the entire Camp and then to each Jew individually, asking him, ‘Do you accept upon yourself this Commandment with all the *halochot* [Jewish law] pertaining to it?’ Every Jew answered ‘Yes’ after each commandment. Finally, the fiery substance which they saw engraved itself on the tablets.”<sup>2</sup>

This Jewish embellishment of the giving of the Law, in which God’s voice looked like a “fiery substance” which split into seventy languages, is strikingly similar to Luke’s comparison of the Holy Spirit to tongues like flames of fire alighting for a while on each head. A number of scholars acknowledge the similarity between the manifestation of God’s power at the giving of the Law and at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

In his *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, F. F. Bruce comments on the tongues as of fire, saying: “When the law was given at Sinai, according to one rabbinic tradition, ‘the ten commandments were promulgated with a single sound, yet it says, “All the people perceived the voices” (Ex 20:18); this shows that when the voice went forth it was divided into seven voices and then went into seventy tongues, and every people received the law in their own language’ (Midrash *Tanchuma* 26c). So now, on the reputed anniversary of the law-giving, people ‘from every nation under heaven’ heard the praises of God, ‘every man . . . in his own language.’ The parallel in the narrator’s mind is plain: it has been caught and expressed by John Keble in his Whitsuntide hymn:

When God of old came down from heaven,  
In power and wrath He came;  
Before His feet the clouds were riven,  
Half darkness and half flame:

But when He came the second time,  
He came in power and love;  
Softer than gale at morning prime  
Hovered His holy Dove.

The fires, that rushed on Sinai down  
In sudden torrents dread,  
Now gently light, a glorious crown,  
On every sainted head.

And as on Israel's awestruck ear  
The voice exceeding loud,  
The trump that angels quake to hear,  
Thrilled from the deep, dark cloud;

So, when the Spirit of our God  
Came down His flock to find,  
A voice from heaven was heard abroad,  
A rushing, mighty wind . . . ."<sup>3</sup>

In a similar vein Philip Schaff wrote: "The Sinaitic legislation was accompanied by 'thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud, and all the people that were in the camp trembled' (Ex 19:6). The church of the new covenant was ushered into existence with startling signs which filled the spectators with wonders and fear."<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps the most vivid description of the analogy between Sinai and the Christian Pentecost is offered to us by Jerome (A. D. 342-420), the famous translator of the Latin version of the Bible known as Vulgate. He wrote: "There is Sinai, here Sion; there the trembling mountain, here the trembling house; there the flaming mountain, here the flaming tongues; there the noisy thunderings, here the sounds of many tongues; there the clangor of the ramshorn, here the notes of the gospel-trumpet."<sup>5</sup>

The close connection that Luke establishes between the time and manner of the Jewish and Christian Pentecosts suggests that Luke saw in the Christian Pentecost the Messianic fulfillment of the events typified by the Jewish

Pentecost. Since the time of Luke, many Christians, like Jerome, have seen the Christian Passover in the same light. James Strong and John M'Clintock note that "It is not surprising that the coincidence of the day on which the festival was observed with that on which the law appears to have been given to Moses, should have impressed the minds of Christians in the early ages of the Church. The divine Providence had ordained that the Holy Spirit should come down in a special manner, to give spiritual life and unity to the Church, on that very same day in the year on which the law had been bestowed on the children of Israel which gave to them national life and unity. They must have seen that, as the possession of the law had completed the deliverance of the Hebrew race wrought by the hand of Moses, so the gift of the Spirit perfected the work of Christ in the establishment of His kingdom upon the earth."<sup>6</sup>

**The Crowning of Christ's Passover.** The Jewish pilgrimage feast of Pentecost gained new significance for Christians because it coincided with the birthday of the Church as an institution. On that day, the Holy Spirit baptized 120 disciples of Jesus as they awaited His coming in an upper room (Luke 24:53). This event was the crowning of Christ's Paschal sacrifice, for by sending forth the Holy Spirit after His ascension, Christ fulfilled the "promise" of the Spirit (Acts 1:4) which had been predicted by John the Baptist (Acts 1:5).

John the Baptist said to those who came to receive the baptism of repentance, "I have baptized you with water; but he [who is coming after me] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). Before His ascension, Jesus promised that John's words would soon be fulfilled: "John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). This promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Peter proclaimed that God's promise had been fulfilled because the Holy Spirit had been given, in accordance with the prediction of the prophets (Joel 3:1-5; cf. Ezek 36:27).

When Jesus ascended to heaven following His resurrection, He presented Himself to the Father as the first fruits of a coming harvest. On that occasion He took into the Holy Place "not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Heb 9:12). In this sense, Pentecost represents the climax of Christ's Paschal sacrifice that was celebrated in heaven. When the Father accepted His sacrifice "for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2) and exalted Him (Acts 2:33), the Father and the Son sent forth the Spirit. Pentecost is then the crowning of Christ's Passover in heaven, which was manifested on earth with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33). "By the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost," writes Ellen White, "thousands were to be converted in a day. This was the result of Christ's sowing, the harvest of His work."<sup>7</sup>

**The Inauguration of Christ's Heavenly Ministry.** Pentecost celebrates not only the crowning of Christ's Paschal sacrifice, but also the inauguration of His heavenly ministry. The ascension constituted the transition from Christ's redemptive work on earth to His intercessory work in heaven. Upon His ascension, Christ was exalted to a position of honor and dignity by being seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55). As the seating of delegates represents their official installation, so the seating of Christ at the right hand of the Father represents His official enthronement. He himself predicted this exaltation when He appeared before the Sanhedrin: "From now on the Son of man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69). In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter explained that the Christ who had been crucified, had been raised from the dead and "exalted at the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33).

The "right hand" is a symbol of the supreme honor, power, and authority with which Jesus was invested. By being invited to sit at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13), Christ was installed to His heavenly ministry. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is seen as evidence of the official enthronement of Christ to His heavenly ministry (Acts 2:33).

"When Christ passed within the heavenly gates, He was enthroned amidst the adoration of the angels. As soon as this ceremony was completed, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples in rich currents, and Christ was indeed glorified, even with the glory which He had with the Father from all eternity. The Pentecostal outpouring was heaven's communication that the Redeemer's inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people."<sup>8</sup>

The meaning of "sitting" as intercessory ministry is explained especially in Hebrews 8:1-2, where Christ is presented as the "high priest, . . . seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent." Through His intercessory ministry, Christ sustains the Church (Rev 1:13, 20), mediates repentance and forgiveness to believers (Acts 5:31; 1 John 2:1-2; 1:9), makes our prayers acceptable to God (John 16:23-24; Rev 8:3), provides us with the invisible and yet real assistance of His angels (Heb 1:14; Rev 5:6; 1:16, 20), and bestows upon us the essential gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

**Inauguration of Christ's Ministry in Revelation.** Some scholars see the inauguration of Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary in the throne

scenes of Revelation 4 and 5. The scenes in a sense are a celebration of Pentecost in heaven, which results in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on earth.<sup>9</sup> Christ, the Lamb that “had been slain” (Rev 5:6), is welcomed back to heaven by four living creatures, twenty-four elders, and myriads of angels who praise Him, saying: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5:12). The immediate result of the Lamb’s sacrifice is intercession (Rev 5:8) and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit represented by the “seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (Rev 5:6).

In his book *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John’s Apocalypse*, Austin Farrer sees in the vision of the throne (Rev 4-5) a description of the feast of Pentecost: “The Christian Pentecost which St. John describes took place in heaven, but had its effect on earth. The Lamb, by virtue of the sevenfold Spirit which is his seven horns of strength, his seven eyes of knowledge, opened all revelation, and when the day of Pentecost was fully come, he poured it on his servants in prophetic Spirit. The pentecostal gift is constantly renewed, as in this ‘apocalypse of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to shew his servants what must quickly be, and which he signified by the message of his angel to his servant John.’ Yet the first Pentecost is not cast into the shade by such renewals, but kept all the more lively in mind.”<sup>10</sup>

This interpretation of the vision of God’s throne (Rev 4-5) as cast in the setting of the Feast of Pentecost suggests that at the time of John’s writing (about A. D. 90-100), the feast played a significant role in the liturgical life of the church, especially since the book of Revelation was used in the liturgy of the church. Farrer continues noting the connection between the imageries of Passover and Pentecost in the vision of the throne: “It is the Christ of the Passover, the paschal Lamb ‘standing as slaughtered,’ who by his sacrificial merit has attained to take the book and loose the seven seals thereof. And so while Pentecost provides the frame of Apocalypse 4-5, it is inlaid with the principal of all the paschal emblems.”<sup>11</sup>

Today many Christians are wondering, What on earth is Jesus doing in Heaven? Some think that Jesus is on vacation in heaven, recovering from His exhaustive earthly mission. Pentecost reassures us that Jesus is not on vacation. He has not taken a leave of absence. He has not forgotten us. On the contrary, Pentecost teaches us that as soon as Jesus ascended to heaven, He was officially enthroned at the right hand of God (Acts 2:32; Rev 5:9-12) and began His intercessory ministry on behalf of believers on earth: “God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).



The New Testament uses several human analogies to describe the heavenly ministry of Christ which began at Pentecost when He poured out the Holy Spirit upon His expectant disciples. He is described as “Priest” (Heb 7:15; 8:4), “High Priest” (Heb 2:17; 3:1), “Mediator” (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6), “Intercessor” (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). This gives us reason to believe that Jesus is working hard to bring to completion at the day of His coming the good work that began on the day of Pentecost with the inauguration of His heavenly ministry.

**The Founding of the Christian Church.** Pentecost celebrates also the founding of the Christian church as an organized body of believers with a message and a mission. The *institution* of the Church began when Christ called the twelve disciples and trained them to become His witnesses. But the *constitution* of the Church occurred at Pentecost when the disciples were qualified for their calling by the power of the Holy Spirit. On that day, Christ’s followers were consolidated into a new body with the conviction and courage to preach the Gospel to the ends of the world.

The Christian church was not extracted from the larger Jewish social order to become another separated-unto-God sect within Judaism. Rather, Pentecost marks the initial fulfillment of the prophetic vision of the ingathering of God’s people from all the nations to the uplifted temple in Zion and the going forth of the Law to teach all the nations (Is 2:2-3; Mic 4:1-2; cf. John 2:19; 12:32). A new people of God (the Church) was formed on the day of Pentecost, consisting not only of Jews but of “all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him” (Acts 2:39).

The loving acceptance of one another and the selfless sharing (*koinonia*) among the members of the new community of faith reflected the universalization of Jesus’ ministry by the Spirit in and through each member. They expressed their spiritual oneness by devoting “themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Their mutual commitment to Christ was expressed by sharing their means with “all, as any had need” (Acts 2:45). Pentecost reminds us that our commitment to Christ finds expression in loving service to others.

**The Birthday of the Christian Mission.** Pentecost celebrates also the birthday of the mission of the Church. After His resurrection, Christ instructed His disciples about “the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) and promised them that, after being energized by the Holy Spirit, they would become His witnesses from Jerusalem “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Peter’s proclamation “standing with the eleven” (Acts 2:14) was the first manifestation of Christian obedience to this missionary task. Throughout the book of Acts, we are reminded that Christians became witnesses as a result of the

outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “We all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). “We are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem” (Acts 10:39; cf. 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:31).

The gift of tongues that were intelligible to “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) underscores the universal scope of the Christian mission. In view of the fact that most of the Jews who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost understood Aramaic or Greek, the linguistic abilities given by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost may be indicative of God’s desire that each language group should hear the Gospel in its native language, the one most meaningful to the individual heart.

It should be noted that the Spirit was given at Pentecost not merely to enrich the corporate worship and fellowship of Christ’s followers, but primarily to energize them for missionary activity. Acts frequently refers to the role of the Spirit in the evangelistic activity of the Church (Acts 4:8; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6). The initial Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit is to be distinguished from the subsequent infilling of the Holy Spirit that empowered Christians to share the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:52; 14:1; 15:28).

Pentecost reminds us that the Christian Church was founded by Christ, not to perpetuate itself as a self-serving organization but to extend the divine provision of salvation to men and women everywhere. The speaking in tongues at Pentecost for a moment set off in bold relief God’s redemptive purpose for the whole world. The missionary outreach of the Church, which unites people of different languages and cultures as one body in Christ, represents the reversal of the scattering and hostility of the nations that followed God’s judgment at Babel (Gen 11:1-9). Pentecost celebrates the birthday of the Christian mission.

**The Bestowal of Spiritual Gifts.** Pentecost marks the beginning of the bestowal of spiritual gifts on all the redeemed so that each may participate in the life and mission of the Church. Before His death, Christ reassured His disciples that He would bestow upon His followers the gift of the Holy Spirit—“the gift that would bring within their reach the boundless resources of His grace.”<sup>12</sup> “I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).

Christ was pointing to a day when the Holy Spirit would come to do a mighty work as His representative. That day came on Pentecost, when His disciples “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4) and “great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). In a sense, Pentecost represents not only the

fulfillment of Christ's promise but also God's answer to Moses' prayer: "Would that the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Num 11:29).

From the day of Pentecost onward, all Christians are called to the full-time task of proclaiming "the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9). All Christians can receive the spiritual gifts that "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12).

