

Comments on Preparing For and Observing the Passover and Night To Be Observed

Greetings everyone. With the spring holy days coming up soon I thought it would be a good time to review some doctrinal and policy matters regarding the holy days and related activities.

Passover. Under the Levitical system God required all who were eligible and within proximity of the central place of worship to observe the Passover by the eating of the Passover sacrifice at the specified time (Numbers 9:13). Only those leuitically “clean,” that is, without ceremonial impurity, were permitted to partake of the Passover (cf. Leviticus 7:19-21; 2 Chronicles 30:17-18). Those scattered in far-flung places could not partake of the sacrifice, since it could be legitimately killed only at the central sanctuary and had to be eaten in its environs (Deuteronomy 16:5-7), but they were instructed to keep Passover (and Unleavened Bread) by remaining ritually clean and avoiding leavening, as evidenced by a letter from Jewish authorities to the Elephantine community in 419 B.C. (*Documents from Old Testament Times*, Harper Torchbooks, 1961, D. Winton Thomas, ed., p. 258-259).

The time leading up to the Passover came to be for the Israelites a time of self-examination and purification. The same principle holds under the New Covenant in the manner in which the Passover ought to be kept. We are admonished to examine ourselves in association with the Passover, and we should be doing that as a part of our preparation for it (1 Corinthians 11:28).

As we approach the Passover we should be asking God to help us see our need to repent and change, and where we are falling short, and we should commit ourselves to changing where needed. (We should actually be doing this continually, but especially as we approach the Passover). This should be a positive, spiritually cleansing experience, not an exercise in fruitless self-flagellation and unresolved guilt. Keep in mind that God is exceedingly merciful and is willing to forgive as we acknowledge and repent of our sins (1 John 1:8-10).

As with the type under the Levitical system, where only those circumcised (if male) were eligible to partake of the Passover (Exodus 12:43-49), only baptized members are permitted to partake of the Passover. Others, including children, should not attend the service. We have rarely made exceptions to allow someone contemplating baptism to attend the service to observe, but this should be done only with the permission of the Pastor, if at all.

Those not able to attend the service because of sickness or infirmity or some other legitimate reason may take the Passover at home. We can provide instructions for those to whom this applies. But able-bodied individuals who possibly can should attend the service at the most convenient location. If due to circumstances an eligible person simply cannot keep the Passover at the normal time, arrangements can be made to keep the “second” Passover at the appropriate time (Numbers 9:1-14).

The proper day and time for keeping of the Passover is discussed in an article entitled “Between the Evenings” in the March-April 2003 Living Church News. A more complete discussion is also available under the title “When Is the Biblical Passover” at www.louisiana-lcg.org/pastors_corner.html.

The Passover service will begin at or shortly after sundown on Abib 14 (the evening of April 18 this year). Members (unless assigned to help set up) should plan on arriving not earlier than thirty minutes before the service is to begin and not later than fifteen minutes before it is scheduled to begin.

Night To Be Observed. The evening after the Passover the first holy day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins, and that evening we celebrate the Night To Be Observed in commemoration of Israel's coming out of Egypt, which is symbolic of our coming out of sin. This has traditionally been done by the sharing of a meal among a group of brethren.

In some locations it's become customary for virtually all the congregation to gather at a single location to observe the evening as a group. This is fine, but it is not mandatory that every member of any congregation be in one location for the Night To Be Observed. Families are free to make their own arrangements, but normally an effort should be made to include others in any group gathering to observe the night besides just the members of a single nuclear family.

Remember that there is a spiritual purpose behind our activities on the Night To Be Observed. You may want to review Mr. John Ogwyn's article on the subject in the March-April 2003 Living Church News. We've welcomed unconverted spouses of members at this event in the past, and continue to do so. However, caution needs to be exercised in who is invited to participate. We are instructed, for example, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17-18). Individuals, friends, relatives, acquaintances, who are divisive, whose doctrinal views conflict with a sound understanding of Scripture, who may mislead newer members of our congregations, should not be invited to the Night To Be Observed, nor to Sabbath services or other activities of the Church. In general our services and activities are planned and intended primarily for our members and prospective members. Our outreach to the world is accomplished primarily through the public preaching of the gospel by our telecasts, broadcasts, public Bible lectures, Internet and publications.

If there are any questions about this policy, or any particular individual situation that needs to be discussed, please let me know. As a general policy, while we don't bar people who show up and conduct themselves honorably and peacefully at our services, anyone who wants to attend services regularly should be encouraged to contact the Pastor, or at least one of the Elders, so we can talk to and get to know the person and make a determination about his readiness to attend services.

I hope all of you have a most uplifting, inspiring and edifying Passover season.

Rod Reynolds
Pastor