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The Blood of the Lamb

A Look at the Contrasts Between the Passover and the Crucifixion

The death of our Lord upon the cross is, in the course of redemptive history, only surpassed in significance by His resurrection. This paper will seek to compare the nature of Christ's death on the cross to the ritual of the Passover and to consider the obvious similarities as an object lesson unparalleled in Biblical text.

What we call 'redemptive history' is filled with patterns God has given us to see His hand at work throughout the generations. For whatever His reasons, our Lord has chosen to use models, shadows/types, and object lessons in the course of history to point to greater and future fulfillment. An easy example of this can be found in those occasions of God's judgment upon the peoples of the world as a precursor to the ultimate judgment yet to come. Smaller examples sometimes center around people (such as Elijah being an earlier model for John the Baptist), places (the old Jerusalem to be replaced by the new heavenly one), or events (the Exodus as a parallel to Christ's own effort to save His people from the slavery of sin). Scripture, when read with an eye to recurrent themes and object lessons, seems more like a blueprint toward salvation than any cursory reading of it might give. This blueprint of redemptive history is incredible in its significance for God's people, and nearly as incredible in the divine, prophetic way it has unfolded.

With that said, there is no greater example in all of scripture of one event being a shadow of a future or greater event than the celebration of the Passover. The Passover, and its ultimate divergence into the Lord's Supper followed by His crucifixion, is the story of an omniscient God foretelling the circumstances of Christ's sacrifice two thousand years before the cross. For those who view the scriptures as merely a collection of old stories, the Passover is a large stumbling block... the circumstances by which the Passover occurred and was subsequently honored (to varying degrees) for two millennia prior to an exacting fulfillment in Christ's sacrifice as "*the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world*" (John 1:29) are historically solid. This is, in part, because the specifics of the Passover itself (as laid out by God) are so detailed. We will here review some of these specifics from Exodus 12, but starting with the most significant one.

"The doorposts and the lentil represent the cross where Christ hung. Christ is that sacrifice... that Lamb who shed His blood on Calvary's cross for the sins of the world. The shed blood of Jesus Christ must be applied by faith to our hearts for our salvation, just like it was applied to the doorposts and the lentil." --"Exodus, the Story of Redemption" Fred W. Oberst

Passover is about the blood of the Lamb. The Passover celebration has many attributes, from the bitter herbs to the unleavened bread (which we will both discuss), but the object lesson revolves specifically around the shedding of blood. In Exodus 12, the chapter does not begin with directions on how to prepare the lamb, but, after first reviewing how the lamb is to be selected, skips straight to the issue of the blood. I believe this ordering is important because it seems done in a way to impress the significance of the blood in the saving of the Jewish families... and of future Christian believers as well.

It goes without saying, but the selection of the lamb for use in the historic Passover was of tremendous significance. The blood from an unworthy lamb would no more save then than if our Messiah had been unworthy when he died for us. Exodus 12 tells us the lambs chosen for the Passover were to be “without blemish”. As parallels go, this parallel to the Lamb of God is like God using a sledgehammer to drive home a key point. The correlation between the Passover lamb and Jesus Christ is as striking as can be... and the whole of scripture testifies to this, with Isaiah 53:7 as one example: *“He was led as a lamb to the slaughter...”* In fact, in the New Testament, Christ is referred to as the Lamb of God more than thirty times. The God we serve has a keen eye for emphasis.

The historic preparation of the Passover meal involved the lamb itself, and then additional accompanying items for the meal. Scripture, after stressing the importance of the quality of the lamb, then gave very specific descriptions on the way in which the lamb was to be prepared:

“Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.” – Exodus 12: 9-10

Fire, throughout Scripture, often refers to God’s judgment. The phrasing in Exodus does not beat around the (burning) bush on what the fate of the lamb was to be: fire was to cook it prior to consumption, and fire was to devour all that remained after the meal. Certainly when Christ was on the cross He suffered in full measure the fiery wrath of God the Father against the sins of His people. The emphasis this chapter of Exodus places on fire should not be missed

among the other components therein... without a propitiating sacrifice, fire would be our fate as well.