"From the Day of Pentecost to the present time, the Comforter has been sent to all who have yielded themselves fully to the Lord and to His service. To all who have accepted Christ as a personal Savior, the Holy Spirit has come as a counselor, sanctifier, guide, and witness. . . . The men and women who through the long centuries of persecution and trial enjoyed a large measure of the presence of the Spirit in their lives, have stood as signs and wonders in the world. Before angels and men they have revealed the transforming power of redeeming love."<sup>13</sup>

The mission of the Holy Spirit will continue until the Gospel has been preached to all nations (Matt 24:14). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is likened to the "former rain" that ripened the Spring harvest that was gathered in at the beginning of Christianity. "But near the close of earth's harvest, a special bestowal of spiritual grace is promised to prepare the church for the coming of the Son of man. This outpouring of the Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain; and it is for this added power that Christians are to send their petitions to the Lord of the harvest 'in the time of the latter rain.' In response, 'the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain.' 'He will cause to come down . . . the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain' (Zech 10:1; Joel 2:23)."<sup>14</sup>

The celebration of Pentecost invites us to seek for the outpouring of the latter rain by putting away all differences and by coming closer together in Christian fellowship. It challenges us to pray daily for a special endowment of spiritual power to become fit to be laborers together with God in the final harvest of the earth.

**The First Fruits of Christ's Redemption.** Pentecost was known as the Feast of the First Fruits because, as we have seen, the first fruits of the Spring wheat harvest were offered on the first and last day of the Feast as an expression of thanksgiving to God. The Christian Pentecost also celebrates the first fruits of Christ's redemptive mission, which are manifested in a variety of ways.

In the first place, Christ Himself is the first fruits of Pentecost because He rose as the first fruits of redeemed humanity on the very day when the first sheaf of barley was presented at the Temple—the event that marked the beginning of Pentecost. Paul alludes to the connection between the two events when he writes: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20).

As the first fruits offered on the first day of Pentecost pointed to the harvest to come, so Christ’s resurrection is the first fruits that points to the harvest of believers to be resurrected at His coming. As Paul puts it, “Each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1Co 15:23). But Pentecost reminds us not only of the final resurrection harvest, but also of our present privilege to receive the first fruits of the Spirit while we await the resurrection harvest. “We ourselves,” Paul says, “who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23).

The meaning of the Feast of Pentecost is lived out every day in our life as our inward being is renewed daily by God’s Spirit (2 Cor 4:16). As we receive the fruits of the Spirit, we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in our life, namely, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22). These in turn enable us to become the first fruits of God. Since Pentecost, God has been picking out those who respond to the Gospel invitation and calling them to be His first fruits. James brings out this truth, saying: “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures” (Jam 1:18). Ultimately, those who have been redeemed from mankind, are “as first fruits for God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

The various applications of the first fruits typology of Pentecost to Christ’s resurrection, the reception of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit in the life of the believer, the Christian calling to be God’s first fruits in this world, and the redeemed as the first fruits of mankind show the importance of the Feast in Christian thought and practice. In a sense, Pentecost is a feast that celebrates what Christ has already accomplished through His earthly redemptive mission, what He is doing in heaven by making intercession for us (Heb 7:25), what the Holy Spirit does on earth as a counterpart to Christ’s heavenly ministry, and what Christ will ultimately do when He comes to reap the harvest of the redeemed.

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**PART II**  
**THE OBSERVANCE OF PENTECOST**  
**IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

Our study of Passover has already shown that the New Testament does not provide us with explicit information regarding the time and manner of observance of festivals. Most likely they were taken for granted, since the religious life of the Apostolic Church was still regulated by the Jewish liturgical calendar.

The many thousands of Jews (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 9:42; 12:24; 13:43; 14:1; 17:12; 21:20) who accepted Jesus as their expected Messiah did not desert their Jewish religion; they became believing Jews. Luke describes them as “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20). Their zeal was undoubtedly manifested in the observance of the feasts, since they are the most enduring aspect of the religious life. Obviously, they observed the Old Testament festivals with a new meaning derived from the redemptive accomplishment of Jesus Christ.

**Indirect Indications of Pentecost’s Observance.** In the New Testament, only three references to Pentecost occur. We examined the first reference in Acts 2:1, where Luke informs us that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred “when the day of Pentecost was fully come” (KJV). We noticed that the close connection Luke establishes between the time and manner of the Jewish and Christian Pentecost suggests that Luke saw in the Christian Pentecost the messianic fulfillment of the events typified by the Jewish Pentecost. By emphasizing that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which gave birth to the Christian church occurred at the very time when the Jewish Pentecost was in progress, Luke seems to view Pentecost as an important anniversary of the birthday of the Christian church.

An indirect indication of the observance of Pentecost is provided by the vision of God’s throne in Revelation 4-5, which is cast in the setting of Pentecost with Christ standing as a slaughtered Lamb sending His seven spirits into all the earth. Jon Paulien notes: “At the inauguration of the heavenly sanctuary, the throne-scene of Revelation 4-5 is fittingly associated with Pentecost. The song of Revelation 5:9,10 recalls the language of Exodus 19:5, 6, which describes the inauguration of Israel as the people of God. According to Exodus 19, the giving of the law on Mount Sinai took place on the fifth day of the third month, the day that was ever after celebrated as the festival of Pentecost. As the New Moses, the Lamb receives, as it were, the new Torah [law] from God in Revelation 5.”<sup>15</sup> This vision of the celebration of Pentecost in heaven suggests that the feast was significant for the church

by the end of the first century. John could hardly have described the celebration of Pentecost in heaven if the feast had no significance on earth.

The second reference to Pentecost is found in 1 Corinthians, where Paul says: “I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has been opened to me” (1 Cor 16:8-9). This is a surprising time reference, since both the Ephesian and Corinthian churches were predominantly Gentile. Pentecost was not connected to any of the pagan feasts of the Roman and Greek society. Paul could hardly have used “Pentecost” as a time reference unless the feast was known in Gentile Christian churches. If I were to tell my parents, who live in Rome, Italy, that I plan to visit them for Thanksgiving, they would not know what I am talking about, because in Italy we do not have such a feast.

Paul’s casual mention of “Pentecost” in a letter written to a predominantly Gentile church suggests that the feast was wellknown to the Corinthians. In his commentary on *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Gordon D. Fee points out: “Such a casual mention of it [Pentecost] in this way (cf. Acts 20:16) may suggest that the church very early saw Christian significance to this feast, probably as a result of the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost.”<sup>16</sup>

**“Hastening to Be at Jerusalem.”** The third New Testament reference to Pentecost is found in Acts 20:16, where Luke informs us that Paul sailed directly from Assos to Miletus, bypassing Ephesus, “for he was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.” This text raises an important question: Why was Paul eager to reach Jerusalem in time for Pentecost? Several suggestions have been made.

Some maintain that Paul was eager to observe Pentecost in Jerusalem to prove to Jewish Christians his respect for Jewish traditions. For example, *The Interpreter’s Bible* says: “Paul was hastening to be at Jerusalem, if possible on the day of Pentecost, probably because he wished to vindicate his loyalty in the eyes of Jewish Christians who would be attending the feast.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, William Neil writes: “His [Paul’s] attendance at the festival would demonstrate to the Jerusalem Christians his loyalty to Jewish tradition.”<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt that Paul was eager to prove to his Jewish brethren that he was not a renegade of the law. Luke tells us that when Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he participated in a rite of purification at the Temple in order to show that, as stated by the church leaders, “there is nothing in what they have been told about you but that you yourself live in the observance of the law” (Acts 21:24).

It is possible, however, that Paul was eager to be in Jerusalem for Pentecost, not only to vindicate his loyalty to Jewish traditions in the eyes of his Jewish brethren, but also because he found profound meaning in the feast. In *The Life of Paul*, Benjamin Robinson observes: “This day [Pentecost] was not only a Jewish celebration, but an anniversary of the outpouring of the Spirit described in Acts, chapter 2. It would be a particularly opportune and appropriate occasion for presenting the contribution of the Gentile churches to the Jewish Christians.”<sup>19</sup>

In a similar vein, G. T. Purves writes: “Among the early Jewish Christians observance of the Hebrew feasts continued, doubtless with fresh significance derived from the new revelation. So it is noteworthy that Paul earnestly desired to present the gifts of the Gentile Churches to the saints in Judea at Pentecost (Acts 20:16).”<sup>20</sup> Gifts can be presented at any time, but Paul may have wished to present the generous gifts contributed by the Gentile churches to the distressed believers in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, because that was the day that commemorated God’s generous gift of the Holy Spirit to His church. What better way to commemorate God’s bestowal of spiritual gifts upon the church on the day of Pentecost than by offering material gifts to needy fellow believers!

Paul also may have wished to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost because of the opportunity the feast provided to meet with a larger number of brethren who would be attending the feast. Eduard Lohse suggests this possibility. “It is quite possible,” Lohse writes, “that the first community in Jerusalem took part in the Jewish Pentecost. For when Paul was in a hurry to be at Jerusalem for Pentecost (Acts 20:16), the apostle must have expected to meet a larger number of brethren than usual on the feast day.”<sup>21</sup>

No one can tell all the reasons for Paul’s eagerness to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Yet all the reasons just mentioned presuppose that the Feast of Pentecost was important for Paul. Whether he wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost to show to his Jewish brethren his respect for Jewish festivals, or because he viewed the feast as an appropriate occasion to present the gifts which had been contributed by the Gentiles, or because he expected to meet a large number of brethren that would be attending the feast, the fact remains that all these reasons presuppose that Pentecost was significant for Paul.

Ellen White acknowledges the importance of Pentecost for Paul when she writes that he shortened his stay at Ephesus, because “he was on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.”<sup>22</sup> In this statement Ellen White explicitly speaks of Paul “on his way to Jerusalem *to celebrate the*



*Feast of Pentecost.*” The implication is clear. Ellen White believed Paul celebrated the Feast of Pentecost.

The same view is expressed by *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*: “Even Paul, least interested in observances as such (Rom 14:5), was eager to celebrate Pentecost at Jerusalem in spite of his missionary journeys in Asia and Greece (Acts 18:21; 20:16).”<sup>23</sup> If the Feast of Pentecost was important for Paul, known for his indifference to observances as such (Rom 14:5), we have reason to believe that it also must have been important for Christians at large.

Unfortunately, the New Testament does not tell us how Paul or the Apostolic Church observed the Feast of Pentecost. If the later documents (to be examined the chapter 7) reflect even partly the apostolic practice, then the Feast of Pentecost must have been observed by the Apostolic Church as a joyful celebration of the risen Christ who ascended to heaven as the first fruit in order to give the gifts of Spirit to His Church.

**Conclusion.** In the New Testament, Pentecost is of fundamental importance to the origin and mission of the Christian. Chronologically and typologically, the Christian Pentecost is linked to the Old Testament Pentecost, because it began on the very day of the Jewish feast as the spiritual harvest of the first fruits of Christ’s redemption.

The Feast of Pentecost celebrates the crowning of Christ’s Paschal sacrifice in heaven. It was manifested on earth with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:32-33), which was the first fruit of the spiritual harvest (Rom 8:23; James 1:18) procured by Christ’s redemptive mission. It commemorates the inauguration of Christ’s ministry of intercession in heaven and the founding of the Christian church on earth. It teaches us that the Christian church came into existence not to be a self-serving organization, but to fulfill the mission of making Christ known, loved, and served throughout the world. It reassures us of another Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the Latter Rain) to enable the Church to complete the spiritual harvest that began on the day of Pentecost. It challenges us to seek daily the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to prepare ourselves and others for the final harvest of Christ’s coming.

The few incidental references to Pentecost in the New Testament suggest that the feast was important for the Apostolic Church. Unfortunately, we are not told how it was observed. If the documents examined in the next chapter are any indication of the apostolic practice, then the Feast of Pentecost must have been observed by the Apostolic Church as a joyful celebration of the risen Christ, who ascended to heaven as the first fruit in order to give the gifts of Spirit to His Church.

The Feast of Pentecost affords us today an opportunity to celebrate our Christian origin and mission while seeking for another Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit to complete the spiritual harvest that began on the day of Pentecost.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

1. *Midrash on Exodus Rabbah* 5:9, as cited in Edward Chumney, *The Seven Festival of the Messiah* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1994), p. 80.

2. Rabbi Moshe Weissman, *The Midrash Says on Shemot* (New York, 1980), p. 82.

3. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids, 1983), pp. 59-60. A similar comment is made by Howard Marshall, "We are reminded of Old Testament theophanies, especially of that at Sinai (Ex 19:18)," *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, 1983), p. 68. James Hastings also concludes: "The resemblance is close and could not well have been accidental," in "Pentecost," *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* (New York, 1918), vol. 2, p. 162.

4. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, 1960), vol 1, p. 228.

5. Jerome, *Ad Tabioli* 7, cited in *The International Bible Encyclopaedia*, s. v. "Pentecost," (Grand Rapids, 1960), vol 4, p. 2319.

6. James Strong and John M'Clintock, "Pentecost," *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York, 1888), vol. 7, p. 929.

7. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 192.

8. Idem, *Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, California 1960), pp. 38-39.

9. See, for example, D. T. Niles, *As Seeing the Invisible* (New York, 1961), pp. 62-95; W. Hurtado, "Revelation 4-5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25 (1985), p. 114; Lucetta Mowry, "Revelation 4-5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952), pp.75-84; Leonard Thompson, "Cult and Eschatology in the Apocalypse of John," *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969), pp. 330-350; M. D. Goulder, "The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981), pp. 342-367.

