**Lesson: Holy Week**

 Holy Week is a good time to reflect on God’s Covenant, which He promises to all who seek Him. A covenant is an agreement or contract; you can bet that when God makes a covenant, He will never break it. God offers people salvation for free if they will be faithful to Him; and that faith leads to eternal life. It is the greatest deal anyone will ever offer you.

 In the Old Testament, God made covenants with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David. Through these prophets, God also promised a New Covenant: His Messiah. The New Covenant was further confirmed through Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Zechariah, Micah, and other great prophets. The Old Covenant was based on faith in God by obedience to His Law, demonstrated by sacrificial sin offerings. The New Covenant is based on faith and is confirmed in the New Testament with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. God knew all along that humans were incapable of remaining obedient due to their sinful nature (ROM 3:20; ROM 7:7,14; JAM 2:10), which is why He promised a more perfect covenant based on faith in Christ’s self-sacrifice (ROM 16:25–26; GAL 3:13–23; HEB 7:15–19; HEB 8:6–13).

 Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Redeemer, the New Covenant (LUK 1:68–79). Christ came to earth to perfectly fulfill the Law on our behalf (MAT 5:12–19), as well as to assume the punishment for our noncompliance with the Law (ISA 53:1–12; PHP 3:11–12). His sufferings and death paid the price of sin which is death (ROM 6:23), thereby conquering sin (1 JO 2:2). His resurrection from the dead brought with it the resurrection of all people (ROM 8:11), thereby conquering death (2 TI 1:10). By redeeming our bodies from the grave and washing our souls clean, we become unblemished like Christ (1 CO 1:8), making us acceptable to live with our perfect God in His kingdom forever (COL 1:29; HEB 10:14).

 Interestingly, the Old and New Covenants have several things in common and this is not a coincidence. God’s plan was repeatedly announced during Holy Week and upon God’s holy mountain in the City of David which is Jerusalem (meaning city of peace).

 Abraham was visited by King Melchizedek, and communed with this great High Priest and King of Salem (meaning peace), sharing bread and wine, and giving tithes of all he owned to the Lord (GEN 14:18–20). Later, Abraham was sent by God to the holy mountain to sacrifice his only legitimate son Isaac (GEN 22:1–8). Isaac asked his father where the lamb was that would be offered and Abraham replied, “God Himself will provide the lamb.” Of course, Isaac was spared because Abraham remained faithful; a ram was sacrificed in Isaac’s place (GEN 22:9–13). This ram represents the Sacrificial Lamb, God’s firstborn and only Son, who was offered for the sin of the world (JOH 1:29).

 God used Moses as a messenger of the Law as well as a messenger of the New Covenant (EXO 24:7–8). During the first Passover, God spared the firstborn of all who obeyed His commandment by sacrificing an unblemished lamb (EXO 12:3–13). Again, Christ is represented in that Passover Lamb (1 PE 1:19). There are numerous references to Messiah in the Old Testament; each of these examples illuminates Christ who shined the light of God for all living souls to see. If you cannot see the light you will lose your way and remain in darkness.

 God commanded His people to remember forever His great works when He freed them from the bondage of Egyptian oppression. This is the purpose of the Old Testament feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits (LEV 23:5–10), which Jews celebrate during Holy Week to this day.

 During this same Holy Week, Christians celebrate the breaking of Christ’s body on the cross (Feast of Unleavened Bread), the shedding of His blood unto death (Feast of Passover), and His Resurrection from the tomb on Easter Sunday (Feast of First Fruits). In accordance with Christ’s commandment, we commemorate these wonderful acts of God every time we partake of Holy Communion (1 CO 11:25–26), in which we share the bread and wine in a spiritual communion with God’s Holy Spirit just as Abraham did so long ago. This we do to remember forever that God has freed us from the slavery and bondage of sin (LUK 22:19–20).

 As we reflect on the sacrifice of Christ and His resurrection, we cannot help but be moved. What a great time to express our gratitude by giving to the Lord the first fruits of our increase (2 CH 31:5; PRO 3:9; 1 CO 16:2). Christ is the first fruits of those who have been raised to live forever on God’s holy mountain of Zion (1 CO 15:20–23,44). All believers will follow Christ in death, and be resurrected to live forever with Him and our heavenly Father in the New Jerusalem (EZE 34:12,23–24; EPH 1:10–11; PHP 3:20–21). What a marvelous gift God has given us; He gave us everything, even Himself! And all He requires in return is gratitude. This we show by offering our worship and gifts through faith (LEV 27:30; DEU 14:22; MAL 3:6–8). Plus, God promises that if we give Him our first fruits (tithe), He will further bless us with increased prosperity, so how can we lose (MAL 3:10; LUK 6:38)? Is there any limit to God’s goodness, grace, and mercy? No, there is not (PSA 100:1–5)!

 Interestingly, many significant sacrifices (all using spotless male sheep) have occurred during Holy Week. In the Old Testament era, this week included the feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits, lasting a total of eight days. Jews have celebrated these feasts annually by eating the Passover meal (also called Seder supper) of which the main course was lamb; unleavened bread and wine also were served with this meal. In the New Testament era, Holy Week includes Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. Christ, who is the Passover Lamb, is celebrated in like manner by Christians for eight days.

