



Teach Your Children

a Passover Mandate

Thirty-five hundred years ago, our forefathers - while steeped in idolatry and slavery in land that was not theirs - were given a service and a mandate. The service would provide temporary freedom from their current taskmasters, but the mandate would secure their freedom for all eternity. The service they were given goes like this -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 12:21-23** . . . "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover *lamb*. ²² "And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning. ²³ "For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you*.

We recognize this passage as part of the Passover story. Simply put, the Israelites were to offer up a sacrificial lamb as a substitute for the life of their firstborn child; and because they did this, their firstborn were spared whereas the firstborn of the Egyptians died. This - of course - provoked Pharaoh to expel the Israelites from Egypt.

This was the service; here's the mandate -

^{NKJ} **Exodus 12:24-27** ²⁴ "And you shall observe (Heb. - "shamar" - *guard*) this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. ²⁵ "It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep (Heb. - "shamar" - *guard*) this service. ²⁶ "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' ²⁷ "that you shall say, 'It *is* the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'

This mandate is two-fold. They were first to observe, or *guard* the Passover service forever, and secondly, they were to never forget the fact that the firstborn children were spared because of the death of an innocent lamb. How were they supposed to guard that fact? By teaching it to their children year after year from that point on.

For generations the Jewish people have maintained the basic understanding of Passover by teaching it to their children through the use of four questions that are asked during the Passover meal. This involvement in the service helps to make Passover real to them and thus they look forward to it each year and have been able to pass it on from generation to generation. On the other hand, the non-Jewish Israelite tribes (referred to as *Ephraim* in the Tnakh) have mixed Passover with other religious practices to where it no longer resembles the Passover we were called to protect. And so their children, instead of eating a Passover meal and asking why we observe this service, now search for rabbit eggs on Easter morning.

Why is that so? Why is it that Jewish children have a better understanding of Passover than do most *Christian* children? I submit the reason is that the Jews continued to teach their children the details of their redemption year after year and generation after generation, but the Christians, in their desire to avoid things "Jewish", did not but instead came up with their own way of observing their redemption. In so doing, the message of God's greatness and power has been lost.

In this study, I want to discuss the value of teaching our children Biblical history. Biblical principles, and the greatness of the God of Israel. We will:

- discuss the Passover Mandate to teach our children
- see why it's so important to instill God's values in the hearts of children
- discuss why teaching is better than conversion
- see ways we can satisfy the Biblical mandate

The Passover Mandate

What is the Passover Mandate? Simply put, it is to guard the way of God by teaching it to your children. This is a multi-faceted task, one that takes effort and commitment. Let's examine some of those aspects. The first is that we are to teach our children about God.

Even before God gave Israel the Passover, He explained to Moses what He was doing and why. Egypt had already suffered under seven severe plagues, but God was not through with Pharaoh. Pharaoh had refused to release the Israelites, and God was going to use his refusal to show Israel His great power. But this display of power was not just for those who were alive at the time. He intended for these stories to be handed down from generation to generation. As he was preparing to instruct Moses concerning the 8th plague, He said -

^{ESV} **Exodus 10:1-2** "Go in to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may show these signs of mine among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that you may know that I am the LORD."

God wanted the Exodus story to be told over and over and to each generation, and for what reason? Because it is by this story that the Israelite children would recognize the God of Israel. Think about it . . . what other story portrays a god that has power over the water, the animals, disease, the sun, the wind, light and darkness, and even life itself. God told the Israelites in advance what He would do with each of these various parts of His creation . . . and then He did it. But there's even more to this passage . . .

God said to *tell* the story to your children. Are we supposed to just *tell* the story, or are we to go even deeper - explaining the hows and whys of the story to our children. I believe it's the latter because the Hebrew words tend to indicate such.

