

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Beyond Sabbath Services: Visiting the Brethren

Dear Brethren,

What is your first thought when a Living Church of God minister contacts you and wants to come by for a visit? Are you happy that he has found time to stop by? Are you apprehensive, wondering if he thinks you've done something wrong?

Throughout the history of the Church, we have encouraged ministers to visit the brethren—not to preach at you, not to correct you, but to get to know you better and let you know our loving concern for you. This should be our way of life throughout the Church of God but, for a variety of reasons, this is not the case everywhere. Some of our ministers are not employed by the Church and have full-time jobs, limiting their available time to visit scattered brethren. Other ministers are elderly and not able to get around as much as they could when they were younger. Driving at night may be a problem for them.

Sociological changes that have taken place in our Western countries are also a factor. Over the last 50 years, there has been a major transformation in the role of women in our world. Fewer women are now stay-at-home wives and mothers. Those who work outside the home have far less time and energy to keep the home and do all the chores women have traditionally done, much less entertain guests. And under this modern regimen where evenings and weekends are needed to do the essentials, taking a couple of hours out of the week to host a minister and his wife or assistant isn't always convenient.

Let us also not forget that a visit from your minister may stack up as less interesting than the Sunday afternoon football game, or *America's Got Talent* or *Britain's Got Talent*—or whatever equivalent entertainment you might have in the

country you live in. Then there is keeping up with social media. How can a minister compete with all this?

However, it is important that ministers and members have face-to-face time outside of the crowded fellowship of Sabbath services. It is important that we truly get to know one another as we go forward into the difficult times that will soon rock our world. It is important that you know the ministers who personally serve you, beyond hearing them speak on the Sabbath.

A Hallmark of Jesus' Ministry

We must not allow the world and the things of the world to control our priorities—and this is just as true of us in the ministry. As ministers, we need to control the use of our time and *make* time to visit God's people. When personal computers became available, I saw a definite shift in the way ministers used their time. I saw it in my own life and schedule, and I did not—and still do not—like it. How easy it is to literally "twitter" away the day. One can spend hours writing and answering e-mails, and end the day with little to show for it. How ironic that we have an app known as Facebook that actually takes *away* from face time. Our world has changed, and it has changed us, whether we want to admit it or not.

Is visiting with each other a *biblical* priority? What about showing hospitality?

Jesus explained that the ones who will be in His Kingdom are those who take the time to treat one another as they would treat Him if He were here in person (Matthew 25:31–40). Would Jesus take time to visit His spiritual brothers and sisters? Conversely, would He carve out time for those who wanted to visit with Him? The answer to both questions is an

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emphatic *yes!* The record shows that He made Himself available to heal many who came to Him in the evening after the Sabbath (Mark 1:29–34). He was often a guest in the homes of both the respected and the disrespected (Luke 14:1; 19:1–7).

There were times when He had to get away from the crowds, but the record shows that He was a “people person” who loved to spend time with individuals of all ages and levels of society. He took time to bless small children (Luke 18:15–17), showing concern for them as well as their parents. He cared for and took time for the sick, the lame, the blind, and the deaf. This was a hallmark of His ministry. How tiring it must have been, being besieged by multitudes everywhere He traveled. But His life demonstrated His values and priorities.

For All of Us

James, the brother of Christ, reminds us that “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). This refers to a calling all of us share, ministers and members: to care for the most vulnerable among us. Jesus instructed a Pharisee who invited Him to dinner, “When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors.... But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:12–13). Notice the word “*when*” at the beginning of this directive. There is an assumption in that word.

Hospitality was an essential element of first-century Christianity, and it ought to be so for us as well. We are told that the early Church broke bread from house to house. This was not the “Lord’s supper,” as mainstream Christianity often claims, but the sharing of meals together. “So continuing *daily* with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart” (Acts 2:46).

One of the characteristics we are to look for as we appoint ministers is that of hospitality. “A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, *hospitable*, able to teach” (1 Timothy 3:2; see also Titus 1:7–8).

But hospitality, which is an expression of love, is not limited to the ministry. Paul instructs us: “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love... distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality” (Romans 12:10, 13). And Peter says it should be done with a right attitude: “Be hospitable to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

Not all members are able to invite a minister into their homes. Some have unbelieving mates who would oppose this. However, I have personally found that when an unbelieving mate—say, a husband—allows a visit, even if reluctantly, he may find that his wife’s minister likes to hunt, fish, or play golf, or shares some other interest. Ministers don’t usually whip out their Bibles and begin preaching. I treasure visits with unbelieving mates.

Many years ago, there were several ladies in the Church whose non-believing husbands were “fishing buddies.” After a number of visits in which we got to know one another, one of them invited me to go fishing with the group. It was an enjoyable experience, and I must believe that it didn’t hurt the situations on the “home front.”

Others in the congregation, due to age and diminished energy, may not be disposed to serve a meal—and, indeed, this is totally unnecessary! Frankly, our waistlines would suffer if everyone served food! Many older members, and younger as well, offer a glass of water, a cup of coffee or tea, and perhaps a cookie (or biscuit, as our British brethren would say). Of course, food and drink are never necessary, but some small token in this direction seems to be a universal form of hospitality.

The point is that your minister may be calling you in the future. I hope he will, and if he does, make the time to visit with him. It will be good for you and good for him, and it will please our Lord and Savior.



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The First Passover

As many of you reading this article know, the Worldwide Church of God under the leadership of Mr. Herbert Armstrong long understood that we are to keep the Passover at the beginning of Nisan 14 at twilight, and that the Israelites began their journey out of Egypt on Nisan 15. This understanding remains unchanged among practically all of the major groups descended from the WCG under Mr. Armstrong.

It is the details behind those two dates that often fuel the greatest misunderstandings; indeed, they sometimes raise the question “Just what do you mean by ‘Passover’”? It has been more than five years since the *Living Church News* has published an article on this subject. In that time, many new members have joined us and our young people are growing into adulthood. That is one reason why this article is important and needed.

The key question behind most Passover controversies is a simple one: At what time on Nisan 14 did the Israelites kill the Passover lambs? Was it shortly after sunset at the start of the day, or in the afternoon approaching the end of the day? There is no doubt that lambs were slaughtered in Jerusalem during the afternoon of Nisan 14 in the year of Christ’s crucifixion. Those who subscribe to an afternoon killing of the Passover contend that the first lamb was slaughtered at the exact moment of Jesus’ death. This may sound good, but is that, in fact, the time God commanded Moses that the Passover lambs were to be killed?

A careful reading of the first five books of the Bible tells a story that has been confirmed time after time by the leadership of the Church of God. What I am laying out here is not only what Mr. Armstrong concluded, but what the overwhelming majority of Church of God leaders agree upon—not based on traditions of men, but upon the Holy Scriptures, as this article will explain in seven simple proofs.

Proof 1

Through Moses, God instructed the children of Israel to take yearling lambs or goats and set them aside on the 10th day of Nisan, the first month of the calendar He revealed to them. The Israelites were to kill the lambs at a specified time on Nisan 14. That specified time is the

Hebrew *ben ha arbayim*, literally meaning *between the two evenings*. But what does this mean?

The *King James Version* translates the Hebrew words rather broadly as “evening,” but most modern translations are more specific. The *New King James Version*, *New American Standard Version*, *New Jerusalem Bible*, *New International Version*, and *New Revised Standard Version* all translate it “at twilight.” *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text* has “at dusk,” and *Moffatt* has “between sunset and dark.” Some commentaries claim that *ben ha arbayim* refers to the interval from the time the sun begins declining in the afternoon until sunset. This is what advocates of an afternoon killing of the Passover believe. However, most scholars agree that “between the two evenings” refers to the time from when the sun sets—twilight or dusk—until the dark of night. If this is correct, it means Passover is kept at the beginning of Nisan 14.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if, without relying on translators, we could simply let the Bible define this term? Thankfully, we can! Notice that the Israelites made a complaint before Moses and Aaron a month after leaving Egypt: “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Exodus 16:3).

God’s patient response comes in verses 4 and 5. “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”

It is evident that this was told to Moses on the Sabbath, as God gave them manna the next morning and did so for six days (see v. 7, “in the morning”). But there was *another* gift from God, and it is important to understand when that gift was given. “**At evening** you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt” (v. 6). Moses explains the context further: “This shall be seen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the **evening**, and in the morning bread to the full” (v. 8). Again, this was spoken on the Sabbath, and something was to happen that evening and the next morning.

The word translated “evening” or “even” in verses 6, 8, and 13 is the Hebrew *‘ereb*, which is associated with sunset, but is somewhat generic. However, “between the two evenings” is found in verse 12 where God said, “**At twilight** you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.” The next verse tells us what happened. “So it was that quails came up **at evening** and covered the camp....”

What was the whole point of this essential chapter? Was it not to reveal to Israel the Sabbath? Was it not to “test them, whether they will walk in My law or not” (v. 4)? And what was God’s response seven days later when some went out on the Sabbath to gather manna? “Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?’” (Exodus 16:27–28).