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10. Austin Farrar, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1970), p.106.
  11. Ibid.
  12. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (note 8 ), p. 47.
  13. Ibid., p. 49.
  14. Ibid., p. 55.
  15. Jon Paulien, "The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35 (1995), pp. 258-259.
  16. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, 1987), p. 820.
  17. *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, 1989), vol. 9. p. 269.
  18. William Neil, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London, 1973), p. 212.
  19. Benjamin Willard Robinson, *The Life of Paul* (Chicago, 1928), p. 183.
  20. G. T. Purves, "Pentecost, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, ed., James Hasting (New York, 1900), vol. 3, p. 742.
  21. Eduard Lohse, "Pentecost," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 6, p. 50.
  22. Ellen G. White, *Redemption: Or the Teaching of Paul, and His Mission to the Gentiles* (Battle Creek, 1878), p. 65.
  23. *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary* (Washington, D. D., 1957), vol. 6, p. 134. Emphasis supplied.

# Chapter 7

## PENTECOST

### IN THE

## EARLY CHURCH

Pentecost ranks with Passover among the great feasts of the early Church. It celebrates the crowning in heaven of Christ's paschal sacrifice, which resulted in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His expectant disciples (Acts 2:32-33). It commemorates the founding of the Christian church and the beginning of the worldwide Christian mission. Thus, it is not surprising that Pentecost was highly regarded in the early Church.

Eusebius of Caesarea (about A. D. 260-340), known as "the Father of Church History," called Pentecost "the feast of feasts."<sup>1</sup> John Chrysostom (about A. D. 347-407), the "golden-mouthed" preacher, used similar phrases in his sermon on Pentecost: "Today we have come at the peak of all blessings, we have reached the capital (*metropolis*) of feasts, we have obtained the very fruit of our Lord's promise."<sup>2</sup>

The importance of Pentecost in the early Church can be seen in the rich theological reflections on the Old Testament typologies of the feast. Some Christian writers were attracted by the "first fruits" typology of Pentecost, others by the "harvest" imagery, still others by the symbolism of the number "fifty." The typology of the Feast of Weeks provided early Christians with a rich source for reflecting on Christ's redemptive accomplishments and ministry on behalf of the Church. The richness of meaning of Pentecost was reflected in the joyful ways in which the feast was celebrated.

**Objectives of the Chapter.** This chapter has three objectives. The first surveys the various theological meanings of Pentecost found in the early Christian literature. The second examines the manner in which Pentecost was observed in the early Church. The third reflects upon time and manner in which Pentecost should be observed today. The closing reflections are based on the findings of our Biblical and historical study of Pentecost.

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PART I  
THE MEANING OF PENTECOST  
IN THE EARLY CHURCH

**Two Theological Perspectives.** The early Church developed the theological meaning of Pentecost by looking at the Old Testament typologies of the Feast of Weeks from two different perspectives. The first was based on the harvest typology of the *whole fifty-day period*. In the Old Testament, as we have seen, Pentecost was called “Feast of Weeks” because it celebrated the seven weeks of the wheat harvest which began on the day after Passover with the waving of the barley sheaf and terminated fifty days later with the offering of the first fruits. This perspective led Christians during the first three centuries to view Pentecost not so much as a day, but as a fifty-day period of rejoicing for the spiritual harvest accomplished through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

The second perspective derived from the typology of the *fiftieth day itself*, which marked the conclusion of the Spring harvest with the offering of the first fruits. The number fifty in the Old Testament was a symbol of remission, since every fifty years debts were cancelled and slaves were set free (Lev 25:10). Furthermore, in Jewish tradition, the Law was given from Mount Sinai fifty days after the Exodus. This perspective eventually led Christians to view Pentecost as the commemoration of the descent of the Holy Spirit.

**Pentecost: A Fifty-Day Period of Rejoicing.** The earliest references to Pentecost describe the feast as a fifty-day period of rejoicing for Christ’s redemptive accomplishments. For example, the earliest mention of Pentecost, found in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (about A. D. 180), says: “While Paul was in prison, the brethren, since it was Pentecost, wept not, neither did they bow the knee, but they stood and prayed rejoicing.”<sup>3</sup>

The custom of refraining from weeping, fasting, and kneeling between Passover and Pentecost is confirmed by several other documents to be examined later. At this juncture, I wish to draw attention only to the fact that in this text, Pentecost is viewed as a *season* of rejoicing rather than as a *single-day* festival.

The fact that Pentecost was originally viewed as a fifty-day season of rejoicing may explain the absence of any controversy regarding the date of its observance. With regard to Passover, as we have seen, Christian churches were bitterly divided between those which observed the feast on the fixed date of Nisan 14 and those which observed it on the following Sunday. But with regard to Pentecost, no trace of any such controversy exists regarding the date, presumably because both groups viewed Pentecost as a *season* of rejoicing

following Passover rather than as *a single day* festival.<sup>4</sup> Whether Pentecost was to begin on the day after Passover or on the first Sunday after Passover was not a critical problem, presumably because the feast was seen as a whole season of rejoicing.

Tertullian (about A. D. 160-225), the Father of Latin Christianity, refers often to Pentecost in his writings. In his treatise *On Baptism*, he wrote: “Pentecost is a most joyful space (*laetissimum spatium*).”<sup>5</sup> The phrase “most joyful space” clearly shows that for Tertullian Pentecost was not a single-day festival but a joyful period of fifty days. What made Pentecost a most joyful period for Tertullian is the fact that during this period “the resurrection of the Lord was repeatedly proved among the disciples, the gift of the Holy Spirit was inaugurated, and the hope of the advent of the Lord indirectly pointed to, in that, when He had been received back into the heavens, the angels told the apostles that ‘He would so come, as He had withal ascended into the heavens’ at Pentecost, of course.”<sup>6</sup>

In this passage, Tertullian shows that Pentecost was viewed as a unitive festival that commemorated the resurrection, the ascension, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the Return of Christ. In his treatise *Against Celsus*, Origen (about A. D. 185-254) expresses the meaning of Pentecost in similar words: “He who can truly say, ‘We are risen with Christ,’ and ‘He hath exalted us, and made us to sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ,’ is always living in the season of Pentecost; and most of all, when going up to the upper chamber, like the apostles of Jesus, he gives himself to supplication and prayer, that he may become worthy of receiving ‘the mighty wind rushing from heaven,’ which is powerful to destroy sin and its fruits among men, and worthy of having some share of the tongue of fire which God sends.”<sup>7</sup>

Eusebius strikes a similar note in his description of the death of the Emperor Constantine in A. D. 337: “All these events occurred during a most important festival, I mean the august and holy solemnity of Pentecost, which is distinguished by a period of seven weeks, and sealed with that one day on which the Holy Scriptures attest the ascension of our common Savior into heaven, and the descent of the Holy Spirit among men.”<sup>8</sup>

In this statement, it is unmistakably clear that Pentecost was viewed as a seven-week period that culminated with the commemoration of both Ascension Day and the descent of the Holy Spirit. Later, in the fourth century, Ascension Day was made into an independent feast that was observed forty days after Passover. A factor which apparently contributed to the separation of these feasts was the desire of pilgrims to celebrate in Jerusalem the various events of the life of Christ on the actual days and in the place where they had occurred.<sup>9</sup>

**Christ, the First Fruits of Redeemed Humanity.** An important aspect of the celebration of the Feast of Weeks in the Old Testament was the waving of the first barley sheaf on the day after Passover (Lev 13:10-14) and the offering of the first fruits of the wheat harvest fifty days later (Ex 34:22; Lev 23:17).

Early Christians saw the prophetic fulfillment of the typology of the first fruits in the resurrection of Christ under a double aspect. First, as a figure of Christ offering Himself as the oblation of first fruits to His Father. In this instance, Christ's resurrection was seen as a sacrificial offering. Second, as a symbol of Christ's being the first fruits of redeemed humanity. These two meanings are brought out by Cyril of Alexandria (died A. D. 444). Commenting on the Biblical texts concerning Pentecost (Num 28:26-31), he wrote: "Contemplate the first fruits of renewed humanity, that is to say, Christ Himself, in the figure of the sheaf and in the first fruits of the field and in the first ears of grain, offered in holy oblation to God the Father. . . . Therefore Christ is prefigured here in the symbol of the sheaf, considered as the first-fruit of the ear of grain and as the new fruit: He is indeed the first-born from among the dead, the way which opens to us the Resurrection, He who makes all things new. The old things have passed away, now everything has become new, says the Holy Scripture. The sheaf is presented before the face of the Lord: so Emmanuel, risen from the dead, the new incorruptible fruit of the human race, ascended to heaven to present Himself henceforth for us before the face of the Father."<sup>10</sup>

We should note that in these passages Cyril refers sometimes to the feast of the wave sheaf and sometimes to the feast of the first fruits. For him the theme of these two Jewish feasts is the same and is fulfilled in the Christian Pentecost during the whole period of the fifty days. For Cyril, as Jean Daniélou points out, the difference between Passover and Pentecost is not one of content but of Old Testament typologies. Passover is seen as the fulfillment of the sacrifice of the lamb, and Pentecost as the fulfillment of the offering of the first fruits. "So we see the line of the theology of the two feasts, distinguishing them not by reference to events in the history of Christ's life, but by the categories of the Old Testament in which the one mystery of Christ is expressed."<sup>11</sup>

Chrysostom mentions the metaphors of the harvest and of the first fruits in a sermon on "Why Are the Acts Read in Pentecost?" He says: "Why did the Holy Spirit come on the Pentecost Day? When the sickle must be put in the harvest, when the first fruits must be gathered in. Do you see the type? See the truth: the sickle of the preaching was put, when the



harvest was gathered in, at the moment the Spirit came like a sharp sickle. I have heard that Christ said, 'Lift up your eyes and see how the fields are already white for harvest (Luke 10:2),' again, 'the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few (John 4:35).' He was the first one put on the sickle. He took the first fruits with him to heaven after having assumed our nature. Therefore this is called 'harvest.'"<sup>12</sup> Here the metaphor of the harvest applies to the whole period of fifty days during which the Acts of the Apostles were customarily read.

The themes we have been considering so far view Pentecost as a fifty-day "spiritual harvest" season during which Christ arose as the first fruits, He ascended to heaven as the first fruits of redeemed humanity to begin His intercessory work, and the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples. In these texts, Pentecost is the feast of the growing church in which Acts is read.

**Pentecost as a Feast of Forgiveness.** Another tradition in the early Church developed the meaning of Pentecost by reflecting upon the typological and historical significance of the number *fifty itself*. Typologically, the fiftieth day was seen as the symbol of forgiveness, because in the Old Testament every fifty years debts were cancelled and slaves were set free (Lev 25:10). Historically, the fiftieth day after Passover, according to Jewish tradition, was the day in which the Law was given from Mount Sinai. Both of these aspects were used to define the meaning of Pentecost.

In his commentary *On the Psalms*, Hippolytus (about 170-236), wrote: "That the number fifty is sacred, is manifest from the days of the celebrated festival of Pentecost, which indicates release from labors, and (the possession of) joy. For which reason neither fasting nor bending the knee is decreed for those days. For this is a symbol of the great assembly that is reserved for future times. Of which times there was a shadow in the land of Israel in the year called among the Hebrews 'Jobel' (Jubilee), which is the fiftieth year in number, and brings with it liberty for the slave, and release from debt, and the like."<sup>13</sup>

This passage reminds us of the Book of Jubilees and of Philo's writings in which the number fifty plays an important role.<sup>14</sup> The fiftieth year (Year of Jubilee) and the fiftieth day (Pentecost Day) have essentially the same character, namely, a time of liberty, remission of sin, and a new beginning. Like the Jubilee, Pentecost celebrates the hope of a new beginning. This idea is expressed also by Clement of Alexandria (about A. D. 150-215): "Fifty is the symbol of hope and of remission given at Pentecost."<sup>15</sup>

Origen also applies the meaning of forgiveness to the fiftieth day of Pentecost: “The number fifty contains forgiveness according to the mystery of the Jubilee which takes place every fifty years, or of the feast which takes place at Pentecost.”<sup>16</sup> The meaning of Pentecost as a symbol of forgiveness given by Christ is developed by Origen several times in his writings.<sup>17</sup> Being the Feast of Forgiveness, Pentecost was of fundamental importance to the spiritual life of believers.

In his *Paschal Letters*, Athanasius also connects the feast of Pentecost with the forgiveness granted on the year of Jubilee: “Counting seven weeks from Passover, we shall celebrate the holy day of Pentecost, which formerly among the Jews was prefigured under the name of the Feast of the Weeks. At this time the freeing of slaves and the forgiveness of debts took place. And this day, finally, was in every way a day of liberty.”<sup>18</sup>

Pentecost can be seen as the Feast of Forgiveness, not only because of the symbolism of the number fifty, but also because of the spiritual preparation that preceded the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that the disciples waited for this event in the Upper Room “with one accord devot[ing] themselves to prayer” (Acts 1:14). Presumably, they prayed for forgiveness and cleansing. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit could represent the answer to their prayers. Though this aspect of forgiveness is not developed in the early Christian literature, it does support the idea of Pentecost as the Feast of Forgiveness.

**Pentecost as the Descent of the Holy Spirit.** Beginning with the fourth century, a tendency developed to assign different days of the fifty to the different events of the resurrection, the ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This tendency led to restricting the name of Pentecost only to the fiftieth day and to commemorating exclusively the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Gregory of Nazianzus (A. D. 329-389), after commenting on the symbolism of the number fifty, wrote: “We celebrate Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit, and the day fixed for the fulfillment of the realization of hope.”<sup>19</sup> In a similar vein, Gregory of Nyssa (about A. D. 330-395) wrote: “Today, the days of Pentecost being accomplished, according to the yearly cycle of the times, at this very hour, that is to say, at the third hour, the inexpressible grace came down: the Spirit newly united to men.”<sup>20</sup> The allusion to the celebration of Pentecost at the very hour in which the Holy Spirit descended reflects the liturgy of Jerusalem, which celebrated the descent of the Holy Spirit at the third hour (9.00 a. m.) by a gathering at the Church of Sion, on the traditional site of the Upper Room. They read the account of the descent of the Holy Spirit from Acts of the Apostles.<sup>21</sup>

When Christians made Pentecost a special feast of the fiftieth day, they began to look for its prefiguring in Judaism and found it in the promulgation of the Law at Sinai. As Passover, which commemorated the historical deliverance from Egypt, was joined to the beginning of the Spring harvest through the offering of the first sheaf of barley on the day after Passover, so Pentecost, which celebrated the completion of the wheat harvest, became linked to a historical event of the Exodus, namely, the promulgation of the Law on Mount Sinai.

