

A HOLY KINGDOM*

Thousands of years ago, the one and only God who created heaven and earth redeemed a kingdom for Himself. His design was for them to be holy, meaning special to Him, and unique among all the nations as His people. Through this kingdom, His goodness and power could be revealed to the rest of the world.

The events we read about in the Old Testament Scriptures are a prophetic shadow that reveals God's greater work of redemption and points us to His Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, what we see in the Old Testament in the natural is what we have spiritually in the New Covenant. For example, in the Old Testament we see literal battles and wars in earthly territories whereas in the New Covenant our fight is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. (See Ephesians 6:12.)

In light of this, in one event, the Passover is the most poignant example of the whole story God is telling about His eternal redemption of mankind through Christ, our eternal Passover Lamb.

*1 Corinthians 5:7b - For Christ, **our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed.*

*1 Peter 1:18-19 - For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, **a lamb without blemish or defect.***

*John 1:29 - The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, **the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Understanding the original Passover story gives us insight into the eternal story God is telling about how He redeemed us to be His Holy Kingdom. Jesus was crucified on the anniversary of Passover in a parallel of events over one thousand years later. A whole new people of God was born in a day. In spite of the fact that we are all over the earth, we who believe Jesus are a special people, bound together like one nation united under the same King with the same God.

Read in your Bible, from the Book of Exodus, Chapters 12 through 14. You will read in these chapters about God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from four hundred years of slavery in the land of Egypt.

To recap: On the tenth day of the month, every family was ordered to select an unblemished lamb from their flock and bring it into their home. Then, on the fourteenth day of the month, they were to slaughter that lamb at twilight, paint the blood of the lamb on the doorpost of their home, and eat the lamb with unleavened bread. They did all of this as God had commanded through Moses, and then God sent the destroyer to bring judgment on Egypt by killing all their first born. God *passed over* the doors which were marked with the blood of the lamb so that the destroyer did not and could not touch the faithful Israelites. No foreigner was allowed to participate in it unless they were circumcised because circumcision was the symbol of the Israelite's special relationship with God and had been ever since God's covenant with their ancestor Abraham. In the middle of the night, the Israelites began walking out of Egypt and away from their lives as slaves. Then, on the third day, God parted the waters of the Red Sea and the Israelites walked through on dry ground. Finally, the waters closed back up to separate them from their enemies forever. There were most likely about two million of them, including a mixed multitude of gentiles who came with them. Those who believed made it through the waters of the Red Sea unscathed and they all rejoiced. This was the birth of their nation. The Jewish people still celebrate Passover every year to commemorate what God did for them. It is also noted frequently throughout the Scriptures as the most significant day in the Israelite's history as God's people to remind them of His love, redemption, and power.

Exodus 19:5b-6a: Out of all nations **you will be my treasured possession**. Although the whole earth is mine, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.

Fast forward to the week of the Passover celebration in the last days of Jesus' life on earth. On the tenth day of the month, Jesus rode into Jerusalem presenting Himself as the unblemished Lamb who was about to be sacrificed. Then, on the fourteenth day of the month, He was arrested and sentenced to be crucified/slaughtered. While He was on the cross, judgment was passed on Him in our place. Every enemy of mankind was placed upon Him including every sin, curse, sickness, punishment, and every oppression of the devil. The destroyer was allowed to destroy Jesus on the cross. He shed His blood and died, and He descended into the eternal fiery inferno, the pit of hell. But then on the third day, God raised Him from the dead. At daybreak, He walked out of the tomb in an imperishable resurrection body to live forever. He was once and for all separated from His enemies. This was the birth of a whole new kind of people: a spiritual people, an eternal people who will never die. The stone of the tomb had been rolled away just like the waters of the Red Sea had been for the people of Israel. Jesus walked out of the grave and all of us who believe were included with Him. This is the event we remember every time we take communion to celebrate forever what Jesus did for us and remember how because of God's great love and by His great power, He delivered us from sin and death forever.

THE NEW COVENANT & REMEMBRANCE

Jesus was Jewish. He knew the Passover symbolized what God required of Him and He tried to explain it to His disciples several times before it happened. Then, on the night of Passover, the night that Jesus was betrayed and handed over to be crucified, He showed His disciples the way to remember and celebrate the New Covenant which would be established through His death and resurrection.

Luke 22:15-20: And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer... And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. (See also Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:17-25; John 13:21-30.)

A covenant is a legally binding agreement between two or more parties where one or more of the parties become obligated to fulfill certain stated conditions. A covenant is an agreement of highest value, sealed with blood to symbolize that any party who does not meet the expressed terms and obligations of the covenant will pay with their own blood, usually meaning death.

In Jesus' day, all of Israel was expectantly waiting for their Messiah to arrive to institute a New Covenant which was better than the covenant of the Law. In this New Covenant, they would each know God for themselves and God would forgive all of their sins forever. Moreover, the Messiah would keep them constantly in God's good graces, so that God would always delight to bless them as His people and they would have total victory over their enemies.