It would be contrary to God’s purpose to give Israel quail during the afternoon of the Sabbath and then to correct them for picking up manna a week later. No, the quail came up **at twilight** after sunset. To think otherwise is to accuse God of enticing the people to break the Sabbath while He was teaching them about it!

So, we can see from Scripture that a Passover observance “between the two evenings” must occur at the beginning of Nisan 14, soon after sunset. This is our first proof.

Proof 2

The Bible tells us plainly that the Passover was kept on Nisan 14 and that the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on Nisan 15 (Leviticus 23:5–6; Numbers 28:16–17). The idea that the Passover lambs were killed during the afternoon of Nisan 14, but were eaten after sunset on Nisan 15, brings about a serious problem, found in a simple question: “Why is Passover called Passover?” Is it not because death would “pass over” those covered by the blood of a lamb or goat (Exodus 12:13, 23, 27)? Nisan 14—*not Nisan 15*—is **named** Passover! How strange that this simple truth is not recognized by some. This is our second proof.

Proof 3

Our next proof is closely associated with our second proof. Those who advocate killing the lamb on one day and eating it on the next fail to see that the Bible speaks of Passover as a whole. This is clarified not only in Exodus 12, but also in Numbers 9, where we see Israel keeping the second Passover. “Let the children of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time” (vv. 2–3). Now notice what comes next: “According to all its rites and ceremonies you shall keep it” (v. 3).

These rites are defined in regard to the men who were unclean and could not keep it in the first month. “On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break one of its bones. According to all the ordinances of the Passover they shall keep it” (Numbers 9:11–12; see also Exodus 12:8–10). Notice the complete lack of reference to any activity on the 15th day of the month. Here it is made plain that the lambs were to be killed and eaten—the whole of the “Passover package” along with the other rites—on the 14th day of the month! This evidence from the Second Passover is our third—and conclusive—proof. But there is more.

Proof 4

The Israelites were not to leave their homes until morning. “And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning” (Exodus 12:22). In our modern world, influenced by Roman conventions, we normally think of “morning” as sometime after midnight—any time between 12 midnight and noon can be “morning.” However, in Scripture, the Hebrew word *boqer*, translated into English as “morning,” refers only to the time from first light until a time after full sunrise. A simple study of the 214 times the word is used should be enough to convince the skeptic.

Interestingly, even at the time of the apostasy of the Worldwide Church of God, scholars advocating the Nisan 15 Passover observed by most Jews today made a significant admission in a study paper: “*Boqer*, though, is somewhat more troublesome. In English we can use the term ‘morning’ for any time between midnight and noon. **We have not found any passage which specifically begins *boqer* with the middle of the night.** It often refers to the light period of the day from sunrise until about the middle of the day...” (*The Passover in the Bible and the Church Today*, Lester L. Grabbe and Robert L. Kuhn with contributions from the Theology Department).

The authors then reference Ruth 3:14. “So she [Ruth] lay at his feet until morning [*boqer*], and she arose before one could recognize another. Then he [Boaz] said, ‘Do not let it be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.’” Regrettably, the authors of the study paper miss the whole point. When Boaz discovered Ruth at his feet, he told her, “Stay this night, and in the morning [*boqer*] it shall be...” (v. 13). We see here that Boaz was looking out for Ruth’s well-being. He did not want her travelling around at night while it was totally dark. Travel was safer after it began to get light, but before it was so light that she might be recognized as coming from the threshing floor. This was early dawn.

The respected *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* defines *boqer* to mean morning, break of day, end of

night, coming of daylight, coming of sunrise, beginning of day. “Linked with the root *baqar*, *boqer*... denoted the breaking through of the daylight and thus dawn or more usually morning” (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 274c).

Some assume that when Pharaoh “called for Moses and Aaron by night” (Exodus 12:31), they left their homes in the dark, sometime after midnight. This assumption is incorrect. Moses and Aaron knew God’s command to remain in their houses until morning—and we learn from an earlier passage that they had their last face-to-face meeting with Pharaoh following the ninth plague, **prior to** the Passover. “Then Pharaoh said to him, ‘Get away from Me! Take heed to yourself and see my face no more! For in the day you see my face you shall die!’ So Moses said, ‘You have spoken well. I will never see your face again’” (Exodus 10:28–29).

What we read in Exodus 12:31 is simply a fulfillment of Moses’ prediction to Pharaoh: “And all these your servants shall

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come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, and all the people who follow you’” (Exodus 11:8)! The Hebrew word translated as “called for” in Exodus 12:31 has a wide variety of meanings, such as *call out*, *call upon*, or *proclaim*.

Our fourth proof is that the Israelites were not to leave their homes until daylight began to show.

Proof 5

The historical record agrees that the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover were originally two separate observances. “This [the Feast of Unleavened Bread] has been considered as a distinct ordinance, and not essentially connected with the passover. The passover was to be observed on the fourteenth day of the first month; the feast of unleavened bread began on the *fifteenth* and lasted seven days, the first and last of which were holy convocations” (“Exodus 12:15,” *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*).

No less an authority than the *Jewish Encyclopedia* says, “Comparison of the successive strata of the Pentateuchal laws bearing on the festival makes it plain that the institution, as developed, is really of composite character. **Two**

festivals originally distinct have become merged...” (“Passover,” Vol. IX).

The ancient historian Josephus wrote, “**We keep a feast for eight days**, which is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk II, Ch. 15, Sec. 1). By the time of Christ, Passover and Unleavened Bread were often used interchangeably to mean both Feasts. Luke 2:41–43, for example, mentions Passover but then refers to “the days”—clearly the Days of Unleavened Bread that follow Passover. Our fifth proof is that the historical record agrees with the scriptural account of Passover as a separate ordinance preceding the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Proof 6

Jesus, the Being who spoke to Moses about Passover (1 Corinthians 10:4), knew the correct time for the observance. Some assert that Jesus kept the Passover early, as an exception to

the rule, because He could not do so on the stake. Others say that Jesus’ “Last Supper,” as it is popularly called, was not the Passover at all. Some make much of the point that the Jews of Jesus’ day were killing Passover lambs in the afternoon of Nisan 14—at the time of Christ’s crucifixion—and that the first lamb was slain at the very moment when the spear was thrust into Jesus’ side.

There were different factions among the Jews at this time. Scripture shows us that some, including

Jesus and His disciples, killed Passover lambs in time for the evening meal on Nisan 14 (Mark 14:12). There was also a faction that kept Passover in the evening beginning the fifteenth, and their lambs were likely slain around the time of Jesus’ death. However, we know that not every Jewish custom is correct, and we cannot set doctrine on such speculations. Many Jewish traditions are in error and we have already seen that the first Passover was kept at twilight at the beginning of Nisan 14.

And to assert that Jesus did not keep the Passover with His disciples on the night He was taken into custody is to deny the Scriptures. I once attended a lecture by a Jewish scholar who tried to prove that it was not the Passover, but Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record that Jesus called it the Passover. Notice Luke’s account: “Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when **the Passover** must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, ‘Go and prepare **the Passover** for us, that we may eat.... Then you shall say to the master of the house, “The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room where I may eat **the Passover** with My disciples?’” Then

He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat **this Passover** with you before I suffer’” (Luke 22:7–15).

As we saw earlier, Passover and Unleavened Bread in Jesus’ day were often called by either expression: “Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called Passover” (v. 1).

In light of these scriptures, can there be any serious doubt that what people call “the Last Supper” was indeed the Passover? Still, some become confused when they read John 18:28, “But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Pass-

It is the body of Christ, the Church, that determines how to keep a Festival, new moon or Sabbath. It is not for every individual to decide for himself when he thinks the Passover should be. **God entrusts to the Church, not to each individual, the responsibility to keep Passover at the proper time.**

over.” This describes religious leaders who would “eat the Passover” on the evening after Jesus did.

Further, we learn from John 19:31 that this day on which Christ was crucified was a Preparation Day. Since we know that the Passover occurs on the Preparation Day for the Holy Day on Nisan 15, we know that Jesus ate the Passover at the beginning of Nisan 14, “when the Passover must be killed” (Luke 22:7).

An upper room was furnished for Jesus to keep the Passover. He kept it on the day when Passover lambs were killed—after lambs had been killed. Nothing about this seemed strange to the Apostles, nor to the gospel writers. Jesus kept the Passover at the beginning of Nisan 14. By contrast, the Sadducees and some others killed their lambs toward the end of Nisan 14 and ate them on Nisan 15, the first Day of Unleavened Bread. Our sixth proof is that Scripture gives no indication that Jesus and His disciples observed Passover on the wrong day or at the wrong time.

Proof 7

The ministry is placed in God’s Church to preserve the unity of the Church and decide on controversial matters. From time to time, people come across a doctrine that they interpret differently from the Church, and personal conscience can become an issue.

We are not to believe something *only* because “the Church says it”—we are to prove all things and hold fast to that which is true (1 Thessalonians 5:21). What do you do when you disagree with the Church on a matter like this? Regarding the Holy Days, the Bible gives us the answer. Leviticus 23 says God told

Moses, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, these are My feasts’” (v. 2; see also v. 4).

