

# 17 – CELEBRATING THE NEW COVENANT

From the very beginning, God has provided tangible ways for us to express our faith in Him or to choose to disobey. His government of love will always uphold our freedom of choice. While God is able to discern “the thoughts and intents of the heart” Hebrews 4:12, everyone else is not. To help others know He is being fair and just, He will point to tangible expressions of faith and the fruit of the Holy Spirit to reveal what is in our hearts (Matthew 7:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10) .

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil gave Adam and Eve a tangible way to express their faith in God or choose to learn about evil (Genesis 2:17). When they ate from the tree, everyone in the universe knew what choice they had made.

After they sinned, the plan of salvation went into effect immediately and Jesus became “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” Revelation 13:8. As a way for people to express their faith in the coming Savior who would die for their sins, they were to sacrifice an animal.

## **1. When did the first animal die? Genesis 3:21**

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The fig leaf clothes Adam and Eve had made were very inadequate. God “made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” The garments of skin were a constant reminder that the wages of sin was death. It also reminded them that they were alive because Jesus would one day die to take away their sin. Our clothes today can remind us that we have a Savior today.

## **2. What offering did Cain give? Genesis 4:2,3**

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## **3. What offering did Abel give? Genesis 4:4**

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**4. How did God respond to their offerings? Genesis 4:4,5**

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**5. Why was Cain's offering not accepted by God? Genesis 4:6,7**

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We can be sure that Adam and Eve had communicated the plan of salvation to Cain and Abel as they were growing up. Cain would have understood that offering an animal sacrifice expressed faith in the coming Savior, repentance for his sin and appreciation for God's forgiveness. His offering of fruit was in reality a tangible expression of rebellion and defiance. The murder of his brother and his lie to God confirm that he was holding onto a rebellious spirit.

## **SAVED FOR A MISSION**

**6. What yearly feast did Jesus and His disciples celebrate together just before Jesus died on the cross? Matthew 26:17-20**

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**7. What event was the Passover a celebration of? Exodus 12:21-24**

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**8. How did this help parents teach their children about God? Exodus 12:25-28**

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The Israelites were instructed to celebrate the Passover as a reminder that God had delivered them from slavery and established them as a nation. This yearly event was also a tangible way for them to express their faith in the Savior to come. When children would ask why they were doing this, parents were to share the story of how God delivered them out of Egypt that they might fulfill the mission He had for them.

## **9. What was the special mission God had for Israel? Exodus 19:5,6**

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They were to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” As priests, they were to represent God on earth and lead every nation to know and serve Him. While they were a “special treasure” to God, they were to remember that all people belonged to Him. God’s plan of salvation was to include everyone, not just the nation of Israel (John 3:16,17).

Unfortunately, Israel repeatedly failed to understand and carry out their mission. They often turned away from God and tried to be like the nations around them and worship their gods (See Jeremiah 2:11-13, 28).

Because of their persistent rebellion, God allowed Assyria and Babylon to conquer them and take them captive. They learned their lesson! After returning from their captivity in Babylon, the Jews never went back to worshipping other gods.

However, out of a desire to keep themselves pure, the Jews went to the other extreme. They began to see themselves as better than everyone else and believed that Gentiles were “unclean” (Acts 10,11). Through misunderstanding the Scriptures, they thought their destiny was to rule the world. They believed the Messiah would conquer the Romans and set up His kingdom on earth.

This was so ingrained in the popular teaching that Jesus had a hard time helping people understand He was coming to save the world from sin. Since they believed Jesus would set up His kingdom on earth, the disciples began to dream about positions of power they might occupy.

“A dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest”  
Luke 9:46.

Later on, the mother of James and John asked Jesus, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom” Matthew 20:21. This caused the other disciples to be “greatly displeased with the two brothers” Matthew 20:24.

