

Passover and the Christian

The Passover was instituted by God as an old covenant sacrament. Prior to the institution of the Lord's Supper under the new covenant, the Passover was the sacred ordinance by which a believer continued in the communion of the saints, in fellowship with the old covenant Church. All Jews were commanded by God to observe the Passover in remembrance of the great Passover event during the days of Moses in Egypt. The New Testament helps us correctly understand the spiritual meaning of the Passover. In this study, we will examine the establishment of the Passover, its true spiritual meaning, and its continued relevance for Christians today.¹

The Lamb of God Foreshadowed in the Old Testament

Sound principles of Biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) require us to interpret the Old Testament through the increased light that God has given to His people through the New Testament. The Old Testament is the New in seed form; the New Testament is a fuller revelation of the Old. Before embarking on a study of the Passover from the Old Testament, we ought to be aware of the Christological significance of the Passover. Let us begin by considering how the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was the Lamb of God foreshadowed by the Passover sacrifice in the Old Testament.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He repeated, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). The apostle Paul refers to Christ as "our Passover" who "was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7).

In Revelation, the last book of the Bible, the apostle John looked and beheld that in the "midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev. 5:6). The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders "fell down before the Lamb" (Rev. 5:8). An innumerable number of angels say with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12). "And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I [John] heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev. 5:13).

The unregenerate are described as seeking to hide "from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" (Rev. 6:16). The "great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues" are then described "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands," "crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev. 7:9-10). "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). God assures us that in heaven "the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them [all the elect] and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Rev.

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7:17). The brethren “overcame him [the great dragon, Satan] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Rev. 12:9-11).

Believers names are written “in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). The Lamb stood on Mount Zion “and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Rev. 14:1). “These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb” (Rev. 14:4).

The bride of Christ is called to make herself ready for the “marriage of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:7). “And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. . . . ‘Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” (Rev. 19:8-9).

John tells us that the wall of the city, New Jerusalem, “had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:14). In the New Jerusalem, there is no physical temple, “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22). “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light” (Rev. 21:23).

John saw “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22:1). “And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him” (Rev. 22:3).

As we have seen from a quick overview of many of the occurrences of “the Lamb” as a title for Christ in the Gospel of John and Revelation, the Lamb of God is a common title for Christ Jesus in the New Testament. This Christological title hearkens back to the Passover, which we will now consider in depth.

The Old Testament

Exodus—The Institution of the Passover

The Passover was first instituted in Exodus, chapter 12. The original institution of the Passover was rich with symbolic, typological language, foreshadowing Christ who was to come:

12:1-6 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, “This month *shall be* your beginning of months; it *shall be* the first month of the year to you. “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: ‘On the tenth *day* of this month every man shall take for himself **a lamb**, according to the house of *his* father, a lamb for a household. ‘And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take *it* according to the number of the persons; according to each man’s need you shall make your count for the lamb. ‘Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take *it* from the sheep or from the goats. ‘Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight.

Every man was commanded to take *a lamb without blemish*. Here we see the first typological reference to Christ; Peter teaches that we are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:19).

12:7-11 'And **they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.** 'Then they shall **eat the flesh** on that night; roasted in fire, **with unleavened bread** and with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it. 'Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire -- its head with its legs and its entrails. 'You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. 'And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. **It is the LORD's Passover.**

Much of the imagery here foreshadows Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper. As we will see later, in the Lord's Supper, new covenant believers are called to eat bread and drink wine, as symbols of Christ's body (flesh) and blood.

12:12 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I *am* the LORD.

12:13 '**Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.**

Here we find the spiritual meaning of the Passover. Why did God command His people to eat the flesh of an unblemished lamb with unleavened bread, and why did God command them to put blood on the two doorposts and above the door of their homes? God intended by these symbolic acts to inculcate an important spiritual truth in the minds of His people: Those whose sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb shall not see death, but those who are not redeemed by the blood of the Lamb shall perish eternally.

12:14-17 'So **this day** shall be to you **a memorial**; and **you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations.** You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. 'Seven days you shall eat **unleavened bread**. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. 'On the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but *that* which everyone must eat -- that only may be prepared by you. 'So you shall observe **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

The Passover began with the sacrifice at twilight and then continued for the following seven days as the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Hebrews were commanded by God to observe the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread as a feast throughout their generations as an everlasting ordinance. We will see later how this ordinance still endures through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Just as water baptism has replaced circumcision as the sacred ordinance by which a person enters the Church, so also the Lord's Supper has replaced the Passover as the ordinance by which a believer continues to maintain fellowship in the Church. However, just as with circumcision, the spiritual meaning of the Passover endures. At its heart, spiritual circumcision and baptism have the same essential meaning, and, likewise, the Passover and the Lord's Supper teach the same spiritual truth.

12:18-20 'In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. 'For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether *he is* a stranger or a native of the land. 'You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.' "

The Passover began at night and was then continued as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was to be observed for seven days. Here we see how a holy day and holy week were to be observed, by holding a holy convocation (the worship of God) and observing such holy time as a day of rest by abstaining from worldly employments (work). The Passover was observed during the first month of the Hebrew year, which was Abib (which falls in March or April of our calendar).

The Jews kept the holy day and week of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread because God had commanded this observance in His word, as "a memorial," "a feast" to be kept throughout their generations as an "everlasting ordinance." Far different is Christendom's observance of Lent, "holy week" (from Palm Sunday through Maundy Thursday and Good Friday to Easter), and Easter. "Holy week" and Easter are modeled after the Jewish observance of the Passover. Easter's date changes each calendar year but is tied to the observance of the Jewish Passover in March or April. Where in the Holy Scriptures did God command His people to observe a Christian *holy week* or resurrection Sunday called *Easter*? It is nowhere to be found, as this is a human tradition, a manmade invention, the creation of the Roman Catholic church.

