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SEVEN OLD TESTAMENT FEASTS

A TYPOLOGICAL STUDY OF LEVITICUS 23

By THE EDITOR

IV. The Subject Considered Analytically

We now turn to the study of the individual Feasts, of which the first is

The Passover

Regarding the Passover we shall note the following points:

1. **Its Inauguration.** The history of God's redemptive plans begins here—the fact of SIN, which hinders fellowship between God and man, must be dealt with.

The first mention of this Feast is in Exodus 12, and in conformity with the Law of First Mention it is dealt with very comprehensively, at the same time leaving room for certain additions that it took on later.

After this first mention the Passover is referred to in six other chapters in the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy), but two only need concern us here, viz., Lev. 23, in which passage the Feast is placed in its *theological* order at the head of the other seven Great Feasts; and Num. 28:16, where it is mentioned in its *chronological* order with the other daily and monthly sacrifices and offerings. The reference in Deut. 16:1-7 is also very interesting, and will be touched on later—it should be carefully compared in detail with the directions for the observance of the Feast in Ex. 12.

2. **Its Relationship** has already been touched on. Although the Synopsis* shows the Sabbath placed last, it should be remembered that it also comes first, as previously described.

3. **Its History** so far as recorded in the Scriptures is very interesting to trace. After its inauguration we have six other *historical* references and one *prophetical*. The latter is found in Ezek. 45:21-24 and refers to the time when Ezekiel's Temple (as it is usually called) will be set up in the Millennial Reign of Christ on earth.

The seven recorded celebrations of the Passover are as follows:

* The Synopsis appeared in issue of April 1952, page 81.

(1) Exod. 12.—Institution. The People brought out of Egyptian bondage.

(2) Num. 9:1-14.—In the wilderness, in the 2nd year of the journeyings.

(3) Josh. 5:10-11.—Entering the Land after the 38 years' wanderings.

(4) 2 Chron. 30:15-22.—Revival under Hezekiah.

(5) 2 Chron. 35:1-19.—Revival under Josiah.

also 2 Kings 23:21-23.—Revival under Josiah.

(6) Ezra 6:19-21.—Revival under Ezra after the Return from Babylon.

(7) Matt. 26:19.—Christ (in anticipation of the crucifixion) introduces the Supper that supersedes the Passover.

Whether, historically, these were the only occasions it was celebrated we are not told; more probably it was frequently if not regularly kept. Slight allusions seem to suggest this; e.g., Solomon offered sacrifices three times a year, at the appointed seasons, including the Feast of Unleavened Bread—which latter would include the Passover.* Later prophets speak of appointed seasons for pilgrimages and sacrifices (as Isaiah refers to in ch. 1:12-14), and possibly an occasional reference to a Passover (e.g., Isa. 30:29—bearing in mind that the Passover was the only *night*-feast of which we have any record). The pilgrimages would no doubt refer to the three Festivals which required the presence of all males before the Sanctuary thrice annually (see later).

The recorded occurrences listed above will repay the student's most careful study. There are spiritual lessons to be found in each separate incident, as well as in the comparison to be made between them. One prominent lesson emerges even from a cursory comparison—when there was departure from God the Passover was allowed to lapse, when there was a coming back to God and a revival of heart the Passover was given its proper place with great rejoicings.

This same feature is also found in many other ways: e.g., when the Temple worship was neglected, the people's freewill offerings for the maintenance of the sanctuary were reduced; where there was a revived concern for the things of God, the offerings abounded in degree and quality.**

* See 2 Chron. 8:13; 1 Kings 9:25.

** E.g., cf. Ex. 36:1-7; Mal. 1:8, 10, 13 (R.V.); and 2 Chron. 31:4-10.

4. **Its Typical Teaching.** The central truth conveyed in the Passover is **Christ our Redemption** (1 Cor. 5:7). Whatever other lessons we may draw from it that is paramount.

The type bears a twofold aspect with this central truth as a pivot, viz., (a) Christ our Redemption appropriated once in one great personal act of faith, by which act the sinner passes from Death unto Life, from Condemnation unto Salvation and Justification. This aspect is that typified in Exodus 12, where the Passover is presented to us as the initial act on the part of the Israelites in their Redemption out of Egypt. The Passover was never again observed in exactly the same manner, not to say the same circumstances, as we see it here. Some of the points of difference we shall note later—what we wish to stress here is that, it was a never-repeated *act* of faith in appropriating the provision made by Jehovah for their deliverance. God provided, they accepted.