# A SYMBOL OF TRUE GREATNESS

**10. How did Jesus describe greatness? Matthew 20:25-28**

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**11. What attitude did the disciples still have when they celebrated the last Passover with Jesus? Luke 22:23, 24**

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The spirit of pride and jealousy continued to manifest itself among the disciples. This must have been very painful for Jesus to witness.

**12. What did Jesus do that evening to help the disciples understand the true nature of the kingdom of God? John 13:3-11**

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It was very difficult for the disciples to see Jesus fulfilling the role of the servant. Peter exclaimed, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’”

Jesus knew that the spirit of selfishness, pride and jealousy was deeply rooted in the sinful nature of the human race. As the Savior of the world, He came “to forgive us our sins *and* to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9. If we don’t allow Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, we are saying we don’t want a Savior from sin.

**13. What did Jesus say after He washed their feet? John 13:12-17**

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Jesus instructed the disciples to follow His example and “wash one another's feet.” In the time of Jesus, washing feet was a necessity.

People wore sandals without stockings and the streets were dirty. While the physical need for washing one another's feet is not as great today, the spiritual need for cleansing is vital. Jesus asked us to wash each other's feet as a tangible reminder that:

- We need to be cleansed from all unrighteousness.
- Jesus is the One who cleanses us from all unrighteousness.
- We are representatives of Jesus to serve and help one another.

This tangible expression of faith is indeed a humbling experience. That is exactly why Jesus asked us to do it. He knew how easy it is for us to fall back into the spirit of pride, greed and jealousy.

## **CELEBRATING THE NEW COVENANT**

### **14. How is Christ referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:7?**

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Jesus is the Passover Lamb. The Passover lamb was to “be without blemish” Exodus 12:5. It represented “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” 1 Peter 1:19. In order for Jesus to be our Savior, He had to live without sin Himself. Fortunately, He “committed no sin; nor was deceit found in His mouth” 1 Peter 2:22.

### **15. What did the unleavened bread represent? 1 Corinthians 5:7,8**

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The Passover was the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted for 7 days. Throughout the week, they were not to eat anything with leaven. Paul compares the leaven to malice and wickedness. As Christians, He encourages us to live with sincerity and truth.

### **16. What meaning did Jesus give to the bread and juice when He celebrated the Passover just before he died? Matthew 26:26-29**

A. Unleavened Bread “This is My \_\_\_\_\_.”

B. Fruit of the Vine “This is My \_\_\_\_\_ of the new covenant.”

Two days earlier Jesus had announced that He would be crucified on Passover (Matthew 26:2). Jesus knew He was “the Lamb of God” who would take “away the sin of the world!” John 1:29. After His death, animals would no longer need to be offered as a sacrifice. This was communicated in a very dramatic way. As soon as Jesus died, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” Matthew 27:51.

In place of the Passover lamb, Jesus said the unleavened bread and “fruit of the vine” would represent His death. They are a reminder that He died to save the world from sin. Before His death, the animal sacrifices were to be a tangible expression of faith in the gospel. After Jesus died, offering them was an expression of unbelief and rejection. Since they were no longer necessary, they were referred to as the “old covenant.”

**17. How long are we to use the bread and juice as symbols to remind us of what Jesus did for us? 1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

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Paul was not with Jesus at the last Passover meal. However, he “received from the Lord” a message to pass onto the church. Whenever we eat the unleavened bread and drink the grape juice, we are remembering what Jesus did for us and also proclaiming His “death till He comes.” In other words, until Jesus returns, we are to celebrate His amazing grace by receiving these symbols as an expression of faith.

**18. How should we prepare to receive these symbols? 1 Cor. 11:27-29**

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We are to examine ourselves, not to determine if we are good enough, but to determine if we are honest with God and ourselves. Jesus knows we are not good enough to be accepted on our own merit. He knows we are “without strength,” “ungodly,” “sinners,” “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” Romans 5:6-8; Revelation 3:17.

When we realize our helplessness, acknowledge our sinfulness, and receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, then the bread and juice become meaningful symbols. Through receiving them, we express that:

- Jesus died for our sins, as well as for the sins of the world.
- We surrender our lives to Him as our Savior and Lord.
- We are looking forward to spending eternity with Him.

