

Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

PASSOVER AND THE LAMB OF GOD



Forerunner

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About Our Cover:

In the Old Testament observance of the Passover, an innocent, unblemished lamb was chosen to be the sacrificial victim, representing Israel's redemption from Egyptian slavery. Like this lamb, Jesus Christ gave His life to be our Redeemer, completely fulfilling the type. He is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. (Applied Optical Media Corp.)

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Christ, Our Passover

The idea of human sacrifice is repugnant to our modern sense of decency and civility. We feel that those who practiced this act of appeasing the gods were ignorant savages of by-gone times. However, it is beyond question that Jesus of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God, was crucified—sacrificed—for the forgiveness of our sins. He is the propitiation, the appeasing force, by which we can enter into God’s presence. God, the righteous Judge of all mankind, provided Jesus Christ to pay the incalculable price for sin.

God’s judgment is perfect. Notice how the psalmist describes the quality of His judgments in Psalm 111:2-4, 6-9:

The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who have pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. He has made His wonderful works to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and full of compassion. . . . He has declared to His people the power of His works, in giving them the heritage of the nations. The works of His hands are verity and justice; all His precepts are sure. They stand fast forever and ever, and are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name.

God’s judgments are great! But only those who have experienced and deeply considered them know *how truly great and exalted* they are. In addition, all of His judgments and works are righteous, a characteristic that points to eternal rather than temporary effects. God’s judgments are not only right, they are eternally right! God does not deal in situation ethics—His laws, His morals, His ethics, work every time, all the time!

Further, He never makes decisions or exercises His power arbitrarily. Because His Word and works always harmonize with the immutable dictates of what is right, they are sure and trustworthy guides for us. Thus, trusting in them and making them a part of our lives will always be right. For this, among many other things, God should be revered.

The Word of God

When we compare God’s works with man’s, what a difference we see! The closer we look at man’s, the more flaws we see. Yet, when we scrutinize God’s works, we just see more perfection. Man is finite; God is infinite. Man is mutable; God is immutable. Man is imperfect; God is perfect.

Consider how adept God is in using one creation to do many different jobs. Air, for instance, is invisible and appears to be weightless, yet it will support the flight of an airplane weighing many tons. In supplying the lungs with oxygen, it supports life. Air also supports combustion, but when separated into its component parts, some of its gases can put out a fire (carbon dioxide), while others greatly intensify fire (oxygen, hydrogen). Air conveys heat and cold, scents and sounds. It holds moisture, moves ships and other things besides. In contrast, man must create special tools for every purpose, and our attempts are often quite clumsy.

Because we have been subtly trained since infancy to seek quick answers, our studies of His Word tend to overlook how profound He is. We often just accept what God says without really searching it out. But like His works, God’s Word is just as much His creation as air.

How infinitely deep and broad God’s Word is! Its uses are virtually inexhaustible. Consider how the ministry applies a familiar scripture to one subject, and a few weeks later, another will use the same scripture to illustrate a different subject altogether!

The writer of Psalm 119 waxes rhapsodic about God’s Word: “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law. I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me. My soul breaks with longing for Your judgments at all times” (verses 18-20). He had the correct idea! We are pilgrims on our way to the Kingdom. We have no idea how long the journey will be, nor have we ever been this way before. If we ignore God’s Word, we will surely wander aimlessly; we will stray from the path.

So we cannot merely look on its surface—we must delve *into* the Bible! Digging is hard work! God’s instruc-

tion is scattered throughout His book (Isaiah 28:9-10). Each section—even each verse!—may have multiple purposes, even as air does in the physical creation. From this principle, it is easy to see that we can understand the Bible on many levels and give them several applications.

What Is He?

Think of this principle in relation to Christ. Notice how the people of His own day perceived Him:

For even His brothers did not believe in Him. . . . And there was much murmuring among the people concerning Him. Some said “He is good”; others said, “No, on the contrary, He deceives the people.” . . . The people answered and said, “You have a demon. Who is seeking to kill You?” . . . “But look! He speaks boldly, and they say nothing to Him. Do the rulers know indeed that this is truly the Christ?” (John 7:5, 12, 20, 26)

Even then, opinion was greatly divided about Him.

- To the average Jew, He was a mysterious fellow, a Man not really understood but liked. Jesus did fantastic things on behalf of the common man, which appealed to his curiosity.
- The Pharisees and Sadducees considered Him an arch-rival, a competitor, the ringleader of a new cult and a threat to their authority and popularity.
- Generally, the Romans saw Him at first as little more than a curiosity, a magician, but in the end they condemned Him as a troublemaker, a traitor. Pilate called Him “just” (Matthew 27:24) and found “no fault in Him at all” (John 18:38). Yet to avoid a seditious riot, he sentenced Him to be crucified.

But what is He to you? It is very important to answer this because Passover is all about what He is. The Bible shows Christ as Creator, Prophet, High Priest and King. He is the Redeemer of Israel and in a multitude of situations, Savior and Deliverer. He is Provider, Healer, Apostle, Judge, Avenger and Forerunner. In all, the Bible gives Him over two hundred guises. At Passover, though, the focus centers primarily on Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world, a human sacrifice of the most sublime quality.

When we ponder what Christ means to us, we should include Romans 10:4: “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” In this regard, Paul says that Christ is the object of the Bible. The law, as one aspect that represents the whole plan of salvation, is the instrument that broadly describes God’s righteous-

ness. Like everything in God’s purpose, the end—the goal—of the law is to bring us “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Jesus fulfilled the law in that He perfectly exemplified God’s desires in everything He did (see Matthew 5:17). He personifies perfect love and government. He is the perfect man yet also God in the flesh. He is the Standard toward which men are to strive.

Not a Mystery to Us

Christ, Paul and John use the term “mystery” to refer to

Christianity itself or some aspect of it. Jesus uses it in Matthew 13:10-11: “And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do you speak to them in parables?’ He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.’”

To a Greek-speaking person, a mystery was not a difficult puzzle to solve, but a secret impossible to penetrate. A biblical mystery is a teaching that is impossible to understand until the meaning is *revealed*, then it becomes plain. Greeks used the term to describe something that was crystal clear to insiders, but unintelligible to outsiders.