(b) The second line of teaching reveals the Passover in all its subsequent celebrations as a Memorial Feast of that great act of Redemption, which was to be kept yearly. This aspect is particularly dwelt on in Deut. 16:1-7 (see specially verse 3). Here also we get Christ our Redemption appropriated, not merely in one act, but continuously *in* and *as* a never-ending Feast.

The Lord's Supper, provided by the Great Head of the Church for His people in this Dispensation, is truly a Memorial Feast, taking our thoughts back to Calvary and the Redemption there purchased and provided for us. But surely this is not the only occasion we may feed upon the living Bread, and give thanks at the remembrance of His Love—there should be a daily feasting in order to sustain our souls and grow in spiritual maturity, otherwise even the weekly feast becomes a barren experience of ritual and ceremonial.

We shall next consider these two aspects in a little more detail.

(1) THE PASSOVER AS AN ACT OF REDEMPTION (EXODUS 12).

The teaching under this head is wonderfully rich, and will provide not only food for the soul but seed for the sower. Space only allows us to choose out a few prominent points from amongst the rest.

Let us note first, however, a more general preliminary point—that the history of redemption has not only a beginning, but also a *prelude*. The prelude to the typical redemption from Egypt was Pharaoh's tyranny, Egyptian bondage, and a great cry of

human distress from more than a million souls. But ages before this there had issued, in anticipation, the wonderful promises of God to Abraham, together with the inalienable Covenant of blessing for the future posterity not only of Abraham, but of the whole earth.* It is of this the Psalmist sings, (God) 'remembered His holy word and Abraham His servant: And brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with singing'.**

Similarly, the redemption of which the Passover is a type, has its own prelude. Sin introduced into the world by the great Adversary, Satan; the Fall which brought man to hopeless ruin and misery; and, blessed be God! the great Covenant of Grace and the eternal counsels of peace and salvation to man from God the Father '*before the foundation of the world*'.*** But of the prelude, and the consummation in the ages to come of God's great redemption scheme, the Bible gives us only glimpses, being taken up, as it is, mostly with the *record*, both prophetic and historic, of its process.

(a) The first lesson is the *Sovereignty of the Lawgiver* in dealing with those who have broken His laws. Sin implies broken law, and the inexorable word has gone forth from the Lawgiver: 'the soul that sinneth it shall die'. If the breaker of law is to be saved, therefore, the means of deliverance can only come from one source, and that is from the Lawgiver Himself. To be efficient and sufficient the plan must uphold both the sovereignty of the Lawgiver and the sanctity of His Law. This the Passover does, and is the eternal affirmation that no other method than the method it typifies will God recognize.

We must distinguish between sovereignty and caprice or even arbitrariness. The basis of God's sovereignty rests not merely upon the eternal fact of His creatorship, but upon the eternal principles of absolute justice and holiness on the one hand, and mercy and grace on the other. Consequently, He can never be swayed by any motives of mere caprice or whimsical arbitrariness which might be thought to exist because He is the Almighty Creator—that He can 'do what He likes' just because He possesses all power. In the method of dealing with sin which He has laid down, He has not only been true to Himself—His own absolute

* See Gen. 15: 13, 14, and the whole chapter. Also ch. 17: 1-8.

** Psa. 105: 42, 43.

*** Eph. 1: 3-11; 1 Pet. 1: 19, 20.

Being—but has vindicated the eternal principles of His Law, except for which the Universe would cease to hold anything that could be called moral—all would be a nightmare of darkness and chaos.

The Passover does not, therefore, place an arbitrary division between Egyptians and Israelites. It illustrates God's sovereign method of dealing with sin. For, as a matter of fact, it is impossible to think of the Israelites as being any better morally than the Egyptians. *All* had sinned. But it was as freely open for the Egyptian to make use of the method of safety from judgment as it was for the Israelite. They preferred, however, their own method—and suffered in consequence. At the same time any Israelite would have suffered if he had essayed to act independently. There was only one method—the method of the Sovereign Law-giver against whose eternal Law both Hebrew and Egyptian had erred. And before God could take up this nation to become a channel of blessing to the whole earth, the question of sin must be dealt with by His method alone and, as we shall see later, that method was by *sacrifice*, the death of a divinely appointed Victim.