### **19. What are we guilty of if we receive the bread and the juice in an “unworthy manner”? 1 Corinthians 11:27**

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If we receive the bread and juice without surrendering our lives to Jesus, we are simply going through the motions. We are receiving the bread and juice in an “unworthy manner.” We are pretending to be a follower of Jesus, but not wanting Him as our Savior and Lord.

This is the same attitude that the Jews had. When Jesus described them as sinners in need of a Savior and claimed to be the God who could save them, they wanted to kill Him (John 8:31-59). They eventually cried out, “Away with him, crucify him.” “Pilate said unto them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” John 19:15.

There is room for only one King. If we refuse to have Jesus reign over us, we would eventually want Him dead also.

### **20. Who does Paul say we should examine? 1 Corinthians 11:28**

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Since no one can read the motives of another person, everyone is to examine themselves, not others.

As parents in Israel explained the meaning of Passover to their children, so parents today should explain the meaning of communion to their children (Exodus 12:26; 13:14-16).

# THE BETTER PROMISES OF THE NEW COVENANT

## 21. What is included in the new covenant? Hebrews 8:10-12

- A. “I will put My \_\_\_\_\_ in their minds, and write it on their \_\_\_\_\_.”
- B. “I will be their \_\_\_\_\_, and they shall be My \_\_\_\_\_.”
- C. “None of them shall \_\_\_\_\_ his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me.”
- D. “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their \_\_\_\_\_ and their lawless deeds I will \_\_\_\_\_ no more.”

The gospel is all about what God promises to do for us, not what we promise to do for Him. He will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He will write His law of love on our hearts and minds so that we delight to obey Him.

Before we are born again, the Ten Commandments are prohibitions:

“You shall not....” They tell us what we should not do and reveal how far short we have fallen from God’s ideal (Romans 3:19,20,23).

After we are born again, the Ten Commandments become Ten Promises. They reveal what God is going to do in the lives of all who trust Him. The Hebrew can be translated as, “You will not....”

Out of a motive of love, you will not want to steal, kill, lie, cheat or take God’s name in vain. You will not want to hurt God or others. You will delight in worshiping God as the only One who is worthy of worshiping and living for (Exodus 20:11; 31:13,17; Revelation 4,5).

Our part is to trust God and give Him permission to carry out His promises in our lives.

**22. Personal thought questions to respond to. Do I want God to:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ Transform me on the inside so that I delight in doing His will?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Be my God, to guide, protect, provide for, and work through me?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Give me eternal life with Him in a place where everyone is loving and trustworthy and enjoys being with God?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Forgive my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness?

**23. The promises God made to Israel were similar. He promised to:**

- A. Exodus 19:6 Make them “a kingdom of \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ nation.”  
B. Exodus 20:2 Be their God: “I am the Lord \_\_\_\_\_ God.”  
C. Exodus 6:4 “...give them the land of \_\_\_\_\_.”  
D. Exodus 34:6,7 Forgive their “iniquity and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”

**24. How did Israel respond to God’s covenant and promises?**

- A. Exodus 19:8 “All that the Lord has spoken \_\_\_\_\_ will \_\_\_\_\_.”  
B. Jeremiah 31:32 “My covenant which they \_\_\_\_\_.”  
C. Hebrews 8:6-9 Jesus is the “Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better \_\_\_\_\_. For if that first covenant had been \_\_\_\_\_, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with \_\_\_\_\_, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...’”

Exodus 19:5,6 says, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant. . .” The word translated “obey” means to “listen intelligently.” The word translated “keep” means “to hedge about, guard, protect.” (See Strong’s Conc.) In other words, God was not asking them to make promises to obey. He was asking them to listen carefully to what His plan was so that they would want to be His people and share in His

mission. However, instead of trusting in God, they promised, “All that the Lord has spoken *WE* will do.” While it sounds like a wonderful response, they didn’t realize how helpless and sinful they really were.

