



PASSOVER *to* PENTECOST 2025

3 April - June 2
Daily Devotionals



NEWLIFECHURCH
FREMANTLE

How To Use This Book

Welcome to the 2025 Passover to Pentecost Devotions! Here you will find daily Bible readings, reflections and prayers that begin Thursday April 3 (10 days before Passover) and run through to Pentecost, Monday June 2.

We invite you to participate in the daily devotions as a way of entering into God's Story as a community. Talk about them within your household, share your insights with a friend online, make the readings and prayers your daily habit for the Passover season and be expectant for God to speak to you and through you.

Digital Copies:

The daily readings and podcast will be emailed each morning to our NLC mailing list. Email info@newlifefremantle.com with any queries related to the mailing list.

Parents:

Parents with little ones: include your children in these daily rhythms! Plan ahead and reduce the content into manageable portions. Ask questions like:

- What does this teach us about God?
- What does this teach us about people?
- Is there something for us to obey?
- Who can you share this with?

Passover Timeline:

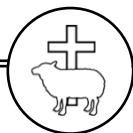
Included as Appendix 1 in this booklet is a timeline of the Passover week events according to how they are recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as well as the Old Testament events that were foreshadowed through Israel before being fulfilled in Jesus. We pray this timeline helps you in understanding how Jesus has fulfilled the Biblical Festivals.

Passover Seder

Included at the end of this booklet is an abbreviated Passover Seder that you can use to host a Passover meal with your family and/or friends. House Churches are encouraged to gather together to enjoy a Passover Seder meal together.

We pray that your faith is stirred and your worship inspired as we celebrate God's Story through the life, death and resurrection of the Passover King and the gift of Holy Spirit!

From Lead Pastors Wayne and Julie Hollett and the Biblical Festival Team



Leviticus 23:1-14

Written by the Biblical Festival Team

Just as Anzac Day is an identity-shaping day of remembrance for Australia and New Zealand, the festival days that God gave to his people thousands of years ago are culture-shaping days of remembrance and celebration. New Life Church remembers and celebrates these seasons each year and have found that this practice has enlarged our vision of Jesus and connection with the Scriptures.

Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits are three of the seven festivals that God gave to his people Israel to celebrate annually. God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel and through them began to unfold his plan of salvation for the whole world. Every festival points to the Messiah Jesus as the Faithful Israelite who would live, die, be resurrected and ultimately fulfil God's plan to save and restore the whole earth.

In Genesis 1:14, God spoke about the different seasons that would be part of his creation: *signs to mark sacred times (mo'ed), and days and years. (Genesis 1:14 NIV)*

In the days of Moses, God announced a series of sacred times – holy days and seasons – to reveal himself to his people: *The Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'These are my appointed festivals [mo'ed], the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. (Leviticus 23:1-2 NIV)*

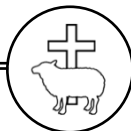
Notice the Hebrew word mo'ed is the same as the word used in Genesis 1:14 – sacred times. Right from the beginning of creation, God chose to use times and seasons, patterns and rhythms to make himself known to us.

Some might ask: "What do these festivals have to do with me? It's 3500 years later and I live in Australia not Jerusalem."

These sacred times – festivals – are about God: "these are my appointed festivals, my sacred times". In God's heart, these days are about revealing himself to people of every nation. Yes, Israel is the messenger, but the message is God – come and behold God who is King over every tribe, language and nation. The message of God's sacred times is God.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for creating rhythms and seasons to help us remember you and your Story. As we approach this Passover season, please give to us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, that we would know you better. Open our eyes that we would see wonderful things in your Word. Turn our hearts to your ways, and not to selfish gain. Satisfy our hearts today with your unfailing love.



Exodus 3 & 6:1-12

Written by Jason Pelling

In today's reading we are gifted with insight into the God who loves to be near: *I have seen. I have heard. I am aware (3:7)*. The NIV uses the phrase *I am concerned*. The NKJV says *I know their sorrows*.

As the Hebrews groaned under the weight of oppression, they battled the lies that said: no one sees, no one hears, no one cares. In times of pain, we are prone to wrestle with those same lies. It's in those dark moments that our souls can be enlightened by the stories of the saints of old. David sang: *Record my misery; list my tears on your scroll – are they not in your record? (Psalm 56:8)*. Asaph wrote: *When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant... Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand (Psalm 73:21-23)*.

Not only does God know our pain and stay near in affliction, he responds to it:
I am the LORD. I will bring you out. I will free you. I will redeem you. I will take you as my own. I will be your God. Exodus 6:6-7

The Exodus and the Passover are not just historical facts but an invitation for us to look up and call on God and discover him again as our comfort, our hope, and our deliverer. Let us not be like the Israelites who, in the midst of their discouragement, were deaf to the truth (6:9). He is still the one who is near to the broken-hearted; he is still the one who sets slaves free, he is still mighty to save.

Prayer:

Father, we thank you that you are near to us. Thank you that you see every tear and you hear every cry. Thank you that you do not abandon your people. We remember your faithfulness to the Israelites in Egypt and we remember your faithfulness to us. Thank you for your grace extended to us in Jesus our Messiah, our Great Deliverer. Thank you that you are teaching us to walk in the way of freedom, and that we are no longer slaves to death and sin.

Take a moment to pray for anyone you know who is feeling oppressed or experiencing pain.



Exodus 7-8

Written by Jason Pelling

In the 9 plagues leading up to the Passover we see Yahweh triumphing over the spiritual powers of Egypt. The Egyptians worshipped a multitude of so-called gods. Yahweh made a spectacle of them.

When God turned water to blood – where were the Gods of the Nile River? Where were Osiris, Isis, and Horus?

When God sent a plague of sickness on the livestock – where was the bull-god Apis, and the cow-headed god, Hathor?

When God sent fire and hail upon the land, where were the sky gods of Egypt?

When God sent darkness so thick you could feel it, where was Ra, the sun god, or Shu the god of light? And then the final plague – the death of the firstborn. Life itself, taken away by the angel of Yahweh.

For many years Israel celebrated the Passover and remembered God's judgment on the powers of Egypt – Pharaoh, his armies, the 'gods'. After they crossed the Red Sea they sang: "Who among the gods is like you, Lord? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? "

Centuries later, in the Passover of Calvary, there was an ultimate confrontation between Jesus and spiritual powers. Yahweh the Great Deliverer was at work – *to be continued tomorrow...*

Prayer from Psalm 116:

I love you Lord, for you heard my voice; you hear my cry for mercy. Because you turned your ear to me, I will call on you as long as I live. The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came over me; I was overcome by distress and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the Lord – save me! Lord you are gracious and righteous; you are full of compassion. Return to your rest, my soul, for God has been good to you. Amen.



Exodus 9-11

Written by Jason Pelling

The Exodus story tells of the defeat of Egyptian powers at the hands of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Pharaoh and the 'gods' of Egypt were defeated and Yahweh liberated a people and invited them to be his royal priests: *Let my people go, so that they may worship me (9:2). You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6).*

In the Passover of Calvary, Jesus took on not only the political and social powers of his day, but every ungodly power that enslaved God's image-bearers – past, present and future. The Apostle Paul wrote that Jesus *cancelled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross. In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross (Colossians 2:14-15 NLT).* John told us that Jesus has *freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve... God (Revelation 1:5-6 NIV).*

In the language of Passover, if you are in Christ you are no longer slaves! You are no longer subject to the gods of lust, money, power or any other forces in this world. You are no longer slaves to the power of sin. You are free to be the worshipper and the image-bearer that God created you to be. This is the Passover story that Jesus embodied: God is here to set you free!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, the Passover King: I stand in your victory today and I declare over my life and my family the triumph of the cross and the power of the resurrection. You have defeated every power and principality and have set me free to be a royal priest in your family. Today I surrender to your leadership and choose to worship you alone. Give me grace this day to love and obey you wholeheartedly and to reveal your goodness to those around me. Amen.



Exodus 12:1-42

Written by Chantelle Macdonald

When we read verse 3 of Exodus 12, that every man shall take a lamb according to his father's house, we remember John 13:1 which says 'before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father' – we see Jesus as the lamb of his Father's house.

When we read of the unblemished lamb in Exodus 12:5, we remember the unblemished offering of the blood of Christ in Hebrews 9. When we think of the Israelites eating the flesh of the lamb in Exodus 12:8 we remember Jesus' statement in John chapter 6, that unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you do not have eternal life.

We read in Exodus 12:12 that God struck down both man and beast, but because of the blood on the doorposts, he passed over the Israelites. We remember that Isaiah saw God the Father strike down God the Son (Isaiah 53:4-5). Our punishment fell upon him.

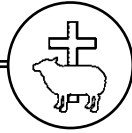
We read in Exodus 12:22 of the hyssop plant that was used to spread the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts, and we remember John 19:29 when they used the hyssop plant to lift up the sponge of wine vinegar to the man on the blood-soaked cross.

We read in Exodus 12:46 that the bones of the Passover lamb were not to be broken and we remember that when the soldier went to break the legs of Jesus (John 19:33), he stopped because the Passover Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, was already dead.

In Exodus 12:23 we read that "When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the... doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down". And we remember that though the enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy, "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the work of the devil" (1 John 3). Jesus said "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Prayer:

Father of Glory, in this Passover season, we ask you to lead us into deeper worship and stronger friendship with your Son. We honour you Jesus, the fulfilment of the Passover sacrifice. You gave up your life to give us life. In the festival of Unleavened Bread, you who were untainted by sin were laid in the tomb. On the Day of First Fruits, you conquered death and arose as the first fruits of the coming resurrection. Our hope is in your sinless life, your sacrificial death, your victorious resurrection, and your soon return. Come Lord Jesus.



John 12

Written by Chantelle Macdonald

Four days before the Passover (Nisan 10), the Jewish people were instructed to choose their Passover lambs. They were inspected for any defects and carefully cared for to ensure they would be a perfect sacrifice for Passover. It was at this time that Jesus was anointed by Mary at Bethany, an act that symbolically marked Jesus as chosen. Over the next few days Jesus was interrogated in Jerusalem by the Pharisees and Sadducees, as if he himself was being inspected and proven to be perfect before his own sacrifice on the cross. The Passover Lamb was indeed Christ, the Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away the sins of the world (1 Cor. 5:7, John 1:29). It was this Lamb, Jesus her Saviour, on whom Mary poured out her affection.

Full of overwhelming gratitude for the freedom, healing, resurrection and love she had experienced and seen, Mary came into the room that night with deliberate intent. Mary understood that time was short – Jesus had spoken a number of times about his imminent and necessary death – and she wanted to lavish her love on her beloved Saviour and King while she still had the chance. Her love took her past the polite customs of her day, past the critical eyes of men, and past caring for her own reputation. Nothing would deter her from radical worship – no harsh words or criticisms, no financial expense. Mary didn't care about her own reputation, but only about Jesus' exaltation.

Mary understood who Jesus was and what he was doing, and she brought him the greatest gift she could offer in response. She brought him an oil used by people of high class and royalty, anointing him as her king. She poured on him an oil used for preparing bodies for burial, using the symbol of her own glory, her hair, as a rag. She extravagantly gave a gift worth a whole year's income, perhaps representing her life's hopes and dreams from what could have been her inheritance or bridal dowry.

The fragrance of that perfume would have clung to Jesus' skin for days. Wherever he walked the fragrance of Mary's worship was tangible to those around him. No doubt it brought Jesus himself comfort as he neared his hour of suffering. Mary's gift became a first fruits offering of worship, a promise of the devotion and love that he would receive from his people in the generations to come.

Mary had spent many hours sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to his words, seeing him move and act. Now she spent her final moments with him, expressing her love and worship. This was not a waste. This was extravagant love to an extravagant God who is worthy of everything.

Prayer:

Beautiful Saviour, you are worthy of all honour and worship. Forgive me for the times I have valued my own reputation, my time, my money, myself more than you. I pause now to remember all the times you have been so lovingly gracious and merciful to me. Thank you for your kindness. Help me to be like Mary, sitting at your feet and listening to your words, considering "everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3:8). You are worthy, my God and King, of all I am and all I have. My life, my worship, is yours. Amen.



Matthew 21:1-17 & 23:37-39

Written by Jason Pelling

Today's readings give us a glimpse into the emotion and anticipation that filled Jerusalem in the days before Jesus' death. We hear the "Hosanna" crowd giving Jesus a royal welcome as he enters the city. We see the rest of the city stirred in wonder: "Who is this?!" We feel the rising rage of religious leaders, indignant that this unqualified Galilean is being praised as the Son of David – God's promised King.

God in the flesh stands in Jerusalem, knowing that despite the jubilant noise of some, he's about to be utterly rejected by the children of Israel and hung up on a Roman cross to die. Incredibly, he makes this pledge to them, saying ***"you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'."***

That was a well-known phrase for the Jews – a statement of blessing regarding the coming of the Messiah. With tears in his eyes, Jesus prophesies to the religious leaders: ***"you've rejected God by killing his prophets, and you're about to reject God by killing me. You will not see me again until you bless me as your Messiah."***

Perhaps we could also say it like this: ***"A day is coming when you will see me again, Jerusalem. And on that day, you will welcome me as the Messiah, the King, the Deliverer of Israel."***

In Matthew 23, Jesus is deeply troubled. But hope is on the horizon. As the blackest hour of history approaches, the heart of God heaves under the weight of ancient covenants and deep desire for his family:

This is not over. I'm not finishing this story without you Israel. I'm going to win your heart, Israel. A day is coming when you, as a nation, will say 'yes' to me.

The Lord has committed himself to the salvation of Israel. They will yet say of Jesus ***'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'***. As Jews around the world celebrate Passover this year, let us pray that they would see the Galilean who truly is the Son of David, the Promised One who came and is coming soon.

Prayer:

Father, as Jews throughout the nations prepare for Passover, open their eyes to see that Jesus is their Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Father, draw them to your Son, that Israel as a nation would welcome her Messiah. Strengthen our brothers and sisters in Israel, and let your word spread rapidly and be honoured in that land. Amen.

10 April 2025

3 Days until Passover



John 13:1-17

Written by Jason Pelling

Stunning. The Eternal Son had always interacted intimately with the fullness of Father and Spirit. Untainted, unrestrained communion. He had come from God. From the dwelling place of God, gazing upon God. Entirely Holy Persons intertwined in indivisible love. In greatness of humility, the Son took on the frail form of man.

And how does he carry himself as the God-Man? The one from God, the one returning to God? He comes on his knees with a towel around his waist and a bowl for dirty feet. He comes via the way of the cross, and to the cross he will go, knowing and showing true glory.

Notice the man fidgeting amongst the twelve. Eyes darting, the smell of silver on his sweating palms. The man whose seeds of anger were about to bloom in blood and death. It says he had loved his disciples...and now he loved them to the very end. And so he would love Judas to the very end.

The hands of the Creator enfold the feet of the betrayer. Judas has made his choice, but still mercy and meekness are poured upon him. Words once spoken hang heavy in the air:

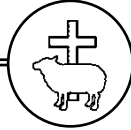
But love your enemies, and do good, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful (Luke 6).

Prayer:

Jesus. You come to serve me still. I receive your loving kindness as you serve me, undeserving as I am. I open my heart to your humble love. Let me be changed by this love. Fill me with the love of the foot-washing God, that others would see you in me. Amen.

11 April 2025

2 Days until Passover



Luke 22-23

Written by Wayne Hollett

God's faithfulness in history gives us confidence today and hope for the future.

Take a few moments to think about this meal in Jerusalem and the events that happen immediately after it. What Luke describes looks like failure and the end of hope. Inner circle betrayal, self-centredness, and denial. Jesus arrested, judged, mocked, humiliated, flogged, executed, and buried.

Paul wrote, *"The message of the cross is foolish to those headed for destruction! But... Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans, and God's weakness is stronger than the greatest of human strength."* 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Amidst the pain and frustration of life not working out how we want it to, the Passover account reminds us that we can live with confident hope that God will fulfil all His purposes and nothing will thwart God.

The blood of those first Passover lambs in Egypt, wiped on the doorframes, provided God's protection for Israel from death and opened the way for exodus from slavery to the Promised Land. The blood of Jesus, the ultimate Passover lamb is far superior! Jesus said, *"This cup is the new covenant between God and his people – an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you."* The blood of Jesus protects everyone who trusts in him, from death and decay, forever. It liberates from slavery to sin in order to worship and obey God and to dwell forever in His presence in His renewed creation.

Facing apparent failure through betrayal and death, Jesus held up that cup at the last Supper to declare that God was fulfilling the promise of a new covenant, a promise given hundreds of years earlier to the prophet Jeremiah (see Jer. 31:31-34). Whenever we drink the cup of the new covenant, we remind ourselves of God's faithfulness in history and our hope for today and for the future.

Prayer:

Father of Glory, in this Passover season, we ask you to lead us into deeper worship and stronger friendship with your Son. We honour you Jesus, the fulfilment of the Passover sacrifice. You gave up your life to give us life. In the festival of Unleavened Bread, you who were untainted by sin were laid in the tomb. On the Day of First Fruits, you conquered death and arose as the first fruits of the coming resurrection. Our hope is in your sinless life, your sacrificial death, your victorious resurrection, and your soon return. Come Lord Jesus.

12 April 2025

Passover begins tonight

**Jesus died in the afternoon,
the first day and night in the grave**



John 18-19

Written by Jason Pelling

In the centuries following the Passover of Egypt, new traditions emerged as a way of remembering what God had done for Israel. A Day of Preparation led into the Passover Sabbath and included a cleansing of the home to ensure no leaven was present¹. Special foods were prepared for the Passover meal to tell the story of slaves being set free. In the temple tradition, a Passover sacrifice was made at 3pm², an addition to the regular daily sacrifices which took place at 9am and noon.