Moses was to commission two silver trumpets to be fashioned (Numbers 10:2). These were to let Israel know when to pack up and move, and: “Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets” (v. 10). Not just anyone could pick one up and start blowing, but: “The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets” (v. 8).

The Scriptures, as well as simple logic, tell us it had to be this way. A primary feature of each high day is that it is to be a “holy convocation”—a commanded assembly. It is no accident that Acts 2:1 informs us that “they were all with one accord in one place” on Pentecost. Just imagine the chaos of everyone determining for themselves when to observe the Holy Days!

In this regard, Colossians 2:16 has often been greatly misunderstood. We spend so much time explaining what it does not mean that we may fail to learn the lesson the Apostle Paul gives us: It is the body of Christ, the Church, that determines how to keep a Festival, new moon, or Sabbath. It is not for every individual to decide for himself when he thinks the Passover should be (Ephesians 4:11–14). Does personal conscience in matters that are not always perfectly clear to everyone override 1 Corinthians 1:10? “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Our seventh proof is that God entrusts to the Church, not to each individual, the responsibility to keep Passover at the proper time.

Conclusion

Some over the years have disputed, argued, and misunderstood the correct day and time of the Passover. However, the Churches of God, as a whole, have been consistent about this for as long as any of us can remember—especially the Church as descended from Mr. Armstrong. Councils and committees have discussed the Passover at great length for decades and always come to the same conclusion: The overwhelming evidence shows that the first Passover lambs were killed at twilight at the beginning of Nisan 14, and the children of Israel began their journey out of Egypt during the evening of Nisan 15. Who would deny that Jesus kept the Passover at the correct time? That is also when we must keep it! (L)



Complete, Perfect, Whole Stones for God's Temple

By **Bill Long**

The Spring Holy Days are upon us, along with the lessons they bring each year. Passover reminds us of the need for Christ's sacrifice for our forgiveness, and the Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that the necessary response to that sacrifice is to come out of sin and to embrace righteousness.

It may seem like a silly question, but have you ever noticed how hard it is to come out of sin? We may renew our intentions to do so yearly as we examine ourselves before the Passover, weekly as we keep the Sabbath, and daily as we pray and meditate. Yet we can all attest to how easily we can get caught up in life's day-to-day responsibilities. This can cause some to lose focus and direction, neglecting the all-important task of meditating on who they are as Christians and what is their life's purpose. Others may focus *so* much on how often they slip and how challenging it is to overcome in this life that they become anxious and depressed, even losing faith to continue living God's way.

Of course, many of us are somewhere in between those extremes. However, no matter where we might fall on that spectrum, we all need to take time regularly to consider a couple of important questions: "What is God creating in me?" and "What am I striving to become?" If we meditate on these questions and become confident in the answers, our task of coming out of sin will not discourage us. Instead, we can develop a vision that will motivate us each day to overcome sin and live a meaningful, purposeful, and joyful life that is pleasing to our God.

Moses demonstrated this singular focus even before he led Israel out of Egypt.

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Hebrews 11:24–27).

Moses had already begun to develop a vision of a life that is pleasing to God. This motivated him to endure years of suffering while seeking to grow in living such a life. He came to understand what God was creating in him, and that pushed him to strive to come out of sin and become someone God could use in His great Work. His life took on meaning and purpose that transcended any passing pleasures of sin. That sort of devotion produces fruit that leads to righteousness and, ultimately, eternal life. "What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:21–23).

What Does God Desire to Create in Us?

When King David faced his sin regarding Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite, he understood that, in order to fully repent and get back to a life of overcoming, he needed a change of heart. In Psalm 51, he first acknowledges that he has sinned against God and sincerely asks to be cleansed. Then he asks for what he knows he needs in order to continue as God's servant. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit" (Psalm 51:10, 12). David knew he needed a certain type of heart before his joy would return. It is important for all of us to understand that God can create in us the heart we need to overcome sin and live joyful lives. Yes, it is possible to rejoice as we overcome sin!

Notice that David asked God to restore the joy he had known before his sin. It wasn't that he had been perfect before his mistake—rather, he had possessed a heart to obey God and to do God's will, and such a heart produces joy. But once he had committed adultery and murder, his heart darkened and his joy left him. He needed his heart to be cleansed so that he could get back to the work of overcoming and living a meaningful, purposeful, joyful life as the king of God's chosen people.

In 2 Chronicles 16:9, God uses one of His prophets to describe the sort of heart He is looking for: "For the eyes

of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.” The *King James Version* translates the verse this way: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is **perfect** toward him.”

“Perfect” is translated from the Hebrew word *shalem* (“shaw-lame”). It means complete, full, just, made ready, peaceable, perfect, quiet, or whole. God wants to create in us complete, perfect, whole hearts. What He begins, He desires to finish—a truth that moved the Apostle Paul to proclaim that he was “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

What Are We Striving to Become?

Before the Israelites could finally enter the Promised Land, Moses had them complete an important task. They needed to whitewash large stones and write on them the words of the law, and build an altar to God (Deuteronomy 27:2–5). An important detail about these stones is often overlooked when reading quickly over the account.

“You shall build with whole stones the altar of the LORD your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God. You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 27:6–8). The word “whole” is translated from the Hebrew

What does it mean for us to “measure twice, cut once” as we grow? Very simply, we are to become masters of our “craft” as Christians. Mastery brings meaning to our lives and is the goal of every true craftsman. **Are we taking the necessary time to pray, study, meditate, and fast? Are we actively serving in our congregations and searching for ways to help one another, stirring up love and good works?**

word *shalem*, the same word used in 2 Chronicles 16 to describe the hearts God desires in us!

While these stones were to be whole and untouched by tools, we cannot say the same about our hearts. In a sense, we are the “opposite”: We have been touched in this life, cut and shaped—certainly by the influence of our adversary the Devil, but also by our own carnal human nature, and by the Satan-influenced society in which we live. Despite this, Jesus

Christ tells us to strive to become perfect. “Therefore you shall be perfect [Gr. *teleios*; complete], just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48).

Do we believe in what God wants to create in us? Have we considered that our loving Father is a Master Craftsman who always has perfection in mind?

God had to remind Job of who He is, the Master Craftsman of the universe, before Job could see his sin and repent (Job 38). When Job saw how blind his self-righteousness had made him, he put his hand to his mouth in shocked humility: “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth” (Job 40:4). Once Job recognized his true state, he was finally able to repent and move forward as a vessel for God.

Measure Twice, Cut Once

Let’s not forget God’s power to change us if we let Him—to give us ready hearts that desire to overcome sin and joyfully complete His work. An old maxim of craftsmen is “Measure twice, cut once.” God didn’t make a mistake when He created us. He cut once and said it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31). King David understood what God does when He creates each of us. “For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well” (Psalm 139:13–14).

God has prepared and planned out every detail of His creation and His plan of salvation for all of mankind, and He

expects us to follow His example and be just as thorough. What does it mean for us to “measure twice, cut once” as we grow? Very simply, we are to become masters of our “craft” as Christians. Mastery brings meaning to our lives and is the goal of every true craftsman. Are we taking the necessary time to pray, study, meditate, and fast? Are we actively serving in our congregations and searching for ways to help one another, stirring up love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)?

It’s interesting that when Jesus Christ walked on this earth as a hu-

man being, He was a craftsman. “And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter?’” (Mark 6:2–3).

The Greek word translated *carpenter* literally means *craftsman*. Jesus Christ is the One who created all things (He-

brews 1:1–2; Colossians 1:15–16). He is the Master Craftsman of the universe. He was a craftsman when He was in the flesh as a human being, and He continues to work as one in building His Church.

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:15–18).

Jesus instructs us to follow His example and measure twice, cut once, as it were, when it comes to our commitment to follow Him fully. He says we cannot be His disciples if we don’t put Him first and carefully consider what life as a Christian truly entails (Luke 14:26–30). Others will mock us if we have the audacity to claim to be Christians yet fail to practice the way of life He admonishes us to live: “This man began to build and was not able to finish” (Luke 14:30). Christ will reject those who say they are His but don’t do what He says (Matthew 7:21–23).

Stones for the Temple

Why is it so important to the Father that we allow Him to shape our hearts to become complete, perfect, whole stones? One reason is that He desires to dwell with us as in a temple. He wants us to be the stones of His temple, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Ephesians 2:19–22).

Through years of successes and failures, learning from God all the while and allowing Him to work in our lives, our lives are slowly shaped for His purposes. We dedicate our lives to constant improvement to make us complete, perfect, whole stones for the temple of God.

When we allow God to create in us clean hearts and we strive to become stones for His temple, we find deeper personal satisfaction, develop confidence, and discover greater meaning and fulfillment in our lives. Just as God’s law was

written on whitewashed, whole stones before Israel entered the land they were to inherit, our hearts must also have His law written on them:

For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, “*This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,*” then He adds, “*Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*” Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water (Hebrews 10:14–22).

God designed us with every detail necessary to be called His people. His intent is that we inherit all things and receive life that lasts forever. The “Shaker philosophy” of craftsmanship is well-known for resulting in high-quality products. One furniture company, Earth Sky Builders, summarizes that philosophy in an interesting way: “Make every product better than it’s ever been done before. Make the parts you cannot see as well as the parts you can see. Use only the best materials, even for the most everyday items. Give the same attention to the smallest detail as you do to the largest. Design every item you make to last forever.” Such an approach *spiritually* surely resonates with God—and should resonate with us.