The most common Hebrew word for tell in the King James version (KJV) of the Bible is "nagad" (נָגַד - Strong's 5046), a word that means to *declare* or to *make known*, but the word used in this passage is "caphar" (סָפַר - Strong's 5608) which carries the sense of *numbering* or *recounting*. In other words, get into the details of the story. It's interesting to note that the noun form of "caphar" is "cepher" (סֵפֶר - Strong's 5612) which is the Hebrew word for *book*. It appears that God intends for us to include details of events that may not appear in just a superficial reading, but may require research on our part to show just how awesome the plagues may have been. Of course, we don't have to stop at the Passover story. There are a number of stories in the scripture that illustrate the greatness of God's power and glory, and sharing them with our children helps to illustrate the security and peace we can have by trusting in the God of Israel.

Instill a Dedication of God's Way in Their Hearts

The next point comes about as a result of the first - we should strive to instill a dedication to God's way in our children. The book of Proverbs, starting in chapter 10, contains a number of proverbs that contrast the thoughts and actions of the wicked with those of the righteous. These proverbs are all set in the context of the Torah -

^{NKJ} **Proverbs 13:14** The law (Torah) of the wise *is* a fountain of life, To turn *one* away from the snares of death.

Within this context, we find this very familiar proverb -

^{KJV} **Proverbs 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.

This proverb is just one of many wise sayings of Solomon that contrast the wicked with the righteous. In it we see that we are to train up a child in *the way*. This implies that you will train up a child in the Torah of God. But training a child is not like training a hunting dog. We don't want our children to follow God simply because they've been trained to do so, there's more to it than that.

In this passage, the Hebrew word for *train* is "chanak" (כָּנַח - Strong's 2596) which means *to dedicate*. *Chanak* is the root word from which we get the word *Chanukkah* which is the *Feast of Dedication*. Thus, we are to *dedicate* our children to God's way. That implies teaching not only how to walk in God's ways, but why. Teach them the benefits, the blessings that come from pleasing God. Show them historical evidence - both in your life and in the lives of those we read about in the scripture - that pleasing God pays off. And yes - also show them what often happens when you turn away from God. This is all a part of dedicating your children to walk in God's way. Is this a guarantee that your children will never leave the walk? No, but if they are dedicated to the walk as a young person, they may walk away when they are older, but that heart will not leave.

What exactly is the way to which we are to dedicate our children? The answer is quite clear! We dedicated them to God's law - the Torah. But keep in mind - the Torah is not just laws and instructions. It's also stories that illustrate God's mercy to those who follow Him as well as His sadness when they don't. Moses, while instructing the children of those who died in the wilderness, said to them -

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 4:9-10** ⁹ ". . . take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children- ¹⁰ how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'

On Mount Horeb (Mount Sinai) God gave Israel the Ten Commandments as well as the statutes and judgments that they would need to know in order to love God and love one another. That is the way we are to follow and the way we are to make known to our children. But the commandments are not all that needs to be taught; we are to teach all that happened at Mount Horeb - especially how God intended to take us as His special people to be an example of how a righteous people can live and be blessed in so doing.

Moses repeated this in a different way just a few chapters later -

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 6:1-2** "Now this *is* the commandment, *and these are* the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe *them* in the land which you are crossing over to possess, ² "that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life . . . "

Therefore, dedicating our children to the way of God means that we instill in them a love of God, what His plans are for us, and the walk He's given to us.

To conclude this first point - the Passover Mandate is to teach our children about God through a never-ending process of storytelling and teaching about God's ways. In so doing, we dedicate our children to God. We'll discuss specific ways of teaching children as we conclude.

Teach or Convert?