 In the Old Testament, the body of Christ is reflected in the feast of Unleavened Bread and the blood of Christ is reflected in the feast of Passover. Unleavened bread, or bread without yeast, signifies the body without sin, representing Jesus Christ. Christ purged us of our sins, making us pure like Him. In the New Testament, the body and blood of Christ were offered to the apostles during the first Holy Communion, and then offered to the world during Jesus’s crucifixion, just as the blood of the lamb was offered during the first Passover. Jews and Christians celebrate every anniversary of Holy Week. Unmistakably, this is God’s design; it is a commemoration of the covenants made by God with His people. People who celebrate God and His Son are among His chosen; and this celebration will continue without end.

* LEV 23:5–6 ~ The feasts of the Passover and Unleavened Bread are described, during which faith offerings are to be made.
* MAT 26:26–28 ~ The Eucharist is described which occurred subsequent to the Last Supper. Jesus said, “Take and eat, this is my body; take and drink, this is my blood of the New Covenant, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”
* JOH 6:30–35,51–58 ~ The people said to Jesus, “Can you show us a sign to convince us that we should believe you, like when our fathers ate manna in the desert?” Jesus answered, “The manna from heaven didn’t come from Moses; it came from God who gives you the true bread from heaven. The bread of life comes from heaven and gives life to the world. I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger again and whoever believes in me will never thirst again. The bread I give is my flesh, and I will give it for the life of the world. Unless you eat the body and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life. If you eat my body and drink my blood, you live in me and I in you; and you will have eternal life, for I will raise you up the last day. Mine is not like the manna from heaven, for whoever eats the bread I give will live forever.”
* 1 CO 5:7–8 ~ Throw out the old leavened dough and become a new dough, without yeast; for that is what you have become because of the sacrifice of Christ who is the Passover Lamb. Therefore, let us keep the feast (of Passover), not with old leaven or with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
* EPH 5:26 ~ We are cleansed from sin by the washing of water and the Word who is Christ.

 The resurrection of Christ is reflected in the feast of the First Fruits, Christ being the first fruits of those raised from the dead to abide forever with God. Christ’s resurrection occurred on the first Easter, in conjunction with the feast of the First Fruits. His resurrection signifies that all believers will, like Christ, be raised from the dead to inherit eternal life in the kingdom of heaven.

* LEV 23:10–12 ~ The feast of the First Fruits is described in which offerings and tithes are given. During that feast, a male lamb is sacrificed.
* JOH 11:25–26 ~ Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, though they were dead, yet shall they live.”
* 1 CO 15:20–23,44 ~ Christ has been raised, the first fruits of those who have died, so that we too may obtain a new life.
* GAL 4:5–7 ~ Believers in Christ will become children of God and fellow heirs to His kingdom.

 Jesus Christ is the unblemished sacrificial lamb. He is represented by the ram sacrificed by Abraham, and He is represented by the lamb sacrificed by the Israelites during the first Passover. Instead of Abraham sacrificing his only son and heir, and instead of the Israelites sacrificing a lamb to save their first born from the angel of death, it was God’s first and only son, the Lamb of God, who would be sacrificed to atone for the sin of the world and to save humankind from the curse of death. Thus, all these sacrifices in the Old Testament were a shadow of Jesus Christ who is the Passover Lamb.

* JOH 1:15,25–29,32–36 ~ John the Baptist preached about the coming of Christ and addressed Him as the Lamb of God.
* ACT 8:32 ~ Jesus Christ was led as a sheep to the slaughter (also ISA 53:7).
* 1 PE 1:19 ~ Peter describes Christ as a sacrificial lamb without blemish.
* REV 5–22 ~ Jesus Christ is depicted throughout the book of Revelation as the Lamb who was slain, and who now sits upon the throne of God.

 In addition to being the sacrificial lamb, Jesus Christ is also the Good Shepherd who dies to save His sheep. He returns to gather His sheep together. The Good Shepherd is the protector. He protects us from evil and death just like the Israelites were protected by the blood of the lamb during the first Passover (EXO 12). Note that King David was originally a shepherd, and his descendant Jesus Christ inherited David’s throne and is our King and Shepherd forever.

* PSA 23 ~ The Good Shepherd is the one who always protects and cares for His sheep.
* ISA 44:28 ~ He is my appointed Shepherd and He will do everything I (God) ask. He will build Jerusalem, and lay the foundation of the temple.
* EZE 34:5–12,23–24 ~ The sheep were scattered because there was no shepherd. The sheep were hunted and killed. Beware you shepherds, for I (God) will require my flock, and I will deliver them. I will find every last one of them. As a shepherd searches for His flock when they become scattered, so I will find my sheep and deliver them from danger on that dark and cloudy day. I will set one Shepherd over them and He will feed them. I will be their God and my servant David will be their prince (referring to the ancestor of David who will inherit the throne, namely Messiah).
* ZEC 13:7 ~ They will strike down the Shepherd and the sheep will scatter. (also MAT 26:31).
* MAT 25:32,46 ~ The Son of God will gather everyone together, and will separate them, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. The sheep will inherit eternal life, but the goats will inherit eternal punishment.
* JOH 10:1–2,7,14–18; JOH 10:27–28 ~ Jesus described Himself to the apostles as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, and who comes back to find His lost sheep, gathering them together to live under His protection and care forever.
* HEB 13:20 ~ Jesus is the Great Shepherd who brings salvation to His sheep.

 Are further sacrifices to God necessary? Not for sin. But we still are supposed to give of ourselves to others and to God, offering the first fruits of our increase to the church and sacrificing ourselves daily for the sake of Christ (ROM 12:1). Further, we still are obliged to abide by God’s laws. However, we cannot be saved by doing these things; only by faith in Christ can we come to the knowledge of salvation, through which we give generously of ourselves in gratitude.

By Andrew Barber, Posted March 31, 2021

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