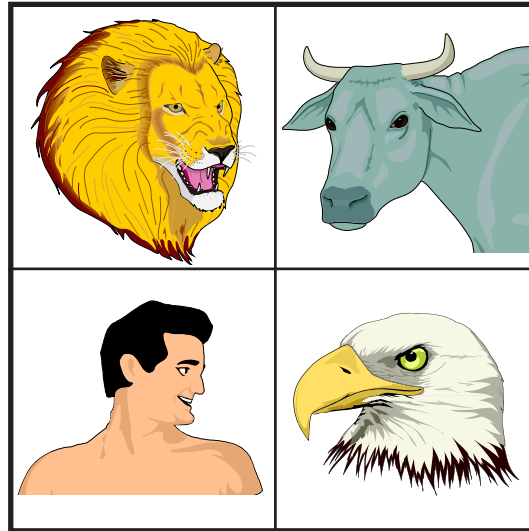
Only “insiders,” those who are obedient to God’s will (Psalm 111:10), can understand the full-

ness of Christianity. As a result of our submission, we understand the plan of salvation *far better* than any “outsider,” no matter how intelligent. Much of our enlightenment comes from keeping God’s festivals, which outline His plan and help us stay on course.

Despite this, we often develop “blind spots,” areas where we overlook weaknesses in our understanding and practice. For example, we tend to recoil in disgust at how “Christianity” presents Christ rather than how He truly is. The churches of this world depict Him as Savior in a maudlin, overly sentimental way that turns our stomachs because it makes Him seem weak. On the other hand, some of us have fallen into the opposite ditch. In the past, we have described Him as an angry, conquering Warrior, Lawgiver and Judge who seems bent on taking human life.

Where is the balance point? What is His true nature? Is not the gospel of the Kingdom of God the totality of the message, life, works and promises embodied in Jesus Christ of Nazareth? The gospel reveals Jesus as:

- The Creator, the One through whom the Father made all things.
- The very Son of God who revealed the Father.
- The Head of the church and Dispenser of the Holy Spirit.



The gospels themselves present four different views of Christ. Knowing how the gospel writers depicted our Savior is important in understanding who He really is. For more information, request the tape series, “Four Views of Christ.”

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Why We Must Put Leaven Out

Years ago, I had a favorite question to ask ministers about the Days of Unleavened Bread. “Why must we go through the physical act of putting leaven out of our homes before the Days of Unleavened Bread, but we are not required to be physically circumcised?” I never received an answer.

There are many parallels between circumcision and de-leavening our homes. Both of these physical acts demonstrate a spiritual principle. Circumcision symbolizes an attitude of heart and mind (Romans 2:26-29), and de-leavening our homes symbolizes putting sin out of our lives (I Corinthians 5:6-7). The New Testament, however, makes it clear that Christians do not have to be circumcised physically (Galatians 5:6). Why, then, do we have to put leaven out of our homes during the Days of Unleavened Bread?

Like me, others may have had the same question and never received an answer. Because they consider these “works” to be done away with the Old Covenant, some churches that observe the holy days do not require members to de-leaven their homes. When we search the Scriptures about this matter, we will see why ridding our homes of leaven is so important but circumcision is not.

First-Century Controversy

Since God instituted circumcision as the sign of the covenant He made with Abraham (Genesis 17:10-11), it predates the Old Covenant by several hundred years. When God called Israel out of Egypt and gave them His laws, He included the command to

circumcise male babies (Leviticus 12:3). Circumcision identified the Israelites as physical descendants of Abraham, gave them a sense of national identity and set them apart from other nations of the world.

The nation of Israel was a type of God’s church. Many of the rituals



that God commanded Israel to do symbolize spiritual principles. For example, the command to kill the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:3-6) typifies the death of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29). Indeed, God established the entire sacrificial system to keep the Israelites mindful of their need for a Savior (Hebrews 9:11-14).

When Christ came, instituting the New Covenant, the way opened for Gentiles to enter the church through repentance and baptism just like the Jews (Acts 10:44-48; 11:1-18). Though they were not physical descendants of Abraham, converted Gentiles became Abraham’s spiritual progeny through their faith in the sacrifice of Christ and receipt of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 3:26-29).

The Gentiles’ conversion resulted

in a serious controversy in the church over whether they should be required to be circumcised. This major issue resulted in the convening of the first ministerial conference in the history of God’s church (Acts 15). At this conference, the ministry was led to decide that the Gentiles do not need to be circumcised. Peter concludes,

So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them [Gentiles], by giving them the Holy Spirit just as He did to us [Jews], and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. (Acts 15:8-9)

God revealed to the apostles that, under the New Covenant, He makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Regardless of race or ethnic origin, He extends the promises of salvation to any and all whom He chooses to call. Under the New Covenant, physical descent from Abraham no longer matters because God is concerned only over the person’s repentance and faith in Christ. Those who receive the Holy Spirit after repentance and baptism become “the seed of Abraham.” Additionally, because the purpose and meaning of physical circumcision have been superseded by the New Covenant, there is no need to inflict pain and possible psychological distress on an adult male through this operation.

Peter emphasizes that God looked upon the hearts of the Gentiles and saw their repentance. Although they were not circumcised, God forgave their sins because of their repentance and faith in Christ and granted them the gift of the Holy Spirit. They were,

therefore, justified by faith and spiritually circumcised, that is, in heart and mind (Romans 2:28-29). During the Jerusalem conference, God revealed to the apostles that *justification fulfilled the spiritual symbolism of circumcision*.

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul makes this very clear:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. (Colossians 2:11-13)

Paul shows that circumcision typifies putting off the old man of sin that is buried in a watery grave at baptism. After being raised from the water in newness of life (Romans 6:4), the repentant sinner stands before God perfect, holy and sinless. The process of spiritual circumcision is complete, and the symbol of physical circumcision is fulfilled.

Purging the Old Leaven

What then are the differences between the symbolism of circumcision and that of putting leaven out of our homes? When God called Israel out of Egypt, He commanded them to observe the seven Days of Unleavened Bread:

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. (Exodus 12:15)

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that God expects Christians to keep this festival. Paul writes, "Therefore let us keep the feast, not

with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:8).

Throughout the New Testament, God uses leaven as a symbol of sin. Jesus warns, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1). In discussing the danger of sin spreading, Paul uses the phrase "a little leaven leavens the whole lump" on two separate occasions (I Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9).

Paul plainly instructs that the purpose of keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread is to remind us of our need to remove sin from our lives.

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (I Corinthians 5:7-8)

Because of the serious sins that a Corinthian member had committed, and the congregation's general acceptance of this situation, Paul advises them to use the Days of Unleavened Bread to "purge out the old leaven." They should examine their attitudes and put these sins out of their lives and out of the congregation. He reminds them that the Passover is a memorial of the death of Christ, who died for us that we may receive forgiveness of sins. They "truly are unleavened," he says, in the sense that they had repented and been justified through faith in the sacrifice of Christ. However, since they had allowed leaven to return into their lives, they needed to get rid of it.