For centuries, people have pondered the timing of the Passover in relation to the death of Jesus. Matthew 26:18 reveals that Jesus was planning a Passover meal with his disciples. Yet John 18:28 tells us that on the day of the crucifixion, the Jewish leaders had not yet eaten the Passover meal, which indicates that the Last Supper was not the same event as the Passover of the Pharisees³. This is a significant detail, as it confirms that when Jesus died at 3pm on Nisan 14, it was on the very same day and hour at which the special Passover lamb was sacrificed in the Temple. We also know that on that day, Jesus' crucifixion began at 9am and darkness covered the land at noon – each event aligning with the timing of Passover sacrifices.

The timing is also significant in light of Jesus' prophecy that he would be buried in the earth for three days and three nights (Matt. 12:40).

The traditional Passover meal would have been eaten in the hours following Jesus' death and burial. Can you imagine it? The hard-hearted and the heart-broken alike, turning away from Golgotha, walking back to the city as the Freedom Festival was due to begin. The blood of the cross still drying as they sat down for a family meal.

Unblemished lambs were sliced open on dining tables only hours after God's Perfect Lamb was rushed into a grave. Unleavened bread was shared as the holy Bread of Life lay in the death-darkness of a tomb. In every hour and every detail, Jesus fulfilled the Passover. God's Appointed Times would clearly proclaim that it was indeed time. The death of the Paschal Lamb. The rise of the Passover King.

Prayer:

We honour you Jesus, the fulfilment of the Passover sacrifice. You gave up your life to give us life. In the festival of Unleavened Bread you were laid in the tomb, untainted by sin. On the Day of First Fruits, you conquered death and arose as the first fruits of the coming resurrection. Our hope is in your sinless life, your sacrificial death, your victorious resurrection, and your soon return. Come Lord Jesus.

¹ See Mark 15:42 - "It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath)". This refers to the Festival of Unleavened Bread Sabbath, also called the Passover Sabbath, which was most likely Thursday and also Nisan 14. As evening approached (Nisan 15), "Joseph of Arimathea... went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body."

² The 3pm sacrifice comes from the interpretation of Exodus 12:6 - "between the evenings".

³ The traditional Passover meal takes place in the evening of Nisan 15 which begins at sunset. The meal is also the start of the Unleavened Bread Sabbath (or Passover Sabbath) which can be a different day to the weekly Sabbath.

13 April 2025

Passover Sabbath
Unleavened Bread begins tonight
50 days until Pentecost



Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Written by Eleanor Sharland

"You must offer it [the Passover Lamb] only at the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honoured."

In Isaiah we read of the one who was 'led like a lamb to the slaughter', who is also referred to as our 'Passover Lamb'. Have you ever stopped to ponder that God chose the time, and place for him to be sacrificed? That this was chosen so that God's name can be honoured? Not only that, but this was the Lord's "good plan to crush him". This is not how we would necessarily interpret a 'good plan', yet God saw more than the 'crushing and causing of grief'. He knew that in the offering of Jesus' perfect life, it would be possible for many to be counted righteous.

Jesus' suffering, according to the Father's plans was foretold in Isaiah 53. Deuteronomy 16 refers to unleavened bread as the 'bread of suffering', Jesus came as the one who would suffer. He was without sin, or leaven, and suffered to bring righteousness for many. God planned this. He planned all the details, down to time and place. There is a great comfort in knowing that none of what happened was a surprise to God but rather part of an intricate plan - God's great plan.

Prayer:

Praying from Psalm 51: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion, blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from sin. Create in me a pure heart and renew a steadfast spirit within me." God, I thank you that nothing happens outside of your knowledge, and that you orchestrated these events over 2000 years ago, to bring me into righteousness. Thank you for your plan to bring generations into the freedom of knowing you. Thank you for your grace and mercy in this. Thank you for the renewing work of your Spirit within me today. Amen.

A Note about Counting the Omer:

"From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the wave offering, count off seven full weeks. Count off fifty days up to the day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to the Lord." (Leviticus 23:15-16)

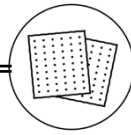
Have you ever counted the days leading up to an event you're really excited about? They say "a watched pot never boils" meaning that the more we pay attention to the time, the more conscious we are of it going by... slowly. It would seem that God has capitalised on this reality, by instructing His people to be mindful of the days between Passover and Pentecost by 'counting off seven full weeks' until the Feast of Pentecost (Feast of Weeks or Shavuot in Hebrew). This season is commonly referred to as 'the counting of the omer.'

An omer is a unit of measure. In the days of the Temple, an omer of the new barley harvest was cut down on the 'day after the Sabbath' in the Passover week and brought to the Temple as an offering. The waving of the barley is required along with other animal, grain and new wine offerings listed in Leviticus 23, called the First Fruits. The 'counting' begins from the start of Unleavened Bread, marks off the seven weeks until the fiftieth day, that is Pentecost.

14 April 2025

Unleavened Bread

**First Fruits begins tonight
49 days until Pentecost**



John 19:38-42; Acts 2:22-31

Written by Chantelle Macdonald

In a Hebrew home in Goshen 3500 years ago, it's body roasted and laid on a table for eating, lay a lamb. A strong unblemished lamb whose death became the means of deliverance for anyone who sat within the house marked with its blood. What would it have been like to sit around the table in Goshen, eating that lamb and waiting for the clock to strike midnight? What was it like for the Hebrews as they fled Egypt, knowing that without the lamb's blood on their doorposts, their families would also have been suffering under the judgement God sent against the unbelieving Pharaoh and Egyptians, mourning the deaths of firstborn sons? What was it like to eat that unleavened bread each day and remember that this journey they were on was their path to fulfilled promises and freedom?

In a garden near Golgotha 2000 years ago, Jesus' body lay in a cold, dark tomb. The perfect, blameless Lamb of God whose death became the means of deliverance for anyone who would receive His blood as the redemptive offering for their lives. What was it like for the disciples as they sat together around their Passover meal, trying to reconcile the promises of God to Israel and the promises of Jesus, with what they had just witnessed? What was it like to eat the unleavened bread that symbolised a nation walking into freedom and new identity, knowing that their beloved friend, the Bread of Life, lay dead in a tomb and their own freedom and identity now seemed to hang in limbo?

Today, as we remember the time in between Jesus' death and resurrection let us pause and reflect. We now stand on the other side of the resurrection. We stand in deliverance and freedom. We know that God raised Jesus up and released him from death, so too releasing us from death into life and guaranteeing a future resurrection glory. We are not left in limbo; our freedom and identity is not uncertain. We do not have to sit around a Passover meal wondering what will happen. We do not have to sit by the tomb's entrance in mourning.

Today we celebrate the truth that Jesus was not abandoned to rot in the grave but was raised to life. Today we give thanks that He took our punishment for sin and became our sacrificial offering so that the judgment for sin – the death we deserved – has passed us over. Today we feed on the truth of Christ, our unleavened Bread of Life, confident that He will sustain us and guide us on the path of life as we journey through this life and into eternity.

Prayer:

Jesus, I celebrate you today. My Passover Lamb and the true Bread of Life, you are my Way Maker, Chain Breaker, Promise Keeper, Life Giver and Sustainer. Thank you for your sacrifice. I receive your finished work on the cross today and believe that through your blood I am made holy and righteous because You are Holy and Righteous. Empower me by your grace to live out this new life you have given me, to love as you have loved, and to be holy as you are holy. I praise you because you have made known to me the path of life, and you will fill me with joy in your presence. Amen.

15 April 2025

Unleavened Bread day 2

**First Fruits
48 days until Pentecost**



Luke 24

Written by Lauren Hollett

On the Hebrew calendar, today marks the end of the third night that Jesus was in the grave, fulfilling his prophecy in Matthew 12:40 to be in the grave for 3 days and 3 nights.

I can't help but read Luke 24 and be struck by the kindness of the Lord to reveal himself to us. Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus didn't actually *need* the stone to be rolled away from the tomb? In his resurrected body, we know that Jesus had the ability to move through materials, to walk through walls (see John 20:19). He could have teleported out of the tomb by himself. And yet, the stone was rolled away. Why? So that it might help others to see and to know that Jesus had risen from the dead.

Why did Jesus walk with the two on the road to Emmaus for so long without announcing who he was? What did it accomplish? It gave him time to explain, in detail, how the Scriptures foretold his resurrection. He knew it would be better this way - to let the hearing and explanation come first, then the shock of the discovery that Jesus was alive to come second.

We read that Peter saw and pondered the empty tomb and the strips of linen (Luke 24:12) before having a personal encounter with Jesus for himself (Luke 24:34). God reveals himself in different times and in different ways to those who are seeking and looking for him. How does he reveal himself to us? In Luke 24 it says:

⁸ "Then they remembered his words."

³¹ "Then their eyes were opened."

⁴⁵ "Then he opened their minds."

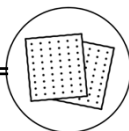
The Holy Spirit brings to remembrance the words of Jesus (John 14:26) and opens the eyes of our hearts and minds. Jesus is risen! Do you believe it? Are you expecting to see him at work today?

Prayer:

God, we thank you that you are so kind in revealing yourself to us. We thank you for the resurrection life that we now share in through Jesus Christ. Lord, today we ask for open hearts and open eyes - we want to be ones who see you, who are looking and expecting you to be at work in our lives and in our world. Like the disciples, we, too, can be full of doubt, discouragement or disbelief. Increase our faith, that our hearts would quicken when the Holy Spirit brings to mind the words of Jesus. Let his words be in our hearts and in our mouths to the glory and praise of your name!

16 April 2025

Unleavened Bread day 3
47 days until Pentecost



Leviticus 23:9-14 & 1 Corinthians 15

Written by Jason Pelling

Jesus rose from the dead on the very day that God had appointed for the Israelites to bring an offering from the 'first fruits' of the harvest. These first fruits are not disconnected from the rest of the harvest, but are the evidence that the full harvest is coming. *"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the first fruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him"* (1 Corinthians 15:22). A radical transition in the human experience has been initiated in the resurrection. A day is coming when you will know the joy of a resurrected body in a fully renewed heaven and earth.

As we live in the tension between the resurrection first fruits and the full harvest, we have a Holy Spirit empowered assignment. Paul declared: *"I want to know Christ and the power of the resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so somehow to attain to the resurrection from the dead"* (Philippians 3:10-11).

For Paul, living as a member of the resurrection community now meant that he could endure suffering and death because they did not have the last word. He knew what it was to die to his way of living and to endure the mistreatment of the world and yet live in hope because he was united with the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead (Romans 8:11).

That is how we live as resurrection people now. We live confidently because we know that Jesus is resurrected and is Lord of all. We die to our self-sufficient ways so that his indestructible life shines through us. We proclaim to a world that is subject to war and pandemic and sorrow that these things do not have the final say. The first fruits guarantee the coming harvest. Death has been swallowed up in victory. Christ is alive!

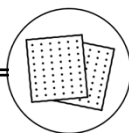
"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm! Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain!"
1 Corinthians 15:58.

Prayer:

Jesus our King, on this Day of First Fruits we declare you are the Resurrection and the Life; the First Fruits from the dead! You conquered sin, put death to flight, and gave us the hope of everlasting life. Redeem all our days because of this great victory. Forgive our sins, banish our fears and make us bold to praise you and to do your will. Strengthen us to wait for the fullness of your Kingdom on the last great Day, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

17 April 2025

Unleavened Bread day 4
46 days until Pentecost



Leviticus 23:9-22; Jeremiah 31:33,34;
Acts 2:1-13; 1 Peter 2:5-10

Written by Wayne & Julie Hollett

"Count off fifty days.." Each of the fifty days is a reminder that there is a God ordained link between Passover (Pesach) and Pentecost (Shavuot or Feast of Weeks). There is a sense of preparation and expectation associated with the counting and the waiting.

The first Pentecost (meaning 'fifty') was the day when Israel was gathered before God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19). At this time God betrothed himself to Israel in covenantal love and commissioned them as his kingdom of priests. This was also the occasion when God gave the Torah to Israel (Torah means 'instruction' or 'law'). First, he delivered Israel and then he brought them into covenantal identity.

Forty days after his death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to his Father in heaven. He commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until they had received 'power from on high'. On the day of Pentecost, day fifty, when they were gathered together in the Temple, He poured His Spirit out on them. They were filled with boldness to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and were heard prophesying in many other languages, for the benefit of those who had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast. The Acts 2 event in Jerusalem confirmed to the disciples what the ceremony at Sinai confirmed to the gloriously delivered nation of Israel. They are a chosen people, delivered and set apart to be a nation of priests; and *now* they are each filled and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, every believer can receive revelation and understanding of God's Word and daily empowering to love and obey Him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength.

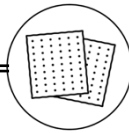
Each day leading up to Pentecost is an opportunity to reflect on our identity as a free and priestly people, and to invite Holy Spirit to *prepare our hearts and minds* to be filled with fresh power to love and serve God in a deeper way. Each day is an opportunity to live with intent and purpose, asking for a renewed hunger to understand our part in a much bigger picture (God's Story) and to ask for a greater grace to partner with Him for His glory.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, I ask that you lead me on a journey in this season to Pentecost. I give you permission to make these fifty days a time of preparation. I choose to set aside this time for repentance, deliverance and cleansing from sin. Father, I ask that you expose and humble my heart in a new way, in order that I might receive hunger, excitement and a fresh release of your love, presence and power through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

18 April 2025

Unleavened Bread day 5
45 days until Pentecost



John 20-21

Written by Julie Hollett

The Jews in Jesus' day, including his disciples, observed the counting of the Omer. We already know that Jesus fulfilled the Passover festival when he was crucified on the day the Passover lambs were killed, he rose from the dead on the Festival of First Fruits and ascended to the Father 40 days later. In addition, all of Jesus' post resurrection appearances occurred within the 40 days of the Omer Count. On the 50th day of the Omer Count (Pentecost/Festival of Weeks), he poured His Spirit on his disciples and then many others, fulfilling the long celebrated Festival of Weeks in Israel (Festival of Weeks).

We can track the activities of Jesus' disciples by noting where he appeared to them:

- The day following the Sabbath, some of the disciples went to the tomb. Jesus appeared to them there. (John 20:11-18)
- The disciples were directed to go to Galilee to meet with Jesus which they did. (Matt. 28:16-20)
- Two of them were on the road headed to Emmaus (away from Jerusalem) when Jesus appeared to them. (Luke 24:1-33)
- Twice they were gathered in Jerusalem in the upper room when Jesus appeared. (Mark 16:14 & John 20:24-28)
- We know some of them had gone back to fishing. Jesus appeared to them on the banks of the Sea. (John 21:1-14)

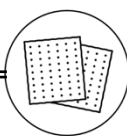
The scriptures seem to point to the fact that the disciples have gone on with their lives; wherever they went though, whatever activity they took up, Jesus kept revealing himself to them, strengthening their faith, opening their eyes, and giving them new understanding of himself and of the scriptures. They were being prepared. Prepared to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and prepared to preach the gospel with great boldness, accompanied by many signs and wonders.

You are invited to intentionally mark off these days counting down to Pentecost. Cooperate with what Holy Spirit is showing and speaking to you. Embrace this season as days of holy preparation and ask Holy Spirit to fill you with fresh grace to be an empowered witness right where you are. We know what happened to the disciples after this season of teaching, preparation and consecration. What is He longing to give us?

Take some time to respond in prayer to the Lord.

19 April 2025

Unleavened Bread day 6
44 days until Pentecost



Mark 11:15-17

"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day"
p.19-20, by Pete Scazzero

Jesus' intense anger and overturning of the tables in the temple courts ought to make us gasp. He knows that if we don't get to God, invaluable treasures will be lost or obscured. We lose the space where we experience God's unfailing love and amazing forgiveness. We lose an eternal perspective on what is important and what is not. We lose compassion. We gain the world but lose our souls (Mark 8:36-36).

Be Free For God by Jean Danielou

"I have a need

Of such clearance

As the Savior effected in the temple of Jerusalem

A riddance of clutter

Of what is secondary

That blocks the way

To the all-important central emptiness

Which is filled

With the presence of God alone."

Meditate:

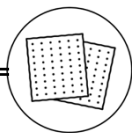
How would you describe "what is secondary" in your life, the thing that might be "blocking the way" to experiencing God?

Prayer:

Lord, help me to see how much I lose when I lose you. My perspective on my life and all of life gets distorted when I don't make space for you, obscuring your love for me. Your love is better than life, and truly I long for more tastes of that love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

20 April 2025

Unleavened Bread day 7
43 days until Pentecost



1 John 2:15-17

"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day"
p.23-24, by Pete Scazzero

At the end of the third century in the deserts of Egypt, an extraordinary phenomenon occurred. Christian men and women began to flee the cities and villages to seek God in the desert. They discerned how easy it was to lose one's soul in the entanglements and manipulations found in society, so they pursued God in a radical way by moving to the desert. They became known as the "Desert Fathers".

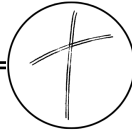
"Society... was regarded by them as a shipwreck from which each single individual man had to swim for his life.... These were men who believed that to let oneself drift along, passively accepting the tenets and values of what they knew as society, was purely and simply a disaster.... They knew they were helpless to do any good for others as long as they floundered about in the wreckage. But once they got a foothold on solid ground, things were different. Then they had not only the power but even the obligation to pull the whole world to safety after them." Thomas Merton

Meditate:

How do you hear the words of the apostle John today: "Do not love the world or anything in the world" (1 John 2:15)?

Prayer:

Lord, in order to be with you, I need you to show me how to "create a desert" in the midst of my full, active life. Cleanse me from the pressures, illusions, and pretences that confront me today so that my life may serve as a gift to those around me.



Matthew 16:21-23

"Emotionally Healthy Spirituality Day by Day"
p.26-27, by Pete Scazzero

The apostle Peter had a passionate heart for Jesus, but he was also rash, proud, immature, and inconsistent. His impulsiveness and stubbornness are evident throughout the gospels. Yet Jesus patiently led Peter to a crucifixion of his self-will, in order that he might experience genuine resurrection life and power.

