

Lesson 3 – Passover (חֹדֶשׁ, *pesach*) – Part 1

Passover and Unleavened Bread

Leviticus 23:4–8 (ESV)

⁴ “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. ⁵ In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. ⁶ And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. ⁷ On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. ⁸ But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

The Institution

The Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread are intertwined within the text, with the Passover celebrated on the first day of the feast (Abib / Nisan 14) and the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated on the following day. The Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for seven days and required daily offerings. The feast demanded a rejection of leavened bread from the Israelites’ meals, households, and storage places. It concluded with a convocation and rest from laborious activity. The observance is instituted within the narrative framework of the Exodus story where God brought plagues of increasing severity against Egypt to demonstrate his power and bring about the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Exod 1–12).

Exodus 12 - The instructions for Israel’s survival of the 10th plague and continued observance:

- (3-5)** Select an unblemished male lamb on the 10th of the first month (Abib / Nisan)
- (6)** Sacrifice the lamb at sundown on the 14th of the first month (Abib / Nisan)
- (7)** Place the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel of the house
- (8-9)** Roast the lamb with fire, and do not eat it raw or boil it
- (8)** Eat the roasted lamb with unleavened bread on bitter herbs
- (10)** Eat all of the lamb that night and burning any leftovers
- (11)** Eat the meal in haste, ready to leave home at a moment’s notice.
- (14)** The Passover was a permanent ordinance.
- (15)** Remove leaven from their homes
- (15-16, 19-20)** Eat unleavened bread for seven days / holy assembly on the 1st and 7th days
- (17)** The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a permanent ordinance.
- (39)** The unleavened bread signified that the Israelites were to leave Egypt in haste, with no time to wait for bread to rise.
- (43-49)** No foreigners or hired help were to eat the Passover meal, but a circumcised sojourner or slave could eat of it.

Exodus 13 – God’s instructions for the people to continue to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread when they took up residence in the promised land

(6) Eat unleavened bread for seven days and observe a feast to the Lord on the seventh day.

(7) No Israelites within the borders of the land were to possess leaven for the duration of the festival.

(6-8) As part of the festival, the Israelites were to remind their children of how God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt.

(1-2, 11-16) The Israelites were to dedicate their firstborn sons and animals to the Lord, sacrificing their beasts and redeeming their sons.

Pilgrimage

Exodus 23:14-18 / Exodus 34:18-26 – The Feast of Unleavened Bread is designated as one of the three pilgrimage feasts where all adult males were to present themselves to the Lord.

Changes

Numbers 9:6-14 - Allowance for *another* Passover that could be observed on the 14th of the *second* month for anyone who had been unclean or traveling and unable to participate in the first Passover. In making this allowance, God emphasizes that the *only* people eligible for the make-up Passover are those who had been unclean or away on a journey; all others who neglect the Passover have sinned and should be “cut off.”

Deut 16:1-8

(2) Sacrifice can be made from “flock” or “herd”

(5-6) Passover sacrifice may not be made in “your towns,” but “at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it”

Old Testament Observances of Passover

Apart from the foundational narrative instituting Passover (Exod 12) and the legal passages regulating the observance (Lev 23, Ex 23 & 34, Num 28 & 29, Deut 16), the formal ritual observance of the Passover is mentioned only a few times in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 9; Josh 5:10–12; 2 Kgs 23:21–23; 2 Chr 30:1–27; 35:1–19; Ezra 6:19–22).

Despite the stated importance for Israel to observe Passover “as a lasting statute” for all future generations (e.g., Exod 12:14; compare Lev 23:5; Num 9:1–5; 28:16), the biblical narrative makes a point of emphasizing how *unusual* observance of the Passover actually was throughout Israel’s history (2 Kgs 23:22; 2 Chr 30:26; 35:18; compare Neh 8:17).

Numbers 9:1-5 - Records that the Israelites observed the Passover one year after leaving Egypt. This was the first official Passover that functioned as a commemoration of the Exodus event.

Joshua 5:10-12 – The first observance of the Passover in the land of Canaan.

Background Passages

Exodus 12 (ESV)

¹ The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, ² “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. ³ Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, ⁶ and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

⁷ “Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. ⁸ They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. ¹⁰ And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. ¹¹ In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover. ¹² For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

¹⁴ “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. ¹⁷ And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. ¹⁸ In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹ For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. ²⁰ You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

²¹ Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. ²² Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the 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 will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. ²⁴ You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons

forever. ²⁵ And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. ²⁶ And when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' ²⁷ you shall say, 'It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.' " And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

²⁸ Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did.

²⁹ At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. ³⁰ And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. ³¹ Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. ³² Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!"

