

Jesus: Fulfillment of the Jewish Feasts

The Hebrews writer tells us in Hebrews 10:1-4 [RSV], **1. For since the Law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices which are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who draw near. 2. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once been cleansed, they would no longer have any consciousness of sin. 3. But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. 4. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.**

According to the dictionary, a shadow is a dark figure or image cast on the ground or some surface by a body intercepting light; a hint or faint, indistinct image or idea; a mere semblance of something else. All of these very much describe the Old Testament and the Law of Moses with all of its types and prophecies, all of which found their fulfillment in Christ. As Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, **17. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18. For truly, I say to you, till Heaven and Earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished."** (Matthew 5:17-18 [RSV])

As **"the light of the world"** (John 8:12 [RSV]), Jesus illuminates our minds as no other. Nowhere is this found as aptly as it did in Luke 24 following His glorious resurrection. Appearing to two downtrodden, gloomy disciples on the road to Emmaus who were grieving and sorrowful over the death of their Master, Jesus said to them, **25. "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?" 27. And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.** (Luke 24:25-27 [RSV])

The feasts the Jewish people engaged in throughout the year also had significance, both for the Jewish people, as well as the ultimate and greater fulfillment found in Christ. These feasts are divine appointments, shadows of things to come. These feasts actually describe His two comings. The four spring feasts describe the first coming of Jesus.

How do we know that God intended the feasts to show His plan for salvation? One of the clues that indicates the feasts have more significance than mere tradition and remembrance is found in Leviticus 23:4 [RSV]. **"These are the appointed feasts of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them."**

The Hebrew translated as **"holy convocations"** actually means "rehearsals." These feasts then were appointed times of rehearsals for events that were to occur in the future.

Paul provides the same conclusion when he refers to the feasts as shadows of things to come and states that the true substance belongs to Christ in Colossians 2:16-17 [RSV]: **16. Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.**

First century believers in Jesus understood that the feasts symbolized God's plan for salvation of man through Jesus, the long awaited Messiah. They continued to practice the celebrations, but with new joy and understanding of the substance that was the Messiah! He sacrificed Himself on the Feast of Passover, He was buried on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, He was resurrected on the Feast of Firstfruits, and He sent the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Weeks, otherwise known as Pentecost. The practices of each of these spring feasts clearly depict the death and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Historically, Passover marks the national liberation of the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery. **Pesach**, the Hebrew name of Passover, the feast literally means "the lamb." God instructed each family to take an unblemished year-old male lamb to their home on the tenth day of the first month. They were to examine the lamb for four days to see that it was perfect. On the fourth day at twilight, they were to kill the lamb and take some of the lamb's blood and place it on the two doorposts and the lintel of their house. On the first Passover, the avenging Angel of God killed every firstborn male throughout the land, from Pharaoh, to slave, to camel. The Angel would "passover" those homes that protected themselves by placing the blood of a lamb on their doorposts and lintels.

Jesus is the Passover Lamb of God and the fulfillment of this Feast. Isaiah wrote of the Messiah to come, saying in Isaiah 53:7 [RSV], **"He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth."** Paul said, **"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed"** (1 Corinthians 5:7). John the Immerser also knew this, proclaiming in John 1:29 [RSV], **"Behold, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!"** This, too, was verified in the great throne scene in Heaven in the *Book of Revelation*. **6. And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the Earth; 7. and He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him Who was seated on the throne. 8. And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; 9. and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for Thou wast slain and by Thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe**

and tongue and people and nation, 10. and hast made them a Kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on Earth.” (Revelation 5:6-10 [RSV])

Jesus completely fulfilled the Passover Week events with exact timing as we will shortly soon see.