In his *Letter to Januarius*, Augustine looks for authorities to justify the fiftieth day of Pentecost. He finds the first authority in Acts of the Apostles, “because it was at that time that the Holy Spirit came.”<sup>22</sup> He finds the second authority in the Exodus account of the giving of the Law: “Indeed there, after they had celebrated the Passover by immolating the lamb, they counted fifty days until the day when the Law was given on Mount Sinai to Moses, the servant of God, written with the finger of God.”<sup>23</sup> The specification of fifty days between Passover and Mount Sinai is not explicitly expressed in Exodus, but it corresponds approximately to its general indications.

In his *Catechism for Beginners*, Augustine develops further the comparison between the giving of the Law by the finger of God and the giving of the Holy Spirit: “For in the case of the people of Israel likewise, from the day on which they celebrated the Passover by killing and eating a sheep with the blood of which their doorposts were marked to preserve them unharmed—from that day, I say, the fiftieth day was completed, when they received the Law written by the finger of God, by which we have already said, that the Holy Spirit is typified; as after the Passion and resurrection of our Lord who is the true Passover, on the fiftieth day the Holy Spirit himself was sent to the disciples.”<sup>24</sup>

“The finger of God” which wrote the Law is seen by Augustine as a figure of the Holy Spirit. “In fact,” Augustine writes, “it is very clearly stated in the books of the Gospels that the finger of God signifies the Holy Spirit. Indeed one of the evangelists has said: ‘It is by the finger of God that I drive out demons’ (Luke 11:20, another expresses the same thing, saying: ‘It is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons’ (Matt 12:28).”<sup>25</sup>

The identification of “the finger of God” with the Holy Spirit enabled Augustine to correlate the two Testaments: “The victim is immolated, the Passover is celebrated, and, fifty days afterwards, the Law of fear is given, written with the finger of God. Christ is immolated, Who was led like a lamb to the slaughter as Isaiah witnesses, the true Passover

is celebrated, and, fifty days afterwards, the Holy Spirit, Who is the finger of God, is given in view of charity.”<sup>26</sup>

We find the same correlation in a sermon attributed to Chrysostom: “On that day the Law was given according to the Old Testament, on the same day the Holy Spirit came according to the new grace; on that day Moses received the Tables of the Law, on the same day the choir of the apostles received the Spirit coming down, instead of the Tables which were given to Moses.”<sup>27</sup> The comparison between the two feasts could be formulated in this way: On the Israelite Feast of the Weeks *the Law* was given to the *children of Israel*, and on the Christian Pentecost *the Spirit* was given to *all the people*.

**Conclusion.** The above survey shows the enormous importance of Pentecost in the early Church. We have found that the various meanings of the feast were developed from two different sources. The first was the actual events that occurred during the fifty days after Passover: resurrection, ascension, inauguration of Christ’s heavenly ministry, outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and beginning of the Christian mission.

The second source was the typologies of the Feast of the Weeks: wave-sheaf, harvest, first fruits, and the fiftieth day—both as a symbol of remission and as a historical reference to the giving of the Law at Sinai. All of these were seen as prefigurations of the events commemorated by Pentecost. By connecting the Christian Pentecost to the typologies of the Feast of Weeks, the early Christians were able to see in the feast richer theological meanings.

## PART II THE OBSERVANCE OF PENTECOST IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The earliest references to the observance of Pentecost in the early Church come down to us from the second half of the second century. The lack of information for the previous period does not mean that Pentecost was not observed. The incidental references to Pentecost in the New Testament that we examined in chapter 6 as well as the earliest accounts of its observance in Christian literature suggest that the feast had been widely observed from apostolic times.

**Season of Rejoicing.** Pentecost was regarded in the early Church as a fifty-day period of joy and triumph during which Christians were to refrain from kneeling and fasting. As noted above, the earliest reference

to the celebration of such a period, as we have seen, is found in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul* (about A. D. 180), where we read: “While Paul was in prison, the brethren, since it was Pentecost, wept not neither did they bow the knee, but they stood and prayed rejoicing.”<sup>28</sup>

From about the same time, a fragment of a lost book about Passover by Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (about A. D. 130-200), says: “Pentecost, in which we do not bend our knees, because it has the same value as the Lord’s day. This custom started in apostolic times.”<sup>29</sup> This passage is interesting because it derives from apostolic times the practice of not kneeling during Pentecost.

By the end of the second century we find in the writings of Tertullian (about A. D. 160-225) numerous admonitions to refrain from kneeling and fasting during the season of Pentecost. In his treatise *On Fasting*, Tertullian challenges the argument that all the feasts have been abolished by posing these rhetorical questions: “Why do we observe the Passover by an annual rotation in the first month? Why in the fifty ensuing days do we spend our time in exultation?”<sup>30</sup> The point of Tertullian’s argument is that the Old Testament feasts can hardly have been abolished if Christians were still observing them. The passage shows that Pentecost was viewed as an unbroken period of rejoicing.

Tertullian expresses the same view of Pentecost in his treatise *On Baptism*: “Pentecost is a most joyous space for conferring baptisms.”<sup>31</sup> What makes Pentecost a most joyous season are the events commemorated during this period. Tertullian mentions specifically four of them: (1) the resurrection, which was repeatedly proven among the disciples; (2) the ascension; (3) Christ’s promise to return to gather His people; and (4) the descent of the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

**Standing in Prayer as an Emblem of the Resurrection.** The celebration of the fifty days as a joyful period in which it was forbidden to fast or to kneel is well attested by such writers as Epiphanius, Basil the Great, Hippolytus, and Jerome.<sup>33</sup> The custom also is mentioned in the apocryphal *Testament of the Lord*: “At Pentecost let no one fast or kneel. For these are days of rest and joy. Let those who bear burdens of labor refresh themselves a little in the days of Pentecost.”<sup>34</sup> The *Apostolic Constitutions* go so far as declaring guilty of sin those who fast during the days of Pentecost, because on those days Christians ought to rejoice and not to mourn.<sup>35</sup>

The reason for not fasting or kneeling during the days of Pentecost is clearly given by Augustine: “The period of fifty days we celebrate after the Lord’s resurrection, represents not toil, but rest and gladness. For this reason we do not fast in them; and in praying we stand upright, which is an emblem

of resurrection.”<sup>36</sup> By standing in prayer during Pentecost, Christians were honoring not only the resurrection of Christ but also the future resurrection of the believers. In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* Basil explains more precisely the eschatological meaning of standing: “All Pentecost is a reminder of the resurrection expected in the age to come. . . . On this point the rules of the church have educated us to prefer the upright attitude of prayer, for by their plain reminder they, as it were, make our mind to dwell no longer in the present but in the future. Moreover every time we fall upon our knees and rise from off them we shew by the very deed that by our sin we fell down to earth, and by the loving kindness of our Creator were called back to heaven.”<sup>37</sup>

**Mood rather than Mode of Observance.** The foregoing references describe more the *mood* of the Pentecost celebration than the *manner* of its observance. Early Christian writers often tell us that during the fifty days of Pentecost Christians did not mourn, fast, or kneel; but they do not tell us what distinctive religious services were conducted either privately at home or publicly at church.

During the first three centuries, apparently only a few distinctive religious ceremonies were associated with Pentecost. One was the administration of baptism. Tertullian explains that Passover was the ideal time for baptism because at that festival “the Lord’s passion, in which we are baptized, was completed.”<sup>38</sup> After Passover, Tertullian says, “Pentecost is a most joyous space for conferring baptisms.”<sup>39</sup> Presumably the reason is that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost could remind the baptismal candidates of the baptism of the Spirit that was to accompany their baptism by water.

It should be noted that the administration of baptism in early Christianity was usually an annual event, because it took at least a year to prepare for baptism candidates coming from a pagan background. While believing Jews could be baptized immediately, as at Pentecost, because they already had a Biblical faith and practice, pagan converts could be baptized only after months or even years of instruction into the Christian faith.

**Special Scripture Readings for Pentecost.** A valuable source of information on the observance of Pentecost in the early Church are the lectionaries, that is, manuals containing specific Scripture readings assigned to the feasts in the year. Though the lectionaries for the feasts are not extant before the ninth century, they do reflect liturgical traditions that go back to early Christianity. Some of them are quite revealing for an understanding of the meaning of Pentecost in the early Church.

The earliest lectionaries are in the Syriac language, a branch of Aramaic that was extensively used in early Christianity. From the second century onward, Syriac was used in translations of the Bible and in the production of Christian literature. The early Syriac Lectionary lists thirteen Biblical passages to be read on the final day of Pentecost. Each passage is accompanied by a brief annotation, which explains the reason for the usage of the passage.

“Job 32:6 to 33:6 (The Spirit gives wisdom);

Daniel 1:1-21 (Ten days put to the test);

Joel 2:21-31 (cf. Acts 2);

Judges 13:2-25 (Birth of Samson, the Nazarite, drinking no wine);

1 Samuel 16:1-13 (Unction of David);

Jeremiah 31:27-37 (New Covenant);

Isaiah 48:12 to 49:13 (The Lord assembles Israel, new Covenant);

Genesis 11:1-9 (Tower of Babel, ‘antitype’ of Pentecost story in Acts);

Exodus 19:1 to 20:17 (Gathering around Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments);

Psalms 47 (Responsively v. 8 ‘God reigns over the nations’);

Acts 2:1-21 (Pentecost-story).

1 Corinthians 12:1-27 (The working of the Spirit);

John 14:15-27 (Promise of the Paraclete).<sup>40</sup>

The comments given in brackets for the choice of the pericopes reveal that Pentecost was seen as a feast that commemorated the new Covenant, the giving of the Law, the outpouring of Holy Spirit, and the bestowal of spiritual gifts. Presumably, these were some of the themes that were expounded during the religious service. The choice of the Old Testament readings suggests that Christians viewed the old covenant established at Sinai through the giving of the Law as a type of the new covenant fulfilled on the day of Pentecost through the giving of the Holy Spirit.

The Greek lectionary mentions the following Scripture readings from the Old Testament:

“Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29 (The seventy elders on whom the Spirit is laid);

Joel 2:23-32 (cf. Acts 2);

Ezekiel 36:24-28 (Gathering of Israel, a new Spirit is put in it).<sup>41</sup>

Of these Scripture readings, the most interesting is the one from Numbers 11:16-29, where we are told that a part of the Spirit of Moses was laid on the seventy elders. In a sense, this is one of the best types of Pentecost story in the Old Testament. The seventy elders played also a significant role



in preparing the Israelites for God's revelation at Mount Sinai (Ex 19: 7) and for leading them into the covenant commitment (Ex 24:9). Apparently, some Christians saw in that story a foreshadowing of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

Goudoever lists several other early Christian lectionaries which mention the reading of Exodus 19 for the liturgy of Pentecost. On the basis of these he concludes: "One of the most striking agreements between the Church and the Synagogue lessons is the reading of the Revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai. The story is considered by the Church fathers as the Old Testament 'type' of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Christian Pentecost Day."<sup>42</sup>

Augustine offers a suggestive comparison between the giving of the Law at Sinai and the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost: "In former times Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai and he proclaimed the commandments of the Lord before the people. There God came down to the mountain, here the Holy Spirit came to be visible in tongues of fire. There thunder and voices, here fishermen sparkling with various flaming tongues. This is what the divine passage said, 'when the days of Pentecost were fulfilled.'"<sup>43</sup>

**Later Developments.** Beginning from the fourth century, the liturgy of Pentecost became very elaborate. The same was true for all the religious feasts. The freedom and financial support that Roman emperors gave to the Church influenced church leaders to develop more elaborate rituals, often in imitation of pompous pagan rituals. The observance of Pentecost began with an all-night vigil during which several masses would be read, the baptismal fountain would be blessed, the baptismal candidates would be confirmed, and numerous prayers and songs would be offered.<sup>44</sup>

During the Middle Ages, various customs developed as part of the celebration of Pentecost. The dove as symbol of the Holy Spirit was widely used to reenact in a dramatic way the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. When the priest arrived at the altar, he sang in a loud and solemn voice: "Come, Holy Ghost" (*Viene Sancte Spiritus*). Then, immediately, a blowing sound was produced in the church. According to Francis Weiser, "This noise was produced in some countries, like France, by the blowing of trumpets; in others by choirboys, who hissed, hummed, pressed windbags, and rattled the benches. All eyes turned toward the ceiling of the church where from an opening called 'Holy Ghost Hole' there appeared a disc the size of a cart wheel, which slowly descended in horizontal position, swinging in ever-widening circles. Upon a blue background, broken by bundles of golden rays, it bore on its underside the figure of a white dove.

