

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 5

[CHURCH SACRAMENT] THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Introduce. In this supplement we want to study the relationship between the Passover festival of the Old Testament and the Lord's Supper of the New Testament. Why was the sacrificial lamb of the Passover festival substituted by the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper?

The Old Testament Passover festival had a *national* significance, a *typical* significance and a *symbolic* significance.

A. THE NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PASSOVER FESTIVAL

1. The Passover festival and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Read Exodus 12:1-28,51; Numbers 28:16-17; Deuteronomy 16:1-4.

The Passover festival was instituted when God delivered Israel out of their slavery in Egypt in 1447 B.C. The Passover festival was the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolised the haste with which Israel left Egypt. They had no time to prepare proper bread. It also symbolised the difficulties they experienced in their journey through the desert.

(1) **The Passover festival according to the Jewish calendar.**

According to the Jewish calendar, a new day begins at sunset (cf. Genesis 1:5). On the tenth day of the first month of the year, the Israelites had to select a lamb without defect, slaughter it on the fourteenth day at twilight, smear some of its blood on the sides and top of the doorframes and roast the lamb as a whole on fire. In the evening, that is the fifteenth day of the month, the family had to gather together in their house, with their cloaks tucked in their belt (so that they could run), with their sandals on their feet and with their staff in the hand (so that they could leave immediately). They had to eat the roasted lamb together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread in great haste, because that night the Lord's angel of death would pass over their house. At midnight on the fifteenth day the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt. Only then did Pharaoh let the Israelites go. The Israelites left Egypt in the morning on the fifteenth day of the month. Israel was delivered (saved) from the house of slavery at the very moment Jesus Christ was crucified many years later! The Israelites had to eat unleavened bread from the fifteenth to the twenty-first evening of the month.

During the final days of Jesus Christ, the Passover lamb was slaughtered on Thursday afternoon (which was the fourteenth day of the month). The Passover meal (Hebrew: pesach) was eaten on Thursday evening, which was the fifteenth day of the month. The fifteenth day of the month was counted as the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During the days of Jesus, the Jewish Passover meal on Thursday evening included the eating of unleavened bread and the drinking from four cups of wine.

(2) **The Passover festival according to the Roman calendar.**

Mark directed his Gospel to the Romans. According to the Roman calendar, a new day begins at midnight. Therefore, in Mark 14:12, the term "first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread" refers to the Roman Thursday, which lasted till Thursday midnight and included the last part of the fourteenth and the first part of the fifteenth day of the Jewish calendar. It should be taken in its broadest sense, as "the day" (the evening) on which the eating of the Passover lamb took place. Because Matthew made use of Mark's Gospel, he says the same thing in Matthew 26:17.

2. The national significance of the Passover festival.

The essential meaning of the Passover festival in the Old Testament was that it was a *commemoration* of the Lord *passing over* the houses of the Israelites and sparing them from the destructive judgement (the killing of all firstborn), which fell on the Egyptians (Exodus 12:14,26-27). The blood of the Passover lamb, which was put on the top and sides of the doorframes of a house, was *the sign for the destroying angel to pass over* that house and *the sign* for the Israelites that no destructive plague with its ruin would touch them (Exodus 12:13). Thus, according to Exodus 12:14,17 and Deuteronomy 16:1-4, the national significance of the Passover festival in the Old Testament was that it commemorated the deliverance of Israel from their slavery in Egypt!

B. THE TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PASSOVER FESTIVAL

Read Matthew 26:2; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.

1. The meaning of the word "type" and "antitype".

A "type" is a person, thing or event that serves as a symbol, illustration or characteristic example. An "antitype" is literally the impression made by a die or stamp and is figuratively that which the type represents. It is the later genuine fulfilment of the former type.

2. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament type of the Passover lamb.

(1) The type is the Passover lamb.

John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the crowd as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Just two days before his crucifixion, Jesus predicted that he would die on the Passover festival (Matthew 26:2). He was predicting that he himself would be the genuine fulfilment of the Old Testament Passover lamb. Later, the apostle Paul says, “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast, as you really are. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Yeast is a symbol for the acts of the sinful nature (cf. Galatians 5:19-21).

(2) The New Testament clearly teaches that the Old Testament Passover festival had typical significance.

The yearly Passover festival not only pointed back to the past: the liberation from slavery in Egypt, but also to the future: the salvation of sin through the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross. It was a sign that pointed forward to the first coming of Christ and his sacrifice of atonement on the cross to save believers once and for all time from their slavery to sin, and it was a seal that guaranteed that this liberation from sin was a glorious certainty! Both the Passover festival in the Old Testament and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in the New Testament took place on the fifteenth day of the first month (Nisan).