"When I am still, compulsion (that busyness that Hilary of Tours called "a blasphemous anxiety to do God's work for him") gives way to compunction (being pricked or punctured). That is, God can break through the many layers with which I protect myself, so that I can hear his Word and be poised to listen....

In perpetual motion I can mistake the flow of my adrenaline for the moving of the Holy Spirit; I can live in the illusion that I am ultimately in control of my destiny and my daily affairs....

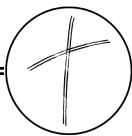
French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal observed that most of our human problems come because we don't know how to sit still in our room for an hour." Leighton Ford

Meditate:

What might be one way your busyness blocks you from listening and communing intimately with the living God?

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me for running my life without you today. I offer my anxieties to you now – as best I can. Help me to be still, to surrender to your will, and to rest in your loving arms. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.



John 20:24-29; 2 Corinthians 5:4-10

Written by Toby Janicki, First Fruits of Zion

Is Seeing believing?

The period of the Counting of the Omer is loaded with celebrations and the anniversaries of many important biblical events.

According to biblical reckoning the "Doubting Thomas" episode took place on the ninth day of the Omer. We read in John 20:26 that the event took place "eight days later," which is eight days after the first resurrection appearance on the first day of the Omer. This then brings us to the ninth day of the Omer.

John tells us of Thomas' doubt that Yeshua had actually resurrected from the grave and that the other disciples had an encounter with him:

So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." (John 20:25)

Thomas did not buy it. Unless he saw the Master with his own eyes he just wouldn't believe. He wanted concrete proof. He wanted to experience it firsthand. Thomas sounds a lot like people today. What's funny is that the very events going on in the Torah at this same time over a thousand years earlier prove that seeing is not always believing. The Israelites had experienced God's mighty hand in the ten plagues in Egypt and seen how he led them out from under Pharaoh's tight grip. Yet, just a few days later as they approached the Red Sea and saw the Egyptian army closing in they cried out:

Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: "Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians"? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness. (Exodus 14:11-12)

Then just a short time after God performed another miracle at the Red Sea, where the sea parted, Israel crossed through and then the sea came back wiping out the Egyptian army, Israel complained again:

Therefore the people quarrelled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" (Exodus 17:2-3)

Based upon this I would argue that seeing is not believing, at least not long-term. While experiencing a miracle from God or the mighty power of his hand can initially instil in us faith and belief, it is not always long-lasting. When trials pop up again, we, like the Israelites, often forget what God has done in the past and enter into a panic. Instead, true faith that lasts is not sustained by experiencing signs and wonders but on working out our faith "with fear and trembling"

(Philippians 2:12). That's what this period of counting the Omer is all about and this is the lesson that the Master taught to Thomas:

Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:26-29)

The Master spoke to Thomas but his words reverberate to us:
"Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

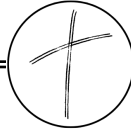
We must remain vigilant in our faith and in our walk as disciples of Yeshua. Even when we don't see his hand actively working, even during periods when we feel like the heavens are shut up, we must believe and have faith that he is still there. Just as he was there all along for the Israelites in the wilderness and for Thomas and his doubts, he will be there for us. This Omer period is the perfect time to work out our faith and improve our walk of trust as disciples of Yeshua. And perhaps if we listen closely enough we can hear the Master's words echoing to us: "Do not doubt but believe."

Meditate:

Ask Holy Spirit to show you the areas of your life where you have decided you can't or won't trust Jesus. What lies have been exalted in your mind above the knowledge of God?

Prayer:

Confess your unbelief to the Lord. Ask for forgiveness and cleansing. Repent. Ask Holy Spirit to fill you with grace to walk by faith and not by sight.



Exodus 19

*"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.11-12 by Carmen Joy Imes*

Leaving Egypt – Deliverance As Grace

Many Christians assume that in the Old Testament era the Israelites had to earn salvation by following the Sinai law, while Jesus did away with that notion, making salvation available for free. This is a terribly unfortunate caricature of the Old Testament, but it is easily resolved by taking a closer look at the story.

Israel arrives at Sinai in chapter 19 of Exodus. That's where Yahweh will give them the law. However, God's elaborate deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt takes place in chapters 3–14. If the law were a prerequisite for salvation, then we would expect to see Moses in Egypt making a public service announcement: 'Hey, everyone—Good news! Yahweh plans to set you free from slavery to Pharaoh. There's just one catch. You're gonna have to agree to live by this set of rules. If you just sign on the dotted line saying that you agree to these conditions, Yahweh will spring into action. Who's in?'

Of course, this is not what happens. Instead, God appears to Moses in the wilderness, reveals his personal name, Yahweh, and gives Moses this message for those living under oppression in Egypt:

'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.' (Exodus 3:16-17)

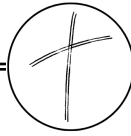
Yahweh delivers them *"with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment"* (Exodus 6:6) without first checking their homes for idols or performing an audit of their morality. His deliverance has to do with his character and his promise to their ancestor, Abraham, rather than with their righteousness. The only requirement is for each family to eat a lamb together and spread its blood on their door frame as a sign for God to protect them from the destroying angel. Whatever Sinai represents, it cannot be a prerequisite for salvation. Israel has already been delivered when they arrive.

Meditate:

What does God's journey with Israel reveal about his character? What lies does it confront?

Prayer:

Write or speak out loud a prayer of confession, asking the Lord to forgive you for holding on to thoughts that are not worthy of Him. Finish by speaking out praise and thanksgiving.



Deuteronomy 8

*"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.16-18 by Carmen Joy Imes*

Middle Of Nowhere: A Place Of Becoming

In spite of the similarities before and after Sinai, a great transformation has taken place. The Hebrews fled Egypt as a mixed multitude, refugees and former slaves seeking a better life. They leave Sinai as a well-organized army, registered and marching tribe by tribe. But change wasn't easy. Big questions plagued the first part of their journey. Are we safe? Where are we going? What's on the menu? Who's in charge? What sort of god is Yahweh? And what does Yahweh expect of us?

We can relate. It's like being lost on a hike. You know where you want to end up, but you can't figure out how to get there because you don't know which direction you're facing. Or maybe you've felt lost in life, stuck in between where you've been and where you're going. You know what you're cut out to do, but you can't get the traction you need to get there. There's a word to describe this state: liminality. It's from the Latin word *limen*, which means "threshold."

Imagine yourself standing in the doorway, neither in nor out of a room. That's liminal space. An airport, for example, is a liminal space. Nobody lives there. We're all passing through on our way to somewhere else. Sociologically speaking, a liminal place is a transitional space where a person lacks social status and is reduced to dependence on others. For example, a wedding ceremony sets the bride and groom apart and lingers in liminal space. During the ceremony the couple is neither married nor unmarried. They wear new, symbolic clothes and explore other symbols of their new life together (rings, candles, vows, kiss). The congregation witnesses their change of status as the minister pronounces them "husband and wife" and welcomes them to re-join the community with a new identity.

When a woman becomes pregnant, she enters liminality. She is officially on the threshold of motherhood, and yet she has not yet experienced most of its aspects—night time feedings, diapering, discipline, pushing a stroller, singing the ABCs. Liminality is usually temporary, but it can be prolonged.

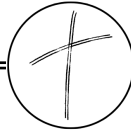
For Israel, the wilderness journey from Egypt to Canaan is liminal space. Far more than just a place to pass through, *it is the workshop of Israel's becoming*. The wilderness is the temporary destination that makes them who they are. Liminal places always do this. They change us.

The Israelites have been liberated from slavery in Egypt, but they have not yet arrived at their final destination. Everything they know about who they are, how to survive, and what is expected of them is stripped away on that fateful night when they make their escape, leaving them vulnerable and uncertain. They don't know how to live under these new arrangements. But God is not in a hurry to lead them out of liminal space and into the land he promised to give them. *They're not ready yet.*

Meditate:

Can you relate to Israel's 'liminal' experience? What threshold are you standing on? How do you need to posture your heart in this season? How can you express that on a daily basis?

Take some time to respond in prayer to the Lord.



Exodus 13:17-14:31

"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.19-22 by Carmen Joy Imes

Are We Safe? Finding Security

We may be long centuries removed from Israel's wilderness wanderings, but we share many of the same basic human instincts. Like the Israelites, we want to know if we can close our eyes at night and fall asleep in safety. Uncertainty breeds anxiety. As I read the wilderness narratives with students, the question I'm asked more than any other is this: "How can the Israelites so quickly forget God's power to deliver them?" The people who've seen ten dramatic plagues on Egypt, whose own households were spared devastation, whose neighbors have willingly given them silver and gold and clothes for their journey, who've heard Pharaoh's command to "Get out!"—these are the same people who quickly change their tune as Pharaoh chases them in hot pursuit.

The Hebrews are terrified. They cry out: Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians?' It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert! (Exodus 14:11-12)

A wonderful promise becomes much harder to believe when we are tired and hungry, or when we can't imagine how things will play out. Abraham Maslow claimed as much in his 1943 essay, which popularized a hierarchy of needs. He posited that certain needs are fundamental, such as physiological needs (food, water, air, sleep) and the need for safety. Without these in place, people are less motivated to focus on higher-level needs, such as love, esteem, and self-actualization.

Contrary to Maslow's assumption, we do not become who we are meant to be by seeking to fulfill every felt need. Still, his overall idea is helpful—without fulfillment of basic needs such as food, water, and a safe place to live, people will very quickly lose interest in promises relating to higher-order thinking about values or beliefs or opportunities.

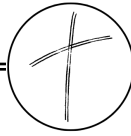
Remember when Moses delivered God's great promise of deliverance to the Hebrews in Egypt? "Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and harsh labour" (Exodus 6:9). The promise was glorious, but they weren't buying it. Hunger, thirst, and fear are powerful masters (These days, so is the lack of internet access). Yahweh knows this. Remarkably, he does not chide the Israelites when they complain or panic as they travel toward Sinai. He simply provides for their needs. *He utilizes this trek to demonstrate to them his trustworthiness.*

Trust is not automatic, and God does not expect it to be. He patiently works on Israel's behalf until they can see that he is worthy of their confidence. God's guidance and protection of the Israelites cultivate their trust in him and in Moses (see Exodus 14:31). The wilderness is his classroom. He has work to do in the Israelites that can only be done in a state of dislocation, in liminal space.

Meditate:

Write a list of the ways God has been faithful to you in the past year. How has he been patient with you? What ways has he grown you in trust?

Take some time to respond in prayer to the Lord.



Exodus 15:22-16:31

*"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.22-23 by Carmen Joy Imes*

What's On The Menu? Learning To Trust

The Israelites haven't travelled far—three days, in fact—when they become desperate for water (Exodus 15:22). I think Maslow would agree that it doesn't matter how dramatic last week's breakthrough was when your throat is parched today. And so they begin to grumble against Moses. The right response would have been to pray and ask God for help. This is what Moses does, and God provides.

The incident is even more striking when read against the plague narratives. In Egypt, the outcome of the first plague, when the Nile turns to blood, is "water they cannot drink" (Exodus 7:24)—a judgment against Egypt. When the Hebrews arrive at Marah, they find "water they cannot drink," but Yahweh shows Moses how to transform it from bitter to sweet (Exodus 15:23-25)—a blessing for his people.

Six weeks later, they run out of food. Despondency sets in. "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death" (Exodus 16:3).

Again, God's response is full of mercy. He announces his plan to provide bread from heaven. In Egypt, God had "rained hail" (Exodus 9:18, 23), but here he "rains bread" (Exodus 16:4). In Egypt, locusts "came up" and "covered" the ground, devouring all the produce (Exodus 10:14-15), but now God provides meat for the people to eat in the form of quail that "comes up" and "covers" the ground (Exodus 16:13).

The bread God provides is not just any bread, however. It doubles as a "test to see whether they will follow his instructions" (Exodus 16:4). Rather than filling their pantries to bank against future famine (this is a road trip, after all!), God invites them into an exercise of daily trust. Each morning, he provides a day's worth of food, as much as each one needs. In this way, they learn how to depend on him daily. Those who disregard his instructions find maggots the next morning in the extra food they've collected.

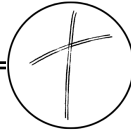
On the sixth day of every week, God provides twice as much. In this way, Israel also learns the rhythm of Sabbath observance—six days of work, one day of rest, repeat. Like a parent with a toddler, patiently teaching obedience and reward, Yahweh trains an entire nation. His provision of food demonstrates his glory and cultivates habits of obedience and trust for forty years straight! Their need in the wilderness supplies the opportunity for a greater display of Yahweh's character. God has things to teach that can only be learned in a state of dislocation. On the way to Sinai, the Hebrews find out what sort of God he is and how to live in dependence on him.

Meditate:

God wants you to know Him as Jehovah Jireh, your provider. Does your life express trust in His provision or do your habits reflect trust in your own ability to provide?

Prayer:

Ask Holy Spirit to search your heart. Confess any mindsets or habits that are robbing you from experiencing the trustworthy faithfulness of God. Ask the Lord to forgive and cleanse you. Repent. Ask Holy Spirit to show you what repentance looks like and fill you with power to walk it out.

**Exodus 17:1-7**

*"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.24-25 by Carmen Joy Imes*

Who's In Charge? Appointing Leaders

Another question that rises to the surface in liminal places is "Who's in charge?" Anyone who has tried to do a group project for school can relate. Nothing gets done until somebody takes the lead. A similar leadership vacuum results whenever an elementary school teacher is absent and requires a substitute. The children face a measure of uncertainty about how the day will go. What is this substitute like? What will be expected of me? Will he be a harsh taskmaster or will he be funny and kind? Inevitably, a student or two steps into the vacuum and asserts their own authority, attempting to control the substitute.

Ultimately Yahweh calls the shots. It is he who appointed Moses to a leadership role. He inevitably bears the brunt of Israel's complaints. But he recognizes that their protest is actually resentment against God himself, merely deflected toward him (Exodus 16:8). Still, it's not easy being the target of their grumbling. Moses reaches a breaking point at Rephidim, where the Israelites complain again about thirst: "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me!" (Exodus 17:4).

On this occasion, God answers the people's prayer directly through the hand of Moses, telling him to strike the rock at Horeb. Water flows in the sight of the elders. The same staff used to strike the Nile, making Egypt's water unfit to drink, now supplies liquid grace for the Israelites. Up next is the battle against the Amalekites, for which Moses and Joshua both receive credit. Joshua fights the battle on the ground, but he only prevails as long as Moses' hands are raised on the mountain (Exodus 17).

Both of these incidents publicly underscore Moses' God-given authority to lead. Moses consistently shoulders the burden of responsibility for the people, bringing their requests to Yahweh and announcing his response. When his father-in-law, Jethro, stops by for a visit, he is alarmed that Moses serves as judge for the people from morning until night (Exodus 18). They come to him whenever they want to know God's will.

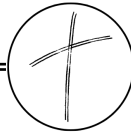
Jethro advises Moses to delegate the bulk of these responsibilities to trained officials, reserving his energy for the most difficult cases. With divine approval for Moses' leadership and a structural hierarchy in place, the people's basic question "Who's in charge?" is answered.

Moses' authority is vindicated by God and supported by a network of leaders serving under him. The resulting clarity provides security for the people, helping them as they learn to trust God and his appointed leaders.

Meditate:

Are there areas of your life where you are refusing to submit to God's appointed leaders? Ask Holy Spirit to search your heart and highlight resentment and rebellion towards the authorities in your life. How is it robbing you of the life and blessing God wants you to receive?

Take some time to respond in prayer to the Lord.



Exodus 3:1-4:17

*"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.26-28 by Carmen Joy Imes*

A Divine Appointment

After three months of walking through the wilderness and following the cloud, the Israelites arrive at Sinai, sweaty, dirty, and tired (Exodus 19:1). I wonder if the people had any idea what was in store for them. Had Moses told them about the bush-in-flames event? Had he told them about the audacious promise God had made to him on these very slopes?

Let's recap the story. Moses was a Hebrew, but he had grown up in the royal palace in Egypt, thanks to a fortunate series of events in which the household that was trying to kill Hebrew babies rescued him instead. However, when Moses was grown, he had an altercation with an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew. Moses killed the man, hid him in the sand, and immediately became "Pharaoh's Most Wanted." He fled for his life, crossed the Sinai Peninsula, joined a Midianite family, and became a shepherd. He stayed away from Egypt for forty long years. One day, while Moses was herding sheep in an area known as Horeb, God showed up as fiery flames from within a bush that did not burn up. Moses was surprised, intrigued. He approached the bush, and Yahweh called Moses by name.

When God announced that he's the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob it would've instantly brought to mind the promises God made to Abraham and reaffirmed to his descendants—promises that had not yet come true. The Hebrews were not out-of-sight, out-of-mind in Egypt. God was still at work bringing his promises of land, descendants, and blessing to fruition. It was time to announce His plan of deliverance. Not only did God show up to meet Moses, He also asked Moses to step up and take responsibility. Moses was God's designated special agent for this rescue operation. But Moses was not buying it. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

After forty years as a fugitive, he thought God was making a mistake. Yahweh's response sidestepped the question. "I will be with you," he said, teaching him an important lesson. It doesn't matter who Moses is. It matters only that God is with him. At that moment, in that sacred encounter, God gives the awestruck shepherd a promise: "This will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain" (Exodus 3:12). And that's not all. At the burning bush, God also revealed his personal name to Moses. This is a big deal.

At Sinai, everything changes. At Sinai, the Hebrews discover who they are and, more importantly, whose they are. Before he leaves Sinai, the place of divine encounter, to return to Egypt, Moses unveils his fears in God's presence: What if they ask me questions? What if they don't believe me? I'm horrible with words. I'd really rather you send somebody else (Read Exodus 3:13; 4:1, 10, 13).