This is the heart of why we are still required to put leaven out of our homes. Leaven represents sin, and deleavening our homes symbolizes purging sin from our lives. However, *cleansing our lives of sin is a lifetime process that will not be completely fulfilled until we are resurrected and transformed into spirit*. As long as we are still flesh

and blood, we will never be absolutely perfect—we will never free ourselves completely and totally of sin. This constant struggle to overcome human nature and put on God's nature is called sanctification.

Nevertheless, we must continually strive to conform to the image of Jesus Christ, that is, to be a truly perfect human being. Paul writes:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

God wants us to observe the Days of Unleavened Bread year after year to remind us that we are not perfect and that our lives are a constant struggle against sin. When we deleaven our homes, we find that, no matter how hard we try, we cannot find every tiny crumb that may be imbedded in carpet or hidden behind an appliance. This illustrates how deceitful sin is and teaches us that we must constantly examine ourselves to purge it out of our lives. Removing sin is hard work! The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us annually of this constant warfare that all Christians must wage throughout their lives.

Why then must we remove leaven from our homes but need not be circumcised? The answer is that physical circumcision no longer has a purpose under the New Covenant. Its symbolism is fulfilled in the process of repentance, baptism and receipt of the Holy Spirit. However, the object lesson of deleavening our homes still has great meaning and purpose for us. The symbolism of putting sin out of our lives will not be completely fulfilled until we are changed and inherit the Kingdom of God and become like Him who cannot sin (I John 3:9).

—Earl L. Henn

January 1996: WHAT HAPPENED?

Why even ask this question? January has been a very interesting month throughout the modern history of the church of God (see inset). As we can see, some of the most significant events in our spiritual lives have had their beginnings in this mid-winter month.

January 11, 1996, was significant for those of us in the Church of the Great God since it was this church's fourth anniversary. God's law says that a tree's fruit can be used generally in the fifth year after three years of "circumcised" fruit and one year of "holy" fruit (Leviticus 19:23-25). Will we have a change of direction in our work after four years of God's revelation of Himself? That remains to be seen.

Hold Fast!

January 16, 1996, was the tenth anniversary of the death of Herbert Armstrong. Ten is used in the Bible to show complete testing, judgment and punishment (Ten Plagues, Ten Commandments, Ten Virgins). It is a number of Divine order or a complete cycle. Over these past ten years, we have seen a great falling away from the truth of God, even though Revelation 3:11 specifically tells us to "hold fast." Could God have used these ten years to determine who will hold fast and who will allow themselves to be pulled away from His truth?

The "Personal" in the February 1996 *Plain Truth*, distributed in January, was first printed in the Winter 1996 issue of *Christian Research Journal*. Entitled "A Church Reborn," it uses a ten-year framework to summarize the "accomplishments" of the

Worldwide Church of God. This includes a comprehensive list of changes in almost everything that the church once believed. A quotation from the "Personal" will suffice to show the attitude:

All these changes in the space of 10 years? Many are now advising us that profound course corrections of this magnitude are without historical precedent, at least since the days of the New

Testament church. . . . Despite the material losses, we have gained much. As Paul wrote, *whatever was to our profit in what we embraced before, we now consider worthless for the sake of Christ.* (Our emphasis)

Ten years after the death of Herbert Armstrong, most of the doctrines he taught are now considered worthless! Is it not ironic that this ten-year summary was officially distributed in

Significant Januaries in Recent Church History

Year	Events
1934	Gospel goes to the United States via radio (7th); first issue of <i>The Plain Truth</i> magazine prepared.
1953	Gospel goes to Europe via Radio Luxembourg (1st).
1965	Radio broadcast begins on Radio London from "pirate" ships (5th).
1972	Gospel goes international via <i>Reader's Digest</i> ; financing received for building "a house for God" (Ambassador Auditorium), and ground-breaking ceremony occurs on January 14; radio broadcast resumes with old tapes of Herbert W. Armstrong (HWA), having been interrupted in October 1971 by Garner Ted Armstrong's (GTA) leave of absence.
1974	Forty years from 1934; Pentecost doctrine is questioned at ministerial conference, and HWA initiates a research team on it; seeds planted for a rebellion to break out in February over 1) GTA's leave of absence, 2) divorce and remarriage, 3) church authority and administrations (voting, democratic government) with most of the tithes staying in local church areas and 4) claims of misallocation of church funds (see HWA's member letter, February 25, 1974).
1978	Ministerial conference: Rebellion occurs when the Systematic Theology Project is discussed and distributed to the ministry after HWA says not to make any changes.
1979	State of California attacks the Worldwide Church of God (3rd).
1986	HWA dies (16th).
1992	Church of the Great God (CGG) begins with the sermon, "Do You See God?" (11th).
1996	???

(Other branches of God's church may have significant dates in January of which we do not have knowledge.)

January 1996? Did God test the leaders of the church for ten years to see if they would “hold fast” to true doctrine or follow the religion of Babylon? The last sentence of the “Personal” gives their response: “Relying on God in faith and in fervent prayer, we fully intend to stay the course on which Jesus Christ has set us.” They are not willing to return to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3)! (Please understand, I do not intend to “bad mouth” the leadership of this church. They are quite happy with what they have done, though, personally, I think they have erred. God, however, makes the ultimate judgment.)

Will God soon begin to show His judgment between those who held fast and those who let go? Perhaps these phrases and numbers are merely speculative and coincidental. Whatever the case, they are certainly interesting in connection with the list of January occurrences.

“Not One Stone”

Matthew 24:2 is interesting in this context of judgment. Jesus prophesies, “Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone [of the Temple] shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” We understand that in other verses the “temple” represents the church, composed of the “called-out ones,” described as “living stones” (I Peter 2:5). As this 10-year agenda of changing doctrine concludes, it would seem all the “stones” have been cast down or cast out on their own. In one fashion or another, the temple has been “completely shattered” (Daniel 12:7)!

We may also think of these stones as symbols of individual doctrines that provided the foundation for our beliefs. Many verses in the New Testament admonish us to cling to sound, godly doctrine. We are warned, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine [of Christ], do not receive him into your house nor greet him” (II John 10). At the same time the “living stones” of the temple were being cast down, the doctrines that defined God’s true people were also being thrown down until all were

gone. Now no doctrinal basis remains to define a true temple people.

The context of Matthew 24 is of the Great Tribulation. God’s people have been cast down from within before, beginning with wolves in the flock in the first century (Acts 20:29-30). Is this current casting down from within to be soon followed by persecution and martyrdom (Matthew 24:9-13)—continuing from within, but increasingly from without?

