

# The Joy of the Passover Ceremony

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All of God's festivals are to be celebrations of great joy because of the wonderful picture that they present of the redemption of man, and the ushering in of the Kingdom of God. Passover is the first of God's annual festivals. Passover occurs in the spring of the year (March/April), which is the beginning of new life. The Passover celebration pictures life. "For all have sinned..." (Romans 3:23), and "...the wages of sin is death; but **the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**" (Romans 6:23).

The Passover ceremony pictures the redemption of man through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. This is a time of great joy and thanksgiving to the Father and Jesus Christ. Passover is an expression of God's love for man. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:16, 17).

However, in the former Worldwide Church of God, instead of being a celebration of joy and thanksgiving, Passover was a somber ceremony with a funeral-like atmosphere. When you entered the room where the Passover ceremony was to be held, you were to speak as little as possible, and only in hushed tones. You were to sit down and be quiet. Children were not allowed to attend, because they might be disruptive. The focus of this ceremony was primarily on the night before Jesus' death.

This Passover ceremony was held on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib, following the same tradition as the Church of God (Seventh Day), from which the WWCG had descended. This Passover ceremony is observed in a time frame that is about twenty-one hours before the death of "...Christ our Passover..." (1 Corinthians 5:7).

How can you have a Passover ceremony that is held before the death of the Passover? Do we just spiritualize away the plain truth that the Passover ceremony cannot be held prior to the sacrifice of the Passover? Where are the scripture(s) that tell us that the Passover ceremony is supposed to be about the night before the sacrifice of Christ our Passover? Where did the emphasis on the night Jesus was betrayed come from? Should the Passover ceremony be a time of darkness and gloom, or of rejoicing and thanksgiving?

Jesus' blood was not shed on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup>, and it is impossible to have a Passover ceremony without the shed blood of the sacrifice. Notice the instructions that God gave to the Israelites, who were in bondage to Egypt (sin). The people were to place the blood of the sacrifice around the entrance to their dwellings (Exodus 12:7). Obviously, the sacrifice had to be dead before this could be done. "And the **blood** shall be to you for a sign upon the houses where

you are: and **when I see the blood, I will pass over** you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt” (v. 13).

Without the blood of the sacrifice they would not be passed over. God said, “and when I see the blood, I will pass over you,” meaning that if He did not see the blood, He would not pass over them, and “...**without shedding of blood is no remission** [859, *forgiveness, pardon*]” (Hebrews 9:22). The wine, which is supposed to represent Jesus’ shed blood for our sins, is meaningless on the night of the fourteenth.

Jesus, “...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: this do **in remembrance** [364, *a memorial*] of Me. After the same manner also he took the cup...saying, This cup is the New Covenant **in My blood**: this do you, as often as you drink it, **in remembrance** [364, *a memorial*] of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

When Jesus presented these on the night before His death, **He had not shed His blood!** These symbols were pointing ahead to His death. “For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, **you do show the Lord’s death till He come**” (v. 26). A memorial is established after an event—not before an event. We do not partake of the symbols of Passover before Jesus’ death, but after His death, on the holy day that God established to be a memorial.

“And this day shall be to you for a **memorial**...” (Exodus 12:14). This is the same day of which God had said, “when I see the blood, I will pass over you” (verse 13). Continue verse 14: “and you shall keep [2287, *celebrate, dance, hold a festival*] it a feast [2282, *festival, time of joy*] to the LORD throughout your generations; you shall keep it a feast [2287] **by an ordinance forever**. Seven days shall you eat unleavened bread...And in the first day there shall be a holy convocation...for **in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt**: therefore **you shall observe this day in your generations by an ordinance forever**” (Exodus 12:14-17).

Passover is a time of great celebration to God for what He has done. “...**Remember** [2142, *a memorial of a past event*] **this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage**; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall be no leaven eaten. This day came you out in the month Abib” (Exodus 13:3, 4). The strength of hand was when the Eternal “...slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt...” (v. 15), and that was on the night of the Passover ceremony.

Likewise, under the New Covenant, Passover is a time of “Giving thanks to the Father, Who has made us meet [2427, *qualified*] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love: **in Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins**” (Colossians 1:12-14).

We cannot redeem ourselves. It is only through the power of God that we can be justified. “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption [629, *deliverance procured by payment of a ransom*] that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation [2435, *mercy seat*] **through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission** [3929, *passing over*] **of sins that are past**, through the forbearance of God; to declare...His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier [1344, *to hold as guiltless, to accept as righteous, to be approved*] of him which believes in Jesus” (Romans 3:24-26).

Passover pictures our justification through Jesus’ blood. Is that something that we should feel guilty about, and show our thanks for the wonderful gift of life by holding a celebration that resembles a funeral service instead of a time of thanksgiving? Our guilt is washed away in Jesus’ blood, and it is gone forever. Passover begins a new and wonderful life in the truth.

Where did the idea that Passover should be a morbid funeral service originate? The early congregations were warned that “...there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, **even denying** [720, *contradicting*] **the Lord that bought them...**” (2 Peter 2:1). From the very beginning of the New Covenant congregations there were attempts being made to undermine the truth by contradicting the Word.

“While the Christians of Palestine, who kept the whole Jewish law, celebrated of course all the Jewish festivals, the heathen converts observed only the Sabbath, and, in remembrance of closing scenes of our Savior’s life, the Passover, though without the Jewish superstitions.’—*Church History, Apostolic Age to A.D. 70, Sec. 29; Lewis Hist. S. & S., page 135.*”<sup>1</sup>

The heathen converts did not keep the annual holy days, and their so-called Passover observance was of the “closing scenes” of Jesus’ life; i.e., it was observed on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup>. There is no command anywhere in scripture to observe the “closing scenes” of Jesus’ life as Passover. This was a perversion of the true Passover ceremony, and it has continued to this very day.

We are to be sorrowful for the sins that we have committed, and we are to turn from the way of darkness, and “...if we walk in the light, as [God] is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Passover is about being set free from the bondage of sin and death by the love of God. It is a time to rejoice with thanksgiving for the wonderful gift of life from the Father and His Son. When we partake of the bread and the wine it is to be done with joy and thanksgiving. **Passover is not a time of gloom!** That attitude is of Satan, who hates Passover and has done everything in his power to pervert it, and he has been very successful at it.

Let us celebrate Passover with joy and thanksgiving to God for setting us free. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> A.N. Dugger and C.O. Dodd, *A History of The True Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p. 47.