

Just another night?

This dinner is not just another dinner! This evening is not just another evening! This evening is a *very special* evening to God!

This evening is a Night to be Much Observed!

The purpose of this article is to discuss with you "the five W's of the Night to be Much Observed" - the "why", the "when", the "who", the "where" and the "what." And I've added one "H"... the "how."

Why?

Our first question is "why?" Why do we keep this observance? Most people outside of God's church have never heard of it. But it is clearly commanded as an important part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread activities. Let us set the stage with the amazing events of the first Passover night, and the first Night to be Much Observed :

And he [Pharaoh] called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as ye have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as ye have said, and be gone; and bless me also. And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men. And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders. And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.

And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual. Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations. (Exodus 12:31-42)

Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron, and told them and the other Israelites to leave Egypt to serve the Eternal. This they had repeatedly asked to do previously and had been turned down. He now gave them freedom to take their sheep and cattle – again, as they had previously requested and had been denied. He told them to get out and, surprisingly, asked a blessing for himself! The Egyptian people were anxious to get the Israelites on their way as soon as possible. They feared that God would have wiped out all of the Egyptians if they didn't free the Israelites immediately.

The Israelites took their unleavened dough and their bread-making equipment wrapped in their cloaks and shawls. They asked the Egyptians for silver, gold and clothing, according to Moses' instructions. God had caused the Egyptians to give the Israelites all they asked for. This brought financial ruin to the Egyptians.

The Exodus began, and the Israelites – six hundred thousand men plus women and children – travelled from Rameses to Succoth. A "mixed multitude" travelled with them too. Perhaps this was a large group of non-Israelites of various nationalities who had also gained their freedom. Perhaps some of them were even Egyptians who had recognized that Israel had the benefit of having the true God on their side. Very many sheep and cattle were also driven along with them. At mealtimes they baked unleavened cakes with the dough mentioned above. Because of the speed at which they were thrust out of Egypt, they hadn't had time to prepare any other food. After their sojourn of four hundred and thirty years – probably to the very night – they left Egypt.

This special night, the night when the mighty God freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, is a night to be much observed to God. This is God's night – not man's! This extra special night is to be observed by Israelites (both physical and spiritual) throughout their generations – forever!

But *why* do we in God's New Testament church keep this Night to be Much Observed? Because, despite our physical nationalities, we have been made spiritual Israelites, and this observance is commanded forever! Yes, we keep it because God commands it. But everything God commands is for a reason, and is virtually always for the benefit of mankind. So what are the reasons for this command?

The reason for the Night to be Much Observed is bound up in the reasons for the Days of Unleavened Bread generally:

And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. This day came ye out in the month Abib. (Exodus 13:3-4)

God told the Israelites through Moses that they were to remember this day on which they came out of their bondage in Egypt, and that it was by God's strength that they were freed. He reminds them that no leavened bread should be eaten. This day in the month of Abib was the day they were to come out of Egypt.

And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year. (Exodus 13:8-10)

We are to teach our children that these things are done because of the way God brought us out of physical and spiritual Egypt. The Days of Unleavened Bread and the Night to be Much Observed are a visible sign that we are keepers and preachers of God's law, and are reminders that, by His great strength, God brought His people out of physical and spiritual Egypt. For these reasons God's people are to keep these ordinances at the commanded time every year.

The marginal reference of Exodus 12:42 in the King James Version gives the alternate translation of "a night of observations". The Revised Standard Version calls it "a night of watching." The Modern Language Version says "that was a night when the Lord kept watch to bring them out of Egypt; it is the night in which through all their generations the Israelites shall keep watch in the presence of the Eternal."

Although Herbert Armstrong used to advise us not to "sermonize" at our Night to be Much Observed dinners, this clearly is an evening when we should be reflecting on the vastly important things that happened on that night – both in the Old Testament when God freed physical Israel from physical Egypt, and in the New Testament when God freed spiritual Israel from spiritual Egypt.

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ had been crucified and buried by the sunset which ended Abib 14 in the year of 31 AD. Think about this! That Night to be Much Observed which began Abib 15 in the year 31 AD was the first night in the whole of eternity that our Creator was not alive. A member of the God Family was dead!

When?

Our second question is "when?" When should we keep this Night to be Much Observed?

Exodus 12:42 says that it should be kept on the same night that Israel was freed from Egypt, and that, as we know, was the night which began the 15th day of the month Abib:

It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.

It was on this night in the month Abib that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. But which night was it?

And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians. (Numbers 33:3)

The Israelites left Rameses on the night of the fifteenth day of Abib, the first of God's sacred months. It was the night after the Passover night (on which they were to remain indoors – Exodus 12:22), and they left displaying victory and rejoicing before their previous captors.

Where?

Our third question is "where?" Where should the Night to be Much Observed be kept?

Although we are strongly commanded to keep this Night to be Much Observed, and we are clearly commanded when to keep it, there is no specific instruction as to where it should be kept.

The first observers of this night kept some of the time on the road out of Egypt and perhaps some time in their homes in preparation for their departure. Herbert Armstrong, when he first realized that Christians should be keeping this night, recommended that we keep it at home, along with another family or two. This is what most church families have done throughout the years. There were a few years when some congregations of God's church kept the Night to be Much Observed all together at various restaurants. We have not continued this as a regular practice – perhaps because there is too much danger of turning this very special night into "just another dinner".