Other January Events

President Ezer Weizman of Israel made an official state visit to Ger-



Triumphant Israeli soldiers drive toward Damascus from the Golan Heights during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. These hills were critical in defending Israel then, but now “peace” may deprive them of this buffer on the Syrian frontier.

many, speaking before the German Bundestag on January 16, 1996. According to *This Week in Germany* (January 19, 1996), “Weizman is the first Israeli president to travel to Germany since [German] unification and only the second ever [since Israel’s founding].” He spoke of forgetting the past and working together for the future. With German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel:

Weizman discussed German-Israeli relations and *Germany’s support for the on-going Middle East peace process.* The two nations, Kinkel observed in a statement to the press, have close political, economic and cultural ties. (Our emphasis)

The Charlotte Observer ran a similar article on Israeli-German ties on January 26, 1996, titled “Israeli

leader: No request for Germans on Golan yet”:

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres briefed German leaders Thursday on peace talks with Syria but said *he stopped short of asking for German troops to help enforce any peace deal.* (Our emphasis)

The key word is “yet.” Notice what *Insight* (February 12, 1996, p. 6) writes about using U.S. and other nations’ troops to protect an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement: “Arrangements would include the stationing of American GIs on the Israeli side of the border while troops drawn from an assortment of other nations would man the Syrian side.” Will U.N. forces—including German—soon be lined up across the border from U.S. and Israeli troops?

Whatever happens, the Jews seem to be relying more and more on Germany. The prophecy in Hosea 5:12-13 depicts Ephraim and Judah going to Assyria (modern Germany) for help to cure their “sickness.” The prophet says they are “like a silly dove” (Hosea 7:11) because Assyria is the rod of God’s anger (Isaiah 10:5), used to punish end-time Ephraim and Judah. They are fleeing straight into the clutches of their real enemy!

Why would Judah go to the Assyrians, considering the long history of bad blood between Germans and Jews? The United States has been pressuring the Israelis to concede the Golan Heights to Syria in return for a peace treaty with the Arab nations. Though U.S. military and economic assistance has always been available to protect their struggling nation, Israel’s leaders have begun to fear losing some of this support if they do not make concessions to the Arabs. Many in Israel today, including the new Prime Minister, Shimon Peres, would be willing to concede Golan for a treaty.

The Israelis are nervous. They foresee increasing U.S. support to the Arabs and declining support for themselves. In addition, they see a hope-

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Sin Is Spiritual!

Sin. Crime. Error. Foul. Wrong. Vice. Each of these words names behavior that fails to reach an accepted standard. Any group of people joining to accomplish a goal will establish a set of rules, laws, guidelines or principles to regulate proper conduct. When such a code is abused or ignored, a penalty is usually imposed.

The great God of all is no different. In dealing with weak and imperfect human nature, He established a code of law based on His own perfect nature (I John 5:3). With it comes the inevitable penalty for its transgression—death (Romans 6:23). In His love for us, however, God has also provided for payment of our sins through the sacrificial death of His own Son (John 1:29; I John 2:2). It is this selfless act that we memorialize and apply personally each year at Passover.

In a seemingly straightforward verse (I John 3:4), God defines sin (*hamartia*) as *anomia*, rendered “lawlessness” (NKJV, RSV, NIV, REB, NAS) or “the transgression of the law” (KJV). Other translations use the words “evil” (Peshitta), “a breaking of God’s law” (Phillips) and “iniquity” (Diaglott). The Greek word *anomia* literally means “being without law.” To get a sense of what John writes, we can express it as, “Whoever does *hamartian* also does *anomian*, and *hamartia* is *anomia*.”

The King James and Phillips versions imply that sin is strictly the

breaking of God’s law, whereas the other translations consider it more generally. However we may understand it, John certainly implies God’s involvement as both Lawgiver and Judge. God will judge each person

gray area is allowed.

This belief, coupled with the Gnostic idea that believers had been initiated into the “knowledge” (*gnosis*) of salvation, led Gnostics to think one of two ways:

“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”

- That the only way to attain true spirituality is to deny their flesh (matter) of anything that might tempt them to sin. Those who thought this way became ascetics.

according to the standards expressed in His law.

Countering Gnosticism

When the apostle John wrote this epistle near the end of the first century, the Gnostic philosophy had swept through the Roman world and had already made serious inroads into the church. Paul fights it in some of his letters, particularly I Corinthians, Galatians and Colossians. John attempts to counter it in all of his writings.

A primary belief of Gnosticism was dualism. This idea purports that a cosmological conflict of antithetic forces exists and will always be polar opposites. In plain English, this means that throughout time and space certain contrary forces have and will struggle against each other. These forces are matter and spirit, evil and good, darkness and light, much like the Oriental *yin* and *yang*. In such a dualistic system, no overlapping or

- The opposite extreme, that the things done in the body are inconsequential because only the spirit counts. These Gnostics often fell into licentiousness.

In I John 3:4, John argues against this second heresy. Some in John’s area of ministry seem to have believed that they could not sin in their flesh. Since their flesh, matter, was ultimately evil anyway, it could not be redeemed and was worthless. Thus, they concluded, *anything* done in the flesh had no bearing on one’s salvation.

They played a semantic game with the words *hamartia* (sin) and *anomia* (lawlessness). They considered *hamartia* to identify the transgressions of moral law, particularly sins of the flesh, such as sexual immorality, gluttony, drunkenness and stealing. *Anomia*, however, categorized sins of the spirit, like rebellion, pride, vanity and greed—the sins that Satan com-

A Ready Answer

“Be Ready Always To Give An Answer” – I Peter 3:15 (KJV)

mitted. They believed God, the eternal Spirit, would look the other way if one committed *hamartia*, but committing *anomia* put one under judgment.

They also made no connection between them; they did not recognize that one could affect the other. Gnostics would not admit that sins of the flesh had their origins in the mind (James 1:14-15) or that such sins could in turn cause their character, their spirit, to degenerate (Jeremiah 7:24). They saw a total and irreconcilable separation between flesh and spirit.

Thus, John tells them *hamartia* and *anomia* are the same; they are both sin! It does not matter to God whether the sin is committed in the flesh or in the spirit—to Him it is sin! If God says not to do something, and we do it, it is sin. He has said not to eat pork and shellfish; if we do, it is sin. He has said not to commit sexual immorality; if we do it is sin. He has said not to hate our brother; if we do, it is sin. He has said to keep the Sabbath; if we do not, it is sin!