³³ The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵ The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. ³⁶ And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

³⁷ And the people of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. ³⁸ A mixed multitude also went up with them, and very much livestock, both flocks and herds. ³⁹ And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

⁴⁰ The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. ⁴¹ At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. ⁴² It was a night of watching by the LORD, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the LORD by all the people of Israel throughout their generations.

⁴³ And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, ⁴⁴ but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. ⁴⁵ No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. ⁴⁶ It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. ⁴⁹ There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you."

⁵⁰ All the people of Israel did just as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron. ⁵¹ And on that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.

Exodus 13:1–16 (ESV)

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”

³ Then Moses said to the people, “Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of slavery, for by a strong hand the LORD brought you out from this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten. ⁴ Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. ⁵ And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. ⁶ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. ⁷ 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.’ ⁹ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. ¹⁰ You shall therefore keep this statute at its appointed time from year to year.

¹¹ “When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, ¹² 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. ¹³ Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. 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. ¹⁵ For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ ¹⁶ It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes, for by a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

Exodus 23:10–19 (ESV)

¹⁰ “For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, ¹¹ but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

¹² “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed.

¹³ “Pay attention to all that I have said to you, and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips.

¹⁴ “Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when

you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD.

¹⁸ “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning.

¹⁹ “The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

“You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.

Exodus 34:18–26 (ESV)

¹⁸ “You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. ¹⁹ All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. ²⁰ The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed.

²¹ “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. ²² You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year’s end. ²³ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. ²⁴ For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

²⁵ “You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning. ²⁶ The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

Leviticus 23:4–14 (ESV)

⁴ “These are the appointed feasts of the LORD, the holy convocations, which you shall proclaim at the time appointed for them. ⁵ In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD’s Passover. ⁶ And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. ⁷ On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. ⁸ But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.”

⁹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, ¹¹ and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, so that you may be accepted. On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. ¹² And on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb a year old without blemish as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹³ And the grain offering with it shall be two tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, a food offering to the LORD with a pleasing aroma, and the drink offering with it shall be of wine, a fourth of a hin. ¹⁴ And you shall eat neither bread nor grain parched or fresh until this same day, until you have brought the offering of your God: it is a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Numbers 9:1–14 (ESV)

¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, ² “Let the people of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. ³ On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its rules you shall keep it.” ⁴ So Moses told the people of Israel that they should keep the Passover. ⁵ And they kept the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so the people of Israel did. ⁶ And there were certain men who were unclean through touching a dead body, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day, and they came before Moses and Aaron on that day. ⁷ And those men said to him, “We are unclean through touching a dead body. Why are we kept from bringing the LORD’s offering at its appointed time among the people of Israel?” ⁸ And Moses said to them, “Wait, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you.”

⁹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If any one of you or of your descendants is unclean through touching a dead body, or is on a long journey, he shall still keep the Passover to the LORD. ¹¹ In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ¹² They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it. ¹³ But if anyone who is clean and is not on a journey fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the LORD’s offering at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. ¹⁴ And if a stranger sojourns among you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its rule, so shall he do. You shall have one statute, both for the sojourner and for the native.”

Numbers 28:16–25 (ESV)

¹⁶ “On the fourteenth day of the first month is the LORD’s Passover, ¹⁷ and on the fifteenth day of this month is a feast. Seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. ¹⁸ On the first day there shall be a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work, ¹⁹ but offer a food offering, a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls from the herd, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old; see that they are without blemish; ²⁰ also their grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil; three tenths of an ephah shall you offer for a bull, and two tenths for a ram; ²¹ a tenth shall you offer for each of the seven lambs; ²² also one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you. ²³ You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a regular burnt offering. ²⁴ In the same way you shall offer daily, for seven days, the food of a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the LORD. It shall be offered besides the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. ²⁵ And on the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation. You shall not do any ordinary work.

Deuteronomy 16:1–8 (ESV)

¹ “Observe the month of Abib and keep the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night. ² And you shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the LORD your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place that the LORD will choose,

to make his name dwell there. ³ You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction—for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. ⁴ No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning. ⁵ You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, ⁶ but at the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at sunset, at the time you came out of Egypt. ⁷ And you shall cook it and eat it at the place that the LORD your God will choose. And in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents. ⁸ For six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God. You shall do no work on it.

Joshua 5:10–12 (ESV)

¹⁰ While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. ¹¹ And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. ¹² And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.

