

A People for His Own Possession

Now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the Earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a Holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel (Exodus 19:5-6.)

What was said above by God was promised to the Children of Israel; if as a nation they were willing to stay the course with Him in faithfulness, keeping the covenant He was making with them, then blessing was assured. The Children of Israel agreed to God's terms and therefore were set in a position above all other nations in the world: Ex 24:7-8. These people were God's exclusive representatives on earth entrusted with the very oracles (words) of God: Rom 9:4-5. The Mosaic Law, as it is called, provided everything needed for Israel to be an effective witness for God on earth. Obedience regarding the Law was a guarantee they would enjoy all the best of God; but to thwart His plan through disobedience brought on the most disastrous results; God disciplining His children more so than any other nation on earth. So Israel was to have the best and the worst; the blessing and the curse from God: Lev 26:15-25; Deut 11:26. Ultimately Israel broke their covenant with God leading to their dispersion throughout the earth just as God had promised: Lev 26:36-46. In these days the Jews remain dispersed and are not presently functioning under a covenant with God; yet in their future is a new and better covenant awaiting them: Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8. The first covenant was weak because it was according to the flesh and was dependant on human volition. But the second covenant to Israel similar to that of the Church is according to the Holy Spirit and will in due time bring a Glory to God and Israel like never before: Heb 8. Without Israel's past relationship with God we would know very little regarding the policies of God for fallen man. The Church is dependant on the law and the prophets, it being the witness to confirm the Church. Israel and the Law is the tutor that brings us to Christ as witnessed by the law and the prophets: Rom 3:21; John 8:56; Lk 24:25-27. The Old Testament is critical and essential in that it continues to shed light about what is good and bad in those choosing to serve God: Rom 7:7; 1Cor 10:6; 2Tim 3:15-17.

In the Law the observances of the Passover: Deut 6:1, Unleavened Bread: Ex 23:15, and First fruits: Ex 23:16 are of unsurpassed significance. Israel had been in the land of Egypt Four hundred and thirty years and with no possibility for release from this slavery. The Israelites were mingled among the Idolatries of Egypt and were idolaters: Jos 24:14. The picture is that Israel was a slave to the sins of Egypt; this representing the worst possible circumstance, yet God would redeem his Children with the unblemished Lamb: this being symbolic to the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Completely apart from any ability on their part, God would purchase them out of this slavery providing the very basis for their lives and function as a nation belonging to God. God

chooses that we serve Him as freed men, freed from sin to serve Him and Him only. We cannot please God while walking in the flesh; it is essential to be walking in fellowship in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Passover, the feast of the Unleavened Bread and Feast of the First Fruits Offering all have a unique significance related to the Church and also Israel in the past and their future. Though the Lord taught them regarding these additional offerings it would be forty years before these additional offerings would be observed and from there forward would have a progressively increasing significance as time went on. The Israelites shortly before what would have been the time for their second annual Passover sent men in to do a reconnaissance of the Promised Land: Num 13:1-2 . The land was a good land just as the Lord promised it would be; but hardness of heart that permeated Israel in the previous year, though seeing all the miraculous signs of the Lord, did not persuade them to have the right heart in order to defeat the enemies of God: Num 13:32-33. It would be thirty-nine more years before Israel would cross the Jordan River: Num 14:30-35. Throughout these thirty-nine years the Passover would be observed yearly but the associated feasts of Unleavened Bread and First Fruits would not be instituted until they were actually in the Promised Land.

Everything they needed to observe the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and the First Fruits was waiting for them already prepared by the Lord. These additional blessings that anybody would want were in the Promised Land not in the wilderness; in the wilderness only the basics were essential in order that they might know God. Great prosperity is always a great hindrance in the way of truly knowing God even though He wants us to have all the best things. Annually they could understand the significance of the Passover: the nine plagues they all survived and the death of the entire first born of Egypt man and beasts, God by Himself redeeming them from this Iron furnace: 1Kings 8:51. These would be images in their minds impossible to forget and God meant it to be that way. Because Egypt was laid to waste and they were safely delivered they were going to understand and remember that the Passover lamb by itself purchased them and their deliverance from the slavery of Egypt: Egipto: Ex 12:26-27,13:14-16, just as symbolically the parents of the first born were to redeem that child with the money the Lord provided them: Ex 34:19-20, Ex 12:35-36; Num 18:15-16; Ex 12:26-27. This was a powerful way of reminding the parents that they were unclean slaves prior to the Lord's deliverance. We are all in this condition prior to the Lord bringing us to Himself. We can have the idea that we are special and in fact this thinking is hostility towards God. The entire human race is ensnared in sin; only one human being would be completely pleasing and acceptable to the Lord, that being His first born and all those following after Him: Heb 7:26; Col 1:10.