With a clear understanding of who we are as God’s people and what He desires to create in us, we can overcome sin and fulfill the Apostle Paul’s admonition: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4). As we recommit ourselves this Spring Holy Day season to continue our spiritual journey out of sin, let us diligently work to become complete, perfect, and whole stones. God wants us to become approved workers so He can use us in His plan of salvation for all mankind. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.... But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:15, 20–21). (M)



What Passover Teaches About the Days of Unleavened Bread

By **Wallace G. Smith**

As we enter the Spring Holy Day season, it is important to recognize the “cumulative” nature of God’s annual Holy Days and what they represent. Most of us in God’s Church recognize that the “feasts of the LORD” given in Leviticus 23—kept by Jesus Christ and the Church He founded—lay out in beautiful detail God’s plan for humanity’s salvation. While we should, of course, spend considerable focus on the Holy Days and their meaning, we must not let our focus on the Days of Unleavened Bread keep us from fully appreciating the lessons of the Passover.

The Passover pictures a key step—the vital first step—without which the rest would be for nothing: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the remission of our sins. Without that, there is not much point in going on to what the Days of Unleavened Bread picture: the removal of sin from our lives.

It is so vital to remember this Passover lesson and keep it in mind as we step into the Days of Unleavened Bread. As John wrote so plainly, “We love Him because *He first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). The Passover in 31 AD demonstrated the depth of God’s love. God took the initiative—while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8)—and cleared the way for a relationship with us. He was willing to pay the ultimate price, the sacrifice of His own Son, so that the stark chasm of sin between us and Him could be bridged. That’s how much we mean to Him!

The Context of Our Lives

The Days of Unleavened Bread picture our only reasonable response to such unfathomable love: accepting it in obedience, thereby showing our love to God. As the Apostle Paul said, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (Romans 6:1–2). The only proper response to such love is to accept it, and we accept it with willing obedience. Else, “how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...?” (Hebrews 2:3).

But, in our efforts to live a life of obedience, we regularly fail. Perhaps less so as time goes on and we learn to more completely allow Christ to live His life in us (Galatians 2:20), but, still, fail we do. He who says he does *not* fail is a liar, ac-

ording to the word of God (1 John 1:8). However much we strive to keep ourselves apart from the evils of this world, the truth is that—having been called in this evil age—we are “swimming against the tide,” as we seek to live our Christian commitment in a world bitterly opposed to our efforts. This world is *not* yet our Father’s world! Why not? Because humanity, in its general hubris, has chosen not to make it so. As we read in the first three chapters of Genesis, human beings chose from the very beginning to seek their own way over their merciful Maker’s—a choice first made by Adam and Eve, and a choice that has been repeated by each and every one of us in our own ways and in our own lives.

Mankind’s rebellious choices amount to a declaration that *we have no need* for God to bless our fields and crops to make them prosper, nor to bless our skies that they may not become our enemies, nor to bless our cities to keep them safe. God has given us free moral agency, so He must witness great suffering in a world that He intends for far better things. Yet, how it must stir Him—with a passion we can scarcely comprehend—in His yearning to set this world right once mankind has finally learned the tragic lessons it seems we can learn in no other way. How He must long for the soon-coming day when He will ensure such calamities never occur again. This is His love for us, while we were yet sinners—the love that motivated Jesus Christ to become our Passover lamb! We should be awestruck by that love, as we strive to live the lives pictured by the Days of Unleavened Bread, emptying ourselves of the “leaven of malice and wickedness” and filling ourselves instead with the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:8).

The truth is that we can sometimes become dejected and mournful, seeing how—time and time again—we fall short of Christ’s perfect standard. Yet that sorrowful, dismal perspective is misleading. Why?

Because we *must* remember that the Days of Unleavened Bread come *after* the Passover! The context of our lives, exemplified by the Days of Unleavened Bread, is that of God’s love shown to us earlier on the Passover!

Indescribable Commitment

Paul proclaims this so powerfully in Romans 8:38–39: “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor

principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Do we believe that amazing statement? Do we see in God a Father who is **completely committed** to helping us succeed? Do we see a Father whose **passion** is to *have us in His Kingdom with Him*? Do we believe our Savior when He says that it is His Father’s “*good pleasure* to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32)? God is **excited** about His future with us!

And it is important enough to Him—and to His Son, Jesus Christ—that They were both willing to endure the agony of the Passover. Yes, it was agony for *both* of Them. In his booklet *John 3:16: Hidden Truths of the Golden Verse*, Mr. Gerald Weston draws attention to the Father’s role in the events of Passover. If we are to successfully live the lives pictured by the Days of Unleavened Bread, we must understand the Father’s role in the Passover and learn what it teaches us.

Consider the “father of the faithful” as an example. Anyone who cannot recognize that God intended Abraham and Isaac to picture Himself and Jesus Christ either hasn’t reflected enough on the matter or doesn’t have eyes to see. Why was the sacrifice of Isaac such a test for Abraham? Because watching your own child suffer and die is one of the most horrible experiences a human being can endure. Can you imagine how much worse it would be if you knew that the suffering and death had to be at your *own hand*? Does anyone doubt that this was a trial for Abraham?

In this context, God wants us to look to the human father—a role He created—to understand our *heavenly* Father (e.g., Matthew 7:9–11). Through this, we can *know* that on that Passover night, when *His Child* asked for the cup to pass from Him if it were at all possible, it had to be *heartbreaking* for the Father to tell His Boy: “No.”

It had to involve an *indescribable* sadness for the Father to watch His Son beaten and tortured, and then to have to turn from Him, allowing Him to become the perfect and complete sacrifice for sin as

He hung to death on a stake—eventually stabbed brutally by a Roman soldier, His blood shed for our wrongdoing.

While hanging there, crucified like a criminal for our sins and not His own, the Savior cried out loudly, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” which Mark 15:34 tells us is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Jesus was quoting Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?” (v. 1).

It was not that the Father did not love His Son—He had known and **dearly** loved Him from eternity past, in a relationship of intimacy and trust that we mere mortals can scarcely imagine. But that distance between Them, in that moment, was necessary. For the price of sin includes that distance. As the Apostle Paul explains: “For He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to *be sin for us*, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). This doesn’t mean that sin is some sort of “substance” that Christ was changed into. Rather, at that moment of torture and death, He represented the totality of our sins, which He bore on Himself. And because sin separates from God, that separation from the Father was another aspect of *our* penalty that the Son of God willingly bore for us, so that those who turn to God need not bear it themselves. Paul explains in Galatians 3:13 that Christ became a curse on our behalf, taking our curse upon Himself, since “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (cf. Deuteronomy 21:23).

Jesus Christ did nothing to deserve being accursed. He did nothing to deserve separation from God. The profound loneliness He experienced in those final moments of His suffering—when He no longer felt the presence of the One He had never been without—was a loneliness He did not earn. *We* earned it. Our sins separate *us* from God. It is part of the price—and He took that burden willingly so those who turn to Him never have to suffer that burden, themselves. Considering that God Almighty was willing to go through such an ordeal—that He and Jesus Christ believed that having you and me in Their Kingdom was worth that price—who are you, who am I, to question Their total commitment to seeing us get there? What awesome love is revealed by the Passover!

Why Passover Comes First

It is in the context of the awesome love of God, expressed in the Passover, that we enter the Days of Unleavened Bread—and *we dare not forget that context!*

We do not enter the Days of Unleavened Bread as if they represent a great audition for the Kingdom, in which God is merely watching us from the sidelines to see if we’re going to “make it.” We enter them

knowing that God is with us, and that He has done all He can to ensure that we know—and *know* that we know—that He is committed to us and our success, that He *loves* us, and that even our many slips and our inevitable stumbles aren’t enough to convince Him to abandon us. He has paid too big a price to give in so easily. We fall, yes—but He is ready at hand, *right there*, to pick us up and encourage us to *keep on going*.

The world’s counterfeit Christianity wants to glory in its incomplete and mistaken understanding of the Passover

It is in the context of the awesome love of God, expressed in the Passover, that we enter the Days of Unleavened Bread—and **we dare not forget that context!**

without accepting the “rest of the story.” After Passover and God’s action on our behalf *must* come our response, typified by the Days of Unleavened Bread: repentance and the commitment to removing sin from our lives. Of course, as we struggle to put our sin out, we must not forget that we have a Father and an Elder Brother who are *with us in the struggle*, and who, while we were yet in our sins, thought of *you* and thought of *me* as prizes worth the price. Their work did not stop at Passover. It continues, and we should be “confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). Why? Because to the God of the universe, the work He is doing in you is no mere obligation. *It is a labor of love.*

Many of us, myself included, have seen and experienced the difficulty and sickness of heart that can come from struggling against the flesh to put out sin, rightly living the lesson of the Days of Unleavened Bread, while losing sight of the vital lesson of the Passover. We need the context Passover provides concerning the incredible love of God for each and every one of us. With that context *firmly* in place, the life pictured by the Days of Unleavened Bread can be the joy that God intends it to be: a life in which we are learning to feed on Christ and allow Him, more with each passing day, to live His life within us.