Christ says that we are to obey all things which He commanded (Matt. 28:20); we are to live by every word of God (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4). As we will see later, Christ, in the New Testament, commanded that Christians observe the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him. Christ commanded that we remember His death by observing the Lord's Supper, not the annual *Good Friday* invented by the Roman Catholic church. Christ commanded that we remember His resurrection by observing the Lord's Supper on the Lord's Day (the first day of the week), not by observing the annual *Easter* feast day invented by the Roman Catholic church. God's Word knows nothing of a Christian holy week, Good Friday, or Easter; God never told His people to remember these events from the life of Christ on a particular day or week each year. On the contrary, the Lord's Supper is the "memorial" and "feast"² that God has commanded Christians to keep throughout their generations as a holy ordinance. The Lord's Day, Sunday, is the holy time in which Christians are to rest from their work and observe a holy convocation to the Lord.

John Calvin comments regarding Exodus 12:1-20:

Since, then, the wrath of God, which then like a deluge covered the whole of Egypt, left the Israelites untouched, He instituted a memorial of His *passing-over*, whereby they had been preserved in safety amidst the public destruction of the whole land. He is also said to have passed-over the Egyptians, whom He deprived of their first-born; but after a different manner, because He spared His chosen ones, as if they had been far away, or protected in places of sure refuge.

² Christ said to do this in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25), which makes the Lord's Supper a memorial; Christ instituted the eating of bread and the drinking of wine, which makes it a feast.

Moses continues to write in Exodus 12:21-22:

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.

John Calvin comments,

For it was necessary that the Israelites should first be reminded, that by the expiation of the sacrifice, they were delivered from the plague, and their houses preserved untouched; and, secondly, that the sacrifice would profit them, only if its conspicuous sign existed among them. We elsewhere see that **the Paschal lamb was a type of Christ**, who by His death propitiated His Father, so that we should not perish with the rest of the world. But, already of old time, He desired to bear witness to the ancients under the Law, that He would not be reconciled to them otherwise than through the sacrifice of a victim. And there is no doubt that by this visible symbol He raised up their minds to that true and heavenly Exemplar, whom it would be absurd and profane to separate from the ceremonies of the law. For what could be more childish than to offer the blood of an animal as a protection against the hand of God, or to seek from this a ground of safety? God, then, shows that He spares the Israelites on no other condition but that of sacrifice; from which it follows, that the death of Christ was set before them in this ordinance, which alone constituted the difference between them and the Egyptians.

But at the same time He taught that no advantage was to be expected from the blood poured forth, without the sprinkling; not that the external and visible sprinkling produced any good effect, but because by this familiar rite it was useful that the ignorant should be brought to perceive the truth, and that they might know that what was put before them visibly must be spiritually fulfilled. It is notorious from the testimony of Peter (1 Peter 1:2) that our souls are sprinkled with the blood of Christ by the Spirit. This was typified by the bunch of hyssop, which herb possesses great cleansing power, and therefore, was often used in other sacrifices also, as we shall hereafter see in the proper places.

Moses continues to teach in Exodus 12:23:

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*.

John Calvin explains,

He forbids them to go out during the night, lest they should mix themselves with the Egyptians, but commands them to keep quietly under the protection of the blood. By this sign they were admonished that they also were exposed to destruction, if they did not separate themselves from the unbelievers under the safeguard of the blood. Afterwards the promise is added, that, provided this were done, the angel would pass them over, and inflict no injury upon them, because God would acknowledge the houses so marked as His own. By this, it is again repeated, that they should alone be safe by the blessing of the blood, who should not neglect to sprinkle themselves with it; because **faith alone confers on us the salvation which is obtained by the slaughter of the**

victim. The angel, whom God had delegated for afflicting Egypt, is here undoubtedly called "the destroyer;" and, although He often executes His judgments by evil angels, it is to be gathered from other passages that this was one of the elect angels, who also was the minister of the people's deliverance under Christ as the Head.

Moses continues in Exodus 12:24-28:

"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. Then the children of Israel went away and did so; **just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.**

Again, we see that God explicitly commanded the Jews to observe the Passover forever as an annual observance. It is an important Biblical principle that we should only worship God in the way He has commanded.

Moses continues in Exodus 12:29-30:

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.

Calvin comments,

Lest the hand of God should be hidden in this miracle, as well in the preservation of the people as in taking vengeance upon the Egyptians, Moses sets forth its power by many circumstances. For he both relates that the destruction took place at midnight, which was the time prescribed by God, and then adds, that all the first-born of the land were smitten, from the son of the king to the son of the captive in the dungeon. It is thus that he indicates proverbially the most abject persons, as he had said before, "unto the first-born of the maidservant that is behind the mill." For it could only be by an extraordinary miracle that this calamity could affect every house without exception, at the same hour, especially when it extended even to the animals. *Thirdly*, he recounts that all the Egyptians were aroused suddenly, and manifestly convinced that the God of Israel was angry with them. *Fourthly*, that Pharaoh humbly prayed of Moses to lead forth the people in haste; no, that he even importunately thrust them out.