*Jeremiah 31:31-34: "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "**This is the covenant** I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "**I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.** No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because **they will all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "**For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.**" (Quoted in Hebrews 10:16-18.)*

*Jeremiah 32:40-41: I will make **an everlasting covenant** with them: I will **never stop doing good to them**, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.*

I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

*Jeremiah 33:15-16: In those days and at that time I will make a **righteous Branch sprout from David's line**; he will do what is just and right in the land... This is the name by which it will be called: **The LORD Our Righteousness.***

Jesus fulfilled these promises and established the New Covenant. He is the Righteous One born in the line of David who gives us right standing with God because of His righteousness. Through His sacrifice in our place, our sins are forgiven and because of this, we are perpetually positioned for God's favor. Moreover, through the Holy Spirit, God's Laws are written upon our hearts and we can each know God for ourselves.

Now, when believers are assembled together, we take communion to remember that Christ's body was a sacrifice for us and His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. It is a cup of blessing, thanksgiving, and celebration of the New Covenant which Jesus Christ established for us! (See 1 Corinthians 10:16.)

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

In the original Passover, the Law of God had not yet been given to the Israelites and so, God did not hold them responsible for upholding the standard of the Law to be counted as righteous. They were delivered by faith. The only thing that was relevant in God's sight was whether or not they had painted the blood of the Passover lamb on their door.

For us as followers of Jesus, because Jesus fulfilled the Law and set us free from it, we are not required to meet the demands of the Law in order to have right standing with God. We are redeemed by faith. Jesus did not negate the Law of God for us through His blood but rather, He fulfilled it on our behalf so that we can receive the benefits of God's forgiveness and the blessings merited only by those who have a clean record before God. (See Romans 3:25-26.) Now, the only thing that is relevant in God's sight is whether or not we believe in the sufficiency of the shed blood of Jesus, our Passover Lamb.

This said, God knows His standard for atonement and it is expressed through His Law. Under the Law, at the Temple of God, when people brought their prescribed blood sacrifices of bulls, sheep, goats, or birds, they brought the greatest sacrifice they could afford to bring. (See Leviticus 5:7, 14:21.) When an offering was brought to God, all the sins of the person bringing the offering were transferred onto their sacrificial animal. Then, the animal was presented to God to shed its blood and give its life in the place of the person who had sinned so that the person could continue to live and be blessed as if they had never sinned.

*Hebrews 9:22: In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.***

*Leviticus 17:11: For **the life of a creature is in the blood**, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; **it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.***

Accordingly, in order for God's terms of payment for the forgiveness of every sin of every person since Adam to be satisfied, a sacrifice of infinite worth was required. God owns all of creation and could afford to give a priceless gift. He gave the best offering He could ever give by giving His one and only Son.

*John 3:16: For **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

One drop of the blood of Jesus is more valuable in God's sight than millions of bulls, sheep, goats, and birds. Because of this, we can be fully assured that Jesus' sacrifice is completely sufficient to pay for all of our sins and errors and redeem us from sin and death forever.

ONE NEW MAN – A CHOSEN GENERATION

In the original Passover, Israel walked out of Egypt and was birthed as a nation out of another nation. (See Deuteronomy 4:34-35.) Since Israel's birth as a nation, there have been two kinds of nations on the earth in God's sight: Israel and all the other nations or, you could say, Jews and non-Jews. Anyone from any

other nation who wanted to enter into relationship with the Most High God was required to be circumcised and convert to Judaism. God made no other way to be in relationship with Him. (Consider Ephesians 2:11-12.)

At the resurrection, Jesus walked out of the tomb and a whole new creation of humanity was birthed out of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

*Ephesians 2:15b-19: **His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity** out of the two, [Jews & Gentiles] thus making peace, and **in one body** to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility... For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, **you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.***

Through the resurrection of Jesus, God created a new generation of humanity, a new species, out of an existing generation of humanity. The first generation includes all the natural descendants of Adam. The second generation includes everyone who believes that Jesus is Lord. We are a chosen generation and a new kind of people.

*1 Peter 2:9 NKJV: But you [are] a **chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

Through faith, we are transformed from the old type of humanity to the new type of humanity and we have the right to become sons and daughters of God. He pours the Holy Spirit out into our hearts so that by the Holy Spirit we cry out to Him as our Father.

*Rom 8:15: The **Spirit you received does not make you slaves**, so that you live in fear again; rather, the **Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."** (See also Galatians 4:6.)*

This means that there are now only two kinds of people on the earth. First Adams and Second Adams. Anyone from the first generation of man who wants to be included in God's eternal covenant has to confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead. God has made no other way to be saved.

The truth is that it is God's desire for everyone to be saved through Christ. But until that day, we as fellow believers are a unique and peculiar people who share a bond that is eternally more significant than any other human bond, loyalty, ethnicity, or nationality. We are a new people.

