

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Our young people's Heritage

I would like to make a point of writing to our young people about the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread before those days come around once again. I trust that the adults will also find something worthwhile in this article, but I specifically wanted to write directly to our teens and pre-teens. In this article, I would like to show you that, even though you young people cannot yet partake of the actual ceremony with the adults each year, the Passover is still very, *very* important to *you*. Passover is an extremely important part of God's plan and it is a very important part of *your* heritage.

You will notice that I use the word "heritage" quite a lot in this article, so I think you should be clear on its meaning. There are five other words that have the same or similar meanings to the word "heritage." They are *inheritance*, *legacy*, *tradition*, *birthright* and *custom*. As we shall see, all five are relevant to the subject of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

But first, let us look back to the very first Passover. Can you imagine being a young Israelite in the land of Egypt 3,500 (or so) years ago, and experiencing the very first ever Passover that Israel kept? It would have been especially dramatic if you were a firstborn child! Only the blood of the slaughtered Passover lamb that had been painted onto the lintels and doorposts of your humble, Goshen home stood between you and certain death:

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover lamb. And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you. (Exodus 12:21-23)

If you were a firstborn child, you would have been in big trouble if your parents had not painted the blood on the door, or if you would have rebelliously belittled God's warning and complained, "I'm not waiting half the night to eat dinner! I'm not staying in! I'm going out with my friends!"

That first Passover was a unique one. There was no other Passover quite like it. It was a very dramatic one because of the Israelites' life-or-death reliance on the lambs' blood.

In the previous days and weeks before this night, God had been humbling the Egyptians by means of nine devastating plagues which He brought down upon them. Then came the tenth, which was the most awesome, when God Himself passed through Egypt and every firstborn human or animal not symbolically protected by one of these "gateways of lambs' blood" was slain:

And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. (Exodus 12:29-31)

Young people, please think about what happened here. To the firstborn, both young and old, that blood on the lintels and doorposts was a matter of life and death.

The years went by, and the meaning of the Passover (as well as they understood it at that time) was passed on to future generations. If we understand it rightly, the blood was not required on the door every year, but the Passover ceremony and the lamb sacrifice *were* required. As we now know so very well, the sacrificed Passover lambs pictured, symbolized and looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But it was also a look *back* – an ongoing reminder year-after-year of that miraculous delivery from Egypt. It looked forward to Jesus Christ and it looked backward to the origin of that miraculous escape from Egypt. God did not want the children to forget about His intervention. He did not want any of the succeeding generations of His people to forget about that first Passover, that first Night to be Much Observed, that first Feast of Unleavened Bread, and how the people of Israel were saved from slavery. God knew that the key to remembering His important issues was for the parents to continually teach their children through the annual observance of the Passover, the Night to be Much Observed, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and, of course, all of the other Holy Days. This is exactly what we parents have been given the responsibility of continuing in God's church today:

And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' So the people bowed their heads and worshiped. (Exodus 12:24-27)

The young people would ask these kinds of questions: "What do you mean by this service? What is the meaning and symbolism of the Passover? Please explain it to us!"

Our God is a great and caring God, even though He had to do this terrible thing; although it was absolutely necessary for this to happen – for so many Egyptian people to die. God really does care about the youth among His people. He was concerned about the young people among the Israelites in Egypt, He was very concerned about all the subsequent generations in all of Israel, and He is concerned about *you* too.

Although it is true that we should be constantly learning all through our lives, the best time to do the major portion of our learning is while we are still children. You young people need to be learning now about the love and concern God has for you. It is very beneficial for you to begin understanding and learning these things now, while you are still young. God's love for His young people is verified by other Feast of Unleavened Bread instructions that are detailed in the book of Exodus:

Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year. (Exodus 13:7-10)

It is important that God's young people know His Law. He gives us reminders every year, during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, of His divine deliverance of the children of Israel and, of course, the spiritual aspects of those events. But these things were not, and are not, just to be remembered during the Passover season. In everyday life, we need to ingrain God's Law, His way of life, and the lessons of His Holy Days into our lives. Yes, every other day of the year, in addition to the Passover and the Spring Holy Days.