“Meanwhile, the choir sang the sequence. At its conclusion the dove came to rest, hanging suspended in the middle of the church. There followed a ‘rain’ of flowers indicating the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and of water symbolizing baptism. In some towns of central Europe people even went so far as to drop pieces of burning wick or straw from the Holy Ghost Hole, to represent the flaming tongues of Pentecost. This practice, however, was eventually stopped because it tended to put people on fire externally, instead of internally as the Holy Spirit had done at Jerusalem. In the thirteenth century in many cathedrals of France real white pigeons were released during the singing of the sequence and flew around the church while roses were dropped from the Holy Ghost Hole.”<sup>45</sup>

Like Easter, Pentecost in time came to include pagan superstitious practices associated with ancient Spring festivals. “In many places,” Weiser writes, “all through Pentecost night could be heard the noise of shooting (*Pfingstschissen*) and cracking of whips (*Pfingstschmalzen*). In pre-Christian times this observance was held to frighten harmful powers away from home and harvest; in Christian times it assumed the character of a salute to the great feast. The modern version of the ancient Spring festival (maypole and May Queen) is connected with Pentecost in many sections of Europe. The queen is called ‘Pentecost Bride’ (*Pfingstbraut*). Other relics of the Indo-European Spring festival are the games, dances, and races held at Pentecost. This tradition used to be most popular everywhere in the Middle Ages, and still is in central Europe. In England, Pentecost Sunday was a day of horse races, plays, and feasting (Whitsun Ale). In Germany, too, people would hold banquets (*Pfingstgelage*) and drink ‘Pentecost beer.’”<sup>46</sup>

The production and sale of a stronger “Pentecost beer,” known in England as “Whitsun Ale,” was an important part of the Pentecost celebration which involved local churches. In his book *The Christian Year*, Edward Horn writes: “This was one of the ‘parish ales’ which were parochial festivals featured by ale which was stronger than usual, and which was sold by the church warden who used the proceeds for the repairs of the church or for distribution to the poor. These ales were of social importance in England in the middle Ages and were usually held in the churchyard or a nearby barn. Colleges and universities used to brew their own ales and raise money by holding their own ales. Such celebrating was not restricted to England and the (Lutheran) Saxon General Articles in 1557 inveighed against the excesses of the ‘*Pfingsttänze*, *Pfingstschissens*, *Pfingstbiers*.’ But, while the English reformers tried to suppress these social activities, Luther could see no harm in them, and most Lutheran orders ignored them.”<sup>47</sup>

Colonial America was not without its Pentecost's frolics. The most important celebration in colonial New York was on Capitol Hill in Albany, which was known as Pinkster Hill, from the German word for Pentecost, "*Pfingsten*." It was a slave frolic. "The Negroes kept up the fun for a week, dancing, eating gingerbread and drinking in honor of their legendary 'Old King Charley.' They used cast-off finery to bedeck themselves and consumed so much liquor that the bacchanalia had finally to be suppressed. On Long Island the festival was observed by whites as well as blacks; in parts of Pennsylvania and Maryland, usually by Negroes only."<sup>48</sup>

The degeneration of the Feast of Pentecost from a celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit into an occasion to seek for the infilling of alcoholic spirits and the pleasure of games, dances, and races is a sad commentary on the perversion of a Biblical feast. Our challenge today is to reject the secularization of God's Holy Days by rediscovering their meaning and relevance for our Christian life.

**Conclusion.** The observance of Pentecost in the early church was characterized by a mood of rejoicing during the fifty days following Passover. What made Pentecost a most joyous season were the events commemorated during that period, namely, the resurrection, the ascension, the promise of Christ's Return, the inauguration of Christ's intercessory ministry, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the Christian mission.

To express their joy and gladness, Christians refrained from kneeling, fasting, and mourning during the fifty days of Pentecost. By standing for prayer and singing, Christians were honoring the resurrection of Christ as well as the future resurrection of all believers.

Like the Jews, Christians had few distinctive ceremonies associated with Pentecost. One of them was the administration of baptism to those candidates who for months or years had been instructed into the Christian faith. Being the celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost could remind the baptismal candidates of the baptism of the Spirit that was to accompany their water baptism.

The Scripture readings for the last day of Pentecost were mostly Old Testament passages dealing with the new covenant and the giving of the Law at Sinai. This suggests that Christians viewed the covenant that God established with the Israelites through the giving of the Law at Sinai as foreshadowing the new covenant that God established with the spiritual Israel through the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

Gradually Pentecost, like Easter, degenerated into an occasion to seek for pleasure rather than the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. Drinking, dancing, playing, and feasting became the popular way to celebrate the feast. To a large extent, this trend has continued to our times. God's Holy Days have largely become an occasion to seek for personal pleasure and profit, rather than for the peace and power of God's Spirit.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

1. Eusebius, *The Life of Constantine* 4, 64, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 1, p.557.

2. John Chrysostom, *In Pentecoste Homiliae* 2, *Patrologiae Graeca* 6, 465.

3. *Acta Pauli* 1, 30-32, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. Montague Rhodes James (Oxford, 1926), p. 572.

4. Tertullian, *On Baptism* 19, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 3, p. 678.

5. The Asian provenance of the *Acts of Paul* as well as of *The Epistle of the Apostles* proves that Pentecost was observed as a season of rejoicing among the Quartodecimans. However, none of these documents tells us how Pentecost was computed among those who kept Passover on the fixed date. Apparently the date for beginning and ending of Pentecost was less important, because contrary to Passover, Pentecost was viewed as a season rather than a single-day festival.

6. Tertullian, see note 4 above.

7. Origen, *Against Celsus* 8, 22, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. 4, p. 648.

8. Eusebius, see note 1.

9. This is suggested by *The Pilgrimage of Etheria*, a Spanish nun who describes her pilgrimage to the various places of the Holy Land associated with Biblical events. For a discussion, see Thomas J. Talley, *The Origin of the Liturgical Year* (New York, 1986), pp. 63-64.

10. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Adoratione in Spiritu et Veritate*, *Patrologiae Graeca*, 48, 1093C, 1096A, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, 1966), pp. 322-323.

11. Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 324.

12. John Chrysostom, *In Acta Apostolorum*, Homily 4, *Patrologiae Graeca* 60, 41-42, cited by J. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), p. 184.

13. Hippolytus, *On the Psalms* 1, 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1971), vol. 5, pp. 199-200.

14. For texts and discussion, see J. Van Goudoever (note 12), pp. 64-67.

15. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata or Miscellanies* 6, 11, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1979), vol. 2, p. 500.

16. Origen, *Commentariorum in Matthaem*, 11, 3, *Patrologiae Graeca* 13, 908A, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 326.

17. See Jean Daniélou (note 10), pp. 325-326.

18. Athanasius, *Epistolae Heortasticae*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 26, 1366A, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 327.

19. Gregory of Nazianzus, *In Pentecostem*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 36, 436 B, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 330.

20. Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio De Spiritu Sancto*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 46, 697B, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 330.

21. This information is found in the diary of *The Pilgrimage of Etheria*, see note 9 above.

22. Augustine, *Ad Inquisitiones Januarii*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 33, 218C, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 331.

23. Ibid.

24. Augustine, *De Catechismo Rudimenta* 13, trans. J. Chrystopher, *Ancient Christian Writers* (New York, 1946), p. 73.

25. Augustine, *Ad Inquisitiones Januarii*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 33, 218D, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 331.

26. Augustine, *Ad Inquisitiones Januarii*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 33, 219A, cited and translated by Jean Daniélou (note 10), p. 332.

27. Chrysostom, *In Sanctam Pentecostem*, *Patrologiae Graeca* 63, 933, cited by J. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), p. 190.

28. See note 3 above.

29. Fragmentum 7, *Irenei*, ed. A. Sieren, 829, cited by J. Van Goudoever, *Biblical Calendars* (Leiden, 1961), p. 182.
30. Tertullian, *On Fasting* 14, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, 1972), vol. 4, p. 112.
31. Tertullian, *On Baptism* 19 (see note 4). In his treatise *The Chaplet*, Tertullian says that fasting and kneeling in worship from Passover to Pentecost were regarded as unlawful (chapter 3).
32. Tertullian, *On Baptism* 19 (see note 4).
33. Epiphanius, *Exposition of Faith* 13; Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 27; Hippolytus, *The Apostolic Tradition* 29, 3; Jerome, *Dialogue Against the Luciferans* 8.
34. *The Testament of the Lord*, 2, 12, ed. J. Cooper and A. J. MacLean (London, 1902), p. 130.
35. *Apostolic Constitutions* 5, 20.
36. Augustine, *Letter 55, To Januarius* 15, 28, in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, ed. M. Dodd (London, 1972), p. 227.
37. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 27, 66, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, 1978), vol. 8, p. 42.
38. Tertullian, *On Baptism* 19 (see note 4).
39. *Ibid.*
40. F. C. Burkitt, *The Early Syriac Lectionaries System*, Proceedings of the British Academy 10 (London, 1923), p. 313, cited in J. Van Goudoever (note 12), p. 188.
41. A. Rahlfs, *Die Alttestamentliche Lectiones der griechischen Kirche*, Nachrichten von der Kön. ges. d. Wiss. Göttingen Ph. Hist. Kl. (Göttingen, 1915), p. 45, cited in J. Van Goudoever (note 12), p. 189.
42. J. Van Goudoever (note 12), pp. 189-190.
43. Augustine, *Sermo* 186, cited by J. Van Goudoever (note 12), p. 190.
44. For a historical survey of the liturgy of Pentecost, beginning from the fourth century through the Middle Ages, see Mario Righetti, *L'Anno Liturgico nella Storia, nella Messa, nell'Ufficio* (Milano, 1969), pp. 312-318.
45. Francis X. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs* (New York, 1958), p. 252.

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46. Ibid., p. 253.

47. Edward T. Horn, *The Christian Year* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 155.

48. Herbert L. Priestley, *The Coming of the White Man* (New York, 1929), p. 342.

49. Eduard Lohse rightly states: “Prior to A. D. 70 the Pharisaic view seems to have controlled its observance. Philo and Josephus agree in stating that Pentecost was celebrated 50 days after the first day of the Passover. Targum Onkelos on Leviticus 23:15f. adopts the Pharisaic view in its rendering of the Old Testament text: ‘You shall count from the day after the first day of the feast (Passover),’” in “*Pentecoste*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol 6, p.46.

50. Ibid., p. 47.

51. Origen, *Hexapla*, ed. Fredericus Field (Hildesheim, Germany, 1964), Leviticus 23:11. 15.



# **Chapter 8**

## **THE OBSERVANCE OF PENTECOST TODAY**

“Pentecost” is a popular term of the Christian vocabulary. Not only Christian preachers but ordinary members often speak of the need for a new Pentecost for the church today. Christians often pray for the power of Pentecost, the unity of Pentecost, the courage of Pentecost, the revival of Pentecost. There is much talk about the experience of Pentecost, especially among evangelical Christians, but little, if any, discussion about the need to observe the Feast of Pentecost.

Most Christians today think of Pentecost more as a spiritual experience than an annual event on which to commemorate the redemptive accomplishment of Christ’s first Advent. The situation was much different in early Christianity, where, as we noted in chapter 7, Pentecost ranked with Passover among the great feasts of the Church.

Is the Feast of Pentecost a relic from ancient times no longer suitable for modern Christians, or is its meaning and function still relevant for us Christians today? The survey conducted in chapters 5, 6, and 7 of Pentecost from Old Testament times to the early Church was designed to provide a basis for answering this important question.

A Biblical and historical perspective is essential for any attempt to define the relevance of Pentecost, or of any other feast, for us today. While our ultimate authority for defining our beliefs and practices is the teaching of Scripture, we need to be sensitive to the witness of the early Christians. The witness of those who sought to follow Biblical and apostolic teachings can serve as a guide for defining our own faith and practices. We do not live our Christian faith in a vacuum. We are indebted to our spiritual ancestors who have transmitted to us much of what we believe and practice.

**Objectives of the Chapter.** This chapter addresses four major questions. First, should the Feast of Pentecost still be observed by Christians today? In other words, is this feast still valid and relevant for Christians today? Second, when should Pentecost be observed? Should the fifty days of Pentecost be counted from the first day after Passover, according to the traditional Jewish custom, or from the first Sunday after Passover, according to the general early Christian practice? Third, what is the meaning of Pentecost? Which significant events should be commemorated during the fifty days of Pentecost? Fourth, how should Pentecost be observed? Should Pentecost be more a *season of rejoicing* or a *one-day* celebration?

In this chapter, I attempt to answer these questions on the basis of the Biblical and historical survey of Pentecost conducted above. The suggestions offered are only tentative, designed to stimulate thinking and further research rather than to lay down hard and fast rules.

## PART I THE CONTINUITY OF PENTECOST IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

**A Prophetic Festival.** A first indication of the continuity of Pentecost in the Christian church is the prophetic nature of the festival. Like Passover, Pentecost is a remarkable typological feast which celebrates not only the blessings of the agricultural harvest of wheat in Old Testament times, but also the blessing of the spiritual harvest of souls reaped in New Testament times through Christ's redemptive ministry.

The prophetic nature of Pentecost is evident in the New Testament, first of all, in the timing of the first Christian Pentecost given by Luke. We noted in chapter 6 that Luke introduces the events that occurred on the day of Pentecost by saying: "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Acts 2:1, KJV). The Greek verb *sumpleroustai*, which literally means "was being fulfilled," seems to be intentionally chosen by Luke to make the point that the momentous events of the day of Pentecost occurred not before, not after, but at the very time of the celebration of the Jewish Pentecost.

The sense of prophetic fulfillment is expressed also by Peter on the day of Pentecost when he declares that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was a clear fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-32). The Spring harvest celebrated at Pentecost foreshadowed the outpouring of God's Spirit which would bring about a spiritual harvest of souls: "And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21; cf. Joel 2:32).

