

Commemoration at Home Without an Elder?

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BIG SANDY, Texas—For decades, our congregation has supported the idea of individuals and families commemorating the suffering and death of our Lord at home without an elder present.

Some people might ask: Is that even an issue among your congregation?

My answer: No, it is not an issue to members of our congregation. However, as hard as it might be to believe, we have friends in various Church of God congregations who are still bound to the notion that they must have an "elder" present to oversee religious functions at home.

Support home commemoration

Those who have heard me teach may remember me saying on several occasions: "I do not believe that the way we commemorate the suffering and death of our Lord is ideal. But we continue doing it because what we are doing is not sin."

Someone could ask: What do you mean by that?

My response: The Exodus Passover was a family event in the home. The last supper of the Son of God was a cozy event with His disciples. Most of the commemoration services among the Church of God have been more like official ceremonies of many denominations in this world. While I do not believe the style is ideal, I don't believe that style to be sin.

For decades, I have supported members of our congregation commemorating the suffering and death of our Lord in their homes.

Still have a group service?

Someone could ask: Does your congregation still have a group service?

My answer: Yes.

Someone could ask: Has your congregation changed its style at the commemoration service?

My response: We have made a few changes. (For the record, I am not asking anyone to imitate what we do. I am merely informing.)

- Many years ago, we decreased the pastor's role (my role) by removing me from a head table. At first, we had two senior citizens (elders by age) sit at the head table. More recently, we have a head table without people. Rather, we portray three seasonal symbols—foot-washing, broken bread and wine.
- Many years ago, we substituted scripture-reading for preaching.
- Many years ago, we added more music to the program. Many Church of God congregations have one congregational hymn. We generally have three congregational hymns and four selections of special music.
- Many years ago, we changed the mood of the evening. Many Church of God congregations have an extremely somber mood. Our commemoration service is a mixture of mourning and rejoicing. We mourn the fact that our behavior contributed to the death of the Son of God. However, we rejoice at the fact that He did indeed die for us.

Do you have a meal?

Someone could ask: Does your congregation have a meal at the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord?

My answer: That is an astute question. There was a meal at the Exodus Passover (Exodus 12:1-11), at the last supper of the Son of God (John 13:1-17) and at the congregation in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:20-22). However, a meal is not a part of our tradition. While I understand the beauty of a meal, I support the tradition of not having a meal at the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord.

Was Exodus 12 a perpetual pattern?

Someone could ask: Was Exodus 12 a perpetual pattern?

My answer: While I support the Exodus 12 pattern, I don't believe that this pattern was used throughout the history of Israelites.

When Bible students look back at the various history lessons surrounding the Old Testament Passover, they realize that the Exodus Passover was a different event from the Passovers that followed later.

Domestic Passover first

One way to describe the difference is that the Exodus Passover of Exodus 12 was a domestic event and that later Passover observances were sanctuary events.

- Why do we call the Passover of Exodus 12 a domestic event?

It occurred in the homes of the people. The Passover of Exodus 12 occurred before the instructions about the tabernacle (sanctuary) in Exodus 25-27 and about the priesthood in Exodus 28-30 were given.

- Why do we call the later Passover occurrences a sanctuary event?

They occurred after the instructions about the tabernacle (sanctuary) in Exodus 25-27 and about the priesthood in Exodus 28-30 were given.

Became a sanctuary Passover

Once the tabernacle and priesthood were established, the Passover became a sanctuary event.

Notice some phrases that revealed the pivot of thought toward a sanctuary event.

Exodus 12:48—If a stranger wanted to keep the Passover, he had to be circumcised, and then “let him come near and keep it.” This was sanctuary language—projecting to the upcoming change.

Numbers 9:6—When a person was considered “defiled,” this was associated with the sanctuary. A defiled person was prevented from presenting the offering at its appointed time (verses 7 and 13).

Deuteronomy 16:2—The Passover sacrifice was to be presented in the place where God placed His name (His sanctuary).

Deuteronomy 16:5—The Passover sacrifice was not to be within their gates.

Deuteronomy 16:6—The Passover sacrifice was at twilight—at the time the Israelites came out of Egypt.

Time of Hezekiah

History shows that there was a time of revival for the people of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. Following are some scriptures from 2 Chronicles that I will paraphrase.

2 Chronicles 29:2—Hezekiah did that which was right in the sight of God.

2 Chronicles 29:3—Hezekiah repaired the temple.

2 Chronicles 29:4-11—Hezekiah instructed the priests and the Levites to sanctify themselves and to sanctify the house of God.

2 Chronicles 29:20-36—Hezekiah encouraged the offering of solemn sacrifices.

2 Chronicles 30:1—Hezekiah made an invitation for people to keep the Passover.

2 Chronicles 30:2-4—The people agreed to keep the Passover in the second month, because they were not prepared.

2 Chronicles 30:5—The people decided to keep the Passover in the prescribed manner, which they had not done for a long time.

Instead of paraphrasing the next few verses, let’s quote them.

■ Notice the words *sanctify* and *sanctuary*.

2 Chronicles 30:17-20—“For there were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites had charge of the slaughter of the Passover lambs for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to the LORD. For a multitude of the people, many from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover contrary to

what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good LORD provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people."

- For those of you who condemn other people because they aren't worthy enough to partake of the Passover, notice that Hezekiah prayed for them (knowing they weren't worthy enough).

