

Jesus had come into town for the Passover celebration and was nearing the time when He would be betrayed by one of his disciples, publicly humiliated and mocked, beaten beyond recognition, and hung on a cross to die. It was the night before His suffering when He made His special request for His followers to remember that He gave his body for them and poured out His blood as a sacrifice for them. The best way to understand the real meaning of Easter would be from Jesus, in His three words ... **the new covenant**. In **Luke 22** we get a picture of the night before His death: The heart of Easter lies in His words, "**the new covenant between God and his people.**"



Passover and the New Covenant

To put this new covenant in context we must look at history. Long before Jesus was born, God made other covenants with His people (the Israelites) - some to multiply them, some to bless them, and some to give them land. All along the way, God required believers to recognize their sinful nature, confess their sins, ask for forgiveness for their sins, and offer specific animals to the priests as sacrifices for their sins. Their religious observance of Passover included sacrificing unblemished lambs, just as the Israelites had done when they painted their doorposts with the lambs' blood the actual night of Passover - when Moses led God's people out of Egypt- (see **Exodus 12:11-13**).

The sacrificial lamb was a significant part of sparing the lives of the Israelites on Passover as well as in future remembrances of the event. God gave Moses and Aaron specific instructions on how to honor God with annual Passover celebrations. Lamb was the pinnacle of the Passover meal (and still is). The lambs were to be without blemish and even lived with the families for several days before they were sacrificed, adding to the understanding that the ultimate sacrifice was close to the hearts of those whose sins were atoned for.

Easter and Passover have a special relationship for many reasons. Jesus became the "lamb without blemish" as He sacrificed His life for the sins of all who believe in Him - to bring them into right relationship with the Father. Just as the Israelites celebrate freedom from their slavery to the Egyptians as they celebrate Passover, Christians celebrate the victory over sin and death signified in Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus said the new covenant between God and His people was "**an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.**" It was no coincidence that Jesus gave up His life for all at the time of Passover. It was the appointed time, chosen by the Father.

What is the real meaning of Easter? In **John 1:29**, as he sees Jesus approaching, John the Baptist announces to the crowd around him, "**Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**"

He knew that Jesus was the son of God, the long-awaited Messiah, the one whom God's prophets had promised to save mankind from their sins and to give them a deep heartfelt relationship with God the Father. The new covenant would be an everlasting one. (**Jeremiah 31:31-4**, **Jeremiah 32:39-42**, **Isaiah 55:3**) Jesus, our sacrificial lamb, our Savior, our God, our Redeemer - He laid down His life as our sacrificial lamb to pay for our sins. When He rose from the dead three days later, He gave victory over eternal separation from God (death) to all who put their faith and trust in Him. That is the new covenant - everlasting life spent with God through faith in all that Jesus Christ has done and continues to do. (See 1 John 5:10-12; 1 Corinthians 15:3 and Romans 10:9.)

Prayer:

Father God, there is sometimes controversy about how, when, and what to call the remembrance of the greatest day in history - the day Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, rose from the dead and brought the gift of Your forgiveness and eternal life to all who would like to receive it - the new covenant. Please pour out Your Holy Spirit on all who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and put us on our knees before You with thankful hearts for Your great love for us. You, oh God, have given us victory over sin and death, and the promise of never leaving us or forsaking us for eternity. Help us to be the body of Christ, the church, united in awe of how You saved our unworthy souls ... Your body and Your blood as a sacrifice for us. Help us bring this message to all who will listen. Help us to love like You love. Thank You forever! Amen

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