If we are successful in teaching our children, then our children can avoid the process that religious people call *conversion*. In Christian circles, conversion, or being converted, is when a person leaves a life of godlessness or when he changes from one "faith" to another. One prominent church organization says this about conversion -

"Contrary to what many think, it (*conversion*) is not just a one-time event. Instead the Scriptures reveal that it is a process. The process begins with God's calling, followed by the key steps of repentance, baptism and the receiving of the Holy Spirit—finally climaxing with the return of Jesus Christ, when the dead in Christ are resurrected to immortality and given eternal life. That is the ultimate transformation, being changed from a mortal to an immortal being!"¹

According to this organization, conversion is a process that includes repentance, baptism, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Comparing theirs to other organization's web sites, it appears that this formula is pretty much the same for most Christian denominations.

I remember that in the church I was a part of for many years, one of the questions that was often asked of those who were new to or visiting a particular church area was "when were you converted"? This is similar to the question asked in many protestant circles - "when were you saved"?

But is it God's goal that we be converted? Again, remembering back to my previous church fellowship, a common topic of discussion was "what led to your conversion" which simply meant "how did God get your attention"? For many, it was driving along at night and hearing an evangelist on the radio. For others, it was noticing a magazine at the dentist's office. Once God got a person's attention, or as we'd say - "they received their 'calling' ", they would spend many sleepless nights studying their Bible - "proving all things" - as they enjoyed an overwhelming sense of euphoria while beginning to learn "the truth".

But this eventually lead to a problem, especially as the church grew and matured. As the children of these converts became teens and adults, they began to wonder if they had ever been converted because they never had that euphoric feeling; they never had the desire to stay up all night studying their Bible - proving that what their parents had taught them was true; they never had this sense of "being called". For them, walking with God was just something they did! Then one Sabbath, the leader of that organization's teen program gave a sermon in which he explained that those "2nd generation Christians" would probably never have this sense of joy at learning "the truth" because they were raised "in the truth", and what's more - that was the way God intended for it to be.

I concur! God never intended for us to have to be converted. Instead, He intended for us to simply continue to walk in His ways from generation to generation. It's like the song *Ancient Words*² so clearly states, which by the way, is what inspired this article. The song goes like this -

"Holy words, of our faith, Handed down, to this age. Came to us, through sacrifice, Oh heed the faithful words of Christ."

God's word - like we saw previously, was to be handed down to us . . . God never intended for us to have to search it out. Only if our parents failed to teach the truth, or if what they taught us was incorrect, would we have to search it out.

¹ <http://www.ucg.org/bible-study-tools/booklets/transforming-your-life-the-process-of-conversion>

² Written by Lynn DeShazo

Unfortunately, many were not taught the truth of God's way while children. What's more, many of the things they were taught were not Biblically based. But as God continues to call His people back to His way, they find themselves searching for the truth. That is exactly what God - through Moses - said would happen -

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 30:1** "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, ² "and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, ³ "that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you . . ."

Only when we have been separated from God's truth do we have to search these things out, and like the Bereans ³, prove again that they are true. It is then that we - in a sense - are "converted" - but not in the way that's taught by most protestant Christian denominations. Let me explain:

When we think of converting something into something else, we see it becoming something that it never was before, thus in typical Christian thought, we give up an old way and take on a new. But in God's eyes, people who know His way do not adopt a new way, they simply return to the old way - the way that was taught to our Hebrew ancestors.

Our Christian use of the word "convert" is oftentimes based on the thought that the early Christians were leaving Judaism and beginning a new "church". Thus, when we read Peter say -

^{NKJ} **Acts 3:19** "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . ."

. . . we think that he's telling the people to change to something new. But that's not the case. Instead, Peter's telling them to "return" to the old way. How do we know? We know because the first word in the passage - *repent* - comes from the Greek word "meanoeo" which is rooted in the concept of "with understanding" ("meta" - *with* or *after* and "noeo" - *understanding*). In addition, the Greek word from which we get "converted" is "epistrepho" (Strong's 1994) which in most cases means "turn" or "return". If you were to look up the term "epistrepho" in the LXX, you would find that it translates the Hebrew word "shuwb" (שׁוּב - Strong's 7725) as it does in Malachi -

^{NKJ} **Malachi 3:7** Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept *them*. Return (*shuwb*) to Me, and I will return (*shuwb*) to you," Says the LORD of hosts , , '

So Peter's statement in Acts 3:19 could be better rendered -

"With understanding, return to God that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . ."