Moses wrote in Exodus 12:31-36:

Then he [Pharaoh] 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. "Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We *shall* all *be* dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their

shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them *what they requested*. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Calvin notes,

It is not probable that God's servants were recalled into the presence of Pharaoh; but the sense of this passage must be sought for in the prediction of Moses. Pharaoh, therefore, is said to have called them, when, by sending to them his chief courtiers, he compelled their departure. And this is sufficiently proved by the context, because it is immediately added, that the Israelites were by the Egyptians compelled to go out: in haste. Therefore, although Pharaoh never should have seen Moses from the time that he threatened him with death if he came to him again, there is nothing absurd in saying that he called for him when he sent his nobles to him with his command. The perturbation of an alarmed and anxious person is expressed to the life in these words—"Rise up, get you forth, both you and your children; go, serve the Lord; also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said." For he takes no less precaution lest he should give any occasion for delay, than he had before been diligent in bargaining. While, then, he hastily cuts off all objections, the change in the man is evident, for the same God who had before hardened his iron heart has now broken it. Hence, too, that cry—the signal of despair—"We shall all be dead men;" hence, too, their readiness to give willingly of their substance, and to dress up in spoils those whom they had pillaged before. Nor indeed does he without reason repeat that this favor proceeded from divine inspiration, since there would never have been such liberality in robbers as willingly to give up whatever precious things their houses possessed, and to give them to the Israelites, now ready to depart, whom they knew to be justly hostile to them on account of so many injuries. And that the children of Israel should be so prompt to obey, who before had been either slow, or inconstant, or sullen, or rebellious, was brought about by the guidance of the Spirit, who turned their hearts in a moment; since God well knew how to dispose opportunely all the springs of action.

Moses adds in Exodus 12:37-49:

Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds—a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night of solemn observance to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the LORD, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. "But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. "A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it.

"In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. "And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land. For no uncircumcised person shall eat it. "One law shall be for the native-born and for the stranger who dwells among you."

Calvin comments,

He shows that the Israelites have good cause for sacrificing to God with a solemn ceremony year by year forever, and for celebrating the memory of that night; and that the Passover was instituted in token of their gratitude. But this admonition was very useful, in order that the Israelites should retain the legitimate use of this solemn feast-day, and that it might not grow into a mere cold ceremony, as is often the case; but that rather they might profitably, and to the advancement of their piety, exercise themselves in this emblem of their redemption. At the same time, he teaches that this so inestimable a benefit was not to be celebrated in one, or two, or three generations, but that as long as the people should remain it was worthy of eternal remembrance, and that it might never be forgotten, the Passover was to be sacredly observed.

Moreover we must remark, that the generations of the ancient people were brought to an end by the coming of Christ; because the shadows of the Law ceased when the state of the Church was renewed, and the Gentiles were gathered into the same body.

Moses concludes Exodus, chapter 12, with these words:

Thus all the children of Israel did; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies. (12:50-51)

John Calvin notes,

Moses concludes, from the obedience of the people, that nothing was done without the command and guidance of God; from which it is more clearly manifest that He was the sole author of their deliverance.

So also Christians today should do nothing in God's worship "without the command and guidance of God." This principle has been referred to as the regulative principle of worship—that believers are to worship God only in the way that He has prescribed in His Word. More broadly, this principle is known as *sola scriptura*—Scripture alone is the basis for what Christians are to believe and practice. Scripture alone is sufficient for the beliefs and practices, faith and worship, of Christ's Church. This principle destroys all the traditions and inventions of men (Matt. 15:9; Mark 7:8; Col. 2:8). The Great Commission calls us as Christians to obey all that God commanded us in His Word (Matt. 28:20). We are forbidden from adding to or taking away from what God has commanded His people to believe, obey, and observe:

Deuteronomy 4:2: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."

Deuteronomy 12:32: "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

Revelation 22:18-19: "For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.

Jesus taught that God the Father is seeking true worshippers who "will worship the Father in spirit and truth"; "those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:22-24). The true worship of God is based on obedience to God's truth—obeying what God has commanded and neither adding to nor taking away from what He has prescribed. The prophet Samuel said: "Has the LORD as *great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:22). To follow the traditions and commandments of men, to follow man's inventions, is foolish and vain (Matt. 15:9).

The Passover throughout the rest of the Old Testament

Later, in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, we read more regarding the Passover.

In Exodus 34:25, the Jews were instructed, "You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, nor shall the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover be left until morning."

In Leviticus 23:1-7, they were reminded of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as holy time:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these *are* My feasts. 'Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day *is* a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work *on it*; *it is* the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. 'These *are* the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.

'On the fourteenth *day* of the first month at twilight *is* the LORD's Passover. 'And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. 'But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day *shall be* a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work *on it*."

In Numbers 9:1-14, two years after the Hebrews had come out of the land of Egypt, we again read of God's instructions to Moses regarding the keeping of the Passover:

Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: "Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. "On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time. According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it."

So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month, at twilight, in the Wilderness of

Sinai; **according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did.**

Now there were *certain* men who were defiled by a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day; and they came before Moses and Aaron that day. And those men said to him, "*We became* defiled by a human corpse. Why are we kept from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the children of Israel?" And Moses said to them, "Stand still, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you." Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or *is* far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD's Passover. 'On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 'They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it.

'But the man who *is* clean and is not on a journey, and ceases to keep the Passover, that same person shall be cut off from among his people, because he did not bring the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. 'And if a stranger dwells among you, and would keep the LORD's Passover, he must do so according to the rite of the Passover and according to its ceremony; you shall have one ordinance, both for the stranger and the native of the land.' "

Again, we read in Numbers 28:16:

'On the fourteenth day of the first month *is* the Passover of the LORD. 'And on the fifteenth day of this month *is* the feast; unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days.

In Numbers 33:1-4, we read a summary of the history of the Exodus, which includes the Passover:

These *are* the journeys of the children of Israel, who went out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron. Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD. And these *are* their journeys according to their starting points: They departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians. For the Egyptians were burying all *their* firstborn, whom the LORD had killed among them. Also on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.

