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215 - The Passover

1. Introduction

A pivotal moment in the history of the Hebrew nation was their release from bondage after four-hundred thirty years of slavery. As we've seen in previous lessons, their freedom was brought about by perhaps the single most destructive catastrophe to strike the Egyptians - the death of the firstborn. The Hebrews in preparation for that moment, and their deliverance from death, observed God's commands in a solemn memorial that would be remembered throughout their generations. That memorial was **The Passover**.

2. The Passover

In past lessons I've discussed the Passover lamb and other elements associated with the feast and their symbolic connections. We'll touch on those again, but I want to examine the Passover as a whole. Looking at it this way we'll see the significance of the memorial and how it lies at the heart of the Law given to Moses. The elements God introduced were for the benefit of the people at that time but more importantly they were creating a path to the Messiah who would be revealed. We'll examine the Passover as

- a. An event
- b. A dividing line
- c. A blessing
- d. A container, and
- e. The Passover and Christ

Let's take a look at each of these

3. The Passover as an event (Identity)

Our typical approach to studying the Passover is to focus on the lamb, the process of setting it aside, its preparation, use of the blood, and the preservation of the firstborn. A deeper study might also include the aspect of urgency in how the meal was eaten. I'll come back to these aspects later but I want to focus on the overall meaning of the Passover as an event.

The most obvious aspect of the Passover was a coming judgment of God. In the scriptures we have a number of references that speak of the visitation of the Lord. This phrase sometimes denotes a blessing to be received or a negative judgment. Specific to this event are the words of Joseph that he spoke in preparation for his death. "***And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.***" (Gen 50.24). God told Abraham, "***Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also***

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that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge...” (Gen 15.13-14). There are two elements that are stated in this passage.

The first is that Abraham’s seed would be strangers in a foreign land for four generations where they would be oppressed. God informs Abraham they’ll return to the land and describes the conditions under which this will happen. We’ll see that shortly. The second element is that the nation oppressing the children of Abraham will be judged by God. The wording of Joseph’s statement is significant. The visitation of God would be a blessing for the seed of Abraham, and a judgment against their oppressors.

A visitation by the Lord may happen on a broader scale such as we see in the events leading up to the Exodus. But the power of the Lord is also manifested at more personal levels as well attesting to his greatness. This can be seen clearly in the promise of a son God made to Abraham and Sarah. We’re told that *“the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken.”* (Gen 21.1). The magnitude of God’s power in this occurrence is in the fact that God promised to return *“the time of life”* to both Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18.10). The reversal of aging and restoration of the ability to have a child is beyond the ability of any being except the Lord. One of the things that strikes me about this is that when God made the promise to the couple they were beyond their childbearing years. God’s visitation was manifested during a time in which it was biologically impossible for them to have a child on their own.

If we think about the gravity of this situation we see that God declares that a couple, rendered infertile by their age will have a son, and then makes it happen. This wasn’t just a fertility treatment. God blessed them at a time of their lives when there could be no question as to what happened. There are infertile couples who try for years to have children and then after heartbreak and reaching a point of giving up - become pregnant and have a child. This situation wasn’t like that. God reversed the effects of time enabling them to do something they couldn’t achieve on their own. God’s visitation was visible and incontestable.

The Passover was just such an event. It was performed by God in a way that was beyond the reach of humanity. It involved an action that touched on life itself and rendered those affected by it powerless. It also demonstrated the Lord’s care and provision for his people. The visitation of God on the night of the Passover was an event that possessed a truly supernatural character and wouldn’t soon be forgotten by those touched by it. It was an event that confirmed the power of God over not just the elements as he had shown in the previous nine plagues, but that he had the ability to take or protect life. The gods of the Egyptians were nothing more than lifeless icons of a superstitious people who thought they could stand against the creator of all things. Although there are figurative elements in the institution and execution of the memorial, the physical event itself remains an enigmatic expression of divine power and judgment that identified good and evil as well as those who followed the Lord.

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4. The Passover as a dividing line (Boundary)

As I mentioned earlier God promised Abraham that he would bring his offspring back to the land of Canaan four generations after they left it. Abraham would later have the son God promised and so could be confident that the Lord would do as he promised. We don't know what the Hebrews knew about God. They had been separated from their land and heritage and Joseph had been dead for over three centuries at the time that Moses returned to lead them out of bondage. They were probably acquainted with the story of Abraham and how their family came to be, but after hundreds of years of oppression they may not have had much faith in what they heard.