However, if you do wish to keep the Night to be Much Observed at a restaurant, here are a few recommendations:

- Keep the group reasonably small. It becomes "just another restaurant dinner" if the group is too large.
- A quiet, private room is a must! You can't talk properly about the things you should be talking about if you're surrounded by someone else's party, perhaps noisily (and smokily!) celebrating a birthday or a promotion!
- The organizers should double-check the menu to ensure that none of the dishes contain leavened or unclean products.

Who?

Question number four is "who?" Two questions arise here: Who should attend the night to be much observed? And, if we are hosting, whom should we invite?

All of us who are able to attend Sabbath services regularly shouldn't have any trouble participating. Some shut-ins may perhaps be able to attend a dinner if they feel up to it. If you are hosting, and you are considering inviting one of our shut-ins, please remember that he or she may require some special arrangements. Unless absolutely necessary, it is not advisable to spend the evening alone or just with your own family. It is a very special occasion, and sharing it with at least one other family tends to make it more special.

Over the years we have gone back and forth a few times with the decision as to whether non-member spouses (or other family members) should attend the Night to be Much Observed dinner. As it stands today, non-member spouses are to be welcomed. However, a member whose spouse does not attend church is usually the best judge as to whether that spouse will be comfortable or uncomfortable at such a gathering. Although, as we have said that there should be no "sermonizing" at Night to be Much Observed dinners, there may very well arise some conversation on spiritual subjects – and quite rightly so. We certainly should take the comfort of any non-member guests into consideration in our conversations, but not to the detriment of the extra-special nature and spiritual purpose of this evening. It is up to the church member to discuss this with his (or her) non-member spouse well in advance in order to spare him (or her) any unnecessary embarrassment or discomfort.

At this point, and still under the heading of "who", I would like to say a few words on "the fine art of inviting and of being invited."

If you are not hosting and you haven't been invited out yet, please don't be upset or offended. At the time of writing, my family hasn't been invited out yet either! There are lots of people who normally host who rarely or never get invited out. People assume that they must be hosting. What tends to happen so often is that a host asks three or four people who happen to have already been invited out by someone else, and they then assume that all the potential guests are taken! That, of course, probably isn't true. They had just asked the wrong ones!

If you are hosting, please follow the principle of God's "way of give" when you're choosing people to invite. Don't just choose people who will (for instance) satisfy your conversational needs or standards. If you have little children, invite another family with little children so that they too can enjoy the evening. If you have teenaged children, invite another family with teens.

Consider, not who it would be nice to have over (*way of get!*), but rather who it would be nice to *give* an invitation to, to share this special evening with, and who is needy in this respect.

Also, please think when you are inviting, "This family could probably host, so if I invite them will I be contributing to a host shortage?"

What?

Finally, our fifth and last "W" question, "What?" What can each of us do to contribute to making this the extra-special evening that God meant it to be?

Think! Plan! Be creative!

For those who are not hosting, help your host as much as you can. Remember that, just like you, the host family will have been very busy de-leavening, and will have had the additional work of making their home ready to receive you and their other guests. So please don't allow your host to provide the whole meal and clean up as well! *Insist* on an equitable sharing of the costs and preparation of the meal, and in the clean-up afterwards. As we have two church services the following day, we all will need a good night's rest to get ourselves ready for them.

Men! This includes us too! Why should we be allowed the luxury of retiring to the library with our brandy, our cigars [joking, of course!] and our oh-so-spiritual conversation while the ladies do all the washing-up? Remember that, in most cases, it was the ladies who did most of the work in the preparation of the meal. The least we can do is to help with the clean-up. So men! Let's roll up our sleeves, get stuck in, and show them how its done!

How?

Perhaps we should add an "H" to "the five W's." The "how." How should the Night to be Much Observed be kept?

For the answer to this question, we should remember two things:

One, that this evening begins a Holy Day: the first Holy Day of God's sacred year.

The second thing that we should remember is the vast importance and solemnity of what happened on this night two thousand years ago. Jesus Christ was laid in his grave. For the first time in all eternity, a member of the God Family was dead, inactive and out of the picture for three days and nights! In some respects, this short period of time must have seemed like an eternity. Can you imagine what might have happened to the world – what Satan might have done – if God the Father and His holy angels had not been around to keep things stable?

God was dead!

While it is true that Jesus Christ died so that you and I might have eternal life, and this certainly is a cause for great rejoicing, it is not a night for partying. Yes, it is the beginning of a Feast day and we should feast, rejoice, and enjoy ourselves. But our rejoicing should not like that of the world with excesses of noise and alcohol.

Herbert Armstrong strongly recommended that each Night to be Much Observed, we go around the table and give each member or member couple time to explain the miraculous circumstances that led to their being freed from the Egypt of sin and the world.

But what about the children? They're not going to rejoice too much with this kind of conversation! The scriptures reveal that our children should participate in a proper way in the celebrations of the Night to be Much Observed and the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

And thou shalt *shew thy son* in that day, saying, this is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year. (Exodus 13:8-10)

The children should listen to at least some of the accounts of conversion being described by the adults. It might perhaps be a good idea to seat the guests in approximate age order with the oldest at the top of the table and the youngest at the other end (as long as the younger children do not need constant supervision, of course). This way, each person will be sitting next to or someone with whom they likely share common interests.

So there they are: "the five W's and one H of the Night to be Much Observed: the "why", the "when", the "where", the "who", the "what" and the "how." I pray that this year, all of you will have an extra-special Night to be Much Observed. But please remember that this is not just another dinner!

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