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R. C. SPROUL

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Chapter One

The Significance of the Passover

At the very heart of the life and worship of the early Christian community was the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In the early days of church history, the celebration of Holy Communion was known by different names. On the one hand, the early church used to come together and celebrate what they called an "agape feast" or a "love feast" in which they celebrated the love of God and the love that they enjoyed with one another as Christians in this holy supper. The sacrament was called the Lord's Supper because

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it made reference to the last supper that Jesus had with His disciples in the Upper Room on the night before His death. In the early church and later, the Lord's Supper was called the "Eucharist," taking its definition from the Greek verb *eucharisto*, which is the Greek verb that means "to thank." Thus, one facet of the Lord's Supper has been the gathering of the people of God to express their gratitude for what Christ accomplished in their behalf in His death.

The Lord's Supper is a drama that has its roots not only in that Upper Room experience, but the roots reach back into the Old Testament celebration of Passover. In fact, you will recall that before Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room, He had given requirements to His disciples that they would secure a room for the purpose of their meeting together on this occasion because He was entering into His passion. He knew that His trial, death, resurrection, and return to the Father were imminent, so He said to His disciples, "I deeply desire to celebrate the Passover with you one last time."

The immediate context in which Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper was the celebration of the Passover feast with His disciples. The link to Passover is seen not only in His words to the disciples but also in similar language used by

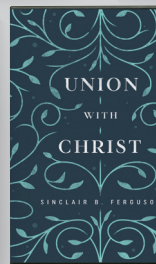
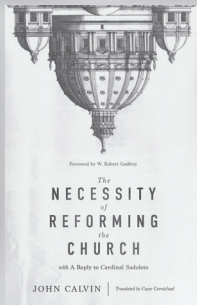
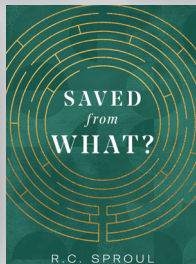
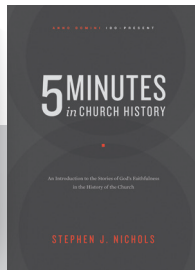
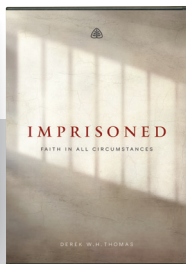
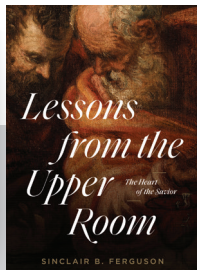
The Significance of the Passover

the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the Corinthian church. He wrote, “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7). It’s clear that the Apostolic community saw a link between the death of Christ and the Old Testament Passover celebration.

For us to get a handle on that, we have to look back to the pages of the Old Testament to the historical context of the institution of the Passover. We must remember the enslavement of the people of Israel in Egypt under the domination of a ruthless pharaoh. Recall that the people suffered greatly, and they moaned and they groaned in their suffering, but their groaning did not go unheard. We understand that God appeared in the Midianite wilderness to the aged Moses who was living in exile as a fugitive from the forces of Pharaoh at that time. When God appeared to Moses and spoke to him out of the burning bush, He said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5).

In that encounter, God directed Moses to go both to Pharaoh and to the Jewish people to deliver the Word of God to them. We recall that Moses felt inadequate for the task and wondered how he was going to be able to communicate the Word of God with any authority to either

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