

Sometimes we as pastors and individuals tend to stay away from the Old Testament and focus entirely on the four Gospels thinking that the stories and the characters of the Old Testament don't apply to our modern day lives. Of course this is not true, there is a lot that we can learn from these ancient stories and characters.

As you study the Bible, you find that there are many similarities between the events and people of the Old and New Testaments. For example, the Passover is directly linked to the Lord's Supper which we will celebrate this morning. The Passover was the final plague that came upon Egypt before Pharaoh agreed to let the Israelites go. If you remember the story, Jacob's favorite son Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and taken to Egypt where as part of God's plan he advanced from being a slave to becoming the most powerful man in Egypt next to Pharaoh. When a drought and famine struck the land, Jacob moved his entire clan to Egypt at the invitation of his son Joseph. The Israelites took up permanent residence in Egypt and over the years grew in numbers. Then a new Pharaoh came to power. Unaware of Joseph's previous contribution to his country, he was threatened by the increasing number of Israelites in Egypt; concerned that they may rise up against his country. So he enslaved them and forced them to build his pyramids and other structures.

Then as part of God's plan, Moses came onto the scene. He had been born as an Israelite slave but raised as a prince of Egypt. But when he killed an Egyptian in defense of a fellow Israelite, he fled into the desert where he married and became a shepherd until God called him from a burning bush. God gave Moses the huge task of leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. Of course, Pharaoh did not want to let his workforce go; who would make all the bricks and build all the magnificent buildings he wanted. Thus, he and Moses got into a power struggle. To help Moses convince Pharaoh to let His people go, God sent ten plagues on Egypt. These included frogs, gnats, flies, turning the Nile River to blood, killing of cattle, boils, hail, locusts, three days of total darkness, and finally, the death of the firstborn which is the subject of our scripture text this morning from Chapter 12 of the Book of Exodus, the first 14 verses. Listen to how God instituted the Passover.

Read Exodus 12:1-14

As I said earlier there are many similarities between the stories and events of the Old and New Testaments. This morning let's see what connections we can find between the Jewish Passover and the Lord's Supper and the life of Jesus. The main item in the Passover celebration was a lamb chosen on the tenth day of the first month and slaughtered on the fourteenth day. The lamb was to be observed for four days to make sure that it had no blemishes or defects. Jesus was also observed for four days in Jerusalem prior to His crucifixion. During these four days He

was tested and asked a lot of questions by the religious leaders, but no one could find fault with Him. As Jesus' death was a sacrifice, so also was the Passover lamb a sacrifice. It was slaughtered at twilight meaning in late afternoon which parallels with Jesus' death on the cross at about three o'clock in the afternoon.

As you study the Bible, you can see an interesting progression in the doctrine regarding the sacrifice of a lamb. In Genesis the lamb was slain for an individual; in our text this morning from Exodus it was slain for a household. Later in Leviticus, the lamb was slain for the nation. And finally, in the crucifixion recorded in the New Testament, the Lamb of God was slain for the sin of the whole world.

In our story this morning from Exodus, some of the blood of the sacrificed lamb was to be placed on the sides and top of the doorframes of the Israelite homes. On the night of the plague of the firstborn, the angel of death would pass over the houses so marked sparing the firstborn of the Israelites. The people's faith would result in their salvation since the blood of the sacrifice symbolized the substitution of one life laid down for another. Redemption, including the forgiveness of sins, takes place only when the blood of an innocent offering is shed. The Passover lamb thus symbolizes Jesus as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world.

There's another interesting connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper. When Jews celebrate the Passover today, they always reserve a place of honor for the possible coming of the great prophet Elijah, who according to the prophet Malachi is the forerunner of the Messiah. At a particular time in the celebration, a special cup reserved for Elijah is filled with wine. No one drinks it, and it is disposed of after the ceremony. In the twenty-second chapter of the Gospel of Luke, we are told in verse 20 that Jesus took the cup after the meal and said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." By this time in the initial Lord's Supper all the other cups were empty, so Jesus must have passed around to His disciples the cup filled and reserved for Elijah; the cup that no one was supposed to drink from. Thus, by this act, Jesus was proclaiming that He Himself was the long-awaited Messiah and that the cup represented a new covenant in His blood.