- For those of you who condemn other people who don't observe the same calendar days that you do, notice that the people didn't stick to the exact days.

2 Chronicles 30:23—"Then the whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness."

- Notice the huge amount of animals.

2 Chronicles 30:24—"For Hezekiah king of Judah gave to the congregation a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, and the leaders gave to the congregation a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep; and a great number of priests sanctified themselves."

2 Chronicles 30:26—"So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem."

Time of Josiah

History shows that there was a time of revival for the people of Judah during the reign of Josiah. Following are some scriptures from 2 Chronicles that I will paraphrase.

2 Chronicles 34:2—Josiah did that which was right in the sight of God.

2 Chronicles 34:3-7—Josiah began to purge Judah of idolatry.

2 Chronicles 34:8-13—Josiah repaired the temple.

2 Chronicles 34:29-32—Josiah renewed the covenant.

2 Chronicles 35:1—Josiah kept a Passover.

Instead of paraphrasing the next verses, let's quote them.

2 Chronicles 35:2-5—"And he set the priests in their duties and encouraged them for the service of the house of the LORD. Then he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to the LORD: 'Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. It shall no longer be a burden on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel. Prepare yourselves according to your fathers' houses, according to your divisions, following the written instruction of David king of Israel and the written instruction of Solomon his son. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of your brethren the lay people, and according to the division of the father's house of the Levites.' "

2 Chronicles 35:6—"So slaughter the Passover offerings, consecrate yourselves, and prepare them for your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses."

■ Notice the huge amount of animals.

2 Chronicles 35:7-9—"Then Josiah gave the lay people lambs and young goats from the flock, all for Passover offerings for all who were present, to the number of thirty thousand, as well as three thousand cattle; these were from the king's possessions. And his leaders gave willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, rulers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings two thousand six hundred from the flock, and three hundred cattle. Also Conaniah, his brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, chief of the Levites, gave to the Levites for Passover offerings five thousand from the flock and five hundred cattle."

2 Chronicles 35:11-12—"And they slaughtered the Passover offerings; and the priests sprinkled the blood with their hands, while the Levites skinned the animals. Then they removed the burnt offerings that they might give them to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the lay people, to offer to the LORD, as it is written in the Book of Moses. And so they did with the cattle."

2 Chronicles 35:14—"Then afterward they prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, were busy in offering burnt offerings and fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared portions for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron."

2 Chronicles 35:18—"There had been no Passover kept in Israel like that since the days of Samuel the prophet; and none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as Josiah kept, with the priests and the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem."

Family of Christ

Bible students are correct to note how the covenant changed after the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. When Christ died, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).

By recognizing that these events occurred at the end of Christ's life, Bible students realize that the family of Christ lived under some technicalities of the Torah.

Following are some scriptures from the book of Luke that I will paraphrase.

Luke 2:21—The infant Christ was circumcised after eight days (as mentioned in Leviticus 12:3).

Luke 2:22-23—When the days of purification according to the law of Moses (as mentioned in Leviticus 12:2-6) were completed, Christ's family took Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the LORD—citing Exodus 13:2.

Luke 2:24—The family offered a sacrifice according to the law of the LORD—a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (as mentioned in Leviticus 12:8).

It should come as no surprise that the family of Christ went to the temple in Jerusalem for the Passover during His life.

■ Luke 2:41-46

■ John 2:13-23

When Jesus talked to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4), He acknowledged that much of His religion centered around Jerusalem (at the temple). He mentioned that this approach was going to change.

Sanctuary commemoration

Someone could ask: Did the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Lord remain a sanctuary celebration?

My answer: Yes. But remember what the new temple is.

A new temple

After the Son of God died, there was no more reason for the sanctuary Passover at the physical temple.

The disciples were the new temple of God. See 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 2 Corinthians 6:16, Ephesians 2:19-22 and other verses.

(For the record, the New Testament disciples still had some contact with the temple even though the purpose of the temple was technically phased out. See Acts 21:18-29.)

Church in homes

The New Testament has several examples of disciples having “church” in homes.

Some examples include: Romans 16:3-5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 1:2.

Freedom of choice

When you commemorate the suffering and death of our Savior in the coming weeks, remember that you have a good choice.

■ Commemorate the symbols of the suffering and death of our Lord with a congregation (the temple of God), which you consider to be edifying.

■ Commemorate the symbols of the suffering and death of our Lord in the privacy of your own home—since you are part of the Body of Christ and you are His temple. (For the record, our congregation has a live Internet transmission of our service for those people who desire that service.)

Reminders

No matter where you choose to commemorate the suffering and death of our Lord, please consider the following four reminders.

- Remember the night that the Son of God was betrayed.

1 Corinthians 11:23—"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread."

- Remember the symbols that the Son of God taught on the night that He was betrayed.

John 13:12-17—"So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.' "

1 Corinthians 11:23-24—"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' "

1 Corinthians 11:25—"In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' "

- Think about the Son of God on the next day at 3:00 p.m. when the Passover offerings were killed.

Matthew 27:46-51—"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?' Some of those who stood there, when they heard that, said, 'This Man is calling for Elijah!' Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and offered it to Him to drink. The rest said, 'Let Him alone; let us see if Elijah will come to save Him.' And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split.' "

- Remember that the Son of God is your Passover.

1 Corinthians 5:7—"For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."