All Our Sins Forgiven

Immediately, John ties the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to this understanding of sin: “And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin” (I John 3:5). The Word came as a man to die for the forgiveness of our sins (*hamartia*) without regard to classification! *Hamartia* is the general word used throughout the New Testament to describe sins of all kinds; it means “to miss the mark” or “to fail to reach a standard.” Thus, John is saying that Christ’s sacrifice covers all transgressions of law, whether or not we consider them to be physical or spiritual in nature.

Ultimately, all law derives from God; He is Lawgiver. He designed and set in motion all the laws of physics, chemistry and biology. Even the laws of man’s governments are allowed by God:

For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance

of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

Of course, God’s spiritual law is of prime importance and takes precedence over all other law. As Peter said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29) when a conflict between the two occurs. Though breaking man’s laws may not always be sin, a rebellious attitude against what God appoints over us will in time lead to transgressing God’s law. One who will not submit to law in one area will not submit to it in others.

Breaking the laws of physical health, such as lack of exercise and rest, injuring and abusing the body, unhygienic practices and poor nutrition, may also produce spiritual effects. Notice I Corinthians 3:16-17:

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.

Neglecting one’s body, Paul says, is a sin of defiling what is holy, and God will punish for it. With an important addition, he repeats this three chapters later:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. (I Corinthians 6:19-20)

Here, Paul, like John, mentions this in concert with Christ’s redemptive sacrifice for us. These types of sins are also forgiven. Our Savior’s gift of His life covers it all!

The Old Testament also looks at sin in this fashion. David writes, “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases” (Psalm 103:2-3). The parallelism in verse 3 inextricably

links the two clauses together so that they are nearly equal. Healing us of sickness is to God forgiving us of sin (see Mark 2:3-12 for the New Testament equivalent).

Even in His original promise to heal in Exodus 15:25-26, God shows a direct link between sin, disease, obedience and healing (see Leviticus 26:14-16; Deuteronomy 28:15, 22, 27-28, 35; Psalm 107:17-20; Isaiah 19:22; Hosea 6:1). This, too, has a New Testament counterpart, James 5:14-15:

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

Isaiah 53:5 is a classic verse that shows how forgiveness and healing are equated and covered by Christ’s sacrifice: “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.” Peter recasts this in I Peter 2:24: “. . . who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” Just as it takes a death to forgive sin, Christ died to heal us. There is no sin that His sacrifice cannot remit!

Free to Choose

One of the Bible’s greatest principles is “choose life,” found in Deuteronomy 30:15-20. God sets before us two ways of life—His way and the wrong way—and gives us the freedom to choose which we will follow. He commands us to choose life so that we may live fully, both now and in His Kingdom, but we can opt for the other way of sin just as readily.

With the receipt of the Holy Spirit, we truly have free choice or free-moral agency. Before conversion, as the apostles wrote, we simply lived like everyone else, that is, according to the course of this world (Ephesians

2:1-3; I Peter 1:18; 4:3). Now, able to judge between the two ways of life more accurately, we have the power to decide to go God's way.

It is in our choices that we sin or live righteously. James is very clear that we do not sin when tempted but "when desire has conceived" or when we *choose* to act on it (James 1:14-15). The sin begins with the choice and continues with the act. Thus, all sin has a spiritual basis.

God illustrates this with an example in Deuteronomy 22:25-27:

But if a man finds a betrothed young woman in the countryside, and the man forces her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But you shall do nothing to the young woman; there is in the young woman no sin worthy of death, . . . for he found her in the countryside, and the betrothed young woman cried out, but there was no one to save her.

Though the man committed a horrible sin, rape, the woman had no guilt ascribed to her because she did not choose to participate in it. How many packs of cigarettes have we smoked—secondhand—just by enjoying a meal in a smoke-filled restaurant? How often have we eaten food that, unbeknownst to us, was

cooked with lard, bacon grease or some other unclean food? Does God condemn us for "sins" beyond our control? No!

Nevertheless, some people may feel guilty when such things happen to them or they allow them to occur. Often, something in their background—like card playing, drinking alcohol or dancing to a converted Southern Baptist—causes them to condemn themselves. Yet Christ's sacrifice even covers these instances! Such conduct, if we feel guilty doing it, may be called a sin of conscience, or as Paul writes in Romans 14:23, "Whatever is not from faith is sin." An act, whether truly sin or not, that defiles the conscience is not done in faith and thus results in sin.

In these situations, we condemn ourselves, even though God may not. "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God" (I John 3:20-21). And why do we have confidence toward God? John had given the answer already in verse 16: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us"!

What an amazing sacrifice was given on our behalf! One precious, priceless sacrifice was all that was necessary to forgive all sin for all time! God makes no distinction be-

tween sins; all are covered by Christ's death on the cross.

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place *once for all*, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, *how much more* shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? . . . [B]ut now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Hebrews 9:12-14, 26)

To God, whatever He considers to be sin is sin. *Hamartia* is *anomia*. No matter how one cares to categorize it, sin is lawlessness, the transgression of law, evil, iniquity. More importantly, all sin has only one remedy, the ultimate sacrifice of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ. What great confidence and hope we have now that we are clean of sin and can freely choose to live as God lives!

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Introducing . . .

Forerunner

For Kids!

Forerunner now has a little sister, ***Forerunner For Kids!*** The editors of *Forerunner* unveiled the first issue of this children's publication for the past Feast of Tabernacles, and we plan to issue four more in 1996.

To help parents teach the Scriptures to their children, each issue will highlight one particular Bible story, for instance, the amazing story of Esther and how she saved

her people from a diabolical plot! Questions, games and puzzles related to the story fill out the rest of the magazine. Though aimed primarily at children of elementary school age, ***Forerunner For Kids!*** can benefit the whole family!

If your child(ren) would like to be on our mailing list for ***Forerunner For Kids!***, please call or write our offices and give us each child's name and age. Thank you!

Christ, Our Passover

continued from page 4

- The Savior who was crucified and resurrected after three days according to the Scriptures.
- The Conqueror of Satan and the soon-coming King of kings.
- The High Priest of the rank of Melchizedek, who sits at our Father's right hand to make intercession for us.
- The Firstborn, our Elder Brother, the Captain of our personal salvation, who loves us with an intensity we cannot fathom even in our deepest, most profound moments.

In short, Jesus Christ is everything we are not, yet are striving to become! He is the Standard, the Example, to whose stature we are conforming ourselves. Therefore, we cannot ever allow what He was and what He accomplished, what He now is and what He will accomplish, to stray very far from our minds.

Though people could look at Jesus with their eyes and hear Him speak with their ears, they could not understand who He was or grasp the implications of His message to them personally. But a miracle has happened to us. Our minds have been opened, and the truth has been revealed to us.