The First Fruits Offering was not to be presented to God for His approval is the idea symbolically portrayed: Lev 23:16-17. This offering included leaven, therefore including the works of man not worthy to present to the Lord. Almost everywhere you find leaven i.e. yeast in the scriptures it is symbolic and indicative of sin. To burn the first fruits offering would have been a form of presenting strange fire to the Lord: Lev 2:11-12, and as we see in the case of Leviticus 10:1-3, it resulted in the death of Aaron's sons.

The First Fruits Offering is God's way of saying, "Serve me by serving one another in sharing what I have provided for you with others, but don't present before me what I have provided for you without it being perfect, according to my specifications". The first fruits indicate that we are the results of God's labors and not that of our own. The first fruits are also analogous to Israel's redemption from the cruel slavery of Egypt; the Passover Lamb providing their release.

It was inevitable in the first years that ignorance would remain regarding these things along with the willingness to compromise the ordinances of God to serve one's own interests rather than the Lord's. To give an example: one of the Israelites is a farmer and has some grain bundles still laying in the field; this person reasons in his thinking that he needs to get these bundles while working on the Sabbath rather than risking sheaths being ruined by rain. This is a picture of man thinking he is saving himself rather than trusting the instructions from God. There can be much to say about sin and our dealings with one another; much of the time we can be seeking our own interests and not that of the Lord's: Phil 2:21. In the case of the farmer, he has defiled the harvest of the Lord because of unbelief. In the New Testament it says not too hastily lay hands upon a person; otherwise you will be participating in their sins. The point in God giving this information is us being able to present to Him offerings of an acceptable nature. Our offerings to Him need to have the correct specifications and by no means any leaven: 1Cor 5:6-8. God wants to bless our crops of righteousness rather than curse our crops related to Greed. If we run ahead God can be merciful but we are still going to have to get back in line in order to experience truth as God would have it. This is the idea of the First Fruits Offering; it's not going to be perfect but do it anyway but not for the purpose of seeking approval before God; remember everything was already provided. God wants us to learn more; it is easy to think we are doing great things for God and come to find out later out we have run ahead seeking our own interests rather than God's. Because of our ignorance's we can be exploited by the Devil.

The Lamb is the Father's first fruits being redeemed by the Father; the Lamb has His first fruits it redeeming the Sons of Israel from the iron furnace, God providing the first fruits of the Promised Land as redemption of their bodies. The first day the Israelites ate of the produce of the land the provision from God (the Manna) stopped. This is all in the Shadows; the realities of this are provided in the New Testament scriptures. The First Fruits Offering for Israel represented what was going to take place when they moved into the Promised Land although all the teaching about it was given while in the desert. We need the desert in order to come to know God. We need cruel slavery to be motivated to leave Egypt. This was the first fruits of all the produce of the land. All these things were to be shared amongst Israel for the benefit of all; forsaking the idolatrous worships of the nations yet not oppressing the foreigners amongst them; being consecrated to God in all things pertaining to the Law. The most important thing for the Israelites to remember was where they came from, that being Egypt. The picture is they were in an iron furnace incapable of winning their own freedom; God even knowing that they would try to return to the bondage, therefore making the division of the Red Sea behind them; this being analogous to eternal security despite our deceitful hearts. Jesus Christ, the indestructible life, became the first fruits of those who had fallen asleep i.e. the Old Testament Saints;

yet they were not made complete without us i.e. the Church, those that belong to Him. The Church has a unique relationship to Christ in that we are actually His spiritual body, His flesh, His bone and bride; we being one Spirit with Him in the Father; Israel indwelling the bride which comes out of Heaven: Rev 21:2. It is the idols of Egypt that divide us; this is entertaining deceitful spirits and the doctrine of demons: 1Tim 4:1. Therefore, let us hold fast our fellowship with the Lord in the Spirit so we come to know the meaning of entering His Rest: (Hebrews 4:1-11).

(1 Corinthians 10:6-7)

⁶ Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, “THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY.”

(Hebrews 4:11)

Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through *following* the same example of disobedience.

(1 Peter 2:9-12)

⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. ¹² Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.