When talking about the plagues God brought on Egypt we focus on the dynamics between Moses and Pharaoh, or between God and Pharaoh, but there's another element we may not consider. The children of Israel may not have had a strong belief in God. They may have felt abandoned and seen their lives as hopeless. Whatever their state, the plagues that came on the Egyptians weren't just about a struggle between a pagan monarch and a prophet of God, it was the Lord's submission of proof to his people that he was there, was powerful and was liberating them. In that liberation there was a division or boundary set between the Hebrews and Egyptians that was impassable and impenetrable.

As we read descriptions of the plagues we find that the children of Israel were protected from the swarms of flies during the third plague (**Ex 8.22-23**). They didn't experience the murrain on their cattle during the fifth plague (**Ex 9.4-7**). The Hebrews weren't afflicted with boils during the sixth plague (**Ex 9.11**). The land of Goshen wasn't affected by the fiery hail that God caused during the seventh plague (**Ex 9.26**). And there was light in the dwellings of the Hebrews during three days of darkness during the ninth plague (**Ex 10.22-23**). The text indicates that there was a clear distinction, or boundary, between those under God's protection and those who opposed his power. The final and most powerful barrier would be that of death in the final plague.

What's interesting at this point is that God extended protection over the Hebrews in the previous plagues without requiring them to do anything. But, as the last plague approaches they're given strict instructions to prepare for it. The need to follow these instructions and the requirements that were to be met further emphasizes the unique and critical nature of this plague. It also indicates that while the Egyptians were being punished for their opposition to God's directive, another boundary would be formed around any of the Hebrews who refused to comply. This introduces another element that has significance as a foreshadow of the final law. That element is the desire to please God and follow his directions willingly in faith. The children of Israel realized what was at stake and the seriousness of the command was made clear by Moses.

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We're familiar with the need to comply with God's directives today. If we want to be saved and be pleasing to God we familiarize ourselves with his commands or instructions. We then follow those to the letter in order to be blessed by him. Just as the Egyptians were outside the boundary of God's protection, there are those today who will find themselves outside the saving grace of the Lord if they fail to heed and follow God's instructions. Unfortunately there are a multitude of doctrines in the world today that fall short and lead millions astray. The boundary between the Egyptians and Hebrews and the reality of death is as real today as it was then.

A limitation is also found in the instructions for the Passover. Foreigners staying in the land they would inherit weren't permitted to eat the Passover (**Ex 12.43**). A servant purchased with money who was circumcised was able to do this while others were prohibited (**Ex 12.44-45**). The Passover denoted a relationship with God that wasn't shared with others at the time. This also foreshadows the blessings of being a child of God today as the Hebrews were at that time.

5. The Passover as a blessing (Inheritance)

Its possible that the Hebrews may have lost sight of who God was or the details of the promises that were made to Abraham but God didn't forget them. Events in the Bible orchestrated by God may seem to take place at random times but the scriptures reveal that there's purpose in the timing of these. The downfall of Judah took place when there "*was no more remedy*" (**2 chr 36.16**) and Christ was brought into the world at the "*fullness of time*" (**Gal 4.4**). The exodus was an event that took place on the four hundred and thirtieth anniversary of the Hebrews presence in Egypt (**Ex 12.40-41**). Paul the apostle told the Athenian philosophers that God set bounds on the territory of nations and the time they will exist (**Acts 17.26**). The Passover is no exception. The timing was precise and the effect it would achieve was also according to the plan of God.

When the family of Jacob came to Egypt they had their personal possessions, flocks and herds. They were supplied with an abundance of what they needed to sustain themselves and wouldn't have been considered poor. Joseph was second in line to Pharaoh and we can imagine that with his power came a fair degree of wealth. Once the family came to Egypt they were given the land of Goshen which was described as the best of the land by Pharaoh (**Gen 47.6**). From that point we can conclude that once the Hebrews were enslaved they were no longer in a position of favor or wealth. They were hated, feared and their male offspring were the target of a partial genocide by the Egyptians who sought to control and reduce the population. In that kind of environment one doesn't gain wealth or become affluent. Now we need to review what God told Abraham as he described how his children would leave the land of their oppressors.