Thus, Jesus says in Matthew 13 that His parables—in reality, most of the Bible's teachings—are not just general illustrations of moral and spiritual truths, but powerful, life-changing messages! Grasping their fuller and deeper meanings depends upon our active recognition and application of Jesus as Savior, King and High Priest in our lives. He reminds us of this in John 15:5, "Without Me you can do nothing."

Preparing for Passover

Every holy day requires some preparation, but a day that is not even a holy day—Passover—demands the most significant personal preparations. Passover itself is preparatory. It prepares us spiritually to participate in the rest of God's plan as outlined by the holy days.

The apostle Paul gives these instructions regarding Passover:

And when He had given thanks, He broke [bread] and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the

new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (I Corinthians 11:24-29)

The "cup" symbolizes the blood Jesus spilled in sacrificing His life. God is saying that through the blood of Christ, He is "sealing" His agreement of salvation with us. Though He had already promised it, Christ's blood certifies His agreement to justify us in preparation for salvation (Romans 5:9-10).

Such a monumental sacrifice must be fittingly remembered! If Passover becomes a mere ritual or pious habit, **it loses its significance** because Christ is not really being remembered with understanding and appreciation. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the brethren as rushing through the service, their minds so focused on their own bellies that they were treating each other with selfish disregard. Passover's purpose is not just to remember certain historical events, but to grasp the *point* of Christ's death. If we fail to comprehend its meaning, we are much more likely to treat His death unworthily.

Though we will not deal with them here, Paul covers three major subjects in I Corinthians 11 and the chapters surrounding it: 1) our relationship with God, 2) our relationship with other members of the church and 3) spiritual liberty. Their common factor—the unique means by which all three are made possible—is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Taking Passover Worthily

Understanding Christ's sacrifice properly determines the quality of our observance of the Passover. To prevent taking it in a careless and unappreciative manner, Paul charges us to examine ourselves, discerning the Lord's body (I Corinthians 11:28-29). "Examine" means to test, prove or scrutinize to determine whether a thing is genuine. "Discern" means to separate, discriminate, to make a distinction for the purpose of giving preference.

An example will help to illustrate what this should accomplish. I have twice had the opportunity to observe a day's play of the Masters golf tournament in Augusta,



Lee Trevino urges a shot into the cup at the 1989 Masters golf tournament. Golf fans are especially appreciative of the professionals' skills because they have tried the same shots and failed. Christians should likewise appreciate Christ's successes because we have so often tried to live righteously as He did and failed!

Georgia. After a short time, I became aware that the spectators there were different from fans at other professional sporting events. Besides enjoying the professional golf, I began watching and listening to the spectators just as closely and found them to be the most appreciative spectators I had ever seen. I soon discovered why. They had, for the most part, personally attempted to make the same shots that the professionals seemed to do so effortlessly. *And most of them had failed!* This realization drove the spectators to appreciate deeply the professional golfers' skills.

Our pre-Passover preparations should involve this principle. A major factor that enables us to take Passover in a "worthy" manner is seriously reviewing our spiritual and moral failures in contrast to the perfect glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This Man lived thirty-three-and-a-half years without committing even one sin!

To avoid taking Passover unworthily, we should not take it without seriously considering its meaning. If we fail to do this, instead of honoring Christ's sacrifice, we share in the guilt of those who crucified Him. However, *awareness of sin should not keep us from taking Passover. It should drive us to it*, for our grateful participation in eating and drinking the symbols enables our sins to be paid.

Despite our self-examination, the focus at Passover is not on ourselves but on the payment for our sins, the means by which we are forgiven. It is a time to concentrate on the most elementary precepts of our salvation, especially on the part Jesus Christ plays in it. Only by a thorough understanding of the fundamentals of any discipline, and energetically and skillfully using them, will we produce success in an endeavor. In this way of life, if we do not understand and use the fundamentals, we will not overcome sin.

Self-examination

We understand that we are to examine ourselves in the weeks preceding Passover and Unleavened Bread. Sometimes, however, we miss the purpose for the examination. Consider these two scriptures in relation to self-examination:

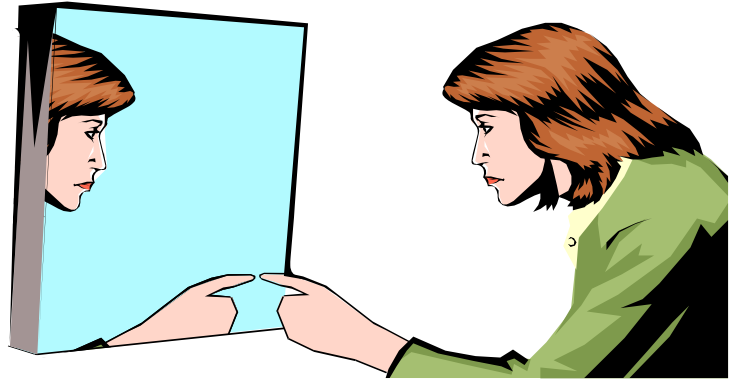
Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. (II Corinthians 13:5)

For we dare not to class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (II Corinthians 10:12)

If we are not careful in this, we can easily fall into two snares, both of which center on the self.

The most obvious one, expressed in II Corinthians 10:12, is that we will judge ourselves in light of other people. This fatal trap deceitfully provides us with self-justification for the way we are. The result is that we will

not change or grow because we will be judging according to our own standards—and why change perfection? Self-examination by our own code produces self-righteousness.



The other dangerous snare occurs when our self-examination is so rigorous that we become very depressed and feel salvation is impossible. Brethren, this is just as utterly self-indulgent as the other! This "woe is me" approach is a not-too-subtle blast against God's judgment and grace for calling us and making things so difficult for us!

Anyone who compares himself to others is not exhibiting faith in God. He is telling God that His Son's life means little to him. Likewise, anyone who feels so morose with guilt that he threatens not to take the Passover is not exhibiting faith in God. He is telling God that He is unable to forgive that much.

At Passover, our focus should be on the payment for sin through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God in His grace is willing to forgive our transgressions on the basis of Christ's death. During Unleavened Bread, the focus shifts to overcoming sin and coming out of this world through God's power, which is also part of His grace. At Passover, it is the grace of God to justify us through Christ's blood. At Unleavened Bread, it is the grace of God to sanctify us as we move toward His Kingdom and glorification.

The Value of Christ's Blood

I Peter 1:18-21 adds more information as to why we should value the sacrifice of Christ.

. . . knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Jesus lay dead and buried three days and three nights. His resurrection is the foundation of our faith, and His glorification is God's pledge to us that there is hope for

our future. I Peter 1:20 emphasizes that “He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world” to be that sacrifice. That is not merely foresight, brethren, that is planning! God’s plan included redemption from the very beginning.

Verse 19 stresses the value of His sacrifice by using the word “precious,” translated “honor” three times in chapters 2 and 3. The Greek word means “to place a value upon,” and this is exactly what we are to do in preparation for Passover! We are to assess the value of His sacrifice to us personally. What would you be willing to pay for His sacrifice?

On the ring finger of my right hand, I wear a gold ring with a small diamond in it. Its material value to a disinterested party would be minimal. But it has great value to me! My dad wore it all of his adult life, and when he died, I inherited it. It would please me very much to hand it back to him at the second resurrection. This ring, then, has value to me far out of proportion to its market value. Those who know Jesus Christ well place a similar, immeasurably higher value on His sacrifice than do others who are acquainted with Him only casually or intellectually.

Verse 18 emphasizes “knowing.” The Christian lives his life knowing the redemption Christ accomplished. The price of our redemption is the value we place on the Life given for our forgiveness. Our former lives were “aimless” because of the value we placed on possessions and our own satisfaction. *Now our lives have direction because we count Christ’s sacrifice as priceless!*

Perhaps Hebrews 10:26-29 can help us realize the awesome value God places on His Son’s sacrifice and provoke us to value it more highly.

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

This is what the unpardonable sin ultimately accomplishes. Through willfully practicing sin, the sinner rejects the very basis of his covenant with God, the blood of Jesus Christ. If one deeply appreciates and values His sacrifice, he will not willfully practice the very actions that made that sacrifice necessary. God forgives with the understanding that the one forgiven has turned from sin and will continue to overcome it.

When God designed this creation, He considered His

purpose along with our free-moral agency. He concluded that He had to devise a payment for sin so profound in its implications that the heirs of salvation, out of overwhelming gratitude, would drive themselves from sin. Such a price of redemption could not be the death of any common person or animal, for these have neither the worth nor the ability to pay for all sin. Only the sacrifice of the sinless God-man, Jesus Christ, could meet these qualifications.

What we see in Hebrews 10:26-29 is the end of a person who, by the very conduct of his life, reveals his pitiful assessment of that sacrifice. The author makes a three-fold indictment against this person. First, they repudiate the oath taken at baptism. Second, they contemptuously reject Christ. Third, they commit an insulting outrage against the merciful judgment of God.

The Lamb of God

Remember, the focus at Passover is on the Lamb, not our sins. Certainly, we should be aware of our sins to provide the contrast to the sinless, spotless and unblemished Lamb, but we ought not wallow in them. To the contrary, we should rather *glory* in the unique One who makes our

deliverance possible.

Under the Old Covenant Passover, the lamb was separated from the flock on the tenth day of Nisan, giving each family four days to observe it more closely. Perhaps, at its birth or purchase, only the father of the family saw and examined it. But from the time of separation until the lamb was slaughtered, the family came to know it more intimately.

Perhaps this sacrifice will have more impact on us if we realize that for many Israelite families, the lamb may have been the family pet. Most Israelites were not ranchers with large flocks, but farmers with very few animals for meat. In such a situation, their animals became much like members of the family.

How often have you killed an animal you love? Even if you have had to do so, you probably avoided putting a knife to its throat! God devised an object lesson in Passover to illustrate its price as forcefully as only the death of an innocent can.

Sacrifice—THE Holy Act

Jesus says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). He is everything to us. Words inadequately describe how much we need Him. He is our Savior, Lord, Intercessor, Brother, Teacher, Example, Strength and King. Passover forces us to focus in on our weakness and Christ’s strength, our need and His abundance, our sinfulness and His perfection, our sentence of death and His offer of life.

The Bible sees sacrifice as **THE** holy act. It is the very essence of love. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16)—in sacrifice!

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said, “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God.’” Previously saying, “Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them” (which are offered according to the law), then He said, “Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.” He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10)

Here, Jesus is recognizing His body as a gift given so that the Father’s will may be done. Animal sacrifices could not accomplish God’s will, but the sacrifice of the sinless God-man, Jesus of Nazareth, could. It has the power to cleanse from sin so that a New Covenant, a whole new religious order, may be established based on a personal relationship—unparalleled in its intimacy—with our Creator.

A major weakness of animal sacrifices is their failure to produce a desire in the offerer to obey God. No animal life is equal in value to a human life. Though we may grieve at the loss of a pet, an animal’s sacrificial death cannot have a real impact because it will not motivate us to do anything. But when a *human* dies for us, we feel it! We feel we owe something in return; indebtedness arises from our gratitude for what the sacrifice accomplished.

In our case, **THE MOST VALUABLE LIFE EVER LIVED WAS**

GIVEN. Gratitude, worship and obedience are the only appropriate responses to such a sacrificial gift as the body of Jesus Christ. There is no other acceptable sacrifice for sin that will allow us to continue living.

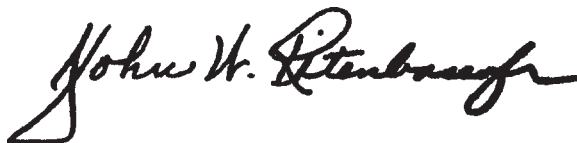
The theme of Passover is the awesome cost of salvation, which is manifested in the sinless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His was not a mechanical sinlessness, but He was sinless, innocent, even while encumbered with the frailties of human nature just as we are. His was sinlessness with sympathy, empathy, compassion, kindness and concern for the helpless slaves of sin. Understanding this, we should feel revulsion that our sins caused such an injustice as His death to occur. At the same time, we should also express appreciation, indebtedness and thanksgiving by departing from sin.

The works of the LORD are great, studied by all who take pleasure in them. His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever. . . . He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever; holy and awesome is His name. (Psalm 111:2-3, 9)

His name is **SAVIOR, REDEEMER AND LAMB OF GOD.**

Human sacrifice? Just one, with the approval of the Father and the selfless participation of a unique God-man, Jesus Christ, was enough for all of time.

In Christian love,



January 1996: What Happened?

continued from page 8

lessly bankrupt America, squabbling internally over a budget and rapidly reducing its own military. Can they depend on the U.S. as a continuing safety net?

Many Israelis fear they cannot. Who else in the world can and might provide that support? Apparently, they feel Germany can. Even if they make a pact with the Germans, Daniel 11:40-45 shows the Beast power, led by the Germans, will overthrow many Mideast nations and set up a government in Jerusalem.