2 Kings 23:21–23 (ESV)

²¹ And the king commanded all the people, “Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” ²² For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. ²³ But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 30:1–27 (ESV)

¹ Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. ² For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month— ³ for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem— ⁴ and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly. ⁵ So they decreed to make a proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, that the people should come and keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem, for they had not kept it as often as prescribed. ⁶ So couriers went throughout all Israel and Judah with letters from the king and his princes, as the king had commanded, saying, “O people of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that he may turn again to the remnant of you who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. ⁷ Do not be like your fathers and your brothers, who were faithless to the LORD God of their fathers, so that he made them a desolation, as you see. ⁸ Do not now be stiff-necked as your fathers were, but yield yourselves to the LORD and come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever, and serve the LORD

your God, that his fierce anger may turn away from you. ⁹ For if you return to the LORD, your brothers and your children will find compassion with their captors and return to this land. For the LORD your God is gracious and merciful and will not turn away his face from you, if you return to him.”

¹⁰ So the couriers went from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, and as far as Zebulun, but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. ¹¹ However, some men of Asher, of Manasseh, and of Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. ¹² The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the LORD.

¹³ And many people came together in Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month, a very great assembly. ¹⁴ They set to work and removed the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for burning incense they took away and threw into the brook Kidron. ¹⁵ And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, so that they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. ¹⁶ They took their accustomed posts according to the Law of Moses the man of God. The priests threw the blood that they received from the hand of the Levites. ¹⁷ For there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to consecrate it to the LORD. ¹⁸ For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, “May the good LORD pardon everyone ¹⁹ who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness.” ²⁰ And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. ²¹ And the people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness, and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with all their might to the LORD. ²² And Hezekiah spoke encouragingly to all the Levites who showed good skill in the service of the LORD. So they ate the food of the festival for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the LORD, the God of their fathers.

²³ Then the whole assembly agreed together to keep the feast for another seven days. So they kept it for another seven days with gladness. ²⁴ For Hezekiah king of Judah gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep for offerings, and the princes gave the assembly 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep. And the priests consecrated themselves in great numbers. ²⁵ The whole assembly of Judah, and the priests and the Levites, and the whole assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners who came out of the land of Israel, and the sojourners who lived in Judah, rejoiced. ²⁶ So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. ²⁷ Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard, and their prayer came to his holy habitation in heaven.

2 Chronicles 35:1–19 (ESV)

¹ Josiah kept a Passover to the LORD in Jerusalem. And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month. ² He appointed the priests to their offices and encouraged them in the service of the house of the LORD. ³ And he said to the Levites who

taught all Israel and who were holy to the LORD, “Put the holy ark in the house that Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, built. You need not carry it on your shoulders. Now serve the LORD your God and his people Israel. ⁴ Prepare yourselves according to your fathers’ houses by your divisions, as prescribed in the writing of David king of Israel and the document of Solomon his son. ⁵ And stand in the Holy Place according to the groupings of the fathers’ houses of your brothers the lay people, and according to the division of the Levites by fathers’ household. ⁶ And slaughter the Passover lamb, and consecrate yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do according to the word of the LORD by Moses.”

⁷ Then Josiah contributed to the lay people, as Passover offerings for all who were present, lambs and young goats from the flock to the number of 30,000, and 3,000 bulls; these were from the king’s possessions. ⁸ And his officials contributed willingly to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiyah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, the chief officers of the house of God, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings 2,600 Passover lambs and 300 bulls. ⁹ Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the Passover offerings 5,000 lambs and young goats and 500 bulls.

¹⁰ When the service had been prepared for, the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their divisions according to the king’s command. ¹¹ And they slaughtered the Passover lamb, and the priests threw the blood that they received from them while the Levites flayed the sacrifices. ¹² And they set aside the burnt offerings that they might distribute them according to the groupings of the fathers’ houses of the lay people, to offer to the LORD, as it is written in the Book of Moses. And so they did with the bulls. ¹³ And they roasted the Passover lamb with fire according to the rule; and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in cauldrons, and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the lay people. ¹⁴ And afterward they prepared for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, were offering the burnt offerings and the fat parts until night; so the Levites prepared for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron. ¹⁵ The singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their place according to the command of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king’s seer; and the gatekeepers were at each gate. They did not need to depart from their service, for their brothers the Levites prepared for them.

¹⁶ So all the service of the LORD was prepared that day, to keep the Passover and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD, according to the command of King Josiah. ¹⁷ And the people of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days. ¹⁸ No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, and the priests and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁹ In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept.

Ezra 6:19–22 (ESV)

¹⁹ On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles kept the Passover. ²⁰ For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were clean. So they slaughtered the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow priests, and for themselves. ²¹ It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of

the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel. ²² And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy, for the LORD had made them joyful and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.