Dad Power

I will conclude this article by sharing a memory that has taught me a great deal. I have shared it many times, and I think it represents something important to keep in mind during this wonderful Holy Day season.

A good twenty-or-so years ago, my smaller-than-it-is-now family and I were in Waco, Texas, visiting my wife’s aunt. One of my sons, around three years old at the time, was *desperately* trying to pedal a little tricycle across the grassy lawn to the paved patio, but he was getting nowhere. Really, *nowhere*—he couldn’t move it even a quarter inch. The grass was just too formidable an obstacle, and his little muscles simply weren’t up to the task.

When I saw him frustrated—crying and wanting to give up—I told him that I would be glad to help him pull the tricycle to the paved patio, where he could easily ride it to his heart’s content. Well, that was no good—he wanted to *ride it* to the patio, so his crying and frustration continued.

It seemed a character-building moment, so I made him a deal. I didn’t want him to give up, and I told him that I would *push* him to the patio on one condition: He had to keep pedaling. I told him that I would guarantee that he would make it to the patio—a task he was utterly incapable of achieving on his own—as long as he *did not quit* pushing against the pedals.

That seemed like a good deal to him, so off we went. He continued to struggle against the pedals, and I was there behind him, pushing the tricycle forward. He was moving! Where

previously he had been going nowhere under his own power, now he was making steady progress under “Dad power.”

That’s when, of course, he figured something out. After we had covered some ground, he just picked up his feet. “Free ride!” seemed to be the thought bouncing around in that brain of his—so then, I stopped, too. It was not my goal to give him a “free ride.” If he was going to build any character through this experience, *he had to be in the fight.*

His halted progress toward the patio was a quick tutor, so he began to strain against the pedals once more, and I began to push again, too. And soon enough, the goal had been reached—the tricycle was out of the grass and on good, smooth pavement, at which point he pedaled away on his own and my help was no longer necessary. (I’m not sure if I received any thanks, but I will happily assume that I did.)

Did he make it to the patio on his own? Hardly! Indeed, in the grass he hadn’t even been able to *budge* the tricycle on his own. It was *all me*—“Dad power.” Yet, had he not been willing to struggle for himself—to persevere, to be in the fight—I would not have been willing to push, because it was the *character in him* that I wanted. While I provided the power and the strength to do the job, he had a role to play, too, because my ultimate goal wasn’t a successful tricycle ride. My goal was to build a bit of character in a son I loved.

The lesson I learned is one I hope I never forget: As we pedal toward God’s Kingdom, we must take great care that we don’t foolishly begin trusting in our own power, or we will be dead in the grass. And, just as importantly, we must not allow ourselves to pick up our feet, hoping for a “free ride”—or we’ll be just as dead and defeating the purpose for which our Father has us pedaling in the first place: participating with Him as He builds character in us, children He dearly loves.

He will get us there. Indeed, He passionately desires to do so. But we must keep pedaling.

As we enter the Days of Unleavened Bread, pedal away! But don’t forget who’s pushing you to the patio and take comfort in the knowledge that your Father loves you more than you can ever understand—that He is going to get you there *if you are willing to keep on pedaling.* As we review this year the lessons of the Days of Unleavened Bread, let’s not forget the lessons we should have learned from the Passover. When we think of the eternal lives we long to inherit, the Passover can remind us of the great and immeasurable love with which God desires to envelop us for *all eternity.* An unending existence awaits us where, for all time, *that* love, comfort, and encouragement will become our rich reality—an existence in which we will *never* know the lack of that love, nor ever fear that we might become distant from it.

Passover reminds us that our Almighty Father and His Son have gone to the ultimate length to make Their home with us. How wonderful that, in the eternal life to come, we will know the joy of Their intimate love and presence forever. (LN)

Rethinking Thomas' Doubt

“Doubting Thomas”—everyone looks down on him. But if we look more carefully at Thomas and his demand for proof, we can see how God used this disciple’s skepticism and lack of faith to help strengthen our faith today.

By **Dexter B. Wakefield**

When a person is referred to as a “doubting Thomas,” it generally means that he refuses to believe what others have said unless he has direct personal experience—and it isn’t necessarily a compliment. The reference is to the Apostle Thomas, who would not believe that Jesus was resurrected and alive unless he could literally put his hand into Christ’s wounds.

The Apostle John was present when the incident occurred that earned Thomas his nickname, and here is his account of what happened. Mary Magdalene had already seen the resurrected Jesus alive near the tomb early that morning, and Peter and John had seen the empty tomb. “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (John 20:19–20).

The disciples saw Jesus and recognized Him, but Thomas wasn’t there. “Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ So he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe’” (John 20:24–25).

Thomas was saying that he would not believe that the Man the other disciples had seen was Jesus unless he had additional evidence to evaluate for himself. He wanted not only to see Jesus, but to perform a physical test as well. What would have been on Thomas’ mind? Was he concerned that the Man whom the disciples saw was an impostor? Was he unsure that there *truly* was a resurrection from the dead?

Prophesied to Be Pierced

The Scriptures had recorded centuries before that the Messiah was prophesied to have His body horrifically pierced. In Psalm 22, King David, writing under inspiration, gives a vivid, prophetic description of the experience and suffering

of the Messiah’s crucifixion: “For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. **They pierced My hands and My feet**; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:16–18). All these things occurred during Jesus’ crucifixion (see Matthew 27). The Hebrew idiom translated “pierced” is “lion bit,” as in violently gouging out a hole. The piercing of the spikes through Jesus’ hands and feet was surely an agonizing experience to endure!

The prophet Zechariah tells us that after Christ’s return, His piercing and crucifixion will be recognized and deeply regretted. “It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me **whom they pierced**. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn” (Zechariah 12:9–10).

A Conspiracy?

But skeptics say that an impostor could have fooled the disciples. “Just make cuts on some man’s hands, feet, and side,” some may suggest, “and he could pose as Christ. After all, the disciples were religious fanatics, and they would want to believe.” And today’s skeptics have ancient predecessors. The religious authorities were well aware of Jesus’ resurrection statements and wanted to be sure that His body stayed in the tomb. They took measures to ensure that it did. The Apostle Matthew gives an account of their actions:

On the next day, which followed the Day of Preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered together to Pilate, saying, “Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise.’ Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, ‘He has risen from the dead.’ So the last deception will be worse than the first.” Pilate said to them, “You have a guard; go your way, *make it as*

secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting the guard (Matthew 27:62–66).

The religious authorities and the guards would have been very careful and highly motivated. There would be no way Jesus’ followers could steal His body. But after Jesus was resurrected, they had to come up with a cover story.

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, “Tell them, ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept.’ And if this comes to the governor’s ears, we will appease him and make you secure.” So they took the money and did as they were instructed; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matthew 28:11–15).

Some continue the religious authorities’ fabrication today, even though it is not possible that the disciples could have physically overcome a guard of armed soldiers—nor, acting by stealth, could they have unsealed the tomb and rolled the stone away without alerting the guard. Breaking the seal of the stone that was set over the entrance of the tomb would have brought swift action by the soldiers. And guards generally did not sleep while on duty because they were well-disciplined and, according to some accounts, the penalty for doing so was death. That is why it was very important to the guard for the Jewish authorities to intervene with the governor on their behalf, if necessary. Sleeping while on duty could have cost them their lives.

Matthew recorded what *actually* happened to the soldiers at the tomb: “And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men” (Matthew 28:2–4). The biblical account is correct. The same power that raised Christ from the dead and opened the tomb also terrified and paralyzed the soldiers for the divine event. Facing possible execution, the soldiers who were on duty at the time would have been very happy to have the Jewish authorities concoct a story and intervene on their behalf with authorities, who would not have believed that the soldiers were overcome by a powerful angel. The bribe would have provided additional incentive.

Thomas’ Doubt Serves a Purpose

Resurrection is a miraculous event, and one of our primary lines of evidence for the resurrection today is the accounts of witnesses from long ago. *Are those accounts really reliable, or could the disciples have been fooled by an impostor?* Skeptics sometimes make this argument.

But while Thomas may have been acting out of a lack of faith, God uses his doubt to shed the light of evidence even more brightly on this event!

While Thomas may have been acting out of a lack of faith, **God uses his doubt to shed the light of evidence even more brightly on Christ’s resurrection!**

A Roman spear usually had a wide, sharp blade that would cause a large, traumatic injury when thrust into a victim. The wound made in Jesus’ side would have been large enough to allow the insertion of a hand. And the spikes that pierced Jesus’ hands (or perhaps the joints between His wrists and hands, as some believe) and helped to support the weight of His body would have created passages completely through Jesus’ limbs that would be large enough to allow the insertion of a finger. Anyone bearing such wounds could hardly be expected to walk around among the living!

Thomas’ opportunity finally came: “And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’” (John 20:26–28).