The last book of the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, is a second giving of the law. Here the Passover is revisited in Deuteronomy 16:1-8:

Observe the month of Abib [March/April], and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. "Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name. "You shall eat no leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, *that is*, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

"And no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall *any* of the meat which you sacrifice the first day at twilight remain overnight until morning.

"You may not sacrifice the Passover within any of your gates which the LORD your God gives you; "but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide, there you shall sacrifice the Passover at twilight, at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. "And you shall roast and eat *it* in the place which the LORD your God chooses, and in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents. "Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there *shall be* a sacred assembly to the LORD your God. You shall do no work *on it*.

Here we are told with more specificity that the Passover sacrifice was to be made at sunset and was then to be followed by the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to include six days of eating unleavened bread and to culminate with a sacred assembly, a worship service, on the seventh day.

In Joshua 5:10-12, we read of what the children of Israel did after Joshua circumcised the children of Israel who had been born during the wilderness years:

Now the children of Israel camped in Gilgal, and kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight on the plains of Jericho. And they ate of the produce of the land on the day after the Passover, unleavened bread and parched grain, on the very same day. Then the manna ceased on the day after they had eaten the produce of the land; and the children of Israel no longer had manna, but they ate the food of the land of Canaan that year.

In 2 Chronicles 30:1-5, we read of King Hezekiah's reformation, in which he called the people to observe the Passover in accordance with God's command. This celebration of the Passover reunited the northern and southern tribes in temple worship:

And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and also wrote letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel. For the king and his leaders and all the assembly in Jerusalem had agreed to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at the regular time, because a sufficient number of priests had not consecrated themselves, nor had the people gathered together at Jerusalem. And the matter pleased the king and all the assembly. So they resolved to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem, **since they had not done *it* for a long *time* in the *prescribed* manner.**

We read of the Passover celebration in 2 Chronicles 30:15-18:

Now many people, a very great assembly, gathered at Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month. They arose and took away the altars that *were* in Jerusalem, and they took away all the incense altars and cast *them* into the Brook Kidron. Then they slaughtered the Passover *lamb*s on the fourteenth *day* of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought the burnt offerings to the house of the LORD. They stood in their place according to their custom, according to the Law of Moses the man of God; the priests

sprinkled the blood *received* from the hand of the Levites. For *there were* many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover *lambs* for everyone *who was* not clean, to sanctify *them* to the LORD. For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD provide atonement for everyone *who* prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though *he is* not *cleansed* according to the purification of the sanctuary." And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people. So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, *singing* to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments.

In 2 Kings 23:21-23, we read of King Josiah's reformation, which included a call to keep the Passover as the Lord had commanded:

Then the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as *it is* written in this Book of the Covenant." Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the LORD in Jerusalem.

A parallel account of King Josiah's celebration of the Passover appears in 2 Chronicles 35:1-19:

Now Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem, and they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* on the fourteenth *day* of the first month. And he set the priests in their duties and encouraged them for the service of the house of the LORD.

Then he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to the LORD: "Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. *It shall* no longer *be* a burden on *your* shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel. "Prepare *yourselves* according to your fathers' houses, according to your divisions, following the written instruction of David king of Israel and the written instruction of Solomon his son. "And stand in the holy *place* according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of your brethren the *lay* people, and *according to* the division of the father's house of the Levites. "So slaughter the Passover *offerings*, consecrate yourselves, and prepare *them* for your brethren, **that they may do according to the word of the LORD** by the hand of Moses."

Then Josiah gave the *lay* people lambs and young goats from the flock, all for Passover *offerings* for all who were present, to the number of thirty thousand, as well as three thousand cattle; these *were* from the king's possessions. And his leaders gave willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiyah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover *offerings* two thousand six hundred *from the flock*, and three hundred cattle. Also Conaniah, his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave to the Levites for Passover *offerings* five thousand *from the flock* and five hundred cattle.

So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their places, and the Levites in their divisions, according to the king's command. And they slaughtered the Passover *offerings*; and the priests sprinkled *the blood* with their hands, while the Levites skinned

the animals. Then they removed the burnt offerings that *they* might give them to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the *lay* people, to offer to the LORD, as *it is* written in the Book of Moses. And so *they did* with the cattle. Also they roasted the Passover offerings with fire according to the ordinance; but the *other* holy offerings they boiled in pots, in caldrons, and in pans, and divided *them* quickly among all the *lay* people.

Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, *were busy* in offering burnt offerings and fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron.

And the singers, the sons of Asaph, *were* in their places, according to the command of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer. Also the gatekeepers were at each gate; they did not have to leave their position, because their brethren the Levites prepared portions for them.

So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah.

And the children of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.

There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.

In Ezra 6:19-22, after the Jews had been freed from the Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the Temple had been completed, the Passover was once again observed:

And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth *day* of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them *were ritually* clean. And they slaughtered the Passover *lambs* for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves.

Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel. And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

In Ezekiel 45:21, we read that the Lord God said,

In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. And on that day the prince shall prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bull *for* a sin offering. On the seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to the LORD, seven bulls and seven rams without blemish, daily for seven days, and a kid of the goats daily *for* a sin

offering. And he shall prepare a grain offering of one ephah for each bull and one ephah for each ram, together with a hin of oil for each ephah.

From this overview of the Passover in the Old Testament, we see the importance of this ordinance to God and His people under the old covenant. It is evident that the Passover was a sacrament, a sacred ordinance, for the Jewish church.