The Passover commemorated the covenant between God and the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the same way the Lord's Supper is a sign of the new covenant that Jesus Christ by His sacrifice on the cross offers to all who will believe and accept Him as their Lord and Savior. Thus, the Communion Cup represents the blood that seals the new covenant just as the sacrificial lamb sealed the old covenant and ensured protection from the angel of death. In the same way, we are shielded from the angel of spiritual death. In Romans 6:23, the Apostle Paul states that "the wages of sin are death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our

Lord.” Through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, we are freed by God’s amazing grace from the bondage to sin to live life as it was originally intended.

On that special night, by the breaking of the bread and sharing of the cup, Jesus transformed the ancient celebration of the Passover into the Lord’s Supper. As observant Jews still celebrate the Passover as a reminder of their national redemption from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, so we as Christians celebrate Communion as a reminder of our spiritual redemption from the bondage to sin; redemption that was paid for by the broken body and shed blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now I have known several pastors, who would never mention the blood of Christ, and a music director who would not sing the hymn *There Is Power in the Blood* that we sang earlier. Unfortunately, they are missing a major point. The “blood of Christ” is not a gruesome expression, but a significant theological statement. When the New Testament speaks about the blood of Jesus Christ, it means not only His death, but also His life, death and resurrection. To the Jewish people, blood symbolized life. Thus the blood of Christ stands for all that Jesus did and still does for us. It also means that our sins are forgiven, and thus, the devil has no power over us; we are free from its guilt.

There is one more connection between this Old Testament story and the New Testament. The Israelites were told to mark the doorposts of their homes by the blood of the lamb so that the angel of death would pass over them that night. Thus they were protected and saved by their faithful obedience to God. Think about it, God didn’t need blood on the doorpost to identify which were the homes of the Israelites; He knows everything. But He wanted them to demonstrate their faith in Him.

In the Book of Revelation, there are several references to a seal being placed on the foreheads of the servants of the Lord to protect them during the period of tribulation. There are many interpretations as to what this seal is. In the Early Church, the concept of sealing was associated with two things: baptism and the Holy Spirit. By baptism, we publicly acknowledge that we have accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and belong to His church. The mark of the Holy Spirit enables us to have the wisdom and strength to cope with the demands of everyday life. The point is that just as the doorposts of the homes of the Israelites were marked by the blood of the lamb, so we as true believers are marked by the blood of the Lamb of God and live under His protection.

In his book *The Great Boer War*, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle recounts the story of a small detachment of British soldiers who come under attack. They were facing overwhelming odds and almost certain death. They realized that their only hope for survival was to seek protection under a Red Cross flag. All they had was a piece of white cloth, but no red paint. So they used

the blood from their wounds to make a large cross on the white cloth. Their attackers respected this grim flag as it was held aloft, and the wounded British soldiers were brought to safety. In the same way that these soldiers were saved by the flag, we as Christians are saved from the consequences of sin by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Because we believe in Him, our place in eternity is sealed; we are marked by the Lamb of God.

Legendary baseball broadcaster Jon Miller, who provided the play-by-play for the Baltimore Orioles for many years, was considered one of the best sports announcers in the nation. His sense of drama and his voice of authority could make even an 8-1 blowout sound exciting. In broadcasting a game, Miller never forgot the most important thing. He always kept an egg-timer to remind him to give the score every three minutes. The Lord's Supper is, in a way, like that. In all the rush and demands of everyday life, it reminds us on a regular basis of the most important thing: God's great love for each one of us as demonstrated by His Son Jesus Christ.

Memory connects the present to the past and serves as a foundation to the future. The Jewish people celebrate the Passover to remind them of how God led them out of slavery in Egypt to the Promised Land. As the Feast of the Passover is a celebration of what God has done for the Jewish people, so the Lord's Supper is a celebration of what Jesus Christ has done and is doing for all who accept Him as their Lord and Savior.

We must never forget that Jesus has freed us from the bondage of our sin, our hurts, our failures, our regrets, our disappointments and our bitterness. As with the Jewish people and the Passover, we must be in the habit of remembering, and communion provides us this opportunity. Believe me, the devil wants us to forget and not remember; he wants us to just go through the motions and not really experience the presence of God in our lives; and he wants us to focus on our problems and the negative aspects of life instead of God's blessings and grace. But we must never forget! Let us now come to God's Table with thanksgiving and in remembrance, in remembrance of what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has done and is doing for us, and for the love that God has for each one of us. When we celebrate communion, we acknowledge that we belong to Jesus Christ. Come and experience God's grace. Amen