The prophetic nature of Pentecost also can be seen in the frequent use of the typology of the “first fruits.” We have seen that Christ Himself is presented as the first fruits of Pentecost because He rose as the first fruits of redeemed humanity on the very day when the first sheaf of barley was presented at the Temple: “Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20).

As the first fruits offered on the first day of Pentecost pointed to the harvest to come, so Christ’s resurrection represents the first fruits of redeemed humanity. As Paul puts it, “Each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:23). Since Pentecost, God has been picking out those who respond to the Gospel invitation and has called them to be the “first fruits of his creatures” (James 1:18). The ultimate fulfillment of the Feast of Pentecost will be at Christ’s Return when the redeemed gathered from mankind will be “as first fruits for God and the Lamb” (Rev 14:4).

The various prophetic applications of the first fruits typology of Pentecost show the importance of the feast in Christian thought and practice. Its meaning and function did not terminate with the coming of Christ because its ultimate fulfillment still lies in the future.

**Observance of Pentecost in the New Testament.** A second indication of the continuity of Pentecost in the Christian church is the few but revealing references to the feast in the New Testament. In chapter 6 we learned that Paul’s casual mention of Pentecost in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:8-9), a predominantly Gentile church, suggests that the feast was well-known to the Corinthians.

Similarly, Paul’s eagerness “to be at Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost” (Acts 20:16) suggests that the feast was important to him. Ellen White acknowledges the importance of Pentecost for Paul when she writes that he shortened his stay at Ephesus because “he was on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost.”<sup>1</sup> The same view is expressed by *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*: “Even Paul, least interested in observances as such (Rom 14:5), was eager to celebrate Pentecost at Jerusalem in spite of his missionary journeys in Asia and Greece (Acts 18:21; 20:16).”<sup>2</sup>

Whether Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost to show to his Jewish brethren his respect for Jewish festivals, or because he viewed the feast as an appropriate occasion to present the gifts contributed by the Gentiles, or because he expected to meet a large number of brethren that would be attending the feast, the fact remains that all these reasons presuppose the significance of Pentecost for Paul. If the feast was significant for

Paul, known for his indifference to observances as such (Rom 14:5), we have reason to believe that it also must have been important for Christians at large.

**The Observance of Pentecost in the Early Church.** A third indication of the continuity of Pentecost in the Christian church is its widespread observance in the early Church. Numerous early Christian writers attest, as pointed out in chapter 7, that Pentecost was observed as a fifty days period of joy and triumph.

What made Pentecost a most joyous season were the events commemorated during that period, namely, the resurrection, the ascension, the promise of Christ's Return, the inauguration of Christ's intercessory ministry, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the birth of the Christian mission. To express their joy and gladness, Christians refrained from kneeling, fasting, and mourning during the fifty days of Pentecost. By standing for prayer and singing, Christians were honoring the resurrection of Christ as well as the future resurrection of all believers.

We found that Christians, like Jews, had few distinctive ceremonies associated with Pentecost. One of them was the administration of baptism to those candidates who for months or years had been instructed in the Christian faith. Since Pentecost was the celebration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it could remind baptismal candidates of the baptism of the Spirit that was to accompany their baptism by water.

The Scripture readings for the last day of Pentecost were mostly Old Testament passages dealing with the new covenant and the giving of the Law at Sinai. This suggests that Christians viewed the covenant that God established with the Israelites through the giving of the Law at Sinai as foreshadowing the new covenant that God established with the spiritual Israel through the giving of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

## PART II THE DATE OF PENTECOST TODAY

**Ambiguity in the Dating Method.** The question of the date on which to observe Pentecost today is more complex than it might at first appear. There are two major problems. The first problem is the ambiguity of the method for dating the feast in the Old Testament. We noted in chapter 5 that the Feast of Weeks in Old Testament times was reckoned by counting seven weeks from the first putting of the sickle to the barley: "You shall count seven weeks: begin to count the seven weeks from the time you first put the sickle to the standing grain [barley]" (Deut 16:9).

This was a rather ambiguous method for determining the date of the Feast of Weeks, because the counting of the fifty days (counting of the *omer*—barley sheaf) could not begin until at least some of the barley was ready for harvest and a sheaf of it could be presented as a wave-offering before the Lord. If, because of weather conditions or failure to synchronize the lunar calendar with the solar year, none of barley was ready for harvest, then both Passover and the offering of the wave sheaf would be delayed by a few weeks. This means that the determination of the dates of Passover and Pentecost was conditioned by the state of the calendar and of the barley harvest.

Once the barley harvest was ripe, the second problem was to determine on which day the first sheaf of barley, known as *omer*, was to be cut and presented as a wave-offering before the Lord. According to Leviticus 23:15, this ceremony was to take place “*the morrow after the sabbath.*” Since the compound expression “a sabbath of solemn rest—*shabbath shabbathon*” is used to designate both the weekly Sabbath and the Day of Atonement (Ex 31:15; Lev 23:3, 32; 16:31), the question is, Which Sabbath is meant, the *weekly* Sabbath or the *annual* Passover Sabbath?

This question became one of the outstanding points of contention between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees interpreted the “Sabbath” as the festival day of Passover, Nisan 15, and thus they waved the first sheaf of barley on the following day, Nisan 16. From that day, they counted the fifty days to Pentecost. This has been the prevailing Jewish tradition that has continued to our day.<sup>49</sup>

The Sadducees, however, supported by the Boethusians, the Karaites, and the Samaritans, took the word “Sabbath” to mean literally the first Sabbath that fell during the week of Unleavened Bread. This means that they counted the fifty days from the first Sunday after Passover. Consequently, Pentecost for them would always fall on the same day of the week, namely, Sunday. This method of reckoning Pentecost was widely accepted in early Christianity, apparently even by (Quartodeciman) Christians, who observed Passover not on Easter-Sunday, but by the fixed date of Nisan 14.

**No Controversy over the Date of Pentecost.** Surprisingly, contrary to the date of Passover which stirred up a bitter controversy, we find no trace of any controversy regarding the date of Pentecost in early Christian literature. We noted in chapter 3 that the adoption and promotion of Easter-Sunday was strongly rejected by those Christians (mostly Jewish-Christians) who wanted to remain faithful to the apostolic tradition by observing Passover according to the Biblical date of Nisan 14.

One would imagine that the same Christians who adamantly refused to adopt the Easter-Sunday date promoted by the Church of Rome also would also have refused to adopt the counting of the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover. We would expect them to follow the traditional Jewish method of counting the fifty days of Pentecost from the day after Passover (Nisan 16), irrespective of the day of the week. Apparently that was not the case.

How can we explain the absence of any opposition to the dating of Pentecost from the Sunday after Passover to the Sunday occurring fifty days later? Presumably, two factors contributed to the general acceptance of this dating. The first factor could have been the fact that Pentecost was viewed more as a *joyful season* lasting fifty days than a feast observed on a single day. During the first three centuries, Pentecost was observed primarily by refraining from fasting, kneeling, and mourning during the fifty days of the feast. Since the observance of Pentecost consisted more of a *mood of rejoicing* over a period of fifty days than a *manner of observing* a specific day, Christians must have felt that observing the *season* of Pentecost was more important than arguing about the precise *date*.

It is noteworthy that even among the Jews the Feast of Weeks, as the name indicates, was viewed as a harvest season extending over seven weeks. Moreover, in the dispersion where getting the calendar right was difficult, a second day was added to the first “in order that on one day at least the festival might be observed in common by the Jewish world both in the land of Israel and also in the dispersion.”<sup>3</sup> This suggests that even among Jews there was a certain freedom in determining the date of Pentecost.

A second factor could have been that both the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred on a Sunday. By reckoning the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover, it was possible to commemorate these two important events of the Pentecost season on the actual day of the week on which they occurred. The early Christians may have found support for their method of dating Pentecost from Jewish sectarian traditions (Sadducees, Boethusians, Karaites, Samaritans) that counted the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover.

**A Word of Caution.** The problems outlined above regarding the date of Pentecost should caution anyone about the risk of being dogmatic on the date for observing the feast today. From a historical perspective, two methods could be legitimately used today to establish the date of Pentecost. The first is to reckon the fifty days of Pentecost from the day after Passover (Nisan 16), which means that Pentecost could fall on any day of the week. This dating is

supported by the traditional Jewish interpretation of Leviticus 23:15, which understood the phrase “the morrow after the sabbath—*Shabbat*” as referring to the annual Passover Sabbath. This method is still used by Jews today to date their Pentecost.

The second dating method that could be used today is to reckon the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover, which means that Pentecost always would fall on a Sunday. This dating is supported by the sectarian Jewish interpretation (Sadducees, Boethusians, Karaites, Samaritans) of Leviticus 23:15, which took the word “Sabbath” to mean literally the first Sabbath after Passover. Consequently, they counted the fifty days from the first Sunday after Passover. This method of dating Pentecost was widely accepted in the early Church, apparently even by those who observed Passover by the fixed date of Nisan 14.

**A Tentative Proposal.** Since a good case can be made for using either method for determining the date of Pentecost today, it behooves us to respect those who choose to observe Pentecost at a date different from ours. At this point in my research I tend to support the reckoning of the fifty days of Pentecost from the first Sunday after Passover. My reasons are essentially three.

First, the phrase “the morrow after the sabbath—*Shabbat*,” which is used in Leviticus 23:11, 15 to designate the starting point of the countdown to Pentecost, could well refer to Sunday, because the term “Sabbath” was ordinarily used for the seventh day of the week. In fact, this is the way the Greek version (Origen’s *Hexapla*) understands the two passages. Two marginal notes to the two verses read, “the day which is after the Sabbath” and “the first day after the Sabbath.”<sup>4</sup>

The term “Sabbath—*Shabbath*” by itself is not used in the Old Testament to designate annual feasts. Only the compound expression *shabbath shabbathon*, usually translated as “a sabbath of solemn rest,” is used to refer to the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:31; 23:32), but not to the feasts in general. The absence of any instance where the term “Sabbath” is used by itself to designate an annual feast supports the view that the “sabbath” of Leviticus 23:11, 15 is most likely the weekly Sabbath. In such a case, the “morrow after the Sabbath” would be Sunday—the day from which the seven weeks were to be counted.

My second reason for supporting the Sunday to Sunday reckoning of Pentecost is the instruction given in Leviticus 23:15 to count “seven *full* weeks.” The phrase “seven *full* weeks” suggests seven complete weeks running from the first to the last day of the week, or as we would say today,



from Sunday to Saturday. Even the name “Feast of Weeks” suggests that the feast consisted of complete weeks. In this case the seven weeks would be counted from Sunday to Sunday.

My third reason is the consistent witness of the early Church that observed Pentecost from the Sunday after Passover to the Sunday occurring fifty days later. The fact that this dating of Pentecost was widely accepted without signs of opposition suggests that the early Christians viewed it as Biblically sound.

The method we use today to determine the date of Pentecost may not be as critical as for other feasts. First, because Pentecost began in the Old Testament as a harvest festival whose date was determined by the ripeness of the wheat crop. Second, because it was observed in the early church more as a *season of rejoicing* than a *specific holy day*. Whether we count the fifty days of Pentecost from the *first day* after Passover or from the *first Sunday* after Passover, the difference is relative, because we would still be observing most of the season of Pentecost at the same time.

### PART III THE MEANING OF PENTECOST TODAY

Our study of the meaning of Pentecost in Scripture and history shows that the meaning of the feast is largely determined by the five major events that occurred during the fifty days of waiting by the disciples in the Upper Room, namely, (1) the resurrection of Christ, (2) His ascension, (3) the inauguration of Christ’s heavenly ministry, (4) the bestowal of spiritual gifts, and (5) the birthday of the Christian church. These events are part of the unitive celebration of Pentecost. Let us reflect on their meaning and relevance for today in the light of the preceding Biblical and historical survey of Pentecost.

**The Resurrection of Christ.** The first Christian Pentecost began on the day Christ arose as “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). “Christ arose from the dead as the first fruits of those that slept. He was the antitype of the wave sheaf, and His resurrection took place on the very day when the wave sheaf was to be presented before the Lord. . . . The sheaf dedicated to God represented the harvest. So Christ the first fruits represented the great spiritual harvest to be gathered for the kingdom of God. His resurrection is the type and pledge of the resurrection of all the righteous dead. ‘For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.’ 1 Thess 4:14.”<sup>5</sup>

As the offering of the first sheaf marked the beginning of the fifty days of the Jewish Pentecost, so the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits of redeemed humanity marked the beginning of the fifty days of the first Christian Pentecost. Christ's resurrection, however, not only marks the beginning of Pentecost but also gives the joyous mood to the whole period of the feast.

The early Christians honored Christ's resurrection during the fifty days of Pentecost by standing for prayer and by refraining from fasting and mourning. While at Passover they commemorated Christ's suffering and death by fasting and mourning, at Pentecost they celebrated His resurrection by refraining from fasting, mourning, or kneeling. "One might say," as Thomas J. Talley points out, "it is the Pentecost that celebrates the resurrection."<sup>6</sup>

The Pentecostal experience brought home to the disciples the reality of Christ's resurrection. On several occasions, Christ announced to His disciples that the Son of Man must die and rise on the third day (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Matt 12:40; John 2:19), but they could not understand "what rising from the dead meant" (Mark 9:10). But as the risen Savior appeared on numerous occasions to the disciples during the first "forty days" (Acts 1:3) of Pentecost, they finally grasped the reality of His resurrection.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter boldly proclaimed: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32). Pentecost was the proclamation and celebration of Christ's resurrection. From that day on, the resurrection became the center of the apostolic preaching, because it revealed the fundamental basis of the Christian faith (Acts 3:14; 4:10; 8:35; 13:33; 17:3, 31; 23:6).