The New Testament

The Passover in Jesus' time

We read in Luke 2:41 that Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, went to Jerusalem every year "at the Feast of the Passover." And when Jesus was twelve years old, "they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast." Thus, the Passover was being observed in Jesus' time. How appropriate that, at the time of the Passover, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) began His earthly ministry in the temple in Jerusalem, "sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46).

The Passover is mentioned frequently in the Gospels. When Jesus cleansed the temple of the money changers, we read that "the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (John 2:13). Soon after, we read, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did" (John 2:23). When Jesus fed the five thousand, we read again that "the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was near" (John 6:4).

In John 11:55-57, we read of the chief priests and the Pharisees plot to kill Jesus:

And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think -- that He will not come to the feast?" Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report *it*, that they might seize Him.

In John 12:1, we read that "six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead." In John 13:1, the apostle adds, "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

For the apostle John, more than any other New Testament writer, Jesus is the Lamb of God foreshadowed by the Passover lamb, and the Passover is a central organizing motif that ties together many of the events in Jesus' ministry with the crucifixion that lies ahead. With each mention of the Passover, we are reminded that Christ's crucifixion is drawing near; the Lamb of God, without spot or blemish, is approaching His appointed death on the Cross.

Holy Week

That Christ's death coincided with the Jewish Passover explains why the manmade traditions of Easter and holy week, which are an annual memorial observance of Christ's passion, occur at this time every March or April. While these events are very important and a key part of the

gospel of Christ, they are to be remembered whenever the gospel is preached, especially on the day that the Lord Himself set apart as holy, the Lord's Day, the first day of every week. Since God did not tell His Church to observe an annual holy week or holy day called Easter, that is not something that is a part of God's will for His church. We should not presume that God is pleased with the inventions of men, even if done with the best of intentions.

Despite the fact that God did not prescribe an annual observance of these events, it is indeed true that a significant portion of the Gospel accounts are devoted to setting forth the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion.

That passion week began on Sunday with Christ's triumphal entry and His weeping over Jerusalem.

On Monday, Christ cleansed the temple and taught the Passover crowds.

On Tuesday, He contended with the Jewish rulers and continued to teach the Passover crowds.

On Wednesday, the chief priests and the scribes plotted against Jesus, and Judas joined their conspiracy.

On Thursday, preparation was made for the Passover, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, Jesus prayed on the Mount of Olives, and Jesus was arrested.

On Friday, Jesus was mocked, beaten, and tried before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate. In John 18:28, we read that "they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover." In John 18:39, Pilate said, "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Then they all cried again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a robber." That same Friday, our Lord Christ was crucified, and was buried in the grave of a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph (Matt. 27:57).

On Saturday, the Jews observed the Sabbath.

On the third day, Sunday, the Lord was raised from the dead, and the first day of the week became the Lord's Day, the day belonging to the Lord as sacred time. The Lord's Day, Sunday, not holy week, is the time that Christians are to set apart in honor of their Lord (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10). On the Lord's Day, we remember what Christ did for us on that great Friday in which the Lamb of God was slain for our sins. On the Lord's Day, we celebrate Christ's resurrection on the first day of the week, that great resurrection Sunday. And, on the Lord's Day, as often as we observe the Lord's Supper, we remember Christ's death and resurrection, in accordance with what He instituted on that Thursday night of the week of His passion.

The Gospel of John—The spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper

We will soon discuss the institution of the Lord's Supper, which is set forth in the three synoptic gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—and again by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians. In consideration of the apostle John's frequent references to Christ as the Lamb of God, both in his gospel and in the book of Revelation, it is quite striking that he makes no mention of the institution of this sacrament in the Gospel of John. Why would John omit such an important part of Jesus' ministry?

While the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, put together, provide a thorough overview of Jesus' life and ministry, John is more focused on key themes and concepts regarding Christ. Instead of setting forth the institution of the Lord's Supper, John, in his gospel, focuses on the profound meaning behind the Lord's Supper. He focuses on the spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper without setting forth the outward sacrament. Through a brief consideration of John, chapter 6, we will see that John provides the foundational teachings for what the Lord's Supper symbolizes and represents. In **John 6:48-56** Jesus said,

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this *Man* give us *His* flesh to eat?" Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. "For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

This passage is not talking about the Lord's Supper, per se. When Jesus spoke these words, He had not yet instituted the Lord's Supper. However, this passage and the larger passage that surrounds it in John 6 do speak of the spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper. Jesus declares that He is the bread of life; the manna that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness foreshadowed Christ, "the living bread which came down from heaven." In the Lord's Supper, Christ instituted the element of bread, as a symbol for His body, His flesh, which He gave for the life of the world. He also instituted the drinking of the fruit of the vine, as a symbol for His blood.

In keeping with his emphasis on Jesus as the Lamb of God, John provides this image of eating the Passover Lamb through the description of eating Christ's flesh. These words are not to be taken literally but figuratively. To eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood neither speaks of a profane cannibalism nor of eating the bread and drinking the wine of the Lord's Supper, but rather it speaks of the spiritual significance to which these elements point. Prior to the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus is teaching the spiritual meaning of the Lord's Supper. To eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood means to be united with Christ in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection; it is to partake of the benefits of Christ's salvific work, the merits of His death.