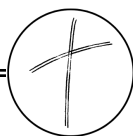
But God has a further surprise in store for him. He works through Moses' staff to validate Moses' leadership, giving a dramatic demonstration of his power. And Yahweh had already designated Aaron as Moses' assistant: "He is already on his way to meet you" (Exodus 4:14).

Moses must have treasured this encounter during the difficult months ahead—leaving his wife’s family, returning to Egypt, trying to rally the Hebrew slaves, and confronting Pharaoh. All the while did he keep thinking about that mountain and Yahweh’s promise to bring them all to Sinai? And the people—did they know this is where they were headed? Do they realize they’ll camp here almost a full year? I suspect that the Hebrews have Canaan on their minds and hope to get there as soon as possible. If so, they are in for a big surprise. On this divine road trip, the detours are essential. The people are not yet ready for Canaan.

Meditate:

What can you learn about God’s leadership from today’s reading?

Take some time to respond in prayer to the Lord.



Exodus 19:3-6

"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"

p.29-31 by Carmen Joy Imes

Profile Update

Words are powerful. Whether you like where you are in life or not, there's a very good chance that you can think back and remember a time when someone said something about you that stuck.

"You're really good at that." Or, on the other hand, "Don't quit your day job."

I remember a particularly dark time in my doctoral studies. Severe interpersonal challenges sapped me of my strength. Just when I was ready to limp across the finish line, my advisors lovingly pulled me aside and told me that I had quite a bit more work to do. I was crushed. It was during those difficult days that a senior faculty member met me for lunch. She told me, "Carmen, I have every confidence that you will graduate. You will find a great job and you will thrive." Those words meant the world to me. I clung to them for the next eighteen months as I labored to finish my research and writing. And she was right. I did finish, and I did find a job, and I am thriving. But if she had said, "Carmen, jobs are very scarce. You should think about heading in a new direction," I might have walked away.

Words are powerful. God's first message at Sinai lays the groundwork for all the rest of his instructions. These words set a new trajectory for the nation of Israel. If we miss it, we'll likely mischaracterize everything else. Moses heads up the mountain to meet with Yahweh. God gets right to the point: This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Exodus 19:3-6)

Grace in Exodus? Absolutely. When Yahweh responded to the cries of the Israelites in Egypt, he didn't blame them for their predicament. He didn't tell them they were naive or spineless or gullible. He said they were a treasure set apart for a special purpose. We miss the grace because we too often see the Ten Commandments without the glorious context of deliverance. We miss the grace because we read the judgment stories in isolation, without the long litany of second chances.

When we read the laws on their own, without the deliverance, we come out with a skewed picture of the Old Testament God. Israel didn't see Yahweh like that. Exodus 19:3-6 is a prime example of grace. In this single passage, four major grace notes are sounded:

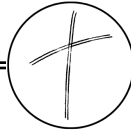
- Yahweh's decisive military victory over Israel's oppressor: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt." God triumphed over Egypt to set his people free.

- Yahweh's loving care for Israel in the wilderness: "I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself." He carried them, keeping them safe.
- Yahweh's invitation to covenant faithfulness: "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant." God is no harsh taskmaster. He drew Israel to himself and offered his commitment to bless them.
- Yahweh's selection of Israel as his ambassador, set apart from other nations for special service: "Out of all nations you will be my treasured possession."

Meditate:

Ponder the 4 lessons of grace in Exodus 19:3-6. Write/share your own history of God's grace by highlighting 4 ways God has demonstrated His grace to you. Ask God to forgive you for so quickly forgetting. Ask for His forgiveness for complaining rather than remembering and giving thanks.

Take some time to pray a prayer of gratitude and thanksgiving.



Psalm 119:1-24

"Bearing God's Name – Why Sinai Still Matters"
p.32-36 by Carmen Joy Imes

Something To Celebrate

Now we've come to the part that most of us would like to skip over. Dare I say it? The law. After Exodus 19, a single exciting chapter with lightning, thunder, glory, and verses inspiring enough to paint on the wall, we enter the weeds—twenty chapters of detailed instructions about what's allowed and what's not, how to build a tabernacle, and how to dress the high priest. A few stories interrupt this sober litany, for instance, the golden calf, but these are chapters that most of us would be quite content to skip. However, as I've already noted, Moses' attitude toward these lists of instructions is strikingly positive. For him, law is a gift to be received gladly. And Moses is not alone in this sentiment.

In fact, the longest chapter in the whole Bible, Psalm 119, is an extended celebration of the law as a gift. Check out this unbridled enthusiasm: Joyful are those who observe his rules and seek him with all their heart (v. 2). I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches (v. 14). I will walk in freedom, for I have devoted myself to your commandments (v. 45). How I delight in your commands! How I love them! (v. 47). Your laws are my treasure; they are my heart's delight (v. 111). As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in your commands (v. 143).

Psalm 119 is an acrostic poem. Each stanza is connected to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and every verse of each stanza begins with the same letter. Somebody spent a lot of time crafting this poetic celebration of the law. The poet held it in high esteem. He thought it was the best thing since manna. But why? Why would the people of Israel consider these rules a treasure? What's the big deal?

To understand their enthusiasm, we need to walk a mile in their sandals. The Israelites lived in a time when people were desperate to know what the gods were saying. Since the gods didn't normally speak audibly as you and I do, priests were trained to read the signs they left in the natural world. Sometimes they manufactured situations in which the gods could reveal things to them, such as the elaborate rituals in which they dropped oil or flour into water and interpreted the results. They sacrificed animals and studied their livers or intestines (yes, their bloody guts) for clues about what the gods were thinking or what they would do next. They watched for strange births or newborn animals with defects. They studied the stars. They contacted the dead, doing whatever it took to forecast the future or discern the will of the gods. An answer was not guaranteed.

Not so with Israel. God took the initiative. He chose them, rescued them, established them as his people, and then told them exactly what he expected. God spoke. No more guesswork. No wondering what would make him happy or angry. He made it all clear up front. How freeing! Why did people breathe a sigh of relief over twenty long and boring chapters of laws at Sinai?

God did not say to them, "Do all these things and I will save you from slavery." He saved them first, and then gave them the gift that goes with salvation, instructions on how to live as free men and women. Moses and the psalmist both realized that they were better off for it. They realized

that true freedom requires clearly communicated boundaries. They recognized the grace of God's law. It was a gift!

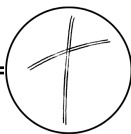
Imagine that your community is planning to build a new playground with easy public access, right beside a busy intersection. Wouldn't it be odd if someone argued that children would have more fun on this playground if there weren't any fences to cramp their style?

A playground with no fences isn't really freedom; it's an accident waiting to happen. Israel's laws are the fences within which life can flourish. Israel's laws are the fences within which life can flourish. They make possible a distinctive way of life so that other nations can see what Yahweh is like and what he expects. The law was never the means by which Israel earned God's favor. The Israelites were saved the same way we are—by grace through faith. But their obedience expressed their covenant commitment, or allegiance, to Yahweh. And it kept them in a position to experience the benefits of the covenant relationship. The covenant promised wonderful blessings for the Israelites—a fruitful land, many descendants, and the opportunity to represent Yahweh to the nations and be a conduit of his blessings.

This law is a gift. It's good news. Yahweh speaks. And he sets up boundaries so that his people can experience the joy of living in freedom.

Prayer:

Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for God's law, his commands and the wisdom in His teachings. Ask God to forgive you where you have/are rebelling against God's commands, preferring your own ideas or the wisdom of this age rather than what God's word says is good and right.



Revelation 1

Written by Julie Hollett

Preparation Of God's People

If Passover is about deliverance, counting the Omer is about a journey of preparation. Preparation for what? During the 50 day trek from Passover (Egypt) to Pentecost (Mt. Sinai), a number of significant events occurred for Israel. The struggles they encountered were preparing them to receive God's Law at Mt Sinai. The Law showed God's people the pathway to lawful living.

The preparation of the people of God is an important theme that is also found in John's letter to the 7 churches of Asia. The first four chapters of Revelation confirms God's heart to prepare his people for events to come. The 7 churches were undergoing, or were about to undergo real, and severe trials. The words from Jesus, written down by John, would encourage these believers to stand firm and to fix their gaze on Jesus and His promise of eternal rewards.

After first explaining how he came to have this vision (ch.1), John begins to address the 7 churches with a powerful message of encouragement. He proclaims the victory of Jesus Christ (v.5) and the privileged position of believers as kings and priests to God. He reminds them from the writings of Israel's prophets, that the tribes of the earth will one day mourn, and that nations will finally turn to the Lord at his coming (Zech. 14, Isa. 45:22-25). He declares the words of God to them, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty! (v.7,8)

John's description of Jesus Christ is the climax of chapter 1. He turns to see the voice that was speaking to him and sees a vision of the risen, glorified Christ who now lives in heaven (Revelation 1:8-20). It is a vision of stunning beauty; a vision that speaks of everlasting power and strength and the righteousness, purity, faithfulness, and wisdom of our Lord. It shows that Jesus Christ is still able to be present among his people on earth because he is seen walking among the 7 lampstands, which represent the 7 churches.

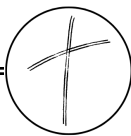
John's revelation goes on (ch. 6 onwards) to speak of a yet future time of tribulation coming to the whole earth. In the same way that Jesus' words to the 7 churches in Asia prepared them for their time of suffering, his words of encouragement, rebuke and comfort also strengthen us today. Jesus Christ will be faithful to prepare us for the season preceding His triumphant return as King. It will involve trials, suffering, purifying and strengthening. Jesus will return to a church that has 'made herself ready' (Rev. 19:7). He will present to himself a 'glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. She will be holy and without fault.' Ephesians 5:26,27.

Meditate:

How is the Holy Spirit at work in you/your family to strengthen your faith, enabling you to persevere?

Prayer:

Pray a prayer expressing your thanks to the Lord for His faithfulness to transform and to keep you through every storm and trial. Use Colossians 1:9-12 to help you pray.



**Revelation 2:1-7;
Zechariah 14**

*Adapted from 'Passover - The Key That Unlocks
the Book of Revelation' by Dan Juster*

The Letters to the Seven Churches

The seven churches of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) were churches for which John was responsible as an apostle, according to early Church fathers such as Papias. John is writing to real churches that are undergoing or will soon undergo a real trial.

The seven letters precede the prophecies of Revelation, because the message to the Churches emphasises the need to be a holy and zealous people if we are to stand firm in the spiritual warfare of the Last Days. If the body of Christ heeds the warnings of these letters and learns to stand firm in the grace of God, Jesus will be faithful to make us a glorious, victorious bride, without spot or wrinkle.

The Church of Ephesus

The first church addressed in Revelation 2:1–7 is the church of Ephesus. Although commended for testing apostles, showing patience and perseverance, and labouring for the Lord, the church is severely warned for having left her first love. She is called to repent so as to not lose her lampstand (the power of witness through the Spirit).

This Church is also commended for rejecting the Nicolaitans, which some scholars believe combined Gnostic heresies with their biblical faith. (Gnostics were heretics who taught that secret knowledge and mysteries were the means of salvation.) From this letter we can learn that the primary faith challenge for every believer is to maintain a fervent love for the Lord. All acceptable works flow from this love, which is crucial preparation for the battle to come and every trial in life. This alone enables the maintaining of righteous motives. Meditating on what the Lord has done and promised stirs this love.

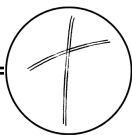
A constant infusion of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18) also maintains this love. God commanded the sons of Israel to love him with all their heart, soul, and strength (Deut. 6:5); *the New Covenant promises the ability to fulfill the command*. Radical love for God and his Son is the key preparation for the Last Days. The reward for overcoming is eating from the tree of life in God's paradise.

Meditate:

In Revelation 2:5 Jesus gives three specific commands to the church at Ephesus. Remember, Repent, Repeat (do the things you did at first). Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you as you ask Him what things He wants you to remember, what things require repentance (turning away from) and what things He is commanding you to return to doing. Write them down.

Prayer:

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with His power to walk in repentance, so that you can love him with your whole heart, more and more every day.



Revelation 2:8-11; Revelation 6

Written by Julie Hollett

The Letters to the Seven Churches

The Church of Smyrna

Christians in developed countries like Australia often don't think a lot about being persecuted for their faith, but there are churches in the world where oppression is a daily reality.

Revelation 2:8–11 describes the persecuted, yet rich, Church of Smyrna:

"I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich!" v9

Some of this persecution came from Jewish impostors, that is, those who weren't born Jewish but took on Jewish practices and persecuted the believers who did not; or those from the Jewish leadership who pressured the believers with false doctrine, accusations, and attempts to woo believers away from the truth. Smyrna's tribulation will last ten days (a number that symbolizes completion).

Two of the 7 churches received no rebuke from Jesus Christ. Smyrna was one of them. The upward call is for all believers to be faithful and fearless.

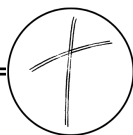
David Jeremiah says this: *"It is from faith that faithfulness springs. If you trust in Christ, you will show yourself to be trustworthy. If you rely on Christ, you will turn out to be reliable. If you depend on Christ, you will be dependable. If you have faith in Christ, you will be faithful. So, the way to lose fear is to gain faith. If you want to be fearless, be faithful; faithful to the Word, faithful to the Lord and faithful to all He has called you to do. And in your faithfulness to Him your faith is strengthened, and in your faith your faithfulness is strengthened. Then you can go through life and face the challenges that come without fear because, where fear used to live, faith has moved in and taken over the whole house."*

Fearlessness is a product of fervent love and faith in God, which is fully present even during a severe trial. This is a major step of preparation for all believers living at the end of the age. This kind of faith is built through a life that has cultivated the discipline of meditating on God's promises and seeing them established in their life as a reflection of God's character. The reward for faithfulness even unto death is the crown of life - resurrection and reigning with Jesus Christ our King and Messiah!

Prayer:

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to make you faithful as Jesus is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23 'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.'



Revelation 2:12-17

Written by Julie Hollett

The Letters to the Seven Churches

The Church in Pergamum - The Compromising Church

Pergamum was known as the City of 'Satan's Throne'. All that remains of the ancient city of Pergamum today is ruins. In its heyday, the most important altar for worship in the city was the Great Altar of Zeus.

Wayne and I visited the ruins of Pergamum in 2012 and were amazed to see the location where the altar, commonly known as 'Satan's Throne', originally stood. It was built on a high, mountainous plateau which overlooks the entire region. It was positioned close to the edge of the plateau. It would've been visible from a great distance and effectively presided over the City. It highlights how the worship of false gods dominated the culture of Pergamum.

In 1878 a German engineer Carl Humann, started to dismantle the Altar of Zeus from the since long abandoned city of Pergamum and eventually took it to Berlin. The altar was stored until a new museum in Berlin was built. Although the museum began to be built in 1910, due to war and economic depression in Germany, it wasn't opened for visitors until 1930. The Great Altar of Zeus (the throne of Satan), went on display in Berlin's Pergamon Museum in 1930 together with a reconstruction of the Ishtar Gate of ancient Babylon. The Ishtar Gate is also known as the gates of hell.

Is it just a terrible coincidence that three years after the grand opening of the museum, Germany began to experience hell on earth when Adolf Hitler became the Chancellor of Germany and soon afterwards it's dictator and Führer?

At the time when this letter was written, the Church in Pergamum, like Smyrna, had also experienced persecution. Although the City had a long history steeped in paganism and idolatry, the believers in Pergamum did not deny Jesus even when they lost a faithful believer, Antipas. Some historians believe that the Altar of Zeus was implemented in the martyrdom of Antipas. The church demonstrated conviction and courage and yet, idolatry had seeped into its congregation. They had yoked the gospel together with paganism and Jesus rebuked them strongly for this: "Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against the promoters of Balaam and the Nicolaitans with the sword of My mouth." v.16

Wherever compromise seeks a foothold in our lives or the lives of others, we need to be vigilant, sober and on guard. We need to be those *who speak the truth to one another in love* (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 4:15).

Our goal in confronting sin is never condemnation but reconciliation. A day is coming when Jesus Christ himself will judge every person. While there is still time, we have a responsibility to encourage each other and to lead people to the cross of Christ where there is forgiveness of sin and life eternal. This is what Paul calls 'the ministry of reconciliation' (2 Corinthians 5:18)

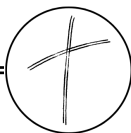
Meditate:

The church is called to repent or be subject to the Lord's severe judgment. Those who overcome are promised hidden manna (the treasures of the Word of God) and a white stone with a new name (Revelation 2:17).

Prayer:

Psalm 139:23,24

Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any way in me that is offensive to you and lead me in the way everlasting.



Revelation 2:18-29

Written by Julie Hollett

*The Letters to the Seven Churches***The Church in Thyatira**

In the opening pages of Revelation, the Lord introduces Himself as heaven's holy warrior (1:12–20) who will prepare His people to overcome their enemies (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), by exhorting them to hear what the Spirit has to say in the letters He writes to seven churches. Although He writes each letter to a particular church, Jesus insists that each letter be heard by all (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22), effectively making each one an "open letter" for all believers to read.

Jesus' message to the Christians at Thyatira is a warning that they are in grave spiritual danger. How can this be? This church, unlike the one at Ephesus, has not lost its first love (2:4–5) but has grown in love and faith with service and endurance (2:19). Surely they are secure! However, alongside these virtues, a vice cohabits. In other words, the risk is not coming from outside the church. Just as it was at Laodicea, persecution by imperial Rome poses no threat to Thyatira's wellbeing. Instead, the danger is coming from within. The church is tolerating the presence of a false prophetess (the woman Jezebel) and her disciples (2:20). The influence of this bad tree and its bad fruit is compromising Thyatira's professed betrothal to Christ. Paul writes a similar warning to the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:2,3):

'I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ.'