(b) The second lesson is the necessity of a *personal appropriation* of that which is provided.* All action centred around the lamb—beautiful type of the 'Lamb of God which beareth away the sin of the world'. This lamb was to be *without blemish*—thus safeguarding the holy character of the antitype. Note the three significant acts of appropriation:

(i) Verse 2.—'*They shall take every man a lamb.*' Here we are directed to the *life* of Christ, for 'faith cometh by hearing' of Him who is now alive. Doubtless, of course, there is, in the command that the lamb should be 'kept up' from the tenth to the fourteenth day, a reference to the three and a half years of the public ministry of our Lord, during which He lived that unique life before God and man which proved Him to be the 'holy, harmless and undefiled' Lamb of God.

But the practical point we are looking at now is, the illustration it provides of the necessity of coming into personal touch with a living Saviour who can and is willing to save. The first cry of

* The teaching here will be found to correspond doctrinally in certain points with our Lord's discourse recorded in John 6: 51-58; the reader will find it profitable to trace the parallels.

a sinner must be directed to a *living Christ*, not to a dead crucifix—although a further appropriation of Christ is essential ere he can be saved (which is found in the next act prescribed). Whilst the life of Christ alone cannot save, there is in that life as lived down here a quality which the sinner needs to apprehend for himself—that quality which assures him that this Jesus is the very Saviour whom *God has appointed* and who is '*able to save to the uttermost*'.

Verse 5 carries the thought further: Here is the very *kind* of a Saviour we need; 'your lamb shall be *without blemish*.' A man enveloped in a raging fire cannot save his fellow-man perishing by his side. *We* need a sinless Saviour; there was only One ever such, the Son of God, whose whole life and nature were so utterly and transparently holy that of Him the Father could exclaim: 'in *WHOM I am well pleased!*' So may sinner and saint find in this same Jesus, 'the Lamb of God,' perfect satisfaction as *Sin-bearer*; 'for *His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree . . . by Whose stripes we are healed*.'*

(ii) Verse 7.—'*They shall take of the blood*.' Here we are made aware of the only means of safety, the *death* of the victim—not merely its life. 'When I see the blood I will pass over you.'** The blood here stands for blood shed, that is, death. 'The blood of Jesus Christ (God's) Son cleanseth us from all sin.' This is because death meant atonement (covering) from sin.

The blood was the ground of their safety and peace. And this remains eternally true. The sinner's safety is not found in anything connected with himself—his life, his works, or his conscience—but in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. As one has well said: 'It is the blood of Christ which gives peace, imparts perfect justification, divine righteousness, purges the conscience, brings us into the holiest of all, justifies God in receiving the believing sinner, and constitutes our title to all the joys, the dignities, and the glories of heaven.'

But pause here and note one important point: the death of the sacrifice is of no avail to anyone until it has been definitely appropriated by an act of faith. The death of the paschal lamb alone could not have saved Israel. It was the *sprinkling* of the blood that caused the avenging sword to pass by. It is here we need to

* 1 Pet. 2: 24.

** Verse 13; see also very specially Lev. 17: 11; Heb. 9: 22.

place the emphasis, for this furnishes the point of contact between God's provision and man's need. Typically the death furnished the ground upon which God can justly pardon, but the sprinkling showed that the man had accepted and trusted for himself.

(iii) Verse 8.—‘*They shall eat of the flesh.*’ This is only possible after the means of safety has been appropriated, and points to our duty and privilege of *communion* and participation in and with Christ, without which we could never sustain the life imparted. Herein lies the secret of many a failure in the Christian life. Many are seemingly satisfied with the safety from wrath to come provided by Christ, but know little of feeding upon Christ. But the type indicates something very different. Here we may quote from Mr Lowe's book,* where he says: ‘The whole of the paschal lamb was eaten; not one particle of it was to be left; they were expressly commanded to consume it all.

‘It is thus the Saviour gives Himself altogether to be His people's food; it is not a part, but the whole of a precious Christ that is provided for us. All the holiness of His life, all the devotedness of His death, all the efficacy of His blood, all the power of His resurrection, the dignity of His ascension, the influence of His intercession, and the glory of His coming again; everything He does, He has, He is, the whole is given unto us to feast upon; and we need it all. I cannot spare a single particle of this provision—not the smallest fibre. I must have Him all to meet the exigency of my case, the necessities of my soul. I apprehend, my brethren, that if we know anything of Jesus, as we ought to know, we shall be anxious to know *all* about Him; we shall find the whole that God has written needful to satisfy the cravings of our soul, needful to compensate the exhaustion of a trying pilgrimage.’

