

The following Scripture passages are offered to aid beginning fellowships. The readings and commentary for this week are more in line with what has become usual; for the following will most likely be familiar observations. The concept behind this Sabbath's selection is Passover.

## Weekly Readings For the Sabbath of April 12, 2008

*The person conducting the Sabbath service should open services with two or three hymns, or psalms, followed by an opening prayer acknowledging that two or three (or more) are gathered together in Christ Jesus' name, and inviting the Lord to be with them.*

*The person conducting the service should read or assign to be read Matthew chapter 26, verse 17, through chapter 27, verse 66; followed by Luke chapter 22, verse 7, through chapter 23, verse 56; followed further by John chapters 18 & 19.*

**Commentary:** The preceding is a large amount of reading, most of which will not be read during the actual Passover service at which feet are washed and the sacraments taken. Therefore, the commentary section of this week's reading will be shorter than usual.

The narrative flow reads in Greek as:

Τῇ δὲ πρώτῃ τῶν ἀζύμων προσήλθον οἱ μαθηταὶ τῷ Ἰησοῦ λέγοντες, Ποῦ θέλεις ἐτοιμάσωμέν σοι φαγεῖν τὸ πάσχα — in English, literal translation: “on the first the unleavened came the disciples to Jesus, saying to him, Where will you we may prepare for you to eat the Passover” (Matt 26:17)

Ἦλθεν δὲ ἡ ἡμέρα τῶν ἀζύμων, ἣ ἔδει θύεσθαι τὸ πάσχα. — in English, literal: “came And the day of the unleavened, on which must be killed the Passover” (Luke 22:7)

In John, we get the expression “the great day of that Sabbath—μεγάλη ἡ ἡμέρα ἐκείνου τοῦ σαββάτω” (John 19:31), for the day on which Jesus could not remain on the cross.

Within Sabbatarian Christendom, dispute still exists over when the Passover sacraments should be taken. There should never be any dispute that the so-called Last Supper was the Passover meal referred to by all of the gospel writers. Jesus ate the Passover. A lamb was sacrificed, and a meal from that lamb was prepared. And after the disciples ate this meal, Jesus took unleavened bread, broke it, and gave it to His disciples and said for them to eat, that the bread was His body—this was the bread served at this Passover meal, and controversy exists over whether it was unleavened or “regular” bread ... when authority broke down early in Christianity's history (by mid 1<sup>st</sup>-Century) controversy over every aspect of what was done and what should be done ensued. But much of that controversy need not exist: in usage, the Sabbath was not one day, the seventh day of the week, or even the high day of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib, but in usage

the Sabbath was the entire period of “unleavened,” which included the seven days of the Feast as well as the preparation day for *great day of the Sabbath* and apparently the entire period from the 10<sup>th</sup> of Abib through at least the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the month. Thus, there was about two weeks of “Sabbath” when every male Israelite was to appear before the Lord in Jerusalem (Deut 16:16). The use of “unleavened—ἄζύμων” represented the entire period of this *Sabbath*, including the great day that was a holy convocation (the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month), the day on which the high priest selected the paschal lamb for Israel (the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month), one or two weekly Sabbaths, the Wave Sheaf Offering (for Pharisees, the 16<sup>th</sup>; for Sadducees, the first day of the week after the weekly Sabbath within the Feast), and the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. All of the period was festival, with some Israelites from distant lands making once in a lifetime trips to Jerusalem. The use of “unleavened—ἄζύμων” did not represent the precision a culture that placed men on the moon wants or expects from its language; thus, uninspired translators have created additional controversy by giving to “unleavened—ἄζύμων” greater precision than the linguistic icon should have received.

The icon “ἄζύμων” represents one of the three times a year all males were to go to Jerusalem. It represents more days than the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Abib; it represents the entire time when an Israelite from, say, Babylon would be in the Jerusalem area for Passover, and Matthew and Luke use the icon to represent by inclusion the day when the paschal lamb would be slain.

Jesus was not betrayed on the dark portion of the *great day of the Sabbath* although someone will try to make this the case—Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would not have been able to procure in weight seventy-five pounds of myrrh and aloes on the *great day of the Sabbath*; plus, the *great day of the Sabbath* is not a preparation day. Nor was the *great day of the Sabbath* the weekly Sabbath. The Pharisees would have been eating their paschal lambs on the dark portion of the *great day of the Sabbath*, but Jesus was in the Garden Tomb while the Pharisees roasted their paschal lambs with fire.

Language ambiguity preceded calendar ambiguity as the reason for the Passover to be eaten on successive nights ... again, the entire period was *Sabbath* so if eating the Passover on one night was good, the Passover celebrating liberation and as such was the reason for keeping the weekly Sabbath (Deut 15:5), then eating the Passover on a second night was even better—for the entire period commemorated what the weekly Sabbath represented under the Moab covenant (Deut chaps 29-32), which would have Israel observing everything written in Deuteronomy (30:10).

Jesus’ death, while a somber occasion, is also a time to celebrate; for with His death, better promises were added to the eternal Moab covenant as its mediator went from being Moses to being the glorified Jesus, and the temple went from being a stone building to being the Body of Christ.