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I've reviewed the fact that God told Abraham his offspring would be strangers in a land that wasn't theirs and this would last for four generations. The Lord also stated that the nation that did this would be judged for their evil. God then adds another dimension to this as he states that when Abraham's children left that nation they would come out with "**great substance**" (**Gen 15.14**). In the Passover there would be a blessing. Those who had been oppressed and killed wouldn't just leave, but would leave with the wealth of Egypt. This aspect of God's action of taking the life of the firstborn of Egypt did two things. It blessed a nation of people who had been deprived of an acceptable quality of life with the ability to thrive. Secondly, it reduced the power of the Egyptians even more. The entire time that Moses had been in Egypt asking for the Hebrews to be set free we see the arrogance, hostility and dishonesty of Pharaoh and his people. The Egyptians were proud, affluent and independent. By the time of the Passover their nation had been ravaged by the plagues, their reliance on their gods challenged and their ability to stand against the God of the Hebrews ineffective. The tenth plague proved to be so devastating that all resistance left in the Egyptians was gone.

We can't imagine what it would be like to have the oldest child of every family die in one night. And it's not just the children of the Egyptians, the firstborn of their animals died as well (**Ex 11.5**). God describes how this would affect them. God stated, "**And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more.**" (**Ex 11.6**). The result of the calamity favored the children of Israel. "**And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians.**" (**Ex 12.35-36**).

The Passover represents the final neutralization of Pharaoh's power. The gods of the land have been useless in countering or preventing the things that have taken place. The firstborn of every family and their animals are now dead. God then uses his influence to cause the Egyptians to give gold, silver, clothing and everything else they wanted to the extent that the Hebrews "**spoiled**" them. The nation was ransacked and depleted of any value that was left. When the Hebrews marched out of the land toward the Red Sea and freedom, they were endowed with enormous wealth and resources. Later in the book as we read about the Tabernacle and objects created for worship we see the extent of the wealth they were given. The Hebrews time in Egypt hadn't been pleasant, but at their departure they reaped the benefits of God's care for them.

We can easily draw a number of parallels between the life of believers today under the Gospel era and the time of the Exodus. In Christ we have freedom from sin and mortality. There's an abundance in the grace of God that can't be obtained by our own merit. The Hebrews would have remained enslaved had it not been for God's intervention and salvation. Likewise, today we wouldn't be free or enriched without God's intervention through Christ. The Hebrews didn't influence the Egyptians to turn over their wealth, that was beyond their ability. Today the

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wealth of God in his blessings toward us isn't possible without God's provision. In that regard the Passover represents the ultimate provisioning for the servants of the Lord in ways beyond their capability. Throughout the scriptures God has always provided an inheritance for his followers, the ultimate form of which is eternal life through Christ.

6. The Passover as a container (Limitation)

I mentioned earlier that we have a tendency to view the Passover from a process perspective. That is we view the various procedures that were carried out and the manner in which they were performed. This allows us to focus on the spiritual aspects of what's being done but at the same time we can lose sight of precisely what the Passover actually was. In a moment we're going to look at the individual figurative elements that were part of the Passover but I want to take some time to focus our attention on the Passover in a way we don't usually consider.

When we think of the Passover we have a mental image of the entire event including the lamb, blood, bitter herbs, the fourteenth day of the month etc. but the Passover itself is a specific element represented by this memorial. An element that represents the mercy and visitation of God in which a judgment is implemented. The idea of a visitation by the Lord is found throughout the Old Testament. The Lord visited Sodom and Gomorrah and destroyed the cities by fire (**Gen 19.1-25**). God visited Abraham and Sarah reversing the effects of aging and blessed them with a son (**Gen 21.1**). There are other examples of this but these are probably the most well known to most people. God's visitation is sometimes positive as in the case of Abraham and Sarah or negative. God would "*visit the transgressions*" of Israel upon them through a negative judgment (**Amos 3.14**). Jeremiah told those who did evil that God would "*visit*" their evil upon them and the day of visitation against Judah is detailed (**Jer 50.25-27**). The Passover was a visitation by God on a nation that enslaved and murdered his people. Joseph, in his last wishes, told the Hebrews to take his bones back to Canaan because the Lord would "*surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob...*" (**Gen 50.24**). The time of that visitation had now arrived. Now let's take a closer look at the Passover and narrow our focus on the event.

We can look at the Passover from a global perspective and find that it exists within an environment God prepared for it. Note the following points.

- a. God began separating the Hebrews from the Egyptians as he created a new year for them and declared the first day of that year. God stated that this day would be the beginning of months for them marking a specific distinction between the Egyptians and all other people on the Earth (**Ex 12.1-2**).
- b. God commanded that a lamb should be sanctified or set apart on the tenth day of this new month. The animal was to be separated and kept apart from the others until the

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proper time (**Ex 12.3**).

c. On the fourteenth day of the month the lamb was to be killed at evening and the Hebrews were to follow specific instructions on how to eat the lamb, what was to be included with it and how the remains were to be destroyed by fire (**Ex 12.6**).

d. On this evening at midnight, God took the lives of the firstborn of Egypt but passed over the houses of the Hebrews who had followed his instructions (**Ex 14.27**).