Though Thomas doubted and showed a lack of faith, Christ was mercifully willing to meet his need. Scripture records that the Apostle saw exactly what he needed to see to convince him that the crucified Jesus truly was alive again, resurrected from the dead. Thomas got the proof he sought, *which provided it for the rest of us, as well!*

Other Recorded Witnesses

Scripture reveals that many others saw Jesus alive after His crucifixion. For example, Jesus appeared to some of the disciples while they were fishing, and when they returned to the shore, He ate with them.

After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed Himself: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing."

They said to him, "We are going with you also." They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing. But when the morning had now come, Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Then Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any food?"

They answered Him, "No."

And He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.

Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!"...

Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—*knowing that it was the Lord*. Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish. This is now the third time Jesus showed Himself to His disciples after He was raised from the dead (John 21:1–7, 12–14).

This account should make us mindful that, although the disciples were to become "fishers of men," Jesus Himself would direct that Work—both then and today.

John added at the end of his book, "This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and *we know that his testimony is true*. And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen" (vv. 24–25). Here, John adds that many things occurred that were not recorded in the gospel accounts.

The Apostle Paul gives further details in his letter to the church in Corinth, Greece.

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over **five hundred brethren at once**, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).

Paul stressed that Christ's resurrection is vital to the Gospel message.

Why Is This So Important?

We remember Christ's death and resurrection throughout the year, but we focus on these events in a special way during Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. His sacrifice as our Passover made it possible for our sins to be forgiven, for us to be reconciled with the Father, and for us to receive God's Holy Spirit. In explaining the meaning of the Christian Passover, the Apostle Paul instructed the church in Corinth, "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed **Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us**. Therefore *let us keep the feast*, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6–8).

Our hope of life after death lies in the resurrection—but if we die profaned by the guilt of our sins, unforgiven and unjustified, we cannot be in the resurrection of the just when Jesus returns. The wages of sin truly is death (Romans 6:23). Christ paid that penalty for us, so that, in the first resurrection, we can "put on immortality" and be in God's Kingdom, His holy mountain, forever. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:53–54).

If we are to live forever, we must be resurrected to life, and Jesus Christ, the First of the Firstfruits, has made it possible through His death and His own resurrected life. Paul also wrote to the church in Rome, "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:5).

Concerning the importance of the resurrection of the dead, the Apostle Paul instructed the church in Corinth,

Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And *if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty*. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. **And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those**

RETHINKING THOMAS' DOUBT continues on page 20



Would You Wash Judas' Feet?

By **Scott D. Winnail**

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, left us with many lessons to ponder as we study His final evening in the flesh. That Passover evening involved new, powerful symbols that go to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Of profound importance as we examine ourselves during this Passover season, is recognizing that Jesus Christ asks nothing of us that He was not willing to experience Himself.

On the night before Christ died, He oversaw the final Passover He would share with His disciples before His crucifixion. In addition to instituting the powerful symbols of bread and wine, He also directed His apostles to practice a new ceremony—the washing of each other's feet. Until this time, foot washing was a task only the lowest of servants performed. Christ took this humbling action and made it part of the sobering annual Passover service.

There are many lessons to be gleaned from the foot-washing ceremony, but in this article we will focus on one specific action Jesus Christ took that evening. Before we draw the lesson, however, we must first understand just who Jesus Christ was and the historic events that preceded His final Passover.

God's Ancient Plan

The Bible tells us that in the very beginning Christ, as the "Word" or *Logos*, was alongside the One we now call the Father, even before creation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). In Their eternal existence together, God and the Word—who was later to become the Son of God—crafted a magnificent plan through which They would expand Their Family. The plan called for the creation of children who would have the opportunity to develop the godly character necessary to one day join the full, spiritual Family of God (1 John 3:2)!

However, developing godly character would necessitate forgiveness for God's physical children, who would certainly sin under Satan's influence. For this reason, They determined that there would need to be a "Savior"—someone who would take the sins of mankind on Himself so that humanity could be forgiven (John 1:29) and "washed clean" from their inevitable

transgressions of God's law. The Bible tells us that this Savior, Jesus Christ, was actually "slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). In fact, the Bible even shows us that Christ's eventual death for mankind was planned "before time began"—demonstrating how ancient this plan of salvation really is (2 Timothy 1:9)! As Christ introduced the new symbols of the Passover and led His disciples in them, He was implementing a plan that He and our Father in Heaven had laid out long before!

The Plan for Judas

Christ, as the Word, inspired the Old Testament prophecies about Himself. He even inspired prophecies of His betrayal by one of His own (Psalm 41:9; 109:6–9) and predicted that His betrayer would commit this act for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12–13).

Christ knew from the beginning of His ministry—from the beginning of *time*—that one of His apostles would need to betray Him. He had prophesied that it would be so! Might

Christ washed the feet of the man who, only a few hours later, would betray Him to death—the feet of an unrepentant thief who accepted a bribe to be an accomplice to His murder!

this have been one of the things He prayed about the night before He selected His apostles (Luke 6:12–13)? Jesus would select one apostle with a character flaw that would eventually lead to his succumbing to Satan's deceptions. And, as Christ's three-and-a-half-year ministry progressed, it is not unreasonable to believe that the identity of His betrayer may have become apparent to Him, if it was not from the beginning. We see that, even before the betrayal, the disciples knew Judas was stealing from the apostles' "money box" (John 12:6). Christ knew Judas' character and his plan of betrayal even during the Passover service, as we will now review!

JUDAS' FEET? continues on page 20

Living Education: Broadening Brains Beyond Books

Like Ambassador College and Living University before it, Living Education provides its students with ample opportunity to read not only the Bible, but also commentaries on it, works on ancient history, and a plethora of Church literature. And that's definitely what those students do—but by no means is it *all* they do. Understanding that “of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:12), in the 2019 fall semester alone, students and faculty alike shared multiple field trips, each providing an enriching and educational change of scenery.

God as the Great Designer

Early in the semester, students and faculty toured North Carolina's historic Biltmore Estate, America's largest privately owned house. “The Biltmore, one of North Carolina's highlight attractions, is only a few hours away from our headquarters,” said Mr. Kenneth Frank, instructor of Living Education's Survey of the Bible courses. “Mr. Armstrong always emphasized quality for the Ambassador College campuses, and we try to stress that to our Living Education students as well. It really is stunning to go through this mansion and appreciate the quality of it. The experience is culturally broadening and connects students to American history.”

But taking students to such a grand location is about more than showing them human architecture. “It's also important that our students appreciate the environment in which we live and the beauty of the world around us—that they see God as the Great Designer behind it all,” Mr. Frank said. “The Biltmore Gardens were the last great project of Frederick Law Olmsted, a famous American landscape architect. We actually went out to the gardens and got to see some of that magnificence. As we walked among these flowers and bushes, we saw the intricacy of the creation and appreciated God's handiwork. It was a clear day and the mountains were fully visible—God provided a stunning experience. The majesty of such a property, the beauty of it, helps us look forward to an age in which many more people can enjoy things like that.”

A Journey into Church History

On another field trip, students had the opportunity to walk North Carolina's “Waldensian Trail of Faith,” accompanied by faculty and by Mr. Rod McNair. “The focus on the eras of God's Church really impressed me on this trip,” Mr. McNair said. “It's so important that all of us refresh that doctrine in

our minds and really understand the validity of it. This trip was a way to make that come to life.”

Described in Revelation 2–3, each era of God's Church can teach us powerful lessons of faith that are applicable today. “We have to emphasize that the modern Waldensian group is largely removed from the Waldensians of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries,” Mr. McNair continued. “By the time they settled in this country, they were basically full-blown Protestants. The story of the Waldensian era, the Thyatira era, is so important because it's about compromise, about what can happen when you have God's truth and face persecution. We can learn from the Waldensians that we can do it the easy way or the hard way—they were persecuted, but as soon as they began to compromise, God's protection was lifted, and then they suffered worse. The lesson of the Waldensians is very applicable for us today: Being strong, not compromising, and going through whatever we have to go through is much better than suffering at the whims of Satan as a result of God lifting His hand of protection.”

Experiences to Broaden Perspectives

To cap off the semester, students were treated to a jazz concert at UNC Charlotte, a strategically timed outing that offered a little relaxation before final exams began. “I don't know too much about jazz,” said Arrianna Anderson, one of this year's Living Education students, “but I could see the players' hard work, and it actually became very interesting in the end.”

While biblical studies take priority at Living Education—Charlotte, the program's social aspect is integral to its success. “The field trip experiences strengthen the relationships students have with each other and with the faculty, taking those relationships to a higher level,” Mr. Frank commented. “It's spiritually beneficial to the students—we drive together, we have a picnic together, we spend the day together. They get a change of pace, a break from the routine, giving them a refreshing experience outside their dorms and the headquarters building. It certainly cements their appreciation for God's way of living, their understanding that we have an active purpose.”

“Walking the Waldensian trail, you get to look at how very little the Waldensians had,” Arrianna reflected. “With a jazz concert, you can get more of a feel for something you might not have paid attention to before. And being able to go out and enjoy God's creation, nature, is especially awesome for me. Living Education has things like that to help you understand history and keep your mind open to new things.”