INCLUSION IN THE NEW PEOPLE – BAPTISM

In the first Passover, the visible outward sign of inclusion in God's covenant promises to Abraham was circumcision. (See Genesis 17:10.) No Israelite or foreigner was allowed to participate in the Passover unless they were circumcised into the covenant. Then, when the Israelites literally walked through the Red Sea, they were figuratively baptized and emerged as the nation of Israel. (See 1 Corinthians 10:1-2.)

But now, when we place our faith in Jesus, God gives us a *spiritual circumcision*. Our Adamic nature is rolled away as the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts. (See Romans 2:29; Ezekiel 36:26; Ephesians 1:13; 1 John 4:13-15.) Then, when we are baptized in water, we outwardly display the change in our hearts. As we are literally submerged into the waters of baptism, we figuratively include ourselves in the death of Jesus, and put to death the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. Coming up out of the waters of baptism signifies our participation in Jesus' resurrection. Our old life is rolled away and we emerge as a new creation.

*Colossians 2:11-12: **In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ**, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.*

Romans 6:3-4: Or don't you know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** We were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.**

Full submersion is the way that Christ's first followers understood the requirements and procedure for baptism. In fact, it is rooted in a practice ordained in God's Law for ritual cleansing, called a *mikveh* in Hebrew. Ritual cleansing like this was required of priests before they could serve God and was required of common people in order to remain clean before God.

When John the Baptist began his ministry in the Jordan River area, he was known as John the Immerser. John baptized people by submerging them in water as a demonstration that they had repented of their sins. (See Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24-25, 19:3-4.) Through John's baptism, repentant people were ceremonially cleansed as they awaited the arrival of the Messiah. But as soon as Jesus arrived, John immediately took second place to Jesus and pointed people exclusively to Him. (See John 3:26-30.)

Later, when Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize people from all nations, He was not referring to John's baptism. Through baptism in Jesus' name, we descend into a watery grave and rise again as a new creation. This is something that John's baptism did not include. In Jesus' baptism, we are repentant, cleansed of sin, and transformed into a new creation as the Holy Spirit makes His home in us. In fact, when John the Baptist prophesied of Jesus, he knew that Jesus' baptism would be more substantial and significant than his ritual washings. Jesus confirmed this before He ascended to heaven.

Luke 3:16-17: John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Luke 24:49: I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

Acts 1:5: For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

For Christ's first followers in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out. They eagerly awaited this "baptism" from heaven. For us today, since the Holy Spirit has already been poured out from heaven, we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe Jesus. There is only one baptism in Christ and it endues us with power from on high, as Jesus promised. (See Ephesians 4:5.) This said, the Holy Spirit functions in different ways to give us what we need to fulfill God's purposes. We will cover this more in a later chapter.

All of this is to say that we are included in God's New Covenant by grace through faith. Baptism reveals the change which has taken place in our hearts and our new commitment to God. The Holy Spirit marks us for ultimate redemption and gives us power for life until Jesus returns.

HEAVENLY KINGDOM

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, His disciples expected Him to fulfill the Scriptures about the Messiah of Israel who will come with vengeance to destroy all of Israel's enemies and rule over all nations for eternity. They thought Jesus was going to establish His Kingdom in the ordinary way of earthly wars and kingdoms.

Acts 1:6-8: Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

They were most likely expecting Jesus to lead them in political or military overthrow of their Roman oppressors to take dominion in the earth. This was a reasonable expectation on their part because of Scriptures pertaining to the rule of God's Messiah such as this one:

*Daniel 7:21-22, 27: As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, **until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. ... Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.***

Assuredly, the day Christ's followers anticipated will come. However, until that day, Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world. Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God in the hearts of those who believe Him until He returns to reign on earth for eternity. Therefore, His purpose for us today is not political rebellion against the powers or governments of this world or taking dominion in the earth. God's priority is the salvation of souls. Therefore, we no longer regard it from an earthly point of view but from a heavenly one.

*Luke 17:20-21: Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "**The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst [within you.]**"*

*John 18:36-3: Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.** If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place." "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "**You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.** Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

*Revelation 1:5b-6: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has **made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.***

Again, I say: Thousands of years ago, the one and only God who created heaven and earth redeemed a Kingdom for Himself. His design was for us to be holy, meaning special to Him, and unique among all the nations as His people. Through His Kingdom, God's goodness and power could be revealed to the rest of the world.

Jesus is our King. Our Kingdom is not of this world – it is holy. To be holy means to be set apart. Holy things are sacred, precious, and should be handled with special care unlike the way that common things are managed. In fact, one of the primary duties of the Old Covenant priests of God was to teach the people to distinguish between the holy and the common. (See Leviticus 10:10.) The way we make our decisions and live our lives reveals if we love the world and its ways or if we love God and His ways. (See 1 John 2:15-17.) Our King's life does not conform to the pattern of this world and as we follow Him, our lives will reflect a holiness that is so peculiar that it becomes a sign and a wonder which brings God great glory.

*Revelation 12:10-11: Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the **salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah.** For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.***

Scriptures are New International Translation (NIV) unless otherwise noted, emphasis added by author