In regard to Jesus' statement that "the bread that I shall give is My flesh," John Calvin comments,

. . . for as the eternal Word of God is the fountain of *life* (John 1:4), so His flesh, as a channel, conveys to us that *life* which dwells intrinsically, as we say, in His Divinity. And in this sense it is called life-giving, because it conveys to us that life which it borrows for us from another quarter. This will not be difficult to understand, if we consider what is the cause of life, namely, righteousness. And though righteousness flows from God alone, still we shall not attain the full manifestation of it anywhere else than in the flesh of Christ; for in it was accomplished the redemption of man, in it a sacrifice was offered to atone for sins, and an obedience yielded to God, to reconcile Him to us; it was also filled with the sanctification of the Spirit, and at length, having vanquished death, it was

received into the heavenly glory. It follows, therefore that all the parts of life have been placed in it, that no man may have reason to complain that he is deprived of life, as if it were placed in concealment, or at a distance.

In regard to the verses that follow, Calvin adds,

. . . this discourse does not relate to the Lord's Supper, but to the uninterrupted communication of *the flesh of Christ*, which we obtain apart from the use of the Lord's Supper. . . . From these words, it plainly appears that the whole of this passage is improperly explained, as applied to the Lord's Supper. For if it were true that all who present themselves at the holy table of the Lord are made partakers of His flesh and blood, all will, in like manner, obtain *life*; but we know that there are many who partake of it to their condemnation. And indeed it would have been foolish and unreasonable to discourse about the Lord's Supper, before He had instituted it. It is certain, then, that **He now speaks of the perpetual and ordinary manner of eating the flesh of Christ, which is done by faith only.** And yet, at the same time, I acknowledge that there is nothing said here that is not figuratively represented, and actually bestowed on believers, in the Lord's Supper; and Christ even intended that the holy Supper should be, as it were, a seal and confirmation of this sermon.

So it is evident that the apostle John did not omit the Lord's Supper altogether from His gospel. Rather, the Lord's Supper, is a symbolic representation, a seal and confirmation, of the spiritual truths proclaimed in this sermon in John 6. Calvin further remarks,

This is also the reason why the Evangelist John makes no mention of the Lord's Supper; and therefore Augustine follows the natural order, when, in explaining this chapter, he does not touch on the Lord's Supper till he comes to the conclusion; and then he shows that this mystery is symbolically represented, whenever the Churches celebrate the Lord's Supper, in some places daily, and in other places only on the Lord's day.

In passing, let us note what John Calvin says regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper in the days of the great theologian Augustine (A.D. 354-430). In Augustine's day, the Lord's Supper was observed "in some places daily, and in other places only on the Lord's day." Calvin argued that the Lord's Supper should be observed frequently, preferably "at least once a week"³. Calvin further articulates in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* that the Lord's Supper

was ordained to be *frequently* used among all Christians in order *that they might frequently return in memory to Christ's Passion, by such remembrance to sustain and strengthen their faith, and urge themselves to sing thanksgiving to God and to proclaim His goodness; finally, by it to nourish mutual love, and among themselves give witness to this love, and discern its bond in the unity of Christ's body.*⁴⁵

What did Jesus mean when he said, "for My flesh is flesh indeed" (John 6:55)? John Calvin explains,

³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.17.44, emphasis added.

He confirms the same statement by other words, "As the body is weakened and consumed by the lack of food, so the soul, if it is not fed with heavenly bread, will soon perish with hunger." For when He declares that *His flesh is truly food*, He means that souls are famished, if they lack that food. Then only will you find life in Christ, when you shall seek the nourishment of life in His flesh. Thus we ought to boast, with Paul, that we reckon nothing to be excellent except Christ crucified; because, as soon as we have departed from the sacrifice of His death, we meet with nothing but death; nor is there any other road that conducts us to a perception of His Divine power than through His death and resurrection. Embrace Christ, therefore, as *the Servant of the Father* (Isaiah 42:1) that He may show Himself to you to be *the Prince of life* (Acts 3:15). For when *He emptied Himself* (Philippians 2:7) in this manner we were enriched with abundance of all blessings; His humiliation and descent into hell raised us to heaven; and, by enduring the curse of His cross, He erected the banner of our righteousness as a splendid memorial of His victory. . . .

What did Jesus mean when He said, "and My blood is drink indeed"? Calvin addresses this question:

But why does Christ mention *His blood* separately, when it is included in the word *flesh*? I reply, He did so in condescension to our weakness. For when He expressly mentions *food and drink*, He declares that the life which He bestows is complete in every respect, that we may not imagine to ourselves a life which is only half or imperfect; as if He had said, that we shall lack nothing that belongs to life, provided that we *eat His flesh and drink His blood*. Thus also in the Lord's Supper, which corresponds to this doctrine, not satisfied with the symbol of *the bread*, He adds also *the cup*, that, having in Him a twofold pledge, we may learn to be satisfied with Him alone; for never will a man find a part of life in Christ, until he has entire and complete life in Him.

Jesus added in John 6:56: "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." Calvin further elucidates the meaning of this statement:

This is another confirmation; for while He alone has life in Himself, He shows how we may enjoy it, that is, by *eating His flesh*; as if He had affirmed that there is no other way in which He can become ours, than by our faith being directed to His flesh. For no one will ever come to Christ as God, who despises Him as man; and, therefore, if you wish to have any interest in Christ, you must take care, above all things, that you do not disdain His flesh.

When He says that He *dwells in us*, the meaning is the same as if He had said, that **the only bond of union, and the way by which He becomes one with us, is, when our faith relies on His death.** We may likewise infer from it, that He is not now speaking of the outward symbol, which many unbelievers receive equally with believers, and yet continue separated from Christ. . . . as it is a display of ignorance to limit this doctrine to the outward sign, so we ought to remember what I have formerly said, that **the doctrine which is here taught is sealed in the Lord's Supper.**

Thus, to eat Christ's flesh and drink His blood is a call to be united with Christ by trusting in His atoning work as our substitute, trusting in Christ and His cross work by faith alone. This proclamation of Christ's death and the benefits that we receive by trusting in the merits of His death and resurrection are sealed to us and proclaimed visibly in the Lord's Supper.