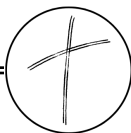
Some knowledge of the background of Thyatira is helpful. Although by worldly standards Thyatira was the least known of Revelation's seven cities, it was distinctive for the large number of trade guilds (related especially to textiles and armour) that prospered there. The influence of these unions on civic life was considerable. Roughly every month they sponsored common meals for their members, feasts that involved worship of the Roman emperor with local patron deities and frequently, sexual immorality. To not involve yourself in these pagan practices meant you were significantly disadvantaged if you wanted to get ahead in business and society. Jezebel was a 'prophetess' in the church of Thyatira who was leading believers astray with her teachings. She approved of sexual immorality and eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. Her message was tempting, and she had attracted supporters. It's sobering to read Revelation 17 at this point.

To follow Jezebel was to share earthly Babylon's identity; to renounce her was to share heavenly Jerusalem's identity. Jesus goes further in his condemnation. Those he identifies as the unrepentant prophetess *and her children* He will punish with suffering and death in this age (v. 22,23); those He identifies as His repentant and steadfast people (v. 24,25) He will reward with a share of royal authority to crush their enemies at the end of this age (vv. 26–28). The lesson for Thyatira and for us is plain: to share a mother's identity is to share her destiny.

Do we have ears to hear Christ's message to Thyatira? What has the lure of economic security led us to tolerate?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, search my heart. Forgive me and deliver me from any idols that have captivated my heart and for the compromise that goes with it. Show me where I have placed worldly goals and security above trust in you. I turn from digging my own wells, broken wells that cannot hold water. You are my source of living water and my hope eternal. Cleanse me today, dear Lord.



Revelation 3:1-6

Written by Julie Hollett

The Letters to the Seven Churches

The Church in Sardis

"And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars, I know your works. You have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.' Revelation 3:1

This was not John's message to the church at Sardis, it was a message from the Lord Jesus himself. Only Jesus 'has the seven spirits of God' and only Jesus holds the seven stars (Rev 1:20). Jesus quickly condemns the lifeless state of the Sardian church: 'I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.' He calls them to repent of their sin and warns them of the judgment that will take place if they don't. "If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you (Rev 3:3b).

One author writes, "This refers not to our Lord's second coming at the end of history but to a coming in judgment on that specific congregation. Furthermore, the warning is especially pertinent in light of the city's history. In centuries past, the Persians captured Sardis unexpectedly when they breached defences thought to be impregnable. Jesus warns the church that it will be caught in judgment unaware if it does not repent."

But not every professing believer in Sardis was spiritually dead. Jesus knew this church and he knew that there was a few who had remained faithful to him.

"Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments, and I will never blot his name out of the book of life." (Rev. 3:4,5)

Jesus knows their hearts. Those whose faith was alive, whose lives and practice matched their words, these ones he declared, would live forever. More than that, he will never blot the name of such people out of the Book of Life but will confess them before the Father. In spite of its current condition, Jesus offered hope to the church in Sardis. The church could experience eternal life if it returned to obeying his commands.

There are no Christians in the area today, but archaeology offers that this church did in fact repent. A Byzantine church, which now lies in ruins, was built in the city hundreds of years after John's death.

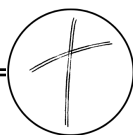
Prayer:

Lord Jesus, I feel distant from You. My choices have not led me to the right places. I've listened to the whispers of the enemy instead of Your words and my heart is filled with shame and unbelief.

I once walked closely with you; my heart was tender to Your leading. Little by little, I exchanged truth for lies, and deception has led me away from You. Instead of taking my thoughts captive and confessing them immediately, I allowed them to grow out of control. Repentance was not my first choice. Blame, cover-ups, or trying to reason and rationalize sin have been my default; these have only given birth to deeper entanglement with sin and a cold heart.

Lord, forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. I turn from my sin today. Root out the darkness in my life and fill me with Your holy presence. Help me understand what went wrong and show me how these destructive patterns began. Why did I seek satisfaction and fulfillment in people, possessions, and ungodly pursuits, rather than You? You are the only One who can truly satisfy my soul.

Lord, I don't want to flirt with sin anymore. I don't want a loveless heart anymore. If my actions have wounded others, show me where and to whom I need to ask forgiveness or how to make amends. I don't want to pretend anymore. I don't want a reputation for being alive when the truth is I feel spiritually dead. Restore my soul. Lead me to walk in paths of righteousness for your honour and glory. Amen.



Revelation 3:7-13

Written by Julie Hollett

The Letters to the Seven Churches

The Church of Philadelphia

The Philadelphian church is praised more than any of the other churches. There is no rebuke. No word of warning, only affirmation and praise.

The church in Philadelphia had faced much hostility and had little strength (v.8b). In Philadelphia, the chief threat to the church apparently came from the Jewish community, 'those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are liars' (3:9). This statement reflects the New Testament affirmation that those who are truly Jewish in a spiritual sense—who are the true people of God—are not those who are Jewish by physical descent alone, but who believe in Jesus Christ for salvation (see Rom. 2:12–29; Gal. 6:16).

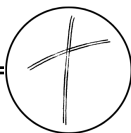
Those who have Jewish heritage but reject Christ are not the children of God; they are outside the kingdom of God. In Philadelphia these Jews caused problems for the church. There are commentators who believe that the non-Christian Jews kicked the Philadelphian Christians out of the synagogue. The early Christians, particularly those of Jewish heritage, met in the synagogues until eventually the non-Christian Jews expelled them, which led to them losing the religious protections Rome gave to the Jews.

The Christ followers in Philadelphia had not denied Jesus in the face of this kind of opposition. They remained true to Christ and He now promised to keep them from the coming trial (v. 10). Since being 'victorious' usually meant staying true to Jesus in the face of persecution, the promise to the faithful in Philadelphia (v.10), does not mean He was letting the suffering pass them by. Most likely, keeping them 'from the trial to come' meant He would preserve them by His grace *while* they suffered for His name. Nothing would separate them from God's love in Christ. As they hold fast to their 'crown,' Jesus encourages them to look forward to the future when they and all who share their faith will live in God's presence forever.

To this faithful church, Jesus also promises an 'open door' of opportunity to witness to the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Because of their persevering faithfulness, this church, located at a strategic crossroads in the ancient world, will enjoy the privilege of calling Jews and Gentiles alike to acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

Prayer:

You have called me to patiently endure and never give up sharing the good news of your death and resurrection with others. Forgive me Lord, I fall short of the persevering boldness of the Philadelphian church. Today I'm asking for renewed zeal and holy boldness to share the gospel with those around me. As I count the days between Passover and Pentecost, teach me to number my days. Fill me with your heart for those who are lost, oppressed and hopeless. Make me like you in all areas of my life, especially that I would be faithful in persecution and suffering. Amen.



1 Peter 2:13-17; 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Written by Julie Hollett

What Does the Bible Say About Praying for Our Leaders?

As we continue to count the Omer, let's encourage one another to cooperate with the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. He is patiently conforming us into the likeness of Jesus. He longs to hear us say "search my heart and cleanse me from anything that offends you."

You don't have to look far to see some form of disruption that is destabilising people and nations. Wars, natural disasters and economic crises, among other things, have begun to threaten many people's ideals of peace and comfort; even personal and national identities are being threatened. We should not envy those in positions of power, especially in government, nor should we judge them as though we could do it better.

Our leaders need God's help. All of them. God is not surprised by flawed individuals in high places. He knows our presidents, prime ministers and governmental leaders are broken people and He asks us to pray for them.

The question is, will I submit to the biblical command to pray for those in authority 'for the Lord's sake'? Will I trust that God sees *everything*; that he is able to bring His sovereign plan and purpose to fruition, despite the spreading tyranny of evil? Do I really believe that '*the king's heart is in the hand of the Lord like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.*' Prov. 21:1

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Romans 13:1 ESV

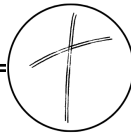
Romans 13:1 states that those who are in positions of power have been allowed there (instituted) by God for a specific purpose. When we pray for them, we are praying that God's will be done and we are also bringing our hearts into submission to God.

Meditate:

How do you carry your heart towards those in authority? Ask Holy Spirit to reveal anything that is hindering you from praying in accordance with His word and His will, and discerning God's higher purposes for your home nation.

Prayer:

Ask the Lord to forgive you, for any thought, word or deed that has led your heart away from the biblical teaching to pray for governmental leaders. Ask the Lord to cleanse and restore you to his mind and perspective. Ask for grace to carry your heart in a way that expresses your trust in God and His leadership – sincerely pray, '*Your will would be done on earth as it is in heaven*'.



Revelation 22:6-21

Written by Julie Hollett

The Book of Revelation – A Call to Prepare with Worship

Jesus said to John, "Fear not, I am the first and the last" (Revelation 1:17). We also read: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come...worship him" (Revelation 14:7). This kind of fear leads my heart to reverential worship. It brings to mind all that it means for God to be God. Instead of a fear that distances me from God, it draws my heart closer to Him. Just as children revere and honour their parents, taking refuge in them, we also must fear God.

Have you ever pondered the amount of worship that's taking place as John's vision unfolds? John's revelation should provoke us to celebrate the glory, power, justice and faithfulness of our great God and His King. John asks: 'Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed' (Revelation 15:3-4). And again: "From the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great'" (Revelation 19:5) The Lord's righteous acts, disclosed in Revelation, are designed to cause worship among all peoples of the earth.

Have you encountered the redeeming love of God that radiates throughout the book? God promises a day when the faithful ones will live with him, when he will wipe away their tears. On that day the greatest cause of pain, will be no more: "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, *and death shall be no more*, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away'" (Revelation 21:3-4).

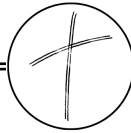
God does not want us to live in terror of persecution or the coming rule of an anti-Christ figure and his armies. Revelation points us to God's plan, His promises, His judgments, and *His faithfulness* to bring to completion the work He began. Following an entire chapter that anticipates persecution (Revelation 13), John reminds believers that they are blessed, secure in God's love and Christ's victory. It stirs me to say '*Lord, provoke in my heart a desire to persevere, whatever may come!*'.

God wants me to live each day with a right perspective of His power, His just judgments, and His trustworthy and eternal promises. We are called to endure based on the sure knowledge that God will judge all who reject and oppose Him. As believers we already know the end. Let's determine to be a people who wait eagerly for the return of Christ; a people who never stop worshipping, never stop seeing, and never give up hope.

'When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.' Luke 21:28

Prayer:

Jesus Christ my Lord and King,
Deliver me day by day from fears that threaten to shake my faith. Teach me to be a worshipper, who is captivated by Your beauty and delights in your faithfulness. Empower me with a reverential fear of you and ground me in your Word. Direct my heart more and more into Your marvelous love and the patient endurance of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Luke 24:13-35

Written by Chantelle Macdonald

On the day of Jesus' resurrection (Day 1 of the Counting of the Omer), two disciples left Jerusalem with downcast hearts. By the time they reached Emmaus, Jesus had opened up their understanding of what the Scriptures said about Him, He revealed Himself to them and left their hearts burning within them (Luke 24:32). Their response was to immediately start walking the 11km journey back to Jerusalem and give bold witness to the truth.

It is a holy, divine love that can change a heart from downcast to joyful, from doubting and confused to full of faith and understanding. It is only divine revelation that can cause a man to return into the city where his friend had been executed and from which he had just fled in fear. This is the love Jesus came to reveal, that he pours out upon us. A love that produces joy, confidence, understanding and a witness to the truth. God's love is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). The power of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God enables us to truly receive, understand, and live in the divine love of the Father and the Son. Jesus loves to reveal himself to us and set our hearts on fire with love, just as he did for the disciples in Emmaus.

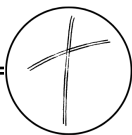
From the time of His resurrection until He ascended, Jesus "gave many convincing proofs that he was alive", he "gave instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" and he "spoke about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3,4). For 40 days Jesus taught his disciples, explaining the Scriptures and preparing them for both revival and persecution. Jesus also prepared them to receive the Holy Spirit – the gift promised by his Father that would fill them with holy fire to burn with love for Jesus and empower them as His witnesses.

Jesus desires that we burn with love. Jesus loves to love us, and he loves to be loved by us. It is what he prayed in John 17:26: that "the love with which You love Me may be in them." We were created to receive divine love and to love God and others with the same passion that he has. To feel and express love to this depths is one of the pleasures and honours of human beings that is excluded from any other created being. We are made in God's image, and as such we have within us the capacity to burn with deep love for Jesus. But we need the power of the Holy Spirit to breathe on us and awaken our hearts.

Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, desires to fill us with revelation and zeal that empowers us, just as it did the disciples. By his grace, Jesus is preparing us to rise as burning lovers of God in every season of life, in both revival and persecution.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit, I ask for the gift of hunger and to thirst for God alone. Fill me with your love and set on fire by its power. Deliver me from the barrenness of my lack of love so that I might delight in you in the deepest places. I want to burn. Prepare my heart in these days leading to Pentecost, to be set on fire, empowered to be a witness to your love. Amen.



John 17:20-26

*Excerpts from "The Heart Cry of Jesus"
by Allen Hood*

What is God after? What is the Church to look like? In two words Jesus was after union and glory – the fullness of Him expressing Himself in and through the complete filling of us.

Nothing accelerates my heart in the grace of God more than coming into agreement with these desires of Jesus. Incessant heart accusations concerning God's nature and ways lose their grip as I study and pray these desires. Lies concerning my created purpose lose staying power as I become confident in God's desires to be close to me. I find Jesus' desires for me are greater than my dullness, and His ability to bring me into those desires and to change me by His glory is greater than my weakness. My soul finds rest and my vision becomes clear.

If we are to see the Church walk in fullness and are to answer the question of discipleship for our day, we must understand the three desires of Jesus. If the church wants to experience verses 20-23, we have to give ourselves to Jesus' heart desires in verses 24-26. We must meditate upon them, pray them, teach them, and pursue them with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength. We can do no less. They are what Jesus died for and what He longs for even now. If you could, would you give Jesus the desires of His heart?

First, Jesus desires we be with Him where He is. It is the foundational request which the other two must build upon. We are the one creature made by God for intimacy with God. As image bearers of God we have a unique design and capacity for communion with God. Our frames were created to house the very presence of the Living God and reflect his glory at the deepest levels in the most dynamic ways.

Second, Jesus desires that we behold His glory. He desires that in the encounter with His self-revelation, His Word, we would love Him with our heart as well as our mind. God's method is designed for a partner and is designed to create fascination, trembling, fear, and love.

Thirdly, Jesus desires our love. This is the goal of Jesus' ministry – the producing of sincere love in the human heart and communion with the creatures He made in His image. The Cross produces great affection in the heart of the individual believer. The Cross becomes the object of meditation for the tenderising of the heart. See how much He loved us! See it! Look upon it! Look what God has done! Look how far His love will go to secure our love, our salvation!

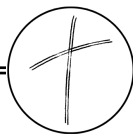
Jesus' heart cry in John 17 is that we would be with Him where He is, behold His glory and fall madly in love with Him in the way the Father loves Him.

His tenderness wounds us. The heart is defenceless against two things: undeserved mercy and unreserved kindness. Jesus overcomes the heart and leaves it rent asunder by loving us – we who are used to setting up shadows and putting forth illusions in order for others to give us their love. Jesus moves through the veneer of illusions to speak directly to the heart. Upon the reception of

such kindness, the heart has no more defences and collapses, only to be caught by the gentle Lover who shares Himself, transforming us at the deepest levels.

"I will hold Him and I will never let Him go; I will die with Him, and will be consumed in the flames of his love. One flame will consume this divine Creator and His wretched creature. Jesus gives Himself unreservedly to me, and I give myself unreservedly to Him. I will live and die in His loving arms; neither life nor death shall ever separate me from Him. O eternal love, my soul longs after You, and chooses You forever. Come, Holy Spirit, and inflame our hearts in love. O to love! O to die! To die to all other loves and to live only for the love of Jesus Christ!" St Francis de Sales

Take some time to respond in prayer to the Lord.



Song of Solomon 1:5

"Deep Unto Deep" by Dana Candler

A Paradox of Grace

We are on a journey to wholehearted love. Our desire is to reach the fullness of love and all that God would give to the human heart according to the riches of the glory of His inheritance in us (Ephesians 1:18). Yet before we take even one step forward, Jesus speaks this foundational fact to each believer's heart - the reality that we are unmistakably, unavoidably *dark*.

Some of this darkness is sin and compromise that must be rooted out of our lives as we come into agreement with His love. Some of our darkness is simply the weakness of our fallen nature, which will be fully and completely reversed in the age to come. Yet as we see this darkness, He reveals that we are also *lovely* to Him even in the process of our growth and maturation in love. He possesses pleasure in us while we are moving from strength to strength (Psalm 84:7) and from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Dark yet lovely. Weak yet enjoyed. God's enjoyment over the life of a believer is not stagnant. It comes as we journey; it comes in the godly struggle and the holy pursuit. The enjoyment of God comes as we fiercely seek to overcome those areas of sin and compromise in our lives, through the power of His love. It is in the context of struggling and warring against the enemies of God in our lives that He empowers us with the revelation of His pleasure in us. His delight does not come when sin is tolerated but when righteousness is fervently pursued.

As we grow in the understanding of His mercy and grace, we must remember not only His kindness but His severity (Romans 11:22). His kindness is unending, and His jealousy is unyielding. We gain great confidence when we know the kindness and mercy of God in the midst of our weakness.

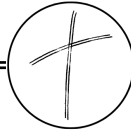
We have a God who is zealous for the lordship of our hearts. He is not a God of fractions but of fullness. He is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14). He desires us completely and utterly. This jealousy flows harmoniously and without opposition to His mercy. In His zeal, he is committed to resist the one who knowingly tolerates secret sin and compromise; but in His tenderness, He gives immeasurable grace to the one who fears Him and stands sincerely before Him. The one who is in this wholehearted pursuit of Him, fleeing darkness and pursuing light - this is the one Jesus calls lovely.