God always intended His young people to learn these things and to be able to identify with this heritage which was to be passed along through generation after generation of the people of Israel.

To this day, the Jews still keep their version of the Passover. They do not fully understand the spiritual aspect of it, and their timing is a little off, but still, they have passed it down from year to year, from generation to generation, through parental example and teaching. We parents in the church of God have this same – nay, an even greater – responsibility:

You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year. And it shall be, when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as He swore to you and your fathers, and gives it to you, that you shall set apart to the LORD all that open the womb, that is, every firstborn that comes from an animal which you have; the males shall be the LORD'S. But every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb; and if you will not redeem it, then you shall break its neck. And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. (Exodus 13:10-13)

We do not need to get into all of the detail about the redemption process in this article, but I want you to see the level of concern and the accent God puts on His young people during the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread season, and that these concepts are to be passed on and remembered generation after generation. Continuing:

So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.' It shall be as a sign on your hand and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt." (Exodus 13:14-16)

God had great concern that this national and religious heritage – this inheritance – was passed on to each generation of the children of Israel. As Canadians, Americans, Britons, Frenchmen, South Africans, Australians, etc., we are citizens of modern Israel. As members of God's true church – no matter what our physical nationalities might be – we are citizens of *spiritual* Israel. God wanted the young people of ancient Israel to remember why they were where they were. That last sentence is strangely worded, but please read it again, because it means what it says. Once they had come out of Egypt, He wanted them to know *why* they were out Egypt, *how* they were out of Egypt, and *who* brought them out of Egypt. God wanted them to remember these important factors. He wanted them to remember that they had come out of slavery, and that it was He who had brought them out. By going over this history every year during Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, its repetition helped them stay relatively obedient to God and to continue to keep His Law and His way of life. Year after year, as long as they kept up this repetition and obedience, God's blessings and protection on them was ensured.

But Israel and its rulers seemed totally unable to remain faithful to God. During the time of the Judges, everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6, 21:25). And you know that the ways that *seem* right to men are the ways of foolishness and death (Proverbs 12:15, 14:12, 16:25)! Eventually, despite God's warnings through His servant Samuel, the Israelites rejected their great, special, unique heritage and God's personal rulership. They demanded a king. Why? So that they could be more like the neighbouring nations. So that they would not have to be different. How like us! Have we changed so very much from our Israelite forefathers?

So God gave them what they wanted. He gave kings to them. Did their lot improve? Not at all! Things went from bad to worse! Their kings were no improvement. Their first king, Saul, failed to be faithful. Even the great King David tottered between obedience and disobedience before learning his lessons. Solomon was the exact opposite to his father! After a promising start, Solomon traded the wonderful heritage of his nation and the matchless wisdom God had initially given him for the satisfaction of his lust for his numerous wives and concubines, many of them who participated in heathen religions and led him and the nation into idolatry.

Young people of God's church, please do not follow Solomon's example. Take a lesson from his mistakes. It is not worth the price you will have to pay if you reject God in order to satisfy your own pursuits for members of the opposite sex who have absolutely no interest in following God's way of life. God *will* provide the right spouse for you if you will just be patient and look in the right areas. Please do not get impatient and give up your precious heritage.

One of the major punishments for the sins of Solomon and his subjects was a huge split in Israel. After Solomon's death, God divided the twelve tribes into the "kingdom of Judah" (which also included parts of the tribes of Benjamin and Levi) in the south, and the "Kingdom of Israel" in the North. The southern Kingdom of Judah retained the temple and the valid priesthood. Its people became known as "Jews." The new, breakaway, northern kingdom retained the title "Israel," and was also, at a later date, nicknamed "Samaria" after one of its main cities. But although it was God who had arranged this split and who had given sovereignty over the northern territories to its inhabitants (I Kings 11:29-38), what is the first thing they did? They rejected their heritage! How? By replacing God's Holy Days with some of their own devising. They even went so far as to set up their own priesthood! (I Kings 12:25-33)

So the children of Israel were split into two different kingdoms, and even went to war with one other. In the same way that the people of the United States, Britain and France, in their civil, revolutionary and other wars did later, Israelite brothers were fighting and killing each other.