Despite the flames that would engulf the Passover lamb, and the almost vicious way in which these flames are described as burning even the very entrails of the creature, it is interesting to note the care given to the bones of the lamb. Rather than enduring equally harsh judgment (i.e. 'ye shall pummel the bones into a powdery dust, then burn ye the dust' or somesuch), the Passover ritual demonstrates a reverence to the form of Christ as it existed in the very bones of the Passover lamb ("*neither shall ye break a bone thereof*", v. 46"). When contrasted against the crucifixion, where it is stated that not a bone of His was broken (John 19:36), the parallel is obvious. "*The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath day was a high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken...*" What is especially intriguing about this verse, however, is illustrated by A.W. Pink in his book 'Gleanings from Exodus'. "*Here was Satan, in his malignant enmity attempting to falsify and nullify the written Word.*" Pink goes on to suggest that the Passover link between the bones of the sacrificial lambs and the bones of Christ was a deliberate point of attack for the enemy; that, in other words, Satan saw fulfillment of this portion of prophecy as something to be averted. Satan understood the significance of prophecy in the course of redemptive history... a concept often abused by the modern evangelical church.

Accompanying the Passover meal were two additional elements that spoke to God's will and His character. These are the bitter herbs which were to dress the meal, and the unleavened bread to be partaken with it. Both the bread and the herbs held a special implication toward the future as well as to the past. The herbs, as many commentators have noted, were specifically bitter as a representation of the bitter oppression of Pharaoh and the slavery thereto. Bitterness

was also symbolic for death throughout scripture. In this case the bitter herbs served as a reminder of where God's people had been, as well as the bitterness of their bondage to sin and death. The lamb itself was the liberation from the past and the symbolic key to the future.

The unleavened bread has been an even more easily understood concept. In their book 'Christ in the Passover', authors Ceil and Moishe Rosen explain: "*Leaven in the bible is almost always a symbol of sin. The putting away of all leaven is a picture of the sanctification of a child of God. Cleansed, redeemed by God's lamb, the true believer must put away all the sinful leaven of the old life before redemption.*" The Apostle Paul demonstrated this understanding about the relation of Christ to the Passover Lamb with his words in 1 Corinthians:

"Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth."

-- 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

On a couple of occasions in Scripture, the idea of some form of 'mark' securing the safety of God's people was utilized. The eventual fruit of the Passover process, and of the crucifixion itself, was the application of this mark upon the lives of God's people. During the Passover, we are told in Exodus 12:22: "*And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning.*" By placing this mark upon their doorposts, the people of God were spared from the most frightening plague recorded in Exodus... the death of all firstborn. As stated at the outset of this paper, Passover is

about the blood of the lamb. Without the sacrifice on our behalf of the ultimate Lamb, we have no more sureness of safety than the Egyptian firstborn throughout the land that first Passover night.

The actual *application* of the blood is yet one last interesting contrast between the original Passover and Christ's crucifixion. Firstly, there is the fact that the blood was to be applied via hyssop around the door to the house. When Christ said "*I Am The Door*", His meaning would have been seen (in part) in light of the Passover ritual. Many commentators have also noted that the Bible goes out of its way to indicate that the blood was to be applied to both the top and sides of the door, which, to some, suggests a rudimentary cross.

The direct parallel between the application of the blood and the crucifixion can be found in two particular verses, one in the Old Testament and one in the New:

"Cleanse me with hyssop and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."

-- Psalm 51:7

"A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips."

-- John 19:29

The hyssop stalk spoken of in John certainly would have come in contact with the blood of Jesus, much like the hyssop from the original Passover came into contact with the blood of the lamb. And, as the verse in Psalms indicates, the hyssop also served in a symbolic cleaning capacity... cleaning away our sins in preparation for a robe of righteousness.

This paper has sought to contrast some of the more well known parallels between the Passover ritual and Christ's crucifixion. There are many, many more parallels, particularly when one looks at Christ's celebration/modification of the Passover during the last supper. These contrasts can be found in the works of many notable theologians, not to mention the works of Paul (as shown earlier in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8). What is interesting to note is how our modern church, and historians in general, view these things.

The current Jewish peoples still celebrate the Passover, but do not see Jesus Christ's life and death as fulfillment of the ritual. This is in spite of a myriad of complex ties between the two, ties so specific they defy rational expectation. The modern Christian church, on the other hand, sees the connection, but acts at times to diminish the need we have for Christ's blood, thus sullyng both the Passover and crucifixion. And the non-believer, in spite of the incredible odds by which two thousand year old prophecy was fulfilled in Christ's death, often degrades all of the above as either superstition, storytelling, or outright fabrication.

From a personal standpoint, I am emboldened at witnessing a God who paints upon such a wide historic canvas. Redemptive history has nuances of such complex consistency, and across such a breadth of time, that the sovereignty of God appears to be beyond question. Whether applied to the doorposts or to our hearts, the blood of the Lamb is the key to our relationship with God in all His triune glory. This is the ultimate lesson of the Passover and is a message our Lord never wanted His people to forget:

“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD -a lasting ordinance.” – Exodus 12:14

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