When Israel had a Temple, in addition to the lamb for each household, a lamb was chosen to die for the sins of the entire nation. On the 10th of the Jewish month of Nisan, it was led in a huge procession from Bethany to the Temple. During the procession, the people waved Palm branches and sang Psalms, including: **25. Save us, we beseech Thee, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech Thee, give us success! 26. Blessed be He Who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless You from the house of the Lord.** (Psalm 118:25-26 [RSV])

Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem to the Temple on the same day, Nisan 10, as the procession of the lamb chosen to die for the sins of the nation. By doing this, He was proclaiming Himself to be **“the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world”** (John 1:29 [RSV]). As Jesus passed by, the people shouted, **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”** (Matthew 21:9 [RSV])

Just as the Passover lamb was examined for four days prior to Passover, so, too, Jesus entered the Temple and was examined for four days prior to Passover by the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Pharisees, who prided themselves in being such keepers of the Law, went and counseled how they might trap Jesus in His words in Matthew 22:15-22, and the Sadducees, who claim there is no resurrection, came and questioned Jesus until He silenced them in Matthew 22:23-33.

Jesus was prepared for sacrifice and beaten on the morning of Passover, just as a lamb to be sacrificed in the Temple was prepared on Passover morning. As Matthew records it in Matthew 27:1-2 [RSV] and Matthew 27:26 [RSV], **1. When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death; 2. and they bound Him and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor. 26. Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to be crucified.**

Jesus was slain at the same time the unblemished lamb was slain on Passover. According to God's instructions, the Passover lamb had to be slain **“in the evening”** (Exodus 12:6 [RSV]). Jesus gave up His spirit at the exact time the lambs were to be killed – the ninth hour of the Jewish day. “In the evening” and “the ninth hour” are based on the manner by which the Temple priests calculated time. Both refer to the same time – three o'clock in the afternoon. **46. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, ... 50. And Jesus cried**

again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. (Matthew 27:46 [RSV]; Matthew 27:50 [RSV])

That Jesus died in just three hours is incredible. Typically, death by crucifixion took three days. The Romans were experts at crucifixion. They wanted the crucified person to live in agony for days, while frightened friends, relatives and travelers stared on in horror. Jesus, a strong, young man, should not have died so quickly. The Roman soldiers were going to break the legs of Jesus to hasten His death in order to appease the Jewish population's observance of the holiday, but the legs of Jesus were not broken as He was already dead. Just as the Passover lamb was to have no broken bones, neither did Jesus, completely fulfilling yet another aspect of being God's perfect sacrifice and our Passover Lamb. **31. *Since it was the day of Preparation, in order to prevent the bodies from remaining on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*** **32. *So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with Him;*** **33. *but when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.*** (John 19:31-33 [RSV]) Pilate, we are told, was astonished to learn that Jesus was already dead (Mark 15:44). Jesus died at three in the afternoon because He had a Divine appointment He needed to keep!

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Feast of Unleavened Bread for He is the Unleavened Bread of Life. Jesus said in John 6:48-51 [RSV], **48. *"I am the Bread of Life.*** **49. *Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.*** **50. *This is the Bread Which comes down from Heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die.*** **51. *I am the Living Bread Which came down from Heaven; if any one eats of this Bread, he will live forever; and the Bread which I shall give for the life of the world is My flesh."***

Historically, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a remembrance of God bringing the Hebrews out of Egypt. It begins at sunset of Nisan 15. In ancient Israel, days were counted from evening to evening; therefore, sunset at approximately 6:00 PM of Nisan 14 begins a new day, Nisan 15. The Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for seven days until Nisan 21. During this period only unleavened bread was to be eaten. The first meal, eaten on the evening of the 15th, is a special one. After the Hebrews sacrificed the Passover lamb, they were to roast and eat all the flesh of the lamb (the head, the legs and the entrails) together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (matzah). No bone of the lamb was to be broken (Exodus 12:46).