Meditate:

How do you view the 'darkness' in your life? How does God want you to respond to your weakness? How do you feel when you perceive weakness in another person?

Prayer:

Ask Holy Spirit to liberate you with the revelation of God's love for you, even though you are 'dark'. Ask for empowering grace to love others the way He loves you.



Revelation 19:7-10

Written by Daniel Lim

The Bride Has Made Herself Ready - Part 1

In Revelation 19 the apostle John was shown in a vision that the Bride of Christ had made herself ready: *"Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."* V.7

When John saw that the Bride of Christ had made herself ready, he was compelled to respond by falling down in worship of the angel who had shown him this. The angel rebuked John for doing so, as he was merely a created being who was serving God, just as John, and only God deserves our worship. What did John see that compelled him to worship and caused the angel to issue such a rebuke? The Scripture does not give us a definitive explanation in Revelation 19, but in Revelation 21–22, this incident occurred again, almost as a replay. John received another similar rebuke from the angel who was with him.

I believe John, the seasoned apostle of love, would not commit such a fundamental theological error after consistently defending and expounding upon the divinity of Christ and the monotheistic nature of God for most of his life. What then caused him to fall down in worship?

Revelation 21:9–18 gives us some insight into this puzzling question. The New Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife, has glory like a jasper stone that is as clear as crystal. The glory like a jasper stone was first seen by John when he saw the Ancient of Days sitting on His throne in Revelation 4:2–3. It was this glory like a jasper stone that caused the seraphim and the four living creatures to extol Him as "Holy! Holy! Holy!" in a perpetual symphony of worship.

When John saw the Bride of Christ prepared in the perfection of her beauty and glory, just as her Bridegroom Jesus Christ, is it possible that this glorious vision compelled him to worship? It was not therefore, just the angel in Revelation 19:10 that compelled John to worship—it was the glory of the Bride that elicited his worship!

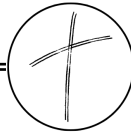
She is now in the image of the Son of God, who is the fullness of God. Humanity, who fell short of the glory of God in Eden, has been redeemed and restored to their eternal calling. Jesus' prayer in John 17 is finally answered: 'And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the *glory which I had with You before the world was.*'

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:5, 22–24)

Meditate:

You are being prepared to meet the Bridegroom King. Is your life moving purposefully towards this? Are you ready?

Take some time to pray a prayer of response.

**Revelation 19:7-10***Written by Daniel Lim****The Bride Has Made Herself Ready - Part 2***

As I study the Scripture, I realize there are five major tasks that the Church must complete before the second coming of Christ. These tasks are delineated from the great commandment and the Great Commission. They are integrated yet distinct. Some are qualitative in nature, and some are quantitative. I believe these five biblical tasks constitute the final frontier of work for the Bride of Christ – applying herself to this work will make the Bride ready for the marriage of the Lamb at the return of Jesus Christ.

We must not forget that we are God's workmanship, saved by grace and justified by faith for good works. We are both the field and the co-workers of Christ. When God sets a task before you, He will empower you to complete the task. As we respond to Him, he will use the process to transform and mature us into the likeness of Christ.

When John saw the Bride of Christ in Revelation 19, he saw her clothed in fine linen, which represents the righteous acts of the saints or "righteous works of the saints." These works of the saints are an overflow of her walk of faith, preparing her for the marriage of the Lamb. We need to discover the quantitative and qualitative nature of these works.

There are five final frontiers of the preparation of the Bride of Christ that can be summarized using the acronym P-I-N-G-O:

P: *Prayer*—Unceasing night-and-day prayer for speedy justice (Luke 18:1–8).

I: *Israel*—The salvation of Israel and Jerusalem to become a praise on the earth (Isaiah 62:6–7; Acts 1:6–8; Romans 11:25–26).

N: *Nations*—Witnesses of the gospel go to all nations and disciple in every tongue, every tribe, and every nation (Matthew 24:14; 28:19–20).

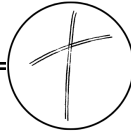
G: *Gospel of the kingdom of God*—This gospel of the kingdom will be preached and demonstrated to all nations; then the end will come (Matthew 4:23; 24:14; Mark 16:15–16).

O: *One*—The Church shall be one even as the Father and Son are one. Union with God and with one another will manifest the most glorified, unified witness for Christ (John 17:20–26).

Meditate on yesterday's question again:

You are being prepared to meet your Bridegroom King. Is your life moving towards this reality with understanding and purpose? Are you making yourself ready?

Take some time to pray a prayer of response.



Genesis 12:1-3; Genesis 17:3-8;
Deuteronomy 28:1-2 & 15

Written by Jason Pelling

The Covenantal Dilemma - Part 1

with reference to 'It Must Be Finished' by Samuel Whitefield, p.71-112.

Israel was called by God to be a light to the nations, showing the world what it means to worship and enjoy God. At Mt. Sinai, Israel was given his Word - the instruction for how to live set apart from the brokenness of the world and in God's blessing. No other nation was given this gift and this calling. But Israel failed. Israel rejected God's Word and rejected God. Israel, called to be light in the world (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6), was herself found to be full of darkness.

This is a dilemma. God has promised to bless the nations through Israel. He made an unconditional and 'everlasting covenant' with Israel through Abraham – promises of a place, a people, and prosperity (see Genesis 12:2-3; 17:7-8). He also made a conditional covenant with the entire nation of Israel at Sinai (see Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 28) – blessings for obedience, curses for rebellion. Yet as both individuals and as a nation, Israel turns her back on God, time and time again. What now? A change of plan? Ignore the promises and the covenants? Impossible.

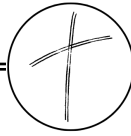
In the midst of Israel's unfaithfulness, Jesus comes as the faithful Israelite. What they could not do, he does. He upholds, obeys, embodies the Word of God. He is the light for the nations. He makes a new covenant, laying down his life to open the door for the entire world to re-enter relationship with the Creator.

Jesus made a way for salvation and blessing, and many individual Jews put their trust in him. But Israel as a nation? As a nation they rejected the Messiah: *Let his blood be on us and our children! Crucify him!* (Matthew 27). As a nation, they are still under the conditions of the covenant from Sinai with its righteous consequences for rebellion. Still, God does not cast them aside. He remembers his promises and with the longing of a lover, he says: *Israel – I'm not finishing this story without you* (Hosea 2).

To be continued...

Prayer:

Father of glory, you are faithful to all your promises! As we approach the Day of Pentecost and the remembrance of the covenant at Sinai, we pray for the salvation of the Jewish people. Spirit of revelation, open their eyes. Have mercy and heal their blindness. Let your light shine upon Israel, that she would experience the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus the Messiah. Amen.



Jeremiah 31:31-37

Written by Jason Pelling

The Covenantal Dilemma – Part 2

with reference to 'It Must Be Finished' by Samuel Whitefield, p.71-112.

A day of salvation for Israel as a nation is predicted by the prophets and summarized by the Apostle Paul: *all Israel will be saved. As it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob'* (Romans 11:26).

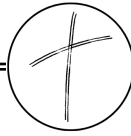
Samuel Whitefield writes that "Paul did not mean every Jewish person throughout history will be saved regardless of their relationship to Jesus. Paul was predicting a day in the future when the entire nation would be saved and forever be free of the Mosaic covenant... [This mystery] has now been revealed. God will bring this to pass through the redemptive work of His Son. Israel's national salvation will mean the end of the curses of the covenant" (p.111).

This is the resolution of the great dilemma! God will be faithful to all of his covenants and will bring about blessings to the whole earth through the people of Israel as they come into the new covenant as a nation: *For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?* (Romans 11:15).

Whitefield continues: "Throughout history, there has always been a saved remnant in Israel, and in our generation, that remnant is growing. There is a significant number of messianic believers in the land who love Jesus, and the closer we get to the end of the age, the more we will see an acceleration in the salvation of the Jewish people. We should rejoice in this and labor for an increase. However, a saved remnant is not enough to conclude the covenant [made at Sinai]. *A day must come when all Israel is saved*" (p.112).

Prayer:

Father of glory, you are faithful to all your promises! As we approach the Day of Pentecost and the remembrance of the covenant at Sinai, we pray for the salvation of the Jewish people. Spirit of revelation, open their eyes. Have mercy and heal their blindness. Let your light shine upon Israel, that she would experience the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus the Messiah. Amen.



Matthew 9:34-38

Written by Samuel Whitefield

Jesus' Burden for Israel – Part 1

People experience a range of emotions when they consider Israel, including affection, respect, sentimentality, disdain, and even hostility. When Jesus looked at Israel (the context of Matthew 9), He was *burdened and moved with compassion: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36 ESV)*

How often have you looked at Israel the way Jesus does? If we saw Israel the way Jesus does, it would result in a dramatic increase in intercession for Israel's salvation (don't confuse this with political success), as well as missional engagement (delivering the gospel).

Jesus deeply loves every people group, but He is Jewish. The Bible is clear on Jesus' burden for all people of every nation, but His compassion for Israel is distinct.

Matthew 9 contains a number of stories of Jesus ministering to Israel, and the first part of the chapter can be summarized by reading the two verses just before Matthew 9:36: *But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons." And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. (Matthew 9:34–35 ESV)*

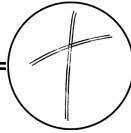
These two verses capture a painful tension: *Jesus faced strong resistance from Israel's leaders* as He ministered in the synagogues, proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom, and liberated the sick and oppressed. Matthew contrasts Israel's hostility with Jesus' desire to serve Israel. This hostility was not universal, but it was strong and led to Jesus' death. The painful tension between Israel's resistance and Jesus' heart to serve, save and lead Israel into the fullness of their God given destiny, is critical to understanding and properly interpreting Matthew 9:36–38.

Jesus was moved with compassion because Israel was "harassed and helpless" like sheep without a shepherd. That compassion was not limited to Jesus' friends, it included His enemies, even the pharisees who considered Him "the prince of demons." In time, a certain Pharisee named Saul (Paul) who thought of Jesus as a prince of demons, would become known as one of Jesus' dearest friends.

Do you share Jesus' compassion for Israel?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, I want to feel what you feel and pray what you pray. Give me your heart for Israel; they are your people and you've spoken unique promises to them. Teach me how to pray for Israel and to experience your passion to see them saved and worshipping you.



Romans 11:13-21

Written by Samuel Whitefield

Jesus' Burden for Israel – Part 2

The prophets repeatedly expressed God's pain over Israel's lack of shepherds and described Israel as "lost sheep:"

'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all'. (Isaiah 53:6 ESV)

'My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray..' (Jer. 50:6 ESV)

'They were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them. For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep...' (Ezekiel 34:4–6, 11 ESV)

Empathy for what Israel has suffered is good, but when you consider Israel, do you feel deep compassion for their 'lostness'? Does it drive you to earnest prayer for labourers and their salvation? This kind of compassion is rare in our time.

Jesus was burdened that there were few labourers (Matt. 9:37). God's glory is at stake in Israel's preservation and Israel's salvation. While there is a vibrant remnant in Israel, God has promised a day when *all* Israel will be saved. Israel will not always be "sheep without a shepherd." In fact, Jesus' words point back to Jeremiah 31:

¹ *"At that time, declares the LORD, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they shall be my people."* ³ *I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you.*

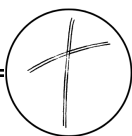
¹⁰ *"Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.'* ¹¹ *For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.* ¹³ *Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy; I will comfort them and give them gladness for sorrow (excerpts from Jeremiah 31).*

A day is coming when the Lord, who scattered Israel, will save Israel in a dramatic way. Matthew 9:38 describes how God will gather His flock and gives critical insight to Jeremiah 31. God's plan to save Israel is not automatic. God is going to save Israel in response to earnest prayer and through sent labourers. We cannot miss this. God wants the global church to set their hearts on Israel in order to see what He has predicted come to pass. The implication is clear; Israel will not be saved until there is earnest prayer and until labourers are sent.

The condition of Israel burdens Jesus. Does it burden you?

Prayer:

Lord of the Harvest, for Your Name's sake, stir your church with a burden for the salvation of Israel. Forgive me for the apathy I feel about something that you are zealous for. Fill me with grace to join you in intercession, so that the Jewish people would begin to cry out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!". Raise up labourers across the earth who will answer your call to work in this harvest field. For your honour and glory, Amen.



Acts 1:1-8; John 17:6-19

Written by Julie Hollett

Connecting the Dots

Today is day 36 of counting the Omer. Acts 1:3 tells us that Jesus appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days and after this he ascended. What do you think Jesus would have been contemplating on Day 36?

Jesus knew His season on the earth was ending and He was returning to His Father in a few days. He also knew what was going to happen on Day 50 in Jerusalem.

On Day 36, I imagine he is thinking about the joy that will be his when he returns to his heavenly home: 'Mission accomplished Father! Death has no hold on me, and the grave will never be the final say. To anyone who puts their trust in me, I have authority to give them eternal life and the right to be your child.'

Jesus would've been thinking about his disciples too; present and future. Jesus' prayer in John 17 gives us many insights into this. After day 36, He has just four days left with the ones He has nurtured, disciplined, protected, corrected, and loved for more than 3 years.

Day 40 is the day He leaves them.

Jesus is aware of what lies ahead for each of them. He is joyfully anticipating the day when he pours his Spirit into each of them, empowering them to witness with extraordinary boldness, to the reality of His eternal life, power, and glory. His love burning on the inside will be the fire that enables his disciples (past, present and future) to endure to the end, overcoming all opposition, and bringing glory to God his Father.

As we anticipate Day 50 on God's calendar, let's ask the Holy Spirit to shake us out of the mundane and to renew in us Jesus' vision for the days ahead. Ask him to breathe His power into our dry bones, according to all that is burning in Jesus' heart. Ask him to fill our hearts with fresh expectation, understanding and zeal, to live wholehearted lives of love for Jesus Christ.

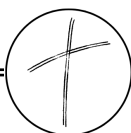
Meditate:

What's on your heart Lord? What do you desire to give me right now? How do you want me to cooperate with you today? Fill me Holy Spirit, with the fullness of Jesus.

Take some time to pray in response to the desire of His heart.

20 May 2025

13 days until Pentecost



Revelation 3:14-22

Written by Billy Humphrey

Dealing With My Own Lukewarm Heart - Part 1

The Lord has been dealing with me very clearly and yet very gently, from Revelation 3:15-20. He has put His finger on areas of my heart where I've assumed I was doing well and didn't need any work. I have honestly been shocked at the depth of my own neediness and sin in areas I thought I had 'under control'. The Lord has been dealing with me about my lovelessness that has manifested in frustration, judgment, and unkindness toward others.

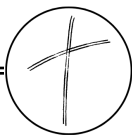
I have been blown away by how moments of frustration have negatively impacted my children and some of those closest to me. I have repented in tears and brokenness as the Lord has graciously met me with forgiveness, mercy, and cleansing. It has been painful and beautiful. I have mourned the loss of intimacy with the Lord and with others because of my sin, all the while knowing God promises to redeem, and is in the process right now of redeeming all that has been lost.

Several months ago, I began praying the prayer of 2 Chronicles 7:14, "Lord, I humble myself before you and turn from my wicked ways..." If I'm honest, I was unaware of any wicked ways in me, so I said it as genuinely as I could, assuming God might show me some small thing that I needed to repent of. Instead, His gentle and clear conviction has landed upon me in intensity bringing me to ashes. I have repented to the Lord and to those I have hurt with my loveless and selfish heart. Even to this very moment I am asking the Lord to show me any others I need to talk to so that I can own and repent of sin that has in any way hurt them. I'm broken. It's a beautiful brokenness, but it's real and it's painful.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, my God and King.

Forgive me. I am complacent, self-satisfied, and ignorant of the ways that I protect myself at the expense of others. Give me eyes to see my poverty, nakedness, and blindness. Renew my heart with truth and a holy conviction of sin. Fill me with your grace to seek forgiveness and release forgiveness where hurt and resentment have damaged my relationships with others. As Pentecost approaches, do what I cannot do. Fill me with the power of your life and love through the Holy Spirit; I want to love you with all my heart, soul and mind. I'm trusting you to bring to completion the good work you've begun in me. Make me a faithful witness like you. Amen.



Revelation 3:14-22

Written by Billy Humphrey

Dealing With My Own Lukewarm Heart - Part 2

The admonition in Revelation 3:15-20 dials in on a single point in verse 17, "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked – I counsel you..." I'm so struck with Jesus' kindness and tenderness in this passage. I have been so wrong about how I have read His admonitions to the church of Laodicea. I thought He was angry in calling out their lukewarmness, but instead I see that He was coming as a tender counsellor inviting them to deeper intimacy. In verse 20 He says, "I am knocking on your door. Will you let me into all the places of your heart so that we can share deep fellowship? I want to be intimate with you, but your lukewarmness is in the way. Let me in so we can experience all the depths of love that is available."

I thought I had it. I thought I had arrived. I have been Laodicean and didn't even know it. And all the while He has been beckoning me to deeper intimacy and love. My own lovelessness has been an indicator of my lukewarmness. I am undone at this revelation.

I declare to you and anyone who will listen, I need Jesus in the highest way. I am a needy man, in need of our wonderful and gracious Jesus to meet me in my lukewarmness and kindle a fire in areas of my soul where I thought I had arrived.

To be clear I am not talking about some hidden sin that others didn't know about. I am talking about moments of anger, frustration, pride, judgment, harshness, and unkindness that I had learned to live with and excuse, because after all, 'nobody's perfect.'

Except that's not true. Jesus is perfect and He wants to perfect us in love (Mathew 5:43-48).