—Editorial Staff

The Mail Processing Department

An Interview with Mr. Gaylyn Bonjour

By **Thomas White**

Among the many people we should all thank for this magazine you are currently reading, let's be sure to include the Church's Mail Processing Department! For the past two decades that department has been captained by the ever-jovial Mr. Gaylyn Bonjour, who graciously agreed to an interview. He first related some of his background, happily recalling the details of his conversion.

"My son was ten," he said, "and I told my wife, Leona, 'You need to go find a church so he can learn respect!' Actually, what my son was doing was being like his father!

"I had a guy working for me who was in the Worldwide Church of God. One day, he said, 'Leona, would you like to come to church?' She said, 'Yeah!' She went, came back, and said, 'This church is really different!' I replied, 'God is for kids and little old ladies. I run a ranch—I don't have time for that.' She kept saying, 'You really ought to come,' and she talked me into going. I put on a white shirt and tie, and I had a pack of Lucky Strikes [cigarettes] in my pocket," Mr. Bonjour said with a chuckle. "The people were well-behaved, and I could see that they were taking notes and listening. They had beat-up Bibles, and I thought to myself, 'They actually use their Bibles!' I just went that one time, and Leona said later, 'You need to come to church.' I said, 'Do they have any literature? Bring some home, and I'll show you where they're wrong.'"

With a flourish, Mr. Bonjour continued, "And here I am! I proved to myself from the Bible that the Sabbath was right, not Sunday. Line upon line, precept upon precept, learning a little here and a little there. I thought, 'Now I know the truth—what am I gonna do with it? I've got to quit smoking, cussing, all that stuff.' That was the start.

"I told the leaders, 'I need to be baptized,'" Mr. Bonjour recalled. "They went, 'What makes you think you're ready for baptism?' I reached into a desk drawer and I pulled out a pack of cigarettes. I said, 'These have been in there a month. I haven't smoked in a month.' And they got smiles on their faces. Just before Passover in '82, my wife and I were baptized."

After a quick mental calculation, Mr. Bonjour said gratefully, "I was 37 years in the world, and now I'm 39 years in the truth. I wouldn't change anything. All of the bad things I went through before coming into the truth were the things that made me repent. I just thought, 'I need to look inwardly. I need to work out my own salvation.' That's what I've been doing."

Keeping MPD Going

And how did he begin working in the Mail Processing Department? "When the Living Church of God split from Global in 1998," Mr. Bonjour began, "all of MPD stayed with Global. The Church put out a message saying, 'We need help in MPD!' I sent it to two guys from my congregation—they said no. I decided to throw my hat in the ring. I was asked, 'Are you willing to relocate?' and I said 'Yeah, I am.' So, I sent my resume in and was hired."

As it turned out, it was an ideal time to relocate. "From the time I was baptized, I had been in Fresno, California," Mr. Bonjour explained, "and you only have so much to give as a pastor before people know what you're going to say. I went to headquarters, and they put me on a 90-day trial. When the previous head of MPD left, they said, 'Can you keep MPD

going?' I said, 'Yeah, I reckon I can.' And I made a few mistakes. If I messed up, I would find out how much it cost, and then to cover it, I would make an offering above what I would normally make. When it comes out of your pocket, you start being more careful!"

Reflecting a bit, he contin-



ued, “That taught me that to run MPD you don’t have to be a rocket scientist, but you do have to pay attention to detail and stay current. Acclimating takes about two years, because in two years, almost everything has changed, but you’ve been there as it changed, so it’s natural for you. That’s how I inherited MPD, and I’ve been in it for 20 years.”

Being Careful with God’s Money

One of the vital ways MPD helps the Church is in keeping up with postal rules and regulations. “We qualify for a bulk mail rate—the average cost of a piece of mail leaving here is 18 cents,” Mr. Bonjour explained. “Otherwise, it would be a minimum of 50 cents. So, the money that we don’t spend on postage goes toward other purposes—that’s the impact that we have. *Minimally*, MPD probably saves the Work about half a million dollars a year.”

Obviously, that takes focused and diligent effort. “We try to be good stewards of the resources that God sends our way, cognizant of the widow’s mite,” he said. “So we stay on the cutting edge. On our Mailer Scorecard, we’ve never had to pay extra postage—we make very few mistakes.”

Such efficiency requires an understanding of federal requirements, which fluctuate all the time. “The post office changes a lot,” Mr. Bonjour revealed. “When they implemented the Intelligent Mail Barcode, we were on top of that. Then we learned how we could get around the National Change of Address (NCOA), which is an antiquated system that has a *minimum* of 40 percent error—four out of ten addresses they have are incorrect.

“We found that by studying the rules, we can avoid the built-in pitfalls the NCOA has,” he said. “We do that by sending a magazine every 60 days—if you have an address that you don’t service within 95 days, it has to go through NCOA. Since we don’t upload through NCOA, they don’t have a chance to mess with our database. We upload it, it goes through our regular process, and we end up with good addresses.”

Mr. Bonjour explained that, although it sounds simple, this workaround saves the Church serious money. “When the NCOA would make mistakes, the address change service would take the mistakes and send them back to us, saying, ‘There’s something wrong with this address.’ That costs you.” He went on to explain just how much it can cost—even tens of thousands of dollars every year! But the effort MPD pours into the process prevents such expenses from burdening the Work, keeping them in the realm of a few hundred dollars a year. “The database is clean and efficient!”

Efficient indeed! For such a crucial department, MPD has only a handful of workers, so everything each one does is essential. “For our size, we’re cutting edge,” Mr. Bonjour said. “We had a vendor come to us and say, ‘We want to handle your mail for you. We’ll presort it and save you money.’ They

went through 47,000 pieces—they made \$50. They found that there’s no fat. We’re as efficient as we can be, and that’s pleasing to all of us. The money that those working in MPD are saving doesn’t only pay their wages, it far exceeds that—for the benefit of the Church.”

Don’t Give Up!

Such important work isn’t easy—physically or spiritually. Dealing with the huge volume of mail, the complicated equipment in MPD, and other fulfillment issues requires a lot of patience, persistence, and problem-solving.

Mr. Bonjour was candid about that. “Working here is filled with little character-builders and big ones,” he said. “There can be frustrations that build up, but those exist in every person’s life. How do you learn to be long-suffering? Well, you’ve got to suffer a long time—you’ve got to deal with problems.”


Nevertheless, the job’s benefits far outweigh its frustrations. “In most places, it’s a job—here, it’s for God.” If the first mailing to someone doesn’t succeed, Mr. Bonjour says they don’t give up. “We’ll first-class mail it to the individual—even if it’s just a semi-annual letter or a TWP invite. We don’t know if they will want it, but we’re going to try to get it to them. You never know who might be impacted by that item. It’s rewarding to know that what you’re doing is for God and His people, and to work around those who are like-minded!”

Mr. Bonjour’s enthusiasm for the Work is shared by his staff—a team he likened to close family.

God Grants the Increase

MPD is keenly aware that without the brethren’s support, none of this would be possible. Mr. Bonjour remarked that “I say at the Feast of Tabernacles, ‘At headquarters, we know that you pray for us. We can’t do it without you. But you don’t know that every morning in MPD, we pray for you. We pray for the scattered brethren, we pray for healing in the Church, and we pray that God continues to bolster those who don’t have the opportunity to be with other brethren more than once or twice a year.’”

As hard as MPD works, “God’s got the accelerator and the brake,” Mr. Bonjour said confidently. “In our biggest year, we sent 1.6 million pieces out—but our department has never converted one person. God does that. He says to preach the Gospel to the world as a witness, and then He opens certain minds. So, in one way, He’s given us something to keep us busy. He says, ‘I am with you until the end of the age. Stay occupied until I come back.’ So that’s what we’re doing!”

We at the *Living Church News* are grateful for Mr. Bonjour’s willingness to sit down with us and for all he and his team in MPD do for God’s Church! 

RETHINKING THOMAS' DOUBT continued from page 15**who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.**

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (1 Corinthians 15:12–20).

Paul said, in effect, *no resurrection means no salvation!*

In a Way, Thomas Helped!

We can know that there is no question that the Man the disciples and hundreds of others saw was, in fact, the resurrected Jesus, thanks to a body of evidence that includes Thomas' own lack of faith in what his friends had told him. We were not present to see Jesus after His resurrection, but we can

have confidence in the veracity of the accounts given of it—on which our faith and our salvation depends.

God anticipated the needs of our faith and provided the example of Thomas and his doubts as evidence of Jesus' resurrection—for our sake, yes, but also for all who need that testimony to bolster their faith. Our Father used Thomas' moment of weak faith to make possible a stronger faith for us—and also to make possible a blessing for us! In John 20:28, we read that Thomas exclaimed “My Lord and my God!” upon fully realizing that the Man before him was, of a certainty, the resurrected Christ. Then, in the next verse, Jesus spoke of a blessing: “Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. *Blessed are those who have **not** seen and yet have believed*” (v. 29).