Traditionally, the meal begins as the woman of the house lights candles. The man takes three loaves of unleavened bread and places them in a white linen envelope that has three compartments. The unleavened bread looks like a flat cracker. It is marked with stripes and has holes pierced through it from cooking. The father removes the middle loaf from its compartment, breaks it, wraps it in a

separate piece of white linen and “buries” it behind his chair cushion or in a drawer where it is later “redeemed” by the father for a price. During the meal, four cups of wine are drunk. The Passover meal concludes with singing. One of the traditional songs sung at this Feast is Psalms 118:21-24. In it we find the prophetic tragedy of the nation of Israel rejecting the Messiah: **21. I thank Thee that Thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation. 22. The Stone Which the builders rejected has become the Head of the corner. 23. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. 24. This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

Jesus was very familiar with this passage of Scripture and how it applied to Him. While confronting the chief priests and Pharisees, Jesus said to them in Matthew 21:42-43 [RSV], **42. “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The very Stone Which the builders rejected has become the Head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? 43. Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it.”**

In Acts chapter 4, Peter and John became arrested for causing quite a stir by healing a man and teaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead in verses 2 and 3. The next day the Jewish leaders, (the very ones who had condemned Jesus some months earlier), asked them by what power were they performing these miracles. Peter answered, and his answer was an interpretation of Jesus' word about the rejected Stone found in Matthew 21:42-43. Starting at the end of verse 8 of Acts 4 Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, declares, **8. “Rulers of the people and elders, 9. if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, 10. be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, Whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing before you well. 11. This is the Stone Which was rejected by you builders, but Which has become the Head of the corner. 12. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** (Acts 4:8b-12 [RSV])

Notice Peter's interpretation, one point at a time. Verse 10: The Stone is Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Verse 8: The builders are the rulers of the people and elders. Verse 10: The rejection of the Stone was their crucifixion of Jesus. Verse 10: The elevation of the Stone to the Head of the corner was the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 12: The implication of this new position at the Head is that there is salvation found in no other. This is the same point that Paul made years later at the Areopagus in Athens: The resurrection declares that Jesus **is** the Son of God in power: All men everywhere must repent and seek after salvation in Him alone.

That was Peter's interpretation of the words of Jesus in Matthew 21:42 while speaking to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. His testimony is still true to this

day. We all must turn to Jesus Christ, and Him alone, to find salvation from our sins and have the hope to share in the resurrection with Him.

Salvation is in no other. It is not in any human creeds or cleverly devised fables. It is not found in the accumulation of material wealth. Choose this day whom you will serve: Will it be the Living Savior, Jesus Christ? Or will it be mammon?

Jesus also said in John 6:35 [RSV], ***“I am the Bread of Life....”*** The Feast of Unleavened Bread is symbolic of Jesus' death and burial, and Jesus fulfilled all the patterns of the Feast.

When breaking the bread at His last meal, Jesus said to His disciples, ***“Take, eat; this is My body”*** (Matthew 26:26 [RSV]). Leaven represents sin. Thus, unleavened bread is a good representation of our sinless Messiah, the Bread of Life. Jesus bore stripes from Roman beatings; the unleavened bread is marked with stripes. Jesus was pierced in the side when He was crucified; the unleavened bread has holes pierced throughout it for cooking. Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, which translates from the Hebrew as the “House of Bread.”

Like the father who wraps the unleavened bread in linen, hides (buries) it and later redeems it, Jesus was wrapped in linen, buried and He paid the price of our redemption with His perfect sacrifice. ***59. And Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, 60. and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock; and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb, and departed.*** (Matthew 27:59-60 [RSV])

The candles lit by the woman of the home during the Feast of Unleavened Bread are symbolic of the Messiah, the Light of the world. Jesus Himself tells us in John 8:12 [RSV], ***“I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.”*** He later states that those who would be His followers are also to be lights to the world (Matthew 5:14). The woman who lit the candles for this Feast was symbolic of Mary, whom God chose to bring us the Light of the world.

The wine in the Passover meal represents Jesus' blood, just as He told His disciples the night He was betrayed. ***27. And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; 28. for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom.”*** (Matthew 26:27-28 [RSV]) It is this eating of unleavened bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine that we observe each Lord's Day in order to remember His death until He comes again.