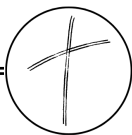
I'm asking Him to burn down all the wood, hay, and stubble in my heart and possess me with His love in fullness. I deeply need Jesus. I will always need Jesus. I will never arrive. The moment I believe I have arrived is the moment I have been deceived by a Laodicean spirit once again. I am asking Him to ignite my lukewarm heart and bring it into a full blaze of possessing love so that I can fellowship with Him at a depth and love others the way He does.

Meditate:

Pentecost beckons our hearts to remember. Counting the Omer is a season of waiting and preparing. How are you responding?

Prayer:

Living flame of love burn me deeply till all that's left is You. Consume my lukewarm heart with your fire. I never want to return to Laodicea again.



John 14:15-21

Written by Billy Humphrey

Vulnerability: A Key To Encounter

For years, I have heard and preached that spiritual hunger is the currency of the kingdom of God - meaning if a person is spiritually hungry, they will see God move in profound ways. I stand by this today. You cannot underestimate the necessity and impact of spiritual hunger.

At the same time, I'm beginning to see that vulnerability is as much a currency of the kingdom as spiritual hunger. Jesus wants His people to be open-hearted and vulnerable with Him. I realize that so often we have taught people (especially children) to do Christian things without teaching them to engage with God with an open, vulnerable heart. When we approach God with a closed heart we may gain information, but we will not receive revelation. And what is revelation? It is the Son of God revealing Himself to us. And when He reveals Himself, *Jesus is being vulnerable with us.*

The Bible uses a variety of terms that all speak of the issue of vulnerability: Open the door of your heart, Set me as a seal upon your heart, Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith, the Spirit of revelation. All of these speak of intimate disclosure from Jesus to us and from us to Him. Jesus literally told His disciples that when He was resurrected, He was going to disclose Himself to His followers in a special way (John 14:21). When the disciples asked what this meant, He gave this shocking and wonderful answer: the Father and I are going to make our home in you so that we may always experience intimate fellowship with you. Vulnerability is foundational to intimacy with Jesus. Vulnerability is key to encounter.

When we consider Jesus's words to the church of Laodicea, we realize that the antidote to their loveless, lukewarm state is to open the door of their hearts so He may come in and connect with them intimately (Rev 3:20). Jesus says, "I will come in and dine with him and he with me". What's evident here is that the closed door is a boundary to intimate disclosure, connection, and fellowship with the Son of God. He is literally knocking on the closed door of our hearts and calling our name, asking us to open our hearts, so He can come in and fellowship with us. What is opening our hearts to Him? It's sharing with Him our thoughts, feelings, pains, fears, questions, joys, desires, and affections - all the good, all the bad, all of who we are. He is not intimidated by the mess of us. He draws near to us in our vulnerability, and promises that He will meet our vulnerable weakness with power (2 Cor 12:9-10).

Prayer:

Jesus, I open my heart to you today. I want real fellowship with You, real encounter. I don't want to hide from You anymore. Will you come into my heart and fill me with your tender love and beauty? I need you Jesus. I open my whole heart to You without self-protection, defence, or boundary. Amen.

23 May 2025

Ascension Day
10 days until Pentecost



Acts 1:1-11

'Son of Man: The Apostle's Gospel'
p. 20-21 by Samuel Whitefield

Today is the 40th day in the Counting of the Omer, and the day on which we remember the ascension of Jesus. Samuel Whitefield writes:

"Because the account of the ascension is so brief, it is easy to read the account without grasping the full weight of the event. The ascension was one of the major transitions of the New Testament. It was the grand *conclusion* to the Gospels because it was the ultimate demonstration Jesus truly was the Son of Man [i.e. divine]. The ascension was also an *introduction* because it set the stage for the ministry of the apostles.

We tend to see Acts 2 as the beginning of the church, but Acts 1 is truly the beginning. Luke intentionally started the story of the church with Acts 1 and not Acts 2. Jesus had to ascend to pour out the Spirit, and His ascension set the stage for the apostles' preaching and the development of what we now refer to as *the church*....

Acts 1 effectively ended Jesus' first coming and set the stage for His second. When he ascended, the apostles began to preach the power of Jesus' first coming (His suffering and resurrection) and the certainty of His second coming (as Judge in glory). The apostolic gospel was a witness to what Jesus had done, a warning of what Jesus will do in His second coming, and an invitation to become part of His people who will be exalted into the heavens with Him."

Prayer:

Jesus we worship you as the resurrected Man who has ascended into the heavens. We long for your return as the Messiah King who will rule over all and establish the Kingdom in fullness. We remember your promise to the disciples: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses". We ask for your Spirit to baptize us and empower us as faithful witnesses, until your return. Amen.

The Final 10 Day Count Down:

Make these final 10 days a special countdown for your family. Fill a special 'treasure box' or hang 10 'countdown bags' with a small gift (like a sweet or chocolate) that you or your children can open each night. Thank the Father for sending the promised Holy Spirit. Speak blessing over one another and ask Him to fill each one of you afresh.



1 Corinthians 15:35-58

'Son of Man: The Gospel of Daniel 7'
p.301 by Samuel Whitefield

Jesus wants us with Him where He is [John 17:24]. This means the process of discipleship is designed to result in our exaltation. We embrace discipleship – the path Jesus walked – so we can ascend into the heavens with Him to rule alongside Him....

The message in Acts 1 [yesterday's reading] summarizes the witness of the church: *On the basis of Jesus' ascension into the heavens, we can confidently proclaim the promises of exaltation into the heavens for those who embrace the path of Jesus.*

The outpouring of the Spirit empowers the church to proclaim this message, enables the church to embrace the difficulty of discipleship, and transforms the church so we become living witnesses – testimonies – of the transformation to come when we are exalted into the heavens as Jesus was.

We will not be made divine as the Son of Man is, but in every other way we will become like Him and exercise dominion with Him. This message is often overlooked, but it is foundational in the New Testament... It is the motivation for suffering and holy living in this life. *If this promise is not true – we are of all men most to be pitied [1 Cor. 15:19].*

"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words."
1 Thessalonians 4:16-18

Prayer:

Give thanks to Jesus for the power of his resurrection and ascension, and the promise of our future participation in this reality. Ask him to strengthen you in the living hope of resurrection and to empower you in the journey of transformation to become like him.



Luke 11:1-13

'Prayer – Why our Words to God Matter'
p.128-129 by Corey Russell

After he finished His parable of perseverance [Luke 11], Jesus looked at the disciples and gave them the command to ask, seek, and knock. These three actions represent a progression of intensity. As we remain in seasons of delay, our intercession increases and the desire fueling our prayers grows. When the thing we are asking for becomes the greatest demand of our soul and the primary cry of our heart, then the answer is not far off. I believe God is calling a young generation to the furnace of prayer. He will use intense situations and circumstances to transform our prayer lives from a whisper to a roar, from a wish to a demand. This is especially true when it comes to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus connects His teaching on prayer with asking for the Holy Spirit: "How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him" (Luke 11:13). In other words, He is a good Father, He is not twisted, and He loves giving good gifts – specifically the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some of the primary principles of intercession found in Luke 11:

1. If we want to grow and mature as believers and leaders, we will face the pressure of delayed and unanswered prayer.
2. In seasons when the door remains closed, our stability lies in knowing God's heart and resting in the faith that He will answer us. Our Father is good.
3. One of the primary fruits of persevering prayer is humility. We cannot grow in the place of intercession if we are not growing in humility.

Prayer:

Pray the Luke 11 prayer of Jesus slowly:

Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come.

Give us each day our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

Lead us not into temptation.

Using Jesus' encouragement in verse 13, we also pray:

Father you are good! Teach me to persevere in prayer! I ask for the gift of your Spirit within me, and for an outpouring of your Spirit in our nation. Amen.



Leviticus 23:15-22; Acts 2:1-21

Sourced from 'First Fruits of Zion'*

The History of Pentecost:

Before the Greek name Pentecost came into common use, this festival was known by its Hebrew name, 'Shavuot'. Shavuot is a harvest festival. Just as the week of Unleavened Bread celebrates the ripening of the barley crop, in a similar way, Shavuot celebrates the ripening of the wheat crop. At Shavuot, the first fruits of the wheat harvest were brought to the Temple and baked into two loaves of leavened bread. The interim forty-nine days of counting are called "the counting of the Omer" because day one begins the harvest of a single barley sheaf (omer) and day forty-nine concludes the harvest of the wheat sheaves. In addition to wheat, the pilgrims celebrating Shavuot brought with them the first fruits of all their crops and offered them before the altar.

We can imagine the disciples and followers of Jesus in Acts 2 joining in this First Fruits procession. The Shavuot festival already carried particular significance for them because it was exactly fifty days after the Messiah had resurrected. He was the First Fruits of the Resurrection. In fact, the disciples and followers of Jesus were themselves the First Fruits of Messiah's ministry. On Shavuot, 3,000 more were added to their number, and the great harvest of souls began.

*http://ffoz.org/messiahonline/articles//appointed_times/shavuot.php

Prayer:

We pray as Jesus taught his disciples (Luke 10:2): Lord of the harvest, send out workers into your harvest field. Immerse the church in Fremantle in the power of your Spirit. Open a door for the gospel of the kingdom in our city, and bring in a great harvest for the glory of your name! Amen.



Joel 2:12-32

*'The Nations Rage'
p.88-89 by Dave Sliker*

Throughout church history, starting with the accounts in the book of Acts, revivals have taken place on local, regional and national scales. In the past couple of centuries, we have seen notable revivals, including the First and Second Great Awakenings, the Welsh revival, Hebrides revival and the Jesus movement. However, we have not yet seen a global revival such as the one Joel prophesied about. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit described by Joel goes far beyond the experiences we have known, as wonderful as they have been. In past revivals, the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit has been activated in large numbers of people, but Joel is describing an unprecedented worldwide move of God....

Joel 2:28:3-21 records one continuous prophecy that speaks of a comprehensive event that has significant global consequences and impact. Perhaps our knowledge of these many preliminary outpourings of the Spirit can help us imagine what it will be like. Take one of the historic revivals that you know most about and think of it multiplied manyfold, to a worldwide level – throughout every nation on the continent, everywhere that people live. Imagine the phenomenal power of the Holy Spirit being poured out across the whole planet in every village, town and metropolis, on isolated farmsteads and in jungles, on board every ship and airplane – simultaneously. What would it look like to have a combination of the day of Pentecost, the First Great Awakening and the Azusa Street revival happening everywhere on earth at the same moment in time?

Prayer:

Holy Father, before the promise of revival in Joel 2 was the call to repentance. Continue to go deeper in my life and align me with your will and your ways. Help me to turn wholeheartedly to you. Fill me afresh Holy Spirit; give me a tender heart that is responsive to your Word. Empower to me live in the blessing of obeying you in everything. Amen.



Ephesians 1

*'The Nations Rage'
p.90-91 by Dave Sliker*

We must note the difference throughout Scripture between “the Holy Spirit within” and “the Holy Spirit upon”. The latter was the Old Testament pattern. As Christians of the New Covenant, we enjoy a dynamic union with God in Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within our innermost being. This profound and glorious new state of being arises from Jesus Christ’s free gift of righteousness. It is a powerful and beautiful interior uniting of our spirit with the Spirit of God. Paul spoke of believers in Jesus being “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:13-14). The indwelling Spirit is both the sign and the seal of the New Covenant of God for those who believe, which gives us great assurance of our eternal destiny with Christ in the days to come and our position in Christ right now. Christ within is our great hope, and we draw much confidence in our day-to-day life from this fact. Having the Holy Spirit within was not the experience of the prophets and others who are portrayed throughout the Old Testament.

According to [Joel 2], in the last days the Lord is going to empower everyone who loves Jesus with the power of the Holy Spirit. By filling His people with the power of the Holy Spirit for the working of miracles, healings and more, God intends to capture the attention of the whole world – the self-absorbed, the powerful, the poor, the broken and oppressed, the lost. This is a breathtaking picture of the breadth and scope of the Lord’s heart and plan.... Psalm 2 and Matthew 24 also confirms the scale of God’s outreach in that day: All of the kings and rulers of the earth will have heard of the coming of the Lord’s anointed King whose inheritance is the nations of the earth – and all nations will hate the Church for the sake of the name of Jesus.

It is stirring and sobering to imagine that time to come. The Church around the world... will be unified in its proclamation of the returning King, and the message of His coming will be punctuated with unprecedented power from the Holy Spirit to capture the attention of the people regarding that message.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for marking me with the precious seal of Yourself – You have placed your Spirit in me. Let me never neglect this privilege. Bring about a revival in my own heart. Turn my eyes away from worthless things and incline my heart towards you above all else! I am your servant – use me for your glory. Amen.



Joel 2:28-32; Haggai 2:6-7

'The Nations Rage'
p.91-92 by Dave Sliker

Joel proclaims that supernatural wonders that have never yet been seen in the history of the world will shake the nations and capture the attention of the people. God will empower His people with such a glorious message that the nations will believe and respond to His mercy.

The prophet Haggai made a similar declaration: "For thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations'" (Haggai 2:6-7). The writer of Hebrews repeated Haggai's prophecy, referring to it as a promise from the Lord to remove the things that could not be shaken, "that the things which cannot be shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:27). The prophets are foretelling a future inbreaking of the power of God across the earth that is without precedent in history and almost unimaginable in its scope and impact. It is hard for us to imagine a book of Acts revival happening worldwide and not merely in one city or one region. Add to this a book of Exodus level of signs and wonders happening globally and concurrently with this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and it becomes even more difficult to imagine. The magnitude of what the Bible is describing about the days to come is far too great for our limited minds to grasp.

Yet our limitations will not deter the progress of God's will. He desires the whole of the earth to see His glory. His passion for both the people who dwell in every nation and also for the reclamation and transformation of the places in which they dwell will be unstoppable. The intensity of God's desire to dwell with us is contrasted with the intensity of His holiness, which requires distance from us until all things are restored and made new. The earth must be transformed into a resting place for the Lord that He might dwell here with His people forever (see Revelation 21:3).

Prayer:

A prayer from Psalm 46: God, you are my refuge and strength; and ever-present help in trouble. Because of who you are, I will not fear. When great disruption touches the earth, you are with me. God of Jacob, you are my fortress. You are at work to receive your inheritance of worship in the nations. Help me to be still and know that you are God. You will be exalted in the earth. Amen



Acts 10

'The Nations Rage'
p.93-94 by Dave Sliker

The goal of the global outpouring of glory is the salvation of every human being who sees and hears and believes: *"And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved"* (Joel 2:32a). All of the terrors and the signs in the heavens and on the earth will occur for one purpose: to provoke the human race to cry out to the Lord for their salvation. But will this phenomenal global outpouring result in a corresponding global response of repentance? Not according to Joel's prophecy. Joel tells us that a remnant will respond and be saved (see Joel 2:32b). What about the rest of humanity? How will they respond?

Because this storm of glory will prove to be greater than every revival in church history combined, we tend to romanticize both the scope and the cost. Again, we are talking about a revival similar to the First or Second Great Awakening, but far greater in intensity and global in scope. Because this revival is beyond our ability to imagine, we can trivialize the subject or dismiss it entirely. Or, in romanticizing, we can view such a move of God's presence and power as a solution to our frustrations with the Church. Impatient with the delay, we forget that God is continually at work to prepare the way, and that He is intent on preparing His Church for His Day and the rage that He sees clearly in the human heart. He is not ignorant nor is He sentimental about the storm of revival on the horizon and what it means for His people.

Therefore, the best thing we can do is to encourage each other to be prepared and to set our hearts toward a deeper engagement with the leadership of the Lord. The Lord's leadership of our lives ensures that we can meet the challenges of this future intensity with sweet simplicity. Our small and simple yes of obedience to the Lord sets us on a very sure foundation in uncertain times. We can and must develop a culture of patience in waiting on the Lord and a persistence in engaging with Him as we grow in love and resolve, staying faithful in prayer over many decades.

Prayer:

Father of glory, our merciful and powerful God, strengthen us to wait patiently in the season of preparation, and to lean into your perfect leadership as you work in us and throughout the whole earth. Holy Spirit, lead us into deeper love for Jesus and others, and into the bold proclamation of your character and purposes to the people around us. Amen.



Acts 19

'The Nations Rage'
p.94-95 by Dave Sliker

It is helpful for us to learn the lessons of the past to understand our future. The book of Acts is the easiest way to begin to understand the prophecy of Joel and the dramatic events that are described in Joel 2 and many other passages. The book of Acts is a local, citywide preview of a global outpouring of the Spirit and the reaction of the nations to it. It also helps me to think of the book of Revelation... as the "end-time book of Acts on a global scale."

However, it seems to me that Christians who utilize the book of Acts as a model for their ministry and the Spirit's activity unintentionally emphasize only the positive elements of the book. They ignore the more intense elements of Luke's account. Yet I find the exact opposite to be true of the book of Revelation, where believers see John's encounter with Jesus about the future to be mostly negative or intense and cannot comprehend the beauty and victory within its pages. Therefore, we need both accounts as a template for our global future. We need to absorb and contextualize both the negative and intense elements of the storyline along with the very hopeful, very beautiful and victorious aspects of the future....

How did Jerusalem respond [to the Acts 2 revival]? As Joel promised, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the activation and engagement of the people of God, and the power and glory of God on the Gospel led to thousands of salvations in Jerusalem (three thousand initially) with many being added daily to their numbers (see Acts 2:40-47). However, the glory and the power of God on the church also produced fear in everyone in the city and great rage and persecution from the city leadership [see Acts 5, and also note the similar dynamics in the city of Ephesus in Acts 19]. Yet in the midst of the persecution there was grace for prayer, great boldness and deep unity.

Prayer:

Father, teach me to pray as the disciples did in Acts 4:

"You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed one.'

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." Amen.