There are sincere but deceived Sabbatarian disciples who will take the Passover sacraments on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib, the day after Jesus was betrayed. They believe they know what they are doing. They have done enough research to know that Pharisees and temple authorities were sacrificing paschal lambs on afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib in preparation for the *great day of the Sabbath*, these lambs sacrificed at 3:00 pm, halfway between noon, the first “even,” and 6:00 pm, the second “even.” ... This is not the practice Moses commandment Israel to remember: “Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you

shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight” (Ex 12:5-6).

Twilight or between the evens was the period when the sun dipped to the horizon until when it dropped below the horizon: it wasn't noon! But with the construction of Herod's temple, Jerusalem had become a tourist trap, one to which dispersed Israelites were commanded to go three times a year. Too many lambs had to be slain for priests to begin killing lambs as the sun dipped to the horizon. Besides, does Moses give any command about only the priest killing paschal lambs? No. The males of the household were to sacrifice the lamb. But with so many journeying to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, it wouldn't do to have lambs killed throughout the city, with blood splattered on rooftops as well as on doorposts and lintels. Plus, there was money to be made by the priests killing lambs ... it is no wonder that Jesus said that none of the Pharisees kept the law (John 7:19). In their zeal for perfection, they lost the principles involved, the foremost being the personal nature of the paschal sacrifice and the realization that blood had to be shed for sin, this blood shed with one's own hands.

The somberness of taking the Passover sacraments of bread and wine comes from the awareness that Jesus shed His blood for the sins of disciples. Instead of each disciple having to slit the throat of a lamb, feeling the knife slice deep and the warmth of the blood gush over hands, causing the knife handle to become slick, the disciple considers what Jesus underwent as He was beaten to weaken Him so that He would not live long on the cross. It is His blood that flows over our hands: invisible, silent, covering our sins as it seeps into the earth, a small portion taken in that sip from the cup, the sip representing the blood smeared on the entryway into Israelite houses in Egypt.

Passover or simply “unleavened—ἄζύμων” is a festive occasion, but there is nothing festive about sin or the sacrifice necessary to cover the death sin requires.

The *Sabbath* or Passover (used in its broad context) represents liberation from sin; so no disciple should ever return to sin, the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), by continuing to live as a Gentile, running with former friends, doing those things that cause Gentiles to be recognized as the Uncircumcised, now uncircumcised of heart. And the foremost outwardly visible thing a person can do to mark him or herself as a Gentile is to not take the sacraments on the night that Jesus was betrayed, the dark portion of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib (Nissan).

The controversy that some Sabbatarian disciples have found between Matthew's and Luke's use of “unleavened—ἄζύμων” and John having Jesus crucified on the Preparation Day for the high Sabbath, the *great day of the Sabbath*, the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib, comes from these disciples' inability to understand 1<sup>st</sup>-Century language use. The *day of unleavened* when the paschal was to be sacrificed, in accordance to Moses' instructions, was not at 3:00 pm on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib as Pharisees were doing, but at twilight beginning the 14<sup>th</sup> ... as the sun was setting on the 13<sup>th</sup> of Abib, and as Israel was going into the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month, the paschal lamb's throat was slit—and it was the 14<sup>th</sup> as the first flow of blood came forth from the lamb. Israel was not to leave their houses the night of the first Passover in Egypt (Ex 12:22). Only Moses and Aaron ventured forth when called upon by Pharaoh. And Israel was free to go, to take their flocks and go into the desert to serve God; but first, during the daylight portion of the 14<sup>th</sup>, Israel spoiled Egypt, taking from that nation that which reflected light as a type and shadow of Roman soldiers slaying Jesus, taking from this world the light of this world, the reflection of God.

Israel in Egypt did not spoil the Egyptians on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month then leave on the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Leaving sin, being forgiven for sins committed in this world, being covered by Jesus' righteousness in the heavenly realm—these are festive realities that should be celebrated. Therefore, it has been for many decades the practice and tradition of the churches of God to observe the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib as *The Night to be Much Remembered*; for disciples leave sin as natural Israelites left Egypt.

The practice of *The Philadelphia Church* is to take the Passover sacraments of bread and wine on the dark portion of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Abib, with this observance being a somber occasion; then to observe *The Night to be Much Remembered* the following night, the dark portion of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib as a festive occasion, with Sabbath services conducted on the daylight portion of this *great day of the Sabbath*.

Whether God will honor Passover sacraments taken on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Abib becomes a matter between God and the disciple—likewise, whether God will honor the sacraments taken quarterly or weekly or with leavened white bread and water (the practice of LDS fellowships) is a matter between God and the person. There is, however, no reason for a disciple to place him or herself in the position of wondering whether God will accept what the person does. The disciple can do as Paul commands:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 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." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

The Passover meal is not eaten every week, but once a year for however many years there are until Jesus returns. The Passover meal will be eaten even after disciples are liberated from indwelling sin and death. But the Passover meal would never have been eaten with leavened bread, for the entire period in Judea was "unleavened—ἄζύμων" or simply, the Passover.

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*The person conducting the Sabbath service should close services with two hymns, or psalms, followed by a prayer asking God's dismissal.*

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