Judah Warned

Whether or not a pact with Germany transpires, the Israelis made an official visit with those overtones. It is noteworthy that Weizman made

his official address to the Bundestag on January 16, the tenth anniversary of Herbert Armstrong’s death. Mr. Armstrong visited with Israeli leaders on many occasions, gently warning them to turn to God and His way of love. Those same leaders sent condolences at Mr. Armstrong’s death. **EXACTLY** ten years later, they make overtures of alliance to the Assyrians, leader of the coming Babylon!

In January 1996, we observe a branch of spiritual Israel, the Worldwide Church of God, officially declaring its temple-destroying agenda complete. *That church has repudiated most of the distinctive teachings of the church of God and accepted many of the doctrines of the religious arm of Babylon!*

We also see a nation of physical Israel (Judah) flying like a silly dove to the military, economic and political arm of Babylon. *She has rejected the protection of God and is courting the embrace of a “lover” for her*

future protection!

This column is entitled “Prophecy Watch,” not “Predict”! I am not predicting anything in particular, just putting together some interesting occurrences and their dates along with Bible numerology for our reflection. While prophecy is interesting and motivating, the direction of that interest and motivation has to be spiritual preparedness. Otherwise, it is an exercise in vanity and futility.

We have had some very interesting Januarys in the 62 years since 1934. In retrospect, this one may be interesting or even *very* interesting. Only God knows, but He instructs us to watch and pray always that events do not “slip up on us” and we find ourselves spiritually unprepared. Paul would probably not mind lending a phrase to fit this context: “. . . so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25)!

—Darryl Henson

BIBLE STUDY: PASSOVER

Last month, we learned that God reveals His plan of salvation for mankind in His commanded holy days. The first step in that plan is shown in the observance of the Passover. The world around us is filled with sin and evil of every kind, and it has been that way since Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. For God to fulfill His plan of reproducing Himself, He had to provide a way to redeem man from his sinful condition and implement a means of forgiveness.

God is holy and will not tolerate sin in any form, even in human beings. Because He will not allow sinful people into His Kingdom, humans must be "justified." By this, God forgives a person's sins, brings him into a right relationship with Himself and imputes Christ's righteousness to him. Only after being forgiven can people take the additional steps of character development and overcoming to qualify to enter the Kingdom of God. Our annual keeping of the Passover reminds us of this initial step in fulfilling the plan of God.



1. When God called the children of Israel out of Egypt, did He have to show them when the year began? Exodus 12:1-2.

COMMENT: During their long sojourn in Egypt, the Israelites lost track of time—they even forgot which day was the Sabbath! God had to show Israel when His year began so that they could begin observing His holy days. Israel's calling out of Egypt symbolizes God calling us out of this evil world.

2. Is Passover one of God's festivals? Leviticus 23:4-5.

COMMENT: Passover is a feast of *the LORD*, not a feast of Israel or the Jews! He instituted it and commands us to keep it.

3. How was Israel to observe the Passover? Exodus 12:3-11.

COMMENT: God told each Israelite family to choose an unblemished lamb on the 10th day of the month Abib. On the 14th day at twilight (just after sundown as the 14th began), they killed the lamb, putting its blood on the doorpost and lintel of their homes. Then they roasted and ate the lamb.

4. Why did they put the blood on their doorposts and lintels? Exodus 12:12-13.

COMMENT: The blood was a sign to the death angel to "pass over" their homes when it went through Egypt. Because of it, Israel's firstborn were saved, while Egypt's firstborn died.

5. What did killing the lamb and putting its blood around the door represent? Isaiah 53:7; John 1:29; Acts 8:32; Revelation 7:14; I Peter 1:18-19.

COMMENT: These yearly rituals represented the death of Jesus Christ, who was God in the flesh. The innocent lamb had to be without blemish because it represented the only Man who ever lived a perfect, sinless life. Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God who gave His life and shed His blood so that we may be saved from eternal death by paying the penalty for our sins. Through faith in His sacrifice, we receive forgiveness of sin and come into a right relationship with God. Because His life was worth more than all human life combined, His sacrifice paid the price for all sin. He redeemed us from the penalty that the breaking of God's law imposes and freed us to live righteously.

6. Was Jesus crucified on Passover? John 18:39; 19:13-18.

COMMENT: Our Savior was crucified in the early afternoon of the day of the Passover. This further confirms He was the One who was to give His life as a ransom for many. Even to the very day, He completely fulfilled the symbolism of the lamb.

7. Did Jesus observe the Passover during His life on earth? Luke 2:40-42; John 2:13, 23.

COMMENT: Jesus kept the Passover as a man because God had

commanded it as a festival. In this, He set us a perfect example, showing us that we should observe this festival too.

8. Are New Testament Christians commanded to keep the Passover? I Corinthians 5:7-8.

COMMENT: The apostle Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians to observe the Passover as a memorial of the death of Christ, our Passover, who was sacrificed for us.

9. What did Jesus teach is the first step in observing the New Testament Passover? John 13:1-5, 14-15.

COMMENT: While His disciples ate the Passover meal, Jesus arose and washed the disciples' feet. Considered a very lowly responsibility in that culture, footwashing was performed by servants when visitors entered a house. By performing this act of humility, Jesus showed us how we should serve each other. He commands Christians everywhere and throughout all ages to follow His example.

10. What else did Jesus teach His disciples to do in observing the Passover? Matthew 26:26-29; Luke 22:19-20.

COMMENT: Jesus told His disciples to partake of unleavened bread and wine during the New Testament Passover service. Through this command, He charged His followers to observe it as a memorial of His death for all time. Since Christ's death completely fulfilled the symbolism of killing a lamb, we no longer need to slaughter a lamb in keeping the Passover.

11. Must all converted Christians observe the New Testament Passover every year? John 6:48, 51-54.

COMMENT: Unless we eat His flesh (represented by the unleavened bread) and drink His blood (symbolized by the wine), we have no life in us and will not inherit eternal life! How vital it is for us to keep the Passover every year!

12. Did the New Testament church of God continue to keep the Passover yearly? Acts 12:4.

COMMENT: Some translations grossly mistranslate the Greek word *pascha* as "Easter." It always means "Passover."

13. Did the apostles teach the Gentiles to observe the Passover? I Corinthians 11:23-26.

COMMENT: The apostle Paul carefully taught the Gentile Corinthians to keep the Passover using the symbols of bread and wine that Jesus had instituted. These scriptures teach us to keep the Passover "till He comes," and the true church of God will still be observing the Passover as He commanded. All those who have accepted His redemption eagerly anticipate His return to share the eternal life He makes possible by His sacrifice!