There ensued a great falling away in Israel. More and more, the people lost the truth of God, and they lost their spiritual inheritance. Actually, they did not *lose* it. More accurately, they downgraded its value in their own eyes to the point where they just threw it away. As time went on, the subsequent generations of Israel slackened their adherence to their heritage. Enticed by the examples of surrounding heathen nations, they gave up their precious inheritance. As you become familiar with the history of Old Testament Israel you will learn that they repeatedly rejected the heritage God had given them. Occasionally you may read of a relatively good king in Israel or Judah, who would obey God and cause his nation – including the children – to follow his example. Things would improve for a short while, but then the good king would die and another evil king would come in his place. This happened over and over again.

One of the reasons for this ongoing rejection of God's heritage, was that the people of Israel were very much the same as we are today in many respects; and especially in the way that they did not like being different. Not realizing that this difference from the world was a great blessing and was part of the wonderful heritage God had given them, they continually desired to be the same as everybody else out in the world. To be different was uncomfortable for them and they overlooked the great blessings they had received by being different. So they copied the things that the people in the world around them did. They began to go after the heathen gods of the surrounding nations; gods which were nothing more than carved lumps of metal, wood and stone. Maybe the Israelites were comfortable for a while with being and doing the same as the people in the world, but they were soon punished for it. Occasionally, when they came to the realization that they were being punished, they turned back to God – but this was usually as a last resort and very temporary.

God exercised an amazing amount of patience and mercy for His people. He kept forgiving them and delivering them out of their punishment. But eventually, it came to the point that their backsliding was happening so often that He sent them into captivity. The Kingdom of Israel went first; captured and exiled by the Assyrians, they were subsequently scattered throughout the western world and, except for a few, have never returned to their homeland. You would think that their brothers – the kings and citizens of the Kingdom of Judah – might have learnt a lesson from God's severe punishment on the northern kingdom. But, except for a few short periods, they did not.

It is true that Judah did boast a couple of good kings – notably Hezekiah and Josiah – who brought the Jews out of their sin, even though temporarily. It is interesting to note that the first thing both kings did when they came into power and realized that their nation was being punished by God, is that they started keeping His Holy Days (II Chronicles 30:1-31:21; 34:1-4; II Kings 23:21-23). Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were the Feasts that they brought back first, and God blessed them for doing so. As you can see by these examples, if we have faith in God, do what He says, and keep His Holy Days, then He will richly bless us.

Nevertheless, as soon as Hezekiah was dead, Judah reverted to idolatry and disobedience. A brief period of obedience and faithfulness came back with Josiah, but again, as soon as he died, the people fell back into disobedience. They continued to reject God and the heritage He had blessed them with, so He sent them into captivity in Babylon. After seventy years of exile, some of the exiled Jews returned to their homeland. But, no matter how hard they tried to make it so, their nation was never the same again. They bounced from one despotic set of rulers to another and, even though they were given a certain level of autonomy in the mid twentieth century, they are *still* plagued by their ancient neighbours.

To this very day, despite the fact that they have maintained some of their heritage, the Jews still do not have the total truth, although, like so many others, they *think* they do. In a perusal of the publications of the Jewish Theological Seminary, one of several organizations that teach the beliefs of the Jews, we find that they are big on tradition and legend, but sadly very little of it is based on the truth of God.