When we think about the Passover we call to mind the sacrifice, the death of the firstborn and the timeframe in which this happened. If we ask someone what the Passover represents the answer we're most likely to get is that this was the night that God struck the firstborn of Egypt. And that's correct. But that's not what the Passover was. The Passover doesn't refer to the death of the firstborn, although that was the judgment of the Lord brought on Egypt. Passover refers to the salvation and preservation of the firstborn of the Hebrews. It represents the preservation of life, not death. It represents the mercy of God toward those who were his people and followed his instructions who were saved. In essence, Passover is a statement of the mercy of God and represents life not death. The paradox here is that the lives of the Hebrews were preserved by the death of the lamb that was sanctified as the sacrifice and its blood on their homes. With this in mind we can easily see how Christ is contained in this figure.

7. Passover and Christ

We've looked at the Passover as an event that identified the followers of God and those who rejected the Lord. We saw how a boundary existed between the Hebrews and those who rejected God. I demonstrated how God blessed the children of Israel and how they spoiled Egypt as they left. Finally I started with a global view of the Passover as a whole and then narrowed the focus so we could see the event as an expression of God's mercy and salvation. With these ideas in mind we can review the elements that were brought together in the Passover to preserve the Hebrews and create a powerful foreshadow or type of what God would do in the future. I've addressed this before in previous lessons but we'll review them here so we cover all aspects of the subject.

a. God set a day as the beginning of the Hebrew year then gave instructions for the Passover lamb to be separated on the tenth day and sacrificed on the fourteenth day.

b. Christ was set apart as the sacrifice for the sins of the world before time began and was then sent into the world to be offered at the fulness of time (**Gal 4.4**)

c. On the night of the Passover the bread of the Hebrews hadn't been in their kneading troughs long enough to rise and so was unleavened. God decreed that no leaven was to be in their dwellings for seven days (**Ex 12.15**).

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- d. In the New Testament leaven is used to represent sin as contrasted with Christ who is our Passover sacrificed for us (**1 Cor 5.6-8**).
- e. At the time of the Passover the firstborn were sanctified to God which was to be remembered throughout their generations (**Ex 13.1**)
- f. Christ is referred to as the firstborn of the dead (**Col 1.18**) pointing to the deliverance from the power of Satan (**Heb 4.14**)
- g. The blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels of the Hebrews saved their firstborn from death as a sign of their faith in God
- h. The blood of Christ applied to one's soul saves one from eternal death (**Rom 5.9, Eph 1.7**)
- I. The Hebrews were freed from bondage and left for Canaan as God had promised
- j. Christ promised the faithful will have an eternal dwelling with him and his father (**John 14.1-3**)

This is a short list of the comparisons that can be made. We've touched on many of these in previous lessons so this serves as a review. These show that the wisdom and engineering of God are powerful. The images and foreshadows form a connection that emphasizes the fact that the Bible is not a book of stories but is indeed the word of God.

8. What we've learned

We typically look at the Passover from a process perspective. That is we review the actions that were taken from the separation of the Passover lamb to the placing of the blood on the doorposts and lintels of the Hebrews dwellings. We've seen the figurative elements contained within the event itself and that brings us to looking at the Passover globally then narrowing our focus on the event as an expression of God's mercy and salvation.

Within the Passover are the elements - the lamb, blood, firstborn, unleavened bread, reverence, protection, identity as God's people and life. As we've seen these elements are perfectly represented in the sacrifice of Christ who was the lamb of God who gave his blood as the firstborn of the father and from the dead. It was his sacrifice that demonstrated the ultimate reverence to God the father in his submission to his will. Christ knew that through his sacrifice God would raise him from the dead and extend that blessing to all those who believe on his son. He made it possible for all of every nation to be identified as a child of God when they obey and

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thus receive the protection from the wrath of the Lord just as the Hebrews did on that solemn night.

Viewing the Passover in this manner should deepen our appreciation for God's wisdom and the intricate nature of how his plan to save mankind was foretold, represented and executed in a way that no one would have predicted or expected. These facts set the story of the Passover apart as one of the most unique not only in the Bible but in the world. Some might try to compare this event to pagan worship and mythology but in the end there's no comparison or equal anywhere or anytime.

8. Next

In the next video we'll examine an element that becomes prominent during the Passover and later the Law given to Moses at Sinai. Join me in the next lesson for a discussion of **The Unleavened Bread**.