Pentecost affords us an opportunity to reflect on the significance and import of Christ's resurrection for our lives today. Christ's resurrection is not merely the restoration to life of a dead body, but it is the emergence of a new order of life. It is the embodiment of eternal life and the beginning of the future resurrection. The nature of Christ's resurrected body is a mystery to us. The empty tomb testifies to this fact. The women "did not find the body" of Jesus in the tomb (Luke 24:1-3, KJV). Jesus' resurrection was a bodily resurrection, yet His body had new and surprising powers transcending physical limitations. He appeared and disappeared to His disciples in a room with locked doors (Luke 24:31, 36; John 20:19, 26). Our Lord's body had been transformed into the kind of "spiritual body" Paul describes by saying: "It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:44).

There is power in Christ's resurrection. That is why Paul wished to "know him and the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10). It is a power that can be experienced in the present and in the future. In the present, we experience the power of Christ's resurrection by leading a new life by the power of God who raised Christ from the dead (Col 2:12; Rom 6:4). "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:1-2).

In the future, we will experience the power of Christ's resurrection when we all will rise because He has risen: "He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (Rom 8:11). Pentecost affords us an opportunity not only to commemorate the resurrection of Christ, but also to seek the power of the risen Christ to walk in newness of life while awaiting for the final transformation of our mortal bodies to a glorified state (Rom 8:22-23; Phil 3:10, 20).

**The Ascension of Christ.** Pentecost celebrates not only Christ's resurrection but also His ascent to heaven. The book of Acts informs us that at the end of forty days of apparitions and discourses, Jesus left His disciples to ascend to heaven (Acts 1:3-11). Apparently that was not His first ascent to heaven, because, according to John, Jesus told Mary Magdalene on the day of His resurrection, "Do not hold me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brethren and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). Later that day, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, He must have already ascended and returned, because He told His disciples: "See my hands and my feet, that it is myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has no flesh and bones as I have" (Luke 24:40). He also gave the opportunity to the doubting Thomas to touch Him (John 20:27). The purpose of these appearances was to authenticate the reality of Christ's resurrection. Luke suggests that an ascension occurred in the evening of the resurrection after the various discourses of Jesus with His disciples (Luke 24:50-51).

The delay of a few hours between the resurrection and the ascension was designed to impress on Mary Magdalene that He was now entering into a new glorified state. During the forty days when Jesus appeared to the disciples, most likely He came down to them from His heavenly abode; otherwise, it is hard to explain where He was during the interval of these manifestations.

The ascension described in Acts (1:3-11) represents Christ's last departure, which put an end to His temporal apparitions and discourses. The

ascension was a formal leave-taking. In a dramatic way, it indicated that the transitional period was over and now Christ was entering a new phase of His redemptive activity. He departed after forty days of manifestations, most likely in view of the fifty days of Pentecost. This would give the disciples ten days to prepare for the reception of the Holy Spirit that He would send them on the final day of Pentecost.

The sacred texts point to two aspects of Christ's ascension: on the one hand, His *celestial glorification*, which occurred on the day of His resurrection; on the other hand, His *final departure*, which took place after a period of apparitions and discourses. Pentecost affords an opportunity to commemorate both of these events.

The manner of the ascension is described in a few simple words: "As they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight" (Acts 1:11). The purpose of this plain description is not to magnify the triumph of the resurrection, but simply to point out that after a period of companionship with His disciples, the risen Savior withdrew His visible presence from the earth, not to manifest it again until His return.

The ascension is a prelude to Christ's descent at the end of time. "While they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven'" (Acts 1:11). This angelic discourse establishes a clear connection between the ascent of Christ to heaven and His return to earth at the end of time.

Pentecost affords us an opportunity to reflect not only on Christ's departure from this earth, but also upon His return to this earth. It reminds us that the present stay of Christ in heaven is a transitory stage in His redemptive plan. He will reside in heaven "until the time for establishing all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:21).

The ascension teaches us that Christ will come as He departed (Acts 1:11), descending from heaven upon the clouds (1 Thess 4:14-16, Rev 1:7) while the redeemed ascend to meet Him in the clouds (1 Thess 4:17). While we are awaiting that glorious day, we must "seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:2), so that "when Christ who is our life appears, then . . . [we] also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4).

Commemorating the ascension during the Pentecost season can give "a lift" to our spiritual life by inspiring us to look up to heaven, where Christ "always lives to make intercession" for us (Heb 7:25). We may call this our

spiritual ascension. We look to heaven to thank Jesus for working hard to bring to consummation His redemptive mission. It is this reassurance that motivates us to live “waiting for and hastening” the glorious day of His coming (2 Pet 3:12).

**The Inauguration of Christ’s Heavenly Ministry.** The ascension constitutes the transition from Christ’s redemptive work on earth to His intercessory work in heaven. Thus, Pentecost affords us the opportunity to celebrate also the inauguration of Christ’s heavenly ministry. We noted in chapter 6 that upon His ascension Christ was exalted to a position of honor and dignity by being seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:55). The “right hand” is a symbol of the supreme honor, power, and authority with which Jesus was invested. By being invited to sit at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Eph 1: 20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13), Christ was installed to His heavenly ministry. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is seen as the evidence of the official enthronement of Christ to His heavenly ministry (Acts 2:33).

According to Ellen White, “The Pentecostal outpouring was heaven’s communication that the Redeemer’s inauguration was accomplished. According to His promise He had sent the Holy Spirit from heaven to His followers as a token that He had, as priest and king, received all authority in heaven and on earth, and was the Anointed One over His people.”<sup>7</sup>

Christ’s intercession in the heavenly sanctuary is perhaps the most ignored chapter of His redemptive ministry. Systematic theology books devote hundreds of pages to the study of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, but few, if any, to the study of Christ’s intercessory ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The impression is that Christ is on a leave of absence between His ascension and return, presumably recovering from His exhausting earthly mission. It is not surprising that many Christians have no idea about what Jesus is doing in heaven.

Pentecost affords us an opportunity to remember that Jesus is not on vacation; rather, that He has been ministering on our behalf since His ascension as “Priest” (Heb 7:15; 8:4), “High Priest” (Heb 2:17; 3:1), “Mediator” (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6), and “Intercessor” (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). We have seen that through His intercessory ministry, Christ sustains the Church (Rev 1:13, 20), mediates repentance and forgiveness to believers (Acts 5:31; 1 John 2:1-2; 1:9), makes our prayers acceptable to God (John 16:23-24; Rev 8:3), provides us with the invisible and yet real assistance of His angels (Heb 1:14; Rev 5:6; 1:16, 20), and bestows upon us the essential gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). The fact that Jesus is actively ministering in heaven on our behalf gives us reasons to believe that He will soon return to bring to consummation His redemptive mission.

**The Bestowal of Spiritual Gifts.** Pentecost celebrates not only the inauguration of Christ's ministry in heaven, but also the beginning of the bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit on the Church. The two are interrelated because it is Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary that makes the ministry of the Holy Spirit possible on earth.

Before His ascension, Christ promised to send to His disciples the Holy Spirit: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). Christ's promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when His disciples "were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4) and "great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33). The manifestation of the Holy Spirit continued after Pentecost through the gifts bestowed for the work of the church.

The gifts of the Spirit are as diverse as the ministries in the Church, but share a profound unity because they come from one Spirit and, like the members of the human body, share the same goal (1 Cor 12:4-31). Some spiritual gifts, such as those of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, and pastors, relate to the ministerial functions of the Church (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). Others gifts, such as service, teaching, liberality, works of mercy, (Rom 12:7-8), words of wisdom, faith, the gift of healing, and working miracles (1 Cor 12:8-11), concern the ministry of the church at large. The practice of charity is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 14:1). The success of the Christian life, as well as the functioning of the Church, depends entirely on the presence of the gifts of the Spirit.

The bestowal of the gifts of the Spirit at Pentecost is likened to the "former rain" that ripened the Spring wheat harvest that in a spiritual sense was gathered in at the beginning of Christianity. Near the close of earth's history, another bestowal of spiritual gifts is promised to equip the Church for the final harvest of the earth. This final outpouring of the Holy Spirit is likened to the falling of the latter rain that in Palestine ripened the fall fruit harvest.

The celebration of Pentecost today affords us the opportunity not only to commemorate the outpouring of the early rain on the day of Pentecost, but also to pray for the unprecedented outpouring of the latter rain of spiritual power to make us fit to be laborers together with God in the final harvest of the earth.

The disciples prepared themselves for the reception of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost by earnest prayer, confession and forsaking of their sins, and consecration of themselves to God. "Under the influence of the Spirit," writes Ellen White, "words of penitence and confession mingled with songs of praise for sins forgiven. Words of thanksgiving and prophecy were heard. All heaven bent low to behold and to adore the wisdom of matchless, incomprehensible love. Lost in wonder, the apostles exclaimed, 'Herein is

Love.’ They grasped the imparted gift. And what followed? The sword of the Spirit, newly edged with power and bathed in the lightning of heaven, cut its way through unbelief. Thousands were converted in a day.”<sup>8</sup>

The celebration of Pentecost challenges us to do the same preparatory work to receive the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We often lament the Laodicean lukewarmness that seems to prevail in the church. The solution to the problem is to be found, not in the introduction of new styles of worships or special seminars on church growth, but in the Upper-Room-type of preparation for the reception of the Holy Spirit. When “with one accord” (Acts 1:14) we come together to seek the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to cleanse our lives and to energize us for service, then we will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to finish the mission of the Church.

**The Birthday of the Christian Church.** Pentecost affords us the opportunity to commemorate also the birthday of the Christian church. Perhaps the most popular national holiday in most countries is the one that celebrates the birthday of the nation, often as a result of bloody wars to gain freedom from dominating powers. Americans celebrate their national birthday on July 4, known as “Independence Day.” As the Americans commemorate the birthday of their nation on Independence Day, so Christians celebrate the birth of their Church on Pentecost.

We noted in chapter 6 that Christ *instituted* the Church when He called the twelve disciples and trained them to become His witnesses. But He *constituted* the Church on the day of Pentecost when He qualified them for their calling by the power of the Holy Spirit. On that day, Christ’s followers were consolidated into a new body with the conviction and courage to preach the Gospel to the ends of the world.

Pentecost commemorates also the birthday of the mission of the Church. Before Pentecost, the disciples were all fearfully shut up in the Upper Room. After the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they boldly went out to witness for their risen Savior. Throughout the book of Acts we are reminded that Christians became witnesses as a result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. “We all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). “We are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem” (Acts 10:39; cf. 3:15; 5:32; 10:41; 13:31). The gift of tongues that were intelligible to “devout men from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) underscores the universal scope of the Christian mission.

The Feast of Pentecost reminds us every year that the Christian church was founded by Christ, not to perpetrate itself as a self-serving organization but to extend the divine provision of salvation to men and women everywhere.



Pentecost challenges us to work, not only to improve the facilities and programs of the local church, but also to save those who are perishing outside the church. Pentecost invites us yearly to come together with one accord to seek the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, so we can become fit to labor together with God in the final harvest of the earth.

#### **PART IV**

### **THE OBSERVANCE OF PENTECOST TODAY**

Our study of Pentecost in both Jewish and Christian history has shown that, unlike other festivals, Pentecost developed few ceremonies. The religious services differed but little from that of other holy days. In view of this fact, I will make no attempt to propose a special order of service for the day of Pentecost, especially since the feast was observed by the early Christians more as a *season of rejoicing* than a *single liturgical day*. Instead, I will submit a few suggestions on how we can make the season of Pentecost an occasion to express our thankfulness to God and seek for a fresh provision of the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

**A Season to Be Thankful.** Pentecost is a season to be thankful for material and spiritual blessings. Jews expressed their thankfulness for their Spring wheat harvest by bringing their first fruits to the Temple on the first and last day of the feast. The early Christians manifested their joy for the resurrection, exaltation, and heavenly intercession of Christ by standing for prayer and refraining from fasting and mourning during the fifty days of Pentecost. As we stand today to honor dignitaries and give a standing ovation to those who perform brilliantly, so the early Christians stood up for Christ when praying, to honor their risen Savior and the future resurrection of the redeemed.

Pentecost today is still a season to be thankful. Our study of the meaning of Pentecost shows that we have many reasons to be thankful. We can be thankful Christ arose as the first fruits of redeemed humanity (1 Cor 15:20). His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection. We can be thankful Christ ascended to heaven to begin a special intercessory ministry in our behalf. As we live our Christian life from day to day, it is reassuring to know we are not alone. We can count on the active assistance of our Savior, who offers us forgiveness (Acts 5:31; 1 John 2:1-2; 1:9), makes our prayers acceptable to God (John 16:23-24; Rev 8:3), provides us with the invisible and yet real assistance of His angels (Heb 1:14; Rev 5:6; 1:16, 20), and bestows upon us the essential gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

We can be thankful for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are available to us through the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary. It is reassuring to know that as Christ fulfilled His promise on the day of Pentecost by sending the Holy Spirit to empower His disciples to begin the spiritual harvest, so He will fulfill His promise to us by sending us His Spirit to empower us to complete the harvest.

How can we express our thankfulness to God during the season of Pentecost? No hard and fast rules can be laid down, because spiritual realities are experienced in different ways by different people. Some may wish to follow the custom of the early Christians by standing rather than kneeling for prayer, at home and in the church, to honor the risen, exulted, and interceding Savior.

Some may wish to express their thankfulness to God during the fifty days of Pentecost by singing songs of thanksgiving during their private and public worship. The new *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* has a good selection of hymns suitable for the Pentecost season. Hymns such as 562, “Come, Sing a Song of Harvest,” reminds of Pentecost as the harvest season when we bring in gratitude our first fruits to God.