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 26:2: "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Christ's crucifixion occurred at the time of the Passover.

Later in Matthew chapter 26, we continue to read of our Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper. When was the Lord's Supper instituted? It was instituted on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, at the Passover.

In Colossians 2, the apostle Paul explains that spiritual circumcision and baptism have essentially the same meaning: both represent cleansing, purification from sin's defilement, dying to the fleshly old man and being born again as a new creature in Christ. Both circumcision and baptism are a sign and a seal of faith. Christ fulfilled the law and thus abrogated circumcision as an ordinance for His people to observe; however, the spiritual importance of circumcision endures. This everlasting ordinance continues today through water baptism, which Christ instituted in the place of circumcision as a more appropriate symbol for the new covenant era. Yet, both circumcision and baptism point to the same spiritual reality.

The Passover, just like circumcision, was a bloody ritual. The Passover involved the bloody sacrifice of a lamb, just as circumcision involved the bloody cutting of the flesh of man. The Passover was most appropriate for the old covenant era. However, under the new covenant, the ordinance that Christ ordained in its place retains the spiritual significance of the sacrifice of an unblemished lamb and the shedding of blood but only uses the symbols of bread and wine as part of the ordinance.

In Matthew 26:17-30, we read of Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper:

Now on the first *day* of the *Feast of the Unleavened Bread* the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples." ' "So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.

When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" He answered and said, "He who dipped *his* hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it."

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. "For this is My blood of **the new covenant**, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

A parallel account appears in Mark 14:1-26:

After two days it was the Passover and *the Feast* of Unleavened Bread. And the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might take Him by trickery and put *Him* to death. But they said, "Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar of the people."

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover *lamb*, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?" And He sent out two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. "Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" ' "Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished *and* prepared; there make ready for us." So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover.

In the evening He came with the twelve. Now as they sat and ate, Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you who eats with Me will betray Me." And they began to be sorrowful, and to say to Him one by one, "Is it I?" And another said, "Is it I?" He answered and said to them, "*It is* one of the twelve, who dips with Me in the dish. "The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born."

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of **the new covenant**, which is shed for many.

"Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Another parallel account is found in Luke 22:1-23:

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover. . . . Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat." So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?" And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. "Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' "Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready." So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; "for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; "for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**" Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.

"But behold, the hand of My betrayer *is* with Me on the table. "And truly the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!" Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing.

In each of the three synoptic gospels, we find the account of Jesus' observance of the first Lord's Supper in the upper room with His twelve disciples. We note that Christ commanded His disciples to do *this* in remembrance of Him. He didn't say to celebrate Good Friday or Easter in remembrance of Him. **He said to celebrate the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Him.** The Lord's Supper is the memorial, feast, and festival celebration, which God prescribed to remember Christ's death and saving work.

Christ here revealed Himself as the Passover lamb whose blood would be shed for His people, for the remission of their sins. No longer would lambs need to be sacrificed every year in March or April at the time of the Passover. Jesus Christ made a once and for all sacrifice for the sins of men; no further sacrifice is needed. The writer to the Hebrews explains,

not that He should offer Himself often . . . He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered **once** to bear the sins of many. . . .
(9:25-28)

The blasphemy of the Roman Catholic church's mass is found in the fact that they offer up Christ as a sacrifice daily at numerous locations throughout the world. Through the doctrine of transubstantiation, they teach that the bread and wine are transformed into the very body and blood of Christ. Christ is sacrificed again and again through the sacrifice of the mass. Yet, God said that Christ was sacrificed once and for all at the end of the ages at Calvary.

God continues to explain in Hebrews 10:1-14:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those *sacrifices there is* a reminder of sins every year. For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come -- In the volume of the book it is written of Me -- To do Your will, O God.' " Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law), then He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second.

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered **one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For **by one offering** He has perfected **forever** those who are being sanctified.

There is no need for a daily or weekly mass or sacrifice of Christ. To do such is to deny the reality of what Christ did once and for all on the Cross. The Lord's Supper, like the Passover, is a memorial, in which we remember what Christ has done once and for all for the remission of our sins. While the bread and wine are only symbols of Christ's body and blood, He yet is really and spiritually present with us each and every time we celebrate this holy feast.

The accounts of the first Lord's Supper in Matthew, Mark, and Luke all draw attention to the timing of the observance, on the Day of Unleavened Bread. Christ's instructions made it clear that that Passover was being replaced with the Lord's Supper. He revealed Himself as the Lamb of God foreshadowed by the Passover lamb. He revealed His blood as the true means of atonement for sin, foreshadowed by the blood of the lamb.

The apostle Paul once again gives us the words of institution for the Lord's Supper, in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; **do this in remembrance of Me.**" In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is **the new covenant in My blood. This do**, as often as you drink *it*, **in remembrance of Me.**" For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

This new covenant ordinance proclaims the Lord's death much better than the old covenant Passover could, as it is a covenant in Christ's blood. The bread and the wine are only symbols of Christ's body and blood. They point us to Christ and His once and for all sacrifice for sins; they take our minds away from fleshly ordinances like the slaying of a lamb. God commands us to do *this* in remembrance of Christ. The Lord's Supper is a visual proclamation of the Gospel. When we observe the Lord's Supper, we are obeying Christ's command and proclaiming the Gospel; we are proclaiming Jesus Christ and Him crucified (cf. 1 Cor. 2:2).