## **25. What was the result of not trusting God? Hebrews 3:12-19**

- A. They had an evil heart of \_\_\_\_\_. 12
- B. They were hardened through the \_\_\_\_\_ of sin. 13
- C. They hardened their \_\_\_\_\_. 15
- D. They \_\_\_\_\_, even though they heard God’s voice. 16
- E. They did not \_\_\_\_\_ God. 18
- F. They could not enter Canaan because of their \_\_\_\_\_. 19

As a result of their unbelief, Israel rebelled, hardened their hearts and disobeyed God. Their lack of faith and their fear of the giants led them to refuse to follow God into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:31-14:4).

## **26. What message was preached to us and to them? Hebrews 4:1,2**

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The gospel is the same for us as it was for them. Hebrews 11 refers to many people who did trust God. They experienced the blessings of the gospel that was preached to them.

Some have believed that before the cross, people were saved by “works” and after the cross people were saved by “grace.” The Bible is clear that there is only one plan of salvation for the human race (Acts 4:12).

The gospel hasn’t changed, but the symbols ordained by God to express faith in the gospel have. The laws related to the sacrificial system are no longer necessary, but the moral law of love that God promises to write on our hearts remains unchanged.

If we misunderstand the gospel and try to obey God in order to gain His acceptance and earn eternal life, we will fail as Israel did. God hopes we will then be open to the new covenant, which is the everlasting gospel.

# LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF ISRAEL

**27. How are we to see the stories about Israel? 1 Corinthians 10:5,6**

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**28. God provided bread from heaven and water from a rock (Exodus 16:4; 17:6). What do these illustrate?**

- A. John 6:35                      Bread                      \_\_\_\_\_
- B. John 4:14; 7:37-39              Water                      \_\_\_\_\_
- C. 1 Corinthians 10:3,4              Rock                      \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus was a living Savior for them, delivering them from Egypt, opening up the Red Sea, providing for their physical needs, and leading them in the way they should go. Jesus desired them to see these physical miracles as tangible reminders that God was very loving and trustworthy. If they had meditated on these truths, their faith would have strengthened. Then when future trials came, they would have turned to God with confidence and faith, rather than murmuring and complaining.

**29. What lessons does Paul point out in 1 Corinthians 10:6-10?**

- A. “We should not \_\_\_\_\_ after evil things.” (10:6)
- B. We should not “become \_\_\_\_\_.” (10:7)
- C. We should not “commit \_\_\_\_\_” (10:8)
- D. We should not “\_\_\_\_\_.” (10:9)
- E. We should not “\_\_\_\_\_.” (10:10)

All of these activities came from a lack of trust in God or a love for sin.

**30. How can the stories of Israel help us today? 1 Cor. 10:1-12**

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We can learn from their failures and also from those who had great faith (See Hebrews 11). Our nature is the same as theirs. Every day we are faced with temptation and trials. Paul warns us to take heed. If we ever think that we are so strong that we don't have to watch and pray, we will fall (Matthew 26:41).

**31. What does God promise to do for us when we are tempted?  
1 Corinthians 10:13**

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When we are tempted to compromise, rationalize and disobey God in order to get ourselves out of a trial, we are encouraged to trust God's plan of escape. When we focus on God's promises, power, and plan for our lives, we will begin to see life from His perspective, rather than from our limited viewpoint. God is bigger than our circumstances. He knows what He is doing. We can trust Him with our lives.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” 2 Corinthians 4:17,18. (2 Kings 6:8-23 illustrates this idea.)

**32. What is God wanting us to experience when we receive the bread and juice? 1 Corinthians 10:16,17,21**

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When we eat the bread and drink the juice, we are expressing our choice to be united with Jesus. We accept His death as our death, His life as our life and invite Him to live within us. Jesus takes our invitation seriously and becomes one with us (John 14:23; Revelation 3:20). It is also a reminder that we are joined to each other, for we are “one body.”