Today we are in the opening years of twenty-first century, but believe it or not, we are still in the very same era that the apostles were in. Like them, our primary emphasis as we approach the Passover each year is on Jesus Christ, on His sacrifice, and on the symbolism of unleavened bread which we eat during the seven days which follow the Passover day. Although bread and wine were likely included in the Old Testament Passover dinners, by fulfilling the symbolism of the lamb sacrifice, Jesus Christ transferred the accent from the lamb and on to these two symbols – the bread and the wine – which, as you know, represent His broken body and shed blood.

Only the adult, baptized members in God's church are permitted to attend the Passover service. But what about you young people? Because you cannot enjoy full participation in the Passover service, does that mean to say that you are not part of God's inheritance? No, it certainly does not! You are not cut off from it. You definitely are included in it. There are many benefits in store for you if you will continue to maintain a proper reverence for the Passover, and if you will faithfully continue to keep all the feasts of God. When you are old enough and when you are baptized, you will be able to keep the Passover.

God has made this inheritance available to you in a very much more meaningful way even than He did for the young Israelites of the Old Testament. Most children dearly love their grandparents and many have favourite uncles too. As the children of God's children, you may be likened to God's grandchildren and the beloved nephews and nieces of Jesus Christ! As such, you are very close to God's heart. He is very interested in you and all the future generations of young people who keep His ways.

Your parents in many respects are like those few obedient kings and people of Israel and Judah. With God's help and strength, your parents have stood firm for His way of life, and it is their job to preserve this heritage and to pass it down to you. Again, with God's help, the various congregations of His church continue in this heritage. We keep the Feasts of God which picture His plan. We strive to understand God's will, to keep His laws and His way of life the best we possibly can. Recent church history over the past ten years has proved that if *we* give up on these things, the chances are that *you* will give up on them too.

Going all the way back again into the Old Testament, God introduced His inheritance to His people through the great leaders, Abraham and Moses, and He continued promoting His heritage over the years through a few prophets and faithful kings. God was not willing to let it be forgotten. Of course, Jesus Christ in His human lifetime built on that same heritage. It was, in fact, His heritage. He started it way back when He was the LORD of the Old Testament, and for His brief human lifetime He kept it, maintained it, and continued it. After His death, resurrection and ascension to heaven, His disciples and apostles continued to keep His heritage and to pass it down to their children.

Coming down to our own generations, God finishes what He begins. He builds upon His own foundations. He does not dig them up and start all over again! This is not Old Testament stuff! This is the "stuff" for the New Testament era today. I do not know how many of you young people will remember Herbert W. Armstrong, who died in January 1986. He is the man that rediscovered God's heritage and, with God's help, restored it to the church. This is one of the reasons why we play one of his broadcasts every so often. We do not worship Herbert Armstrong! But we do recognize the fact that he was the one who rediscovered God's heritage and brought it to us.

You are all probably aware that, a decade or so ago, the majority of the church went the way of Israel and Judah by once again rejecting this precious heritage of God, His Holy Days, and His Sabbaths. Your parents and the remnant of the church of God at this time have not turned away from it. We have not rejected it. We want to pass it on to you. But along with a valuable inheritance come associated responsibilities. There are responsibilities for the parents, and there are responsibilities for you young people too:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth." And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:1-4)

What God is telling the parents here, through the apostle Paul, is that we must pass this heritage – the truth of God – on to you children, and for you children to keep it, value it, work with it, and to listen to your parents. As they follow Jesus Christ, you must follow them. God wants the best for you! He wants you to have successful and happy futures. He wants you to live long on the earth.

So there you have it: the wonderful, precious heritage of God's people. Just because you are not taking the Passover at this time does not mean that you are not to be counted amongst God's people. You *are* God's people. You are God's young people – to be likened to His grandchildren. He loves you dearly.

The heritage of God's people is spelled out in all of God's Feasts and Holy Days, beginning with the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Young people of God's church, your spiritual roots are deep and rich. God will bless you greatly for continuing in your precious heritage.

*John Plunkett
Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada
Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada
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