The Early Church

In Acts 12:1-4, we read that Herod the king "stretched out *his* hand to harass some from the church." Luke writes,

Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread. So when he had arrested him, he put *him* in prison, and delivered *him* to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.

How ironic that this persecutor of Christ's followers carried out this persecution during the Days of Unleavened Bread. Just as Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover, so His followers

were harassed and even killed at this time, and Peter was arrested and imprisoned. Yet, God showed His mercy to Peter by miraculously freeing him from prison.

Hebrews

Hebrews, perhaps more than any other book of the New Testament, is a key to understanding the Old Testament correctly. In addition to explaining and interpreting the Old Testament, it provides a fuller explanation of several Old Testament teachings with the greater light of the revelation that Christ and the new covenant have brought. In Hebrews 11:28, in speaking of the faith of Moses, we read that “by faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.” Here, very briefly, mention is made of the importance of keeping the Passover and the sprinkling of blood for the salvation of God’s people under the old covenant. Of course, obeying this command did not justify them, but it was an important act of obedience to God’s command. Keeping the Passover was also an expression of the Hebrews’ faith in the Messiah who was to come, that they needed “Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant” and “the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*” (Hebrews 12:24). The Hebrews needed to have their sins forgiven; they needed to have their sins expiated by their substitute; they needed to have their transgressions removed from them “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12). They looked forward to the promised Redeemer who knew no sin yet took our sins upon Himself “that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

That the Passover was fulfilled in Christ is evident by the fact that there is no further mention of the observance of this holy day and week by God’s people after Christ’s crucifixion. In contrast, there is mention made of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 and in such passages as Acts 2:42 in which we are told that the first converts to Christianity “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in **the breaking of bread**, and in prayers.”

Christ is Our Passover

The Lord’s Supper presents to us Christ’s death and unites us to Him in His crucifixion, death, burial, and resurrection, insofar as He is really, spiritually present in the sacrament. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” The bread remains bread, and the juice or wine remains juice or wine, but the two elements point us to Christ and unite us to Him through sacred communion.

That the Passover finds its ultimate fulfillment in Christ is most clearly evident from the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8:

Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed **Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us**. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul explicitly refers to Christ as “our Passover.” He was the sinless Son of God, the Lamb of God, slain outside the gates of Jerusalem. Jesus, “that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate” (Heb. 13:12). Jesus said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Christ fulfills what the Passover lamb and the unleavened bread represented.

John Calvin comments on 1 Corinthians 5:

Old leaven receives that name on the same principle as the *old man* (Romans 6:6) for the corruption of nature takes the precedence in us, previously to our being renewed in Christ. *That*, therefore, is said to be *old* which we bring with us from the womb, and must perish when we are renewed by the grace of the Spirit.

We come now to the subject-matter. Paul, having it in view to exhort the Corinthians to holiness, shows that what was of old figuratively represented in the Passover, ought to be at this day accomplished in us, and explains the correspondence which exists between the figure and the reality. In the first place, as the Passover consisted of two parts—a sacrifice and a sacred feast—he makes mention of both. For although some do not reckon the paschal lamb to have been a sacrifice, yet reason shows that it was properly a sacrifice, for in that rite the people were reconciled to God by the sprinkling of blood. Now there is no reconciliation without a sacrifice; and, besides, the Apostle now expressly confirms it

The lamb, then, was sacrificed yearly; then followed a feast, the celebration of which lasted for seven successive days. **Christ, says Paul, is our Passover. He was sacrificed once, and on this condition, that the efficacy of that one oblation [offering] should be everlasting. What remains now is, that we eat, not once a-year, but continually.**

Now, in the solemnity of this sacred feast we must abstain from leaven, as God commanded the fathers to abstain. But from what leaven? As the outward Passover was to them a figure of the true *Passover*, so its appendages were figures of the reality which we at this day possess. **If, therefore, we would wish to feed on Christ's flesh and blood, let us bring to this feast sincerity and truth.** Let these be our loaves of *unleavened bread*. Away with all *malice and wickedness*, for it is unlawful to mix up *leaven* with the *Passover*. In short, he declares that we shall be members of Christ only when we shall have renounced *malice* and deceit.

In the meantime we must carefully observe this passage, as showing that the ancient Passover was not merely a memorial of a past benefit, but also a sacrament, representing Christ who was to come, from whom we have this privilege, that we pass from death to life. Otherwise, it would not hold good, that in *Christ* is the *body* of the legal shadows (Colossians 2:17). **This passage will also be of service for setting aside the sacrilege of the Papal mass.** For Paul does not teach that Christ is offered daily, but that the sacrifice having been offered up once for all, it remains that the spiritual feast be celebrated during our whole life.

Concluding Thoughts

For us as new covenant believers, Christ is “our Passover” (1 Cor. 5:7). He was sacrificed for us. As Christians, we should cherish the Old Testament Scriptures, study them, and meditate upon them, for Christ said that they testify of Him (John 5:39). Jesus said that “all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me” (Luke 24:44). As we study the Old Testament institution of the Passover, we see Christ foreshadowed.

The Westminster Confession of Faith teaches that under the law, the covenant of grace “was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, **the paschal lamb**, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament” (7.5). Under the gospel, “when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and **the Lord’s Supper**, which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.” (7.6)

In this study of the Passover, we learned what the Passover is, why it was instituted, and what it signifies. We saw how Christ fulfilled the Passover and instituted the Lord’s Supper in its place as a holy ordinance for the Church under the new covenant. Let us thank God each day for His goodness to us in sending Christ as our substitute, as our Passover lamb, to bear the weight of our sins and suffer the penalty that was rightfully ours. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). To God alone be the glory!

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