Come, sing a song of harvest,  
Of thanks for daily food!  
To offer God the first fruits  
Is old as gratitude.

Long, long ago, the reapers,  
Before they kept the feast,  
Put first-fruits in a basket,  
And took it to the priest.

Shall we, sometimes forgetful  
Of where creation starts,  
With science in our pockets  
Lose wonder from our hearts?

May God, the great Creator,  
To whom all life belongs,  
Accept these gifts we offer,  
Our service and our songs.

And lest the world go hungry  
 While we ourselves are fed,  
 Make each of us more ready  
 To share our daily bread.

Other hymns, such as “Fire of God, Thou Sacred Flame,” remind us of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit as fire and wind on the day of Pentecost.

Fire of God, Thou sacred flame,  
 Spirit who in splendor came,  
 Let Thy heat my soul refine  
 Till it glows with love dine

Breath of God, that swept in power  
 In the pentecostal hour,  
 Holy Breath, be Thou in me  
 Source of vital energy.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost is beautifully developed in “O Holy Dove of God Descending,” a hymn in which the four stanzas invite the Holy Spirit to descend as “Holy Dove, Holy Wind, Holy Rain, Holy Flame.” Hymns such as these can help us recapture the spirit of Pentecost.

**Floral Decorations.** Some may wish to express the joy and gratitude of the Pentecost season by decorating their homes and churches with flowers. Pentecost is connected with the Spring harvest season when nature blooms, trees and flowers blossom. In Temple times, pilgrims from all over Palestine brought their first fruits to the altar. The baskets of fruit that were carried in procession from the remotest corners of the land were decorated with leaves and flowers. From this ceremony developed the custom of decorating homes and synagogues with small bundles of wheat, plants, and flowers for Pentecost.

In many countries, Adventist churches celebrate in the autumn what is known as the “Harvest Festival.” In many ways, this festival is similar to the American Thanksgiving Day. A major difference is that while the American Thanksgiving Day is celebrated with big dinners and reunions in the home, the Harvest Festival is celebrated as a special thanksgiving Sabbath in the church. On such Sabbath, churches, especially the platforms, are decorated with the fruits and vegetables of the Fall harvest, and the sermon focuses on giving thanks to God for the bounties of the harvest season.

In keeping with the Biblical tradition of the celebration of Spring harvest at the Feast of Pentecost and of the Fall harvest at the Feast of Tabernacles, it may be well for our churches to celebrate both a “Spring Harvest Festival” and a “Fall Harvest Festival.” On both occasions, our churches could be

decorated with some of the produce of the season. Seeing the fruits of the season in the church (not merely at the supermarket) as an object lesson for our worship experience during the Feasts of Pentecost and Tabernacles can serve as forceful incentives to thank God for His bountiful blessings.

The human heart is naturally greedy. Learning to be grateful is part of our Christian growth in grace which enables us to have peace and joy in our hearts. The reason is that a grateful heart is the abiding place of the peace of Christ. The Feast of Pentecost affords us the opportunity to express our gratitude to God for the material bounties of the Spring harvest and for the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit.

**First Fruits Thanksgiving Offering.** A practical way to express our gratitude to God for His material and spiritual blessings is by bringing a special offering, perhaps, during the final Sabbath of Pentecost. We have seen that God's people in Bible times brought their first fruits to the Temple both on the first and last days of Pentecost. On the first day, they brought a sheaf of barley to consecrate to God the harvest that was going to be reaped; on the last day, they brought their first fruits to express their gratitude for the harvest that had been gathered in.

Like the Israelites of old, we too can bring to God at Pentecost a special thanksgiving offering for the material and spiritual blessings received. Traditionally, Adventists used to bring a special sacrificial offering at the conclusion of the "Spring Week of Prayer." In some parts of the world the practice still persists. The celebration of Pentecost provides a Biblical basis both for the Spring "Spiritual Emphasis Week" and the ensuing special offering.

By celebrating at Pentecost the blessings of the agricultural Spring harvest and the spiritual gifts God has bestowed upon us, we can find in the feast the theological incentive to express our gratitude to God for His material and spiritual blessings through a special thanksgiving offering.

Pentecost, as we have seen, concludes the Spring cycle of festivals which celebrate the accomplishments of Christ's first Advent. The celebration of Christ's first Advent begins at Passover, with the commemoration of His vicarious suffering and sacrifice, and ends at Pentecost with the commemoration of His resurrection, ascension, heavenly intercession, and bestowal of spiritual gifts. The commemoration at Pentecost of what Christ has done for us on earth through His atoning sacrifice, and of what He is doing for us in heaven through His intercessory ministry, offers us overwhelming reasons to show our gratitude to God by bringing a special thanksgiving offering.

**“Pentecost Renewal Week.”** The disciples spent the ten days before Pentecost engaged in spiritual exercises to prepare their hearts for the reception of the Holy Spirit. Adventist churches conduct in the Spring a “Spiritual Emphasis Week.” This week is observed in schools with special chapel programs in the morning and evening. Guest speakers are often invited to address the spiritual needs of faculty and students and lead them into seasons of prayer and praise. A similar practice is followed in many churches, though only evening meetings are conducted. Small churches without a pastor usually utilize the devotional readings prepared for this special week of spiritual renewal.

The Spring “Spiritual Emphasis Week,” though observed at about the time of Pentecost, is not directly connected with the feast. With minor changes in the scheduling, it could be made to coincide with Pentecost, and the Fall “Spiritual Emphasis Week” with the Feast of Tabernacles. By doing so, both events would coincide with the observance of two important Biblical festivals.

Today we sing, pray, preach, and talk about the need for a new Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Why not follow the example of the disciples, who spent ten days preparing themselves for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14), by spending at least the week before Pentecost seeking for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps this week could be called “Pentecost Renewal Week.” Connecting the Spring “Spiritual Emphasis Week” with the celebration of Pentecost would add to the week Biblical timing, authority, and meaning.

The disciples’ preparation for Pentecost can serve as a model for the Pentecost Renewal Week by reminding us of the need to prepare our hearts as did the disciples of old. “The heart must be emptied of every defilement, and cleansed for the indwelling of the Spirit. It was by the confession and forsaking of sin, by earnest prayer and consecration of themselves to God, that the early disciples prepared for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The same work, only in greater degree, must be done now.”<sup>99</sup>

**Pentecostal Sermons.** The proclamation of God’s Word plays a key role in the Christian worship experience. Pastors gain inspiration for their sermons from a variety of sources such as the reading of Scripture, a major event, or a perceived spiritual need of the congregation. Sometimes the topic of the sermon is dictated by the church calendar which designates certain Sabbaths to promote, for example, stewardship, temperance, Christian education, religious liberty, Pathfinders, family life, women’s ministries, evangelism, etc. Some of the causes promoted during the sermon can detract from the worship experience.

The seven Sabbaths from Passover to Pentecost offer to the pastor a unique opportunity to ignore temporarily the promotion of significant aspects of the church life and to focus instead on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ's first Advent. The series of seven sermons can start with the suffering and sacrifice of Christ and continue with Christ's resurrection, ascension, inauguration of His heavenly ministry, the bestowal of spiritual gifts, and the birth of the Christian church.

Some topics such as the heavenly ministry of Jesus or the bestowal of spiritual gifts, are so rich in meaning and experience that they could well be presented as a series of Pentecost sermons. This means that in a given year the seven Sabbaths of Pentecost could be devoted to reflecting upon various aspects of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some of the questions that could be considered are: How do we receive the gifts of the Spirit? How do we know which spiritual gifts we have received? How do we cultivate or use our spiritual gifts?

Another possibility is to have a series of sermons reflecting on the meaning, need, and results of Pentecost as a corporate experience for the Church. Some of the topics could be: the secret of a Pentecostal revival, the need today for Pentecostal zeal, the characteristic of a Pentecostal church, conditions for the outpouring of the Latter Rain.

Another subject that would be most appropriate for a series of sermons during Pentecost is Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. Many Christians do not have the faintest idea about what Jesus is doing in heaven. Yet it is through Christ's heavenly ministry that we experience the benefits of His redemptive accomplishments. It is not surprising that we are admonished in Hebrews to "consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession" (Heb 3:1). *Consider (katanoeo)* means "to look at with reflection," "to contemplate."<sup>10</sup>

Pentecost gives the pastor an opportunity to help his congregation appreciate more fully the relationship between Christ's atoning sacrifice on earth and His intercessory work in heaven. What is Jesus doing when He makes intercession for us? Is He making God more willing to forgive us and to help us? A study of the relevant texts suggests that Christ's intercession consists not so much in words as in mighty and significant acts. He presents Himself before the Father as our representative (Heb 7:25). He appears by virtue of His righteousness and sacrificial death. "His intercession is that of a pierced and broken body, of a spotless life."<sup>11</sup>

Equally important to consider during Pentecost are the benefits we derive from Christ's intercessory work. These are great truths that not only

appeal to the intellect but also have a direct impact upon our daily Christian living. It is reassuring to know that Christ's work in heaven gives us constant access to God (Eph 2:18), mediates repentance and forgiveness to believers (Acts 5:31; 1 John 2:1-2; 1:9), makes our prayers acceptable to God (John 16:23-24; Rev 8:3), provides us with the invisible yet real assistance of His angels (Heb 1:14; Rev 5:6; 1:16, 20), and bestows upon us the essential gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33).

Taking time every year during the Pentecost season to deepen the understanding of vital aspects of Christ's redemptive mission can enhance our appreciation of what our Savior has done and is doing for us. Most Christians receive much of their religious education at church during the worship service. The purpose of the annual feasts, such as Pentecost, is to provide an opportunity during the course of the year to lead Christians into a fuller understanding and experience of the great truths of the plan of salvation.

**Conclusion.** Like Passover, Pentecost is a remarkable typological feast which began in the Old Testament as the celebration of the blessings of the Spring harvest and continues in the New Testament as a celebration of the spiritual harvest of souls reaped by Christ's redemptive ministry. The continuity of Pentecost in the Christian church is attested to not only by the references to the feast in the New Testament, but also by its widespread observance in the early Church.

Pentecost was observed by the early Christians as a season of rejoicing from the Sunday after Passover to the Sunday occurring fifty days later. The rejoicing was largely determined by the five major events commemorated during the fifty days of Pentecost, namely: (1) the resurrection of Christ, (2) His ascension, (3) the inauguration of Christ's heavenly ministry, (4) the bestowal of spiritual gifts, (5) the birthday of the Christian Church. These events are part of the unitive celebration of Pentecost.

Our study of Pentecost in both Jewish and Christian history shows that unlike other festivals, Pentecost developed few ceremonies. The feast was observed more as a *season of rejoicing* than a *single liturgical day*. In view of this fact, we have concluded that Pentecost still should be observed today as a season to be thankful for material and spiritual blessings. Our study of the meaning of Pentecost has shown that we have many reasons to be thankful. We can be thankful Christ arose as the first fruits of redeemed humanity (1 Cor 15:20). His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection. We can be thankful Christ ascended to heaven to begin a special intercessory ministry on our behalf. We can be thankful for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which are made available to us through the ministry of Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary.



We can express our thankfulness to God during the season of Pentecost in a variety of ways. Some may wish to follow the custom of the early Christians by standing rather than kneeling for prayer both at home and in church to honor the risen, exalted, and interceding Savior. Others may wish to express their thankfulness to God during the fifty days of Pentecost by singing songs of thanksgiving during their private and public worship. Others may wish to express the joy and gratitude of the Pentecost season by decorating their homes and churches with flowers.

A practical way to express our gratitude to God at Pentecost is to bring a special thanksgiving offering. As the Israelites brought their first fruits to express their gratitude for the harvest that had been gathered in, so we, too, can bring to God at Pentecost a special thanksgiving offering for the material and spiritual blessings received.

The Feast of Pentecost provides an ideal setting for spending at least the last week of the feast to seek for a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit. This week could be called “Pentecost Renewal Week” and could be made to coincide in Adventist churches with the traditional Spring “Spiritual Emphasis Week.” The disciples’ preparation for Pentecost can serve as a model for the Pentecost Renewal Week by reminding us of the need to prepare our hearts as did the disciples of old.

During the seven Sabbaths from Passover to Pentecost, pastors could deliver a series of sermons focusing on the redemptive accomplishments of Christ’s First Advent. Some topics, like the heavenly ministry of Jesus or the bestowal of spiritual gifts, are so rich in meaning and experience that they could be presented as a series of Pentecost sermons.

By taking time every year during the Pentecost season to deepen the understanding of vital aspects of Christ’s redemptive mission, we shall discover that the Feast offers an appropriate opportunity to lead Christians into a fuller understanding and experience of the great truths of the plan of salvation.

**NOTES TO CHAPTER 8**

1. Ellen G. White, *Redemption: Or the Teaching of Paul, and His Mission to the Gentiles* (Battle Creek, 1878), p. 65.
2. *The Seventh-day Adventist Commentary* (Washington, D. D., 1957), vol. 6, p. 134. Emphasis supplied.
3. Eduard Lohse “*Pentecoste*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol 6, p.47.
4. Origen, *Hexapla*, ed. Fridericus Field (Hildesheim, Germany, 1964), Leviticus 23:11. 15.
5. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 785.
6. Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York, 1986), p. 62).
7. Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* Mountain View, California, 1940), p. 39.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
9. Ellen G. White, “Pray for the Latter Rain,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* (March 2, 1897), p. 4.
10. “*Kataneo*,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. William F. Arnt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago, 1979), p. 415.
11. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, California, 1948), p. 416.