We cannot pause long enough to go into all the details of this feasting, yet each detail is full of instruction. Verses 8 to 11 will repay minute study. In verse 11 we are reminded of our pilgrim character and habit, as those who have been separated unto God (see 1 Pet. 2:11).

(c) The next lesson is that which concerns the fact of *substitution*.

Note the difference between the death of the guilty person for *his own sin* and the *sacrifice of the substitute* for the saved sinner's sin. The first is legal punishment which satisfies Law but does

* *The Annual Festivals of the Jews*, by J. B. Lowe, B.A.

not save. The second not only satisfies Law—the law of the Sovereignty of God—but saves and clears the guilty. Christ's sacrifice as our substitute not merely 'covers' the sin (which was the only thing the Old Testament offering could do), but brings the sinner into a new relationship with God on the grounds of Justification—treating the saved sinner as if he had never sinned.

Herein is found the uniqueness of God's method of dealing with sin—it preserves His own holy and righteous character inviolate, whilst He becomes 'the Justifier of him who *believeth* in Jesus' (Rom. 3:25, 26).

But in order to enjoy the real truth of substitution we must look at it in the right light. The Passover does not, of course, emphasize the fact of substitution in the same way as the sin-offering or the ritual of the day of Atonement. The Passover directs attention to the need of sacrifice, and especially of our *appropriation* of that sacrifice. At the same time it does contain the thought of substitution to some extent. Had the lamb not been slain, the death sentence must needs be carried out. The lamb became, therefore, a substitute—but *only on condition of appropriation*, that is, by an act of *faith*. This point is important; for Scripture nowhere speaks of or implies that the substitutionary aspect of the death of Christ is applicable to the sinner apart from active faith. Christ died *for all*, whether saved or unsaved. He died *instead* of those alone who accept him in saving faith. They are reckoned as dead.

Substitution, therefore, has at its centre the idea of identification. This is where the sin-offering comes in, for the offerer was to lay his hand upon the victim and so identify himself with it, after which the victim's death was accepted as his own. 'When thus identified with the sacrifice of Calvary, but only then the sinner may adopt the language of the sin-offering, and say "He His own self bare my sins in His own body on the tree".' Let us grasp the true content of substitution, and clearly recognize the limit of its application in the Passover.

(d) The fourth lesson is no less obvious, though often overlooked—the *certainty of judgment* upon all who refuse the way of deliverance. Note that this is not so much the refusal of *safety* as the refusal of the particular *means* to safety. The *need* of safety from wrath to come is often recognized by those who are religiously inclined today—the point is that people will not accept

the *means of safety* provided by God, but are madly busy 'going about to establish their own righteousness'. Yet upon all such the judgment of the Lawgiver must rest—were it otherwise He were not God.

There are many other beautiful typical teachings in this subject, though it is not our purpose to go into all the details, but rather to concentrate upon a few of the principal ones. It is a very precious foreshadowing of the glorious person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to recognize two lines of teaching: that first which reveals to us the Redeemer and His work in all the marvellous perfection of His glory, and then, the manner in which the type applies to the needs of sinner and saint.

Not only in place but in importance it is a unique Feast. 'It was a sacrifice, and yet quite out of the order of all Levitical sacrifices. For it had been instituted and observed before the Levitical sacrifices existed: before the Law was given, nay, before the Covenant was ratified by blood . . . It may be said to have been the very *basis* and foundation of *all* the later sacrifices of the Law, and of the Covenant itself. Lastly, it belonged neither to one nor to another class of sacrifices; it was neither exactly a sin offering nor a peace offering, but combined them both. And yet in many respects it quite differed from them.

'In short, just as the priesthood of Christ was a real Old Testament priesthood, yet not after the order of Aaron, but after the earlier, prophetic and regal order of Melchizedek, so the sacrifice also of Christ was a real O.T. sacrifice, yet not after the order of Levitical sacrifices, but after that of the earlier prophetic Passover sacrifice, by which Israel had become a royal nation.'

(To be continued)