Luke 18:1-8

'The Nations Rage'
p.97 by Dave Sliker

In 1722, as the Enlightenment was beginning to come to full bloom in Europe, a wealthy young nobleman and landowner named Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf opened his estate to provide asylum and Christian community for religious minorities that had been oppressed by the Catholic Church. A handful of young Moravian Protestants found their way to his door, and together they founded a new settlement they named Herrnhut, which means, "Under the Lord's Protection" or "The Lord's Watch". It was on this land, after a significant outpouring of the Holy Spirit on August 13, 1727, that Zinzendorf and his Moravian community began to give themselves to a night-and-day prayer watch that would continue for a century.

Zinzendorf longed for a passionate and pietistic "religion of the heart" that would warm the cold expression of rational religious thought that had overtaken the Reformation as a by-product of Enlightenment philosophy. These Herrnhut prayer watches became the source of the spiritual power that lit fires of mission and revival from England and the colonies of America to the ends of the earth.

The earliest Protestant mission initiatives were born out of these prayer watches. Sixty years before the pioneering missionary to India William Carey, who was himself inspired by Moravian missionary zeal, seventy young Moravians from this community of six hundred answered the call to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, famously declaring that their aim was that "the Lamb would receive the reward of His suffering." The flame of night-and-day prayer sparked the explosion of Protestant missions over the next three hundred years. This was one more dramatic illustration of the effectiveness of continual intercessory prayer. The spread of Christianity historically has been fueled by prayer, from the prolonged prayer in the [temple] before Pentecost and onward over the millennia since then.

Prayer:

Lord, may my heart be your house of prayer. And may our Prayer Room and our gathering places be a furnace of prayer that burns day and night. Give us a greater vision for the Lamb to receive the reward of his suffering, and launch the gospel of the kingdom into our city and beyond, like never before. Amen.



Acts 2

'Son of Man: The Apostolic Gospel'
p.27-30 by Samuel Whitefield

"When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost, the man who had denied Jesus three times before His crucifixion proclaimed Jesus publicly with confidence and passion. Peter's sermon that day was bold, direct, and confrontational. The presence and power of the Spirit was tangible, and approximately 3000 responded in repentance.

"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ [Messiah], this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:36).

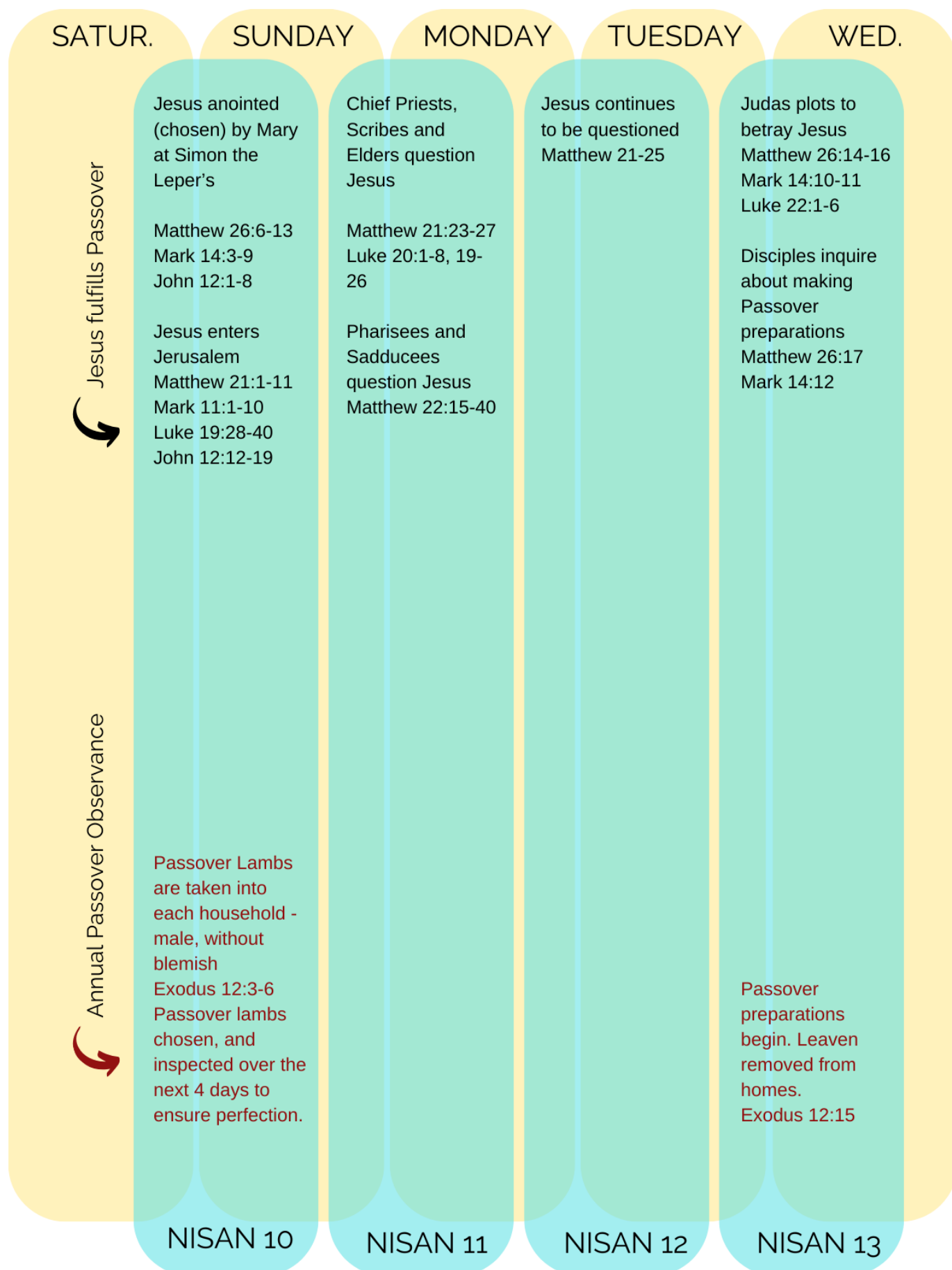
Prior to the resurrection, Jesus repeatedly avoided publicly presenting Himself as Messiah [Christ] and did not allow the disciples to present him as Messiah. The prophecies... in the Old Testament present the Messiah as a king and ruler who delivers Israel and the nations while executing judgment on the wicked. Jesus knew the messianic promises would be fulfilled in his second coming when He came to establish the kingdom and take dominion over the earth."

Peter and the apostles could now see that the stage was set for Jesus, the divine human, to return as the Messiah, and fulfil every prophetic promise. This was the good news they were to proclaim, and Holy Spirit was present to empower them to proclaim it. 2000 years later, we continue the story. Let us fix our eyes on the returning King, receive the power of His Spirit, and live as faithful witnesses – until He comes!

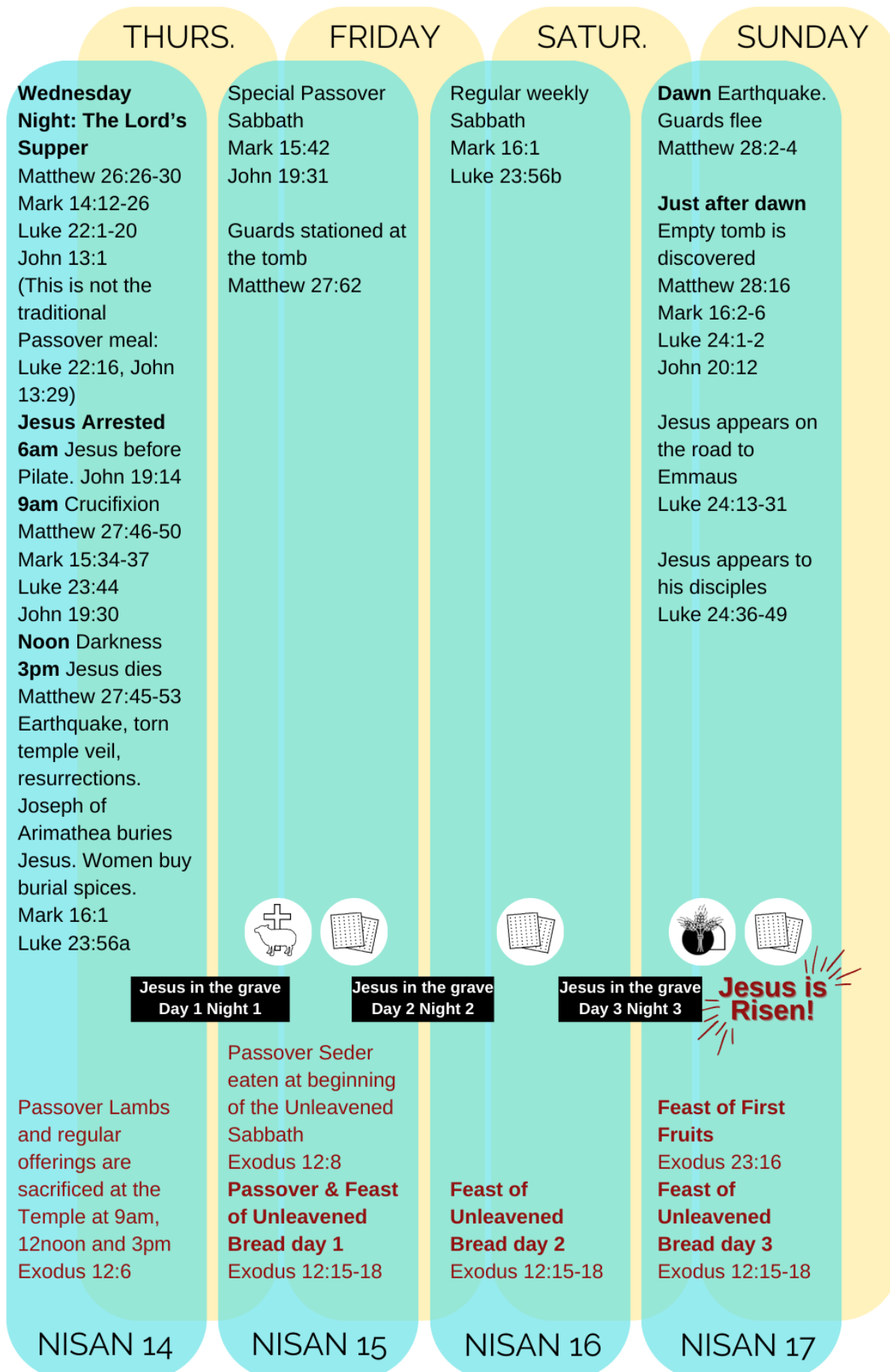
Prayer:

Father of Glory, on this Pentecost day we thank you for your promises – both what you have fulfilled and are yet to fulfill. We remember your covenant with Israel, and pray for the salvation of Jewish people everywhere. We thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit and ask that you fill every believer afresh, empowering us to live and proclaim the Good News. Amen.

Appendix 1 – Passover In The Year Jesus Died



- Blue Days = Jewish calendar days, sunset to sunset
- Yellow Days = Conventional calendar days, midnight to midnight



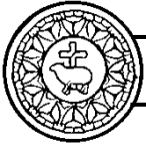
Nisan 17 is also Omer 1...the countdown to Pentecost begins: Lev. 23:15-16



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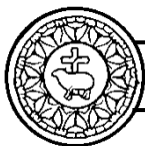
Preface

The Passover Seder is a disciple-making tool that uses story-telling to engage us, our children and our senses in the stories of the Exodus, Israel and in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before eating your main meal, use this 'seder' (meaning order or script) as a guide for your Christ-centred 'story-telling Passover meal'. Adapt the outline according to your household's needs. We will be referring to the following foods:

- *Matzah (unleavened bread)*
- *Bitter Herbs*
- *Parsley and salt water*
- *Charoset (apple and nuts)*
- *Lamb (eaten with the main meal)*

Over the centuries, many traditions have been added to Jewish Passover Celebrations. Some of these traditions are helpful for diving deeper into God's Passover story, while some are additions with less connection to the actual Scriptures. In this 'seder' our aim is to share a very simple, adaptable, Jesus-focused framework for your meal with clear links to the Passover of Exodus and the Gospels. For that reason, a number of common Passover practices (e.g. finding the afikomen, the four cups of wine, Elijah's seat) have not been included - but you might like to look into those traditions for yourself at some point. Keep Jesus at the centre and enjoy the journey of exploring the wonders of God's Story!



Lighting the Table Candles

Leader begins by lighting the table candles:

As we light the festival lights, we welcome you Holy Spirit. We ask for your light to fill our hearts as we share this Passover meal.

Everyone stand together and pray (leader can speak first, others can echo him/her):

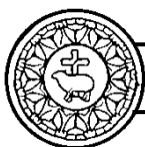
Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe;

You have chosen us from the beginning of time;

You have made us holy through the blood of your Son, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world;

In love you have given us Sabbaths for rest, holidays for joy, festivals for gladness, and your Son for our freedom.

Blessings to our God who chose to deliver us!



Serving the Matzah

Question #1 *(asked by a child or the youngest person)*

Why are we eating matzah tonight?

Leader:

We eat the matzah to remind us that the Hebrews did not have time to wait for yeast to rise because they had to be ready to move when God spoke. We eat the matzah tonight because we remember Jesus. Matzah that is striped and pierced reminds us that by his stripes we are healed. He was pierced for our rebellion.

Choose someone to read 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 and 2 Corinthians 5:21:

"Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

"God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."

Leader:

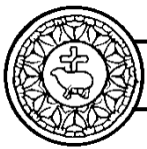
Tonight we eat the matzah – bread without yeast – to remember Jesus who was without sin.

Break the matzah.

Hold it up and say together:

Because he was broken for us!

Eat the matzah.



Serving the Bitter Herbs

Question #2 (asked by a child or the youngest person)

Why are we eating bitter herbs?

Leader:

Long ago on that Passover night, God instructed the children of Israel to eat bitter herbs. For thousands of years they have done this to remember the bitterness of the cruel slavery at the hands of Pharaoh.

*As we taste the bitterness, let us remember the bitterness of slavery to sin.
Let us remember the bitter suffering of Jesus as he was beaten and then hung upon the cross.*

Psalm 22 prophesies the suffering our Lord endured for our deliverance.

Choose someone to read Psalm 22:13-18:

"Like lions they open their jaws against me, roaring and tearing into their prey. My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me. My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead. My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing."

Leader:

In our celebration of freedom, let us remember the great cost of our redemption.



Serving the Parsley and Salt Water

Question #3 (asked by a child or the youngest person)

Why do we dip our herbs twice tonight?

Leader:

Parsley is dipped in salt water to remind us of the bitterness of the slavery that Israel endured. The bowl of salted water speaks of the many tears that were shed and the cries that went up to God for deliverance from their powerful enemy. Let us remember that God is a Father who sees and cares and is stronger than every enemy.

Choose someone to read from Exodus 3:

Then the Lord told [Moses], "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land."

First Dipping: Everyone taste the parsley with the salt water.

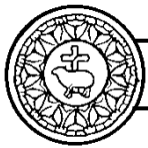
Leader:

Jesus died at Passover but on the Day of First Fruits he was resurrected from the dead. Because he is the first fruits of the resurrection, we look forward to our resurrection, and the ending of all tears and all suffering. As we dip a second time, we long to hear the voice that John heard in Revelation 21:

"Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

Second Dipping: Everyone taste the parsley with the salt water. Say together:

Jesus, we long for you to return and to wipe away every tear, and to remove death and sorrow and crying and pain. Come Lord Jesus!



Serving the Charoset (Apple and Nuts)

Leader:

We eat the charoset and remember the mortar and the bricks of slavery in Egypt. Generations of back-breaking work. Emotional trauma. No days for rest. But the charoset is also sweet to taste. We remember the sweetness of freedom: God intervened and broke the power of the oppressor.

We also remember our slavery to sin. We were incapable of saving ourselves. We deserved neither mercy nor grace. But as you taste the sweetness of this dish, remember that God, who is mighty to save, came near to us and broke the power of sin!

We can say with the Apostle Paul: "What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Romans 7:24- 25)

Taste the charoset together**Question #4** (asked by a child or the youngest person)

Why are we eating this meal reclining?

Leader:

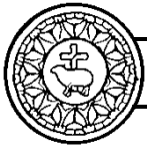
Because Christ, our Passover Lamb, has bought our freedom! Slaves don't recline to enjoy a meal, but sons and daughters do! Tonight we remember that we are no longer slaves, but children of the King. We are free to come and take our place before our glorious Father who sits on the eternal throne!

Remember the words of Jesus in John 8:

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be set free'?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free."



Preparing to Serve the Lamb

Leader:

As the Hebrews needed the blood of a lamb on their doorposts for the angel of death to 'pass over' them, so we need the blood of the Lamb on our hearts for death to 'pass over' us. John the Baptist proclaimed: "Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Peter reminds us: "For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God."

Tonight we will eat this lamb, remembering the willing sacrifice of Jesus, God's own gift of a perfect lamb. He gave up his life to give us new life. Because of Jesus, death has passed over us, and we have been set free to enjoy eternal life in his presence.

Concluding toast before the main meal – fill everyone's glasses.

Leader:

Father of Glory, we ask you to lead us into deeper worship and stronger friendship with your Son, the Crucified and Resurrected Lord. We honour you Jesus, the fulfilment of the Passover. You gave up your life to give us life. In the festival of Unleavened Bread, you were laid in the tomb, untainted by sin. On the Day of First Fruits, you conquered death and arose as the First Fruits of the coming resurrection. Our hope is in your sinless life, your sacrificial death, your victorious resurrection, and your soon return.

Everyone raise their glasses: *Until he comes! Maranatha*!*

Drink together, then serve the meal.

Option: *During your meal, take some time to pray for the salvation of the Jewish people.*

**Maranatha comes from an Aramaic phrase meaning 'come Lord' or 'the Lord has come' (see 1 Corinthians 16:22). It is used by Christians around the world as a prayer for the return of Jesus.*



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