So to *convert* simply means to *return* to the way - to the ordinances of God that He gave His people at the beginning. It implies that you (our your ancestors) have forsaken the way of God, and thus there is a need to return to God's way.

With that thought in mind, if our children were taught God's way of life and were raised walking in that way, do we want them to "convert"? No - we want them to *return* - like the Prodigal Son who strayed from the way and then wanted to return to the way he had been taught at home. Bottom line - it's better to teach our children from the beginning than it is for them to have to convert later in life.

³ Acts 17:10-11

Teaching Suggestions

There are many ways to teach children about the greatness of the God of Israel, so we'll just discuss a few.

Verbally Communicate God in Your Life -

Little children's minds are like funnels - everything they hear goes to their head. Therefore, the primary way to teach them is to talk to them about God. Moses said that -

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 11:18-19** "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ¹⁹ You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

Laying up the words of God in the heart of our children should be a never-ending process, starting in the early morning and continuing till they go to bed. Think of it as making a lay-up in basketball - it's relatively easy to do, but it does take practice. Here's some ideas -

- When speaking of God, insert adjectives before the word "god". For instance, "the Creator God", "the All-Knowing God", "our Savior God", "the Everlasting God"
- Credit God in the natural world. For instance, if you're sitting around a campfire ask the children "why does a fire burn?", then explain to them the natural laws that will always result in fire;
- Question them about God's laws. Again, if cooking marshmallows around a campfire, ask them why it's OK to eat some marshmallows, but not others.

Lead by Example

The Passover story provides two examples of teaching children by example. The first is the example of eating unleavened bread for seven days, which is a remembrance of God's deliverance from Egypt

^{ESV} **Exodus 13:7-8** Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. ⁸ You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

The other example is the sacrifice of the firstborn lambs.

^{ESV} **Exodus 13:12, 14** you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's. ¹⁴ And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.'

This first example is something we can continue to do each year. In fact, if we make an example out of observing God's Sabbath and festivals, we do more to teach our children about God than anything we can do by just talking to them. By our example of commitment to these days while early in their lives, we instill in them a commitment to the Sabbath and festivals that will benefit them tremendously when they grow older and have to make those decisions themselves.

Openly expressing thanks and gratitude to God when things go well is another way we can use verbal communication to acknowledge the power of God. When children hear parents acknowledge God's work in their lives, they become a witness to them that God is associated with good things.

Let Them See You Study God's Word -

Even though this might fit under the category of "Example", personal Bible study in the presence of your children can do much to give them comfort and security. We probably don't consider the fact

that if a child knows you are reading the instructions for a new security system for your home, he will probably sleep better knowing Daddy has added a new layer of security to the home. How about reading the Bible in their presence. If you are teaching them that God is their defense, they might appreciate the fact that you're learning more about God.

The same holds true when reading to your children. Stories of how God delivers His children will help your children get a better grasp of God - especially since in the eyes of young children, Daddy is god.

Conclusion

In this study, we've seen that even before Israel became a nation God showed them the importance of parents teaching God's ways to the children. If they do, God's ways will be instilled in their heart so that there will never be a generation that does not understand the God of Israel.

As it has been for 3500 years, the future of God's people depends on their children. Will the children follow in the paths of their parents, rearing up children who will follow God's way, and will those children do the same? I pray that that may be the case, for only then will there truly be a people prepared for the Lord, and only then will we enjoy the eternal freedom God promised Israel so many years ago.

I'll close with a passage from Psalm 78, a passage that paints a picture of God's people that is a stark contrast to the historical Israel. This is the Israel to come . . .

^{ESV} **Psalm 78:1-7** Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth! ² I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, ³ things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. ⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶ that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments . . .

Shalom Alechem