C. THE SYMBOLICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT PASSOVER FESTIVAL

Read Hebrews 9:11-14,22.

1. The meaning of the word “symbol”.

A *symbol* is a thing, mark or sign that represents a truth or an idea, which has analogous qualities.

2. Jesus is the fulfilment of the Old Testament symbol of the shedding of blood.

The symbol is the blood of the Passover lamb. The Old Testament principle or truth was, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (atonement of sin)” (Hebrews 9:22).

(1) The blood of animal sacrifices.

The writer to the Hebrews says that the blood of all the animal sacrifices during the Old Testament period were “carnal (or better: temporary) regulations (Greek: *dikaionmata sarkos*), which applied until the time of the new order (improvement, reformation) (Greek: *diorthosis*)”, that is, until the first coming of Christ (Hebrews 9:10).

He teaches that the blood of the animal sacrifices only made the flesh of people clean, that is, only ceremonially, outwardly, incomplete and temporarily, but could never clean their consciences from the guilt (and shame) of sin (Hebrews 9:13; Hebrews 10:1-4). The animal sacrifices and their blood remained symbols. But symbols are weaker than the reality they represent.

However, the blood that Jesus shed on the cross genuinely cleanses the consciences of believers from feeling guilty (and ashamed) for their sins (Hebrews 9:14; Hebrews 10:1-4): it cleanses people really, inwardly, completely and permanently! Thus, Jesus obtained *an eternal redemption* (Hebrews 9:12).

(2) The sacrifices were continually repeated.

The writer to the Hebrews also says that the animal sacrifices during the Old Testament period were repeated endlessly year after year, but they never made people perfect (Hebrews 10:1).

However, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was *once-for-always* (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). It made atonement for sins, provided purification for sins and made people holy and perfect in God’s sight (Hebrews 2:17; 1:3; 2:11; 10:10,14).

(3) The sacrifices symbolised deliverance from the plague.

The blood of the Passover lamb only delivered the Israelites from the destructive plague: the destroying angel killing all the first-born.

However, the blood of Jesus Christ saves all who believe in him from their sins and its consequences! The Passover festival *was not only a reminder of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt (the national significance), but also a sign and a seal of the deliverance from the slavery of sin (the typological significance)!* It was *a sign* pointing forward to the first coming of Christ and his sacrifice of atonement on the cross in order to deliver believers once for all from the slavery of sin, and it was *a seal* that guaranteed the deliverance from the slavery of sin as a glorious assurance!

D. THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLS AND REPLACES THE PASSOVER FESTIVAL OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Passover lamb and its blood was replaced by the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

Jesus had instituted the Lord's Supper during the last Passover meal on Thursday evening, the fifteenth Nisan. He took the elements of bread and wine, present in the Jewish Passover festival, and consecrated them (set them aside) to a new use in the Lord's Supper.

The third of the four cups of wine, which was generally called *the cup of blessing*, was used for the second element in the Lord's Supper. Jesus did this because by his death on Friday the fifteenth Nisan he would fulfil the typical and symbolical meanings of the Passover festival in the Old Testament.

The once-and-for-always and all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross has made all future animal sacrifices and shedding of blood completely unnecessary (Hebrews 10:17-18)! Therefore, it is entirely fitting that the bloody elements in the Passover festival should make way for elements without blood: namely bread and wine in the Lord's Supper.

2. The national meaning of the Passover festival had to disappear.

Read Exodus 12:51; Numbers 33:3-4; Deuteronomy 16:1-3; Ephesians 2:11-16.

The national meaning of the Passover festival commemorated Israel's deliverance from their slavery in Egypt.

Until Christ's death, the Gentiles were excluded from citizenship in Israel (Ephesians 2:12) and the Passover festival was celebrated only in the nation-state of Israel.

However, by his death, Jesus Christ has broken down the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, which in the Old Testament had separated the Jews from the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22). The dividing wall of hostility was a symbol of the ceremonial law with all its regulations, including the regulations of the Jewish religious festivals. Therefore it is quite natural that the Passover festival, which was a symbol with a national flavour, should be replaced by the Lord's Supper, which is a symbol that carries with it no implication of nationalism! The death of Jesus Christ marked the end of all the Passover festivals of the Old Testament! Christians do not celebrate the Jewish Passover festival, but they do celebrate the Lord's Supper in every nation of the world!