

Explanation of the Symbols of the New Testament Passover

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As the ancient nation of Israel was required to observe the Passover and the symbols which pointed forward to Christ, the spiritual nation of Israel today is required to observe the new covenant symbols that Christ introduced at Passover (see study: The Timing of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ), pointing back as a memorial to his death and what it accomplished (Jn. 13:8; 1Cor. 11:26).

There are three symbols associated with the New Testament Passover: foot washing, unleavened bread, and the wine.

Foot Washing:

The foot washing symbolizes our service to others and humility before our God. Christ taught his disciples to wash one another's feet if they wanted to be part of his body, the church (Jn. 13:3-8).

(He) got up from supper, and laid aside his garments; and taking a towel, he girded himself. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded (Jn. 13:4-5; ESV used throughout unless otherwise noted; Ed. note in parenthesis).

The laying aside of his garments was to picture Christ laying aside everything he had with the Father, prior to becoming a flesh and blood human being (Jn. 17:5; cf. Job 19:25; Heb. 10:5-7). Included in this symbolism was Christ's willingness to lay aside his life. Christ's example, on the night prior to his death, was meant to teach his followers that they should be prepared to humble themselves and lay aside whatever is necessary to serve others,

If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you (Jn. 13:14-15).

The foot washing is also to remind God's people that Christ's death provided the means through which every sin can be washed away following repentance and baptism. By extension, it is a reminder that even after repentance and baptism God's people can still pick up some dirt, symbolizing sin, while walking through this world from Passover to Passover. Therefore, the need to repent and have sins washed away on an ongoing basis is brought to mind during the foot washing ceremony. This includes any spiritual leaven, or sin, that might be picked up, or recognized, during the final de-leavening process leading up to the evening of the 14th of the first month,

Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed (been baptized by immersion in water) does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean' (Jn. 13:10; cf. 1Jn. 1:8-10; emphasis added).

Unleavened Bread:

Unleavened bread represents the sinless body of Christ that was broken for everyone. Because leaven is often used in scripture to represent sin, it was not offered with the sacrifices during the First Covenant period (Ex. 23:18; 34:25; Lev. 2:11). Therefore, during the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, all leaven is to be removed from one's living space (Ex. 12:15). This symbolizes the positive effect of Christ's atoning work on behalf of every sinner who repents and seeks to live in newness of life, as defined by God's law and commandments (Rom. 6:4).

After the foot washing and while the disciples were eating, Christ asked a blessing on some bread and explained what it symbolized,

While they were eating, he took (some) bread, and after a blessing he broke (it), and gave (it) to them, and said, "Take (it); this is my body" (Mk. 14:22 cf. Mt. 26:26; Ed. notes in parentheses).

Just as an Israelite had to lay his hands upon the animal he was to sacrifice in his place, so we too lay our hands upon the unleavened bread which symbolizes the body of Jesus that was the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin.

Wine:

The wine (SGD 3631) symbolizes the blood of Christ which was shed to atone for, or cover, all sin that has been or is yet to be committed. Christ compared his shed blood to the new wine of the Second Covenant (cf. Mt. 9:17),

And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood' (Lk. 22:20).

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me' (1Cor. 11:25).

According to Almighty God's law of animal sacrifice, almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb. 9:22). The shedding of Christ's blood represents the culmination of his sacrifice for sins, thus paying the wages of sin, which is everlasting death (Rom. 6:23); this is for both the physical and spiritual host. His sacrifice fulfilled all aspects of the animal sacrificial system, which was added as a teacher for the Israelites pointing forward to the time when the son of God would fulfill what these sacrifices represented (Mt. 5:17; cf. Gal. 3:19; 24-25).

We should all examine ourselves starting from the first day of the first month, seeking God's assistance to recognize all the leaven of sin so we can work to remove it, according to God's will and strength of spirit, and then partake of the Passover meal at the appointed time. By doing this every year, God's people remain sanctified and part of Christ's body (1Cor. 11:26-29).

This document is the collaborative work of individuals who believe God's truth should be given freely (Mt. 10:8; 1Cor. 2:12; 2Cor.11:7; Rom. 10:14-21) and the message of the one true God should be made available to all nations (Mt. 24:14) as a prerequisite to the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings (Mt. 17:10; 19:17; Mk. 9:11; Lk. 1:17; Rev. 19:11-16).

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