The God who is able to use our weaknesses for His own glory—and our benefit—did so with Thomas' doubt. (L^N)

JUDAS' FEET? continued from page 16**Christ's Merciful Example**

Of all the godly attributes Christ displayed, *mercy* is one that resounds in His example of foot washing. The biblical understanding of mercy conveys a sense of deep compassion, tender affection, and deep love. In fact, in Isaiah 49:15 God says that His own merciful love is even greater than that of a mother for her child. Just as a mother's nature is to show mercy, deep love, and tender affection to her child, God the Father and Jesus Christ have, even more truly and faithfully, this type of mercy concerning God's children—children who look like Them (Genesis 1:26)! This is why “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16)! Judas was a sinner and the betrayer of the Messiah. Yet, as Judas' Creator, Christ was moved to show him incredible mercy and compassion just hours before Judas betrayed Him.

In John's account of the last Passover, we see Jesus Christ humbling Himself as a servant and washing the feet of *each* of His twelve apostles. It is important to note that Christ did not skip over Judas when his turn came.

Jesus lovingly and mercifully washed Judas' feet as well (John 13:11–12). It was only *after* washing Judas' feet that Christ directed him to depart and tend to the betrayal (vv. 21–27). And *then* Judas left (v. 30)!

A Lesson for Us!

Christ washed the feet of the man who would betray Him only a few hours later—the feet of a thief who accepted a bribe to be an accomplice to His murder! Knowing that Jesus possessed this knowledge, we see how He demonstrated loving, patient, and godly mercy in washing even the feet of His betrayer.

How many of us would walk in Christ's footsteps and wash Judas' feet? As Christians, called to put on the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–8) and become men and women after God's own heart (Acts 13:22), could we too display the godly love and mercy needed to wash Judas' feet?

On a more personal note, who is our “Judas”? Is there a person—alive or dead—whose feet we would refuse to wash, if given the opportunity? Do we have the God-like forgiveness to look beyond slights, hurts, disappointments, and betrayals, to the ultimate *potential* of the individual? Do we yearn

so deeply for our “enemies” to be forgiven and to enter God's Kingdom one day that we would serve them in mercy and wash their feet? These are important questions to ask as we examine ourselves in preparation for the Passover.

Christ made plain in the Sermon on the Mount that it is the merciful who will, themselves, obtain mercy (Matthew 5:7). And God will extend His own forgiveness only to those who forgive *others* (Matthew 6:14–15).

Christ's final Passover before His crucifixion and resurrection leaves us with many profound lessons. One of the most important is about our need to extend godly mercy to others—even to the unrepentant! Our Lord and Master, our High Priest, our Savior and King, asks nothing of us that He was not willing to do Himself. His example of washing Judas' feet is a profound reminder of the mindset and heart we must develop toward our fellow human beings. As we prepare to become full members of the God Family one day, and as we prepare for the upcoming annual Passover, we should be sure to meditate on the question, “Would I wash Judas' feet?” With God's help, the answer to that question must be “Yes, I would!” (L^N)

Charlotte Family Weekend 2019

Looking Back and Looking Forward

Charlotte Family Weekend 2019 has come and gone, and as we go forward in 2020 with wonderful memories, we can also look back to consider 13 previous years of successful events.

The Charlotte Family Weekend (CFW), sponsored by the Headquarters congregation of the Living Church of God, has traveled quite a road during the last two decades, and has gone through many changes along the way. But over the years, the plan has always been the same: to offer an event with a family-friendly atmosphere during the winter months between the Fall and Spring Holy Days. While the activity generally draws most of its visitors from the East Coast of the United States, we have always been joined by the pleasant company of visitors from across North America and even overseas.

We appreciate them all! Every year, event planners strive to make the lodging and accommodations as pleasant and welcoming as possible.

Since its inception in 2007, the CFW has seen changes of venue for several of its activities and Sabbath services, going from a small, humble building in Mint Hill that first year, to the HQ building in Charlotte, and most recently to the Renaissance Suites hotel. Similarly, Charlotte natives and guests alike remember experiencing Sports Day and other activities in the Sun Valley High School gymnasium in Weddington, before we more recently began contracting with the Carolina Courts Sports Center of Indian Trail.

We hope that, wherever the event has roamed, its overall benefit has remained: an opportunity to fellowship, learn, and share our experiences with old friends and new.

On that note, CFW 2019 can be called a wonderful success! There was a very good turnout, with 557 attending at Sabbath services and over 4,100 “tuning in” online for the livestream. According to planners, visitors, and locals alike, the brethren enjoyed the large, common seminars

on Friday, which discussed reasons to believe God exists, how society is changing as it has abandoned God, and how to stand strong in the face of such changes. Previous years have used a “break out” approach to the seminars, with smaller groups focusing on topics such as being a Christian single, teen, or married couple. But this year’s seminars were geared for the whole crowd and provided a nice change of pace—as did the “question and answer” session with the three seminar presenters on Friday night, which gave the crowd an opportunity to follow up with their own questions about the presentations. One new member remarked that this year’s seminars and follow-up event reflected LCG’s emphasis on servant leadership, as speakers lent themselves without partiality to everyone while openly addressing everyone’s questions—both onstage and off.

Seminars aside, the schedule for this year’s CFW differed notably from those of just about every CFW of the past decade in other ways, as well. This year, planners “front loaded” some of the weekend’s usual activities onto the Thursday and Friday leading up to the Sabbath. Charlotte is a “working city” that sees many of its industrious residents head out of town to more recreational locales this time of year—drastically reducing the city’s “busyness” for the entire week. This made it ideal to schedule CFW 2019’s Sports Day for Thursday, December 26, which left Sunday—normally a hectic day with many visiting brethren needing to depart early—completely open for attendees either to get together or to head home without fear of missing any planned activities.

What’s more, the weather certainly cooperated this year, as it often does, with high temperatures getting up into the 60s. Although it certainly *can* get cold during our winter weekends (some may recall the snowy Saturday evening dinner dance of 2010), this year’s visitors from “down under” might have been understandably confused and left wondering if they had successfully reached the wintry Northern Hemisphere at all.

As always, we here in Charlotte would like to thank everyone for helping to continue this tradition of keeping spirits zealous and hearts entwined, ensuring that the Holy Days are not the *only* times in the year that brethren can come together in unity and brotherhood. We would especially like to thank our visitors for bringing so much to the activities each year. Have a pleasant Spring Holy Day season, and stay tuned for more details about CFW 2020!

—William Williams



The Bible's Food Laws vs. the Coronavirus

The world is anxiously watching the coronavirus. Appearing suddenly in December 2019, the virus—now labeled COVID-19—quickly spread across the Chinese city of Wuhan in Hubei province (population 58 million). Within a month, COVID-19 had already caused more deaths than the 2002–2003 SARS virus outbreak. Thousands have died in China, with scores of thousands infected. China's government has severely restricted travel, attempting to quarantine several cities, but despite drastic measures the deadly virus has spread to Australia, Europe, and North America.

While questions remain, Chinese health officials and the World Health Organization link the illness to human consumption of wild animals, including scaly anteaters, badgers, salamanders, scorpions, hedgehogs, snakes, bats, and even wolves. Exotic dishes—called *yě wèi*, “wild flavors”—are very popular in Chinese culture. While markets that provide these animals for food are illegal, the prohibition of their sale has not been strictly enforced, and they often end up in the bowls of millions.

China is also the world's leading consumer of pork, and homes near pigs and other livestock lead to human diseases referred to as “zoonotic.” Swine influenza and other epidemics have originated in China in times past.

Other cultures promote similar diets. In parts of Africa, people consume “wild meat”—including monkeys and bats. Because of these practices, the Ebola epidemic stubbornly lingers in those countries, causing suffering and loss.

What's more, spread across almost all cultures is the consumption of shellfish such as oysters, shrimp, lobster, crab,

mussels, and clams. Health warnings against eating these crustaceans in certain seasons are common.

The obvious question is, “Should the animals described here be considered food for human beings?” Anciently, the Creator God distinguished “clean” (edible) meats from “unclean” (not to be eaten) meats, explaining in detail which kinds of mammals, fish, birds, and insects He created for people to eat. He tells us plainly, “You shall not eat any detestable thing. These are the animals which you may eat” (Deuteronomy 14:3–4), then goes on to list the approved and prohibited items (vv. 4–21).

Sure enough, along with pig and shellfish, bat is among the prohibited meats! Our loving God allows His people a wide variety of foods, such as the meat of animals that chew the cud and have split hooves. Why, then, would He limit the types of meat, fish, and fowl that we may use for food? The “unclean” creatures essentially form the “clean-up crew” in our planet's ecosystem. Animals that eat carrion contain in their bodies much of the harmful matter they consume. They balance nature and clean the environment, but were not created for human consumption.

Feasting on these “wild flavors” can cause serious health problems and illnesses, including the deadly diseases mentioned above. While this information is not widely accepted by the general population, reams of medical literature contain warnings about the long-term use of the aforementioned creatures as food.

Hopefully, the countries affected by the COVID-19 epidemic will successfully halt its progress. They are working hard to do so. It is sobering to realize that many infectious diseases could be prevented, and humanity's general health improved, by simple obedience to the Bible's food laws.

—J. Davy Crockett, III