Passover

(כֹּפֶּסֶת, *pischa'*; פֶּסַח, *pesach*; Πάσχα, *Pascha*). A sacred observance in Judaism that commemorates the climactic 10th plague in the book of Exodus, when Yahweh punishes Egypt by killing all the firstborn but “passes over” (פֶּסַח, *pasach*) the firstborn of Israel (Exod 12:12–13), resulting in the Israelites’ deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Exod 12:14–17).

The Institution of Passover

Passover is celebrated on the 14th day of the first month Abib (later called Nisan). The observance is instituted within the narrative framework of the exodus story where Yahweh brought plagues of increasing severity against Egypt to demonstrate his power and bring about the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery (Exod 1–12).

The 10th and final plague was the death of all the firstborn—human and animal—in Egypt (Exod 11:4–6). God punished Egypt but spared the firstborn of Israel, as long as the Israelites properly followed Moses’ instructions. On the night of the plague, the Israelites were instructed to stay in their homes after slaughtering a lamb and placing its blood on the lintel and doorposts of their houses (Exod 12:7, 21–22). The blood was to be a sign that distinguished the Israelites and separated them from the intended victims of the plague (Exod 12:13, 23). Since the people were to be ready to depart Egypt at a moment’s notice, they were to eat the lamb quickly, dressed to travel and with staff in hand (Exod 12:11).

The Israelites followed Moses’ instructions, and at midnight that night, Yahweh struck down the firstborn of Egypt (Exod 12:28–29). Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron in the middle of the night and ordered them to take all the Israelites and depart Egypt (Exod 12:31–32). The Israelites left hastily, taking their bread dough before it was leavened (Exod 12:34), so on the journey they had to bake unleavened cakes because they had not had time to prepare any other provisions (Exod 12:39). The Israelites were instructed to observe the Passover on the 14th of the first month every year to commemorate that night when God delivered them from Egypt (Exod 12:14, 24–27).

Old Testament Observances of Passover

Apart from the foundational narrative instituting Passover (Exod 12) and the legal passages regulating the observance (see “Passover Regulations”), the formal ritual observance of the Passover is mentioned only a few times in the Old Testament (e.g., Num 9; Josh 5:10–12; 2 Kgs 23:21–23; 2 Chr 30:1–27; 35:1–19; Ezra 6:19–22). Despite the stated importance for Israel to observe Passover “as a lasting statute” for all future generations (e.g., Exod 12:14; compare Lev 23:5; Num 9:1–5; 28:16), the biblical narrative makes a point of emphasizing how *unusual* observance of the Passover actually was throughout Israel’s history (2 Kgs 23:22; 2 Chr 30:26; 35:18; compare Neh 8:17).

Numbers 9:1–5 records that the Israelites observed the Passover one year after leaving Egypt. This was the first official Passover that functioned as a commemoration of the exodus event. The narrative itself is very brief. Yahweh reminds Moses that Israel should observe the Passover on the 14th day of the first month as prescribed, Moses tells the people to observe the Passover, and the people comply (Num 9:2–5). Because a few people were unclean on

Passover and unable to participate, Yahweh allowed a “make-up” observance on the 14th of the second month (Num 9:6–14).

Joshua 5:10 simply reports that Israel observed the Passover on the 14th of the month. After Joshua, the only times Israel is depicted as keeping the Passover are during the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Chr 30) and Josiah (2 Kgs 23:21–23; 2 Chr 35:1–19). When Josiah (r. 640–609 BC) commands the people to keep the Passover, the narrator adds that it had not been kept “from the days of the judges who had judged over Israel or during the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah” (2 Kgs 23:22 LEB). However, the narrator provides no details on *how* the Passover was kept. The writer of 2 Chronicles elaborates on Josiah’s Passover (2 Chr 35) and records a Passover initiated by Hezekiah (r. 726–697 BC) that is not mentioned in 2 Kings (2 Chr 30).

Hezekiah’s Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the second month (2 Chr 30:2), in line with the allowance in Num 9:6–12, likely because Hezekiah’s reforms had begun in the first month, and the Israelites did not finish cleansing the temple until the 16th day of the first month (2 Chr 29:17–18). Because of this, the people, the temple, and the priests were either not sanctified in time to observe it in the first month or they were not yet assembled (making them either unclean or traveling; 2 Chr 30:3). Echoing the sentiment of 2 Kgs 23:22, the Chronicler states that Israel “had not kept it [i.e., the Passover] as often as prescribed” (2 Chr 30:5 LEB). Their observance of Passover under Hezekiah is recorded in 2 Chr 30:13–22. This festival also clearly combines the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover since the account begins stating they held “the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month” (2 Chr 30:13), but the exception in Num 9 is only made for observing Passover in the second month. The narrative does little to shed light on how Passover was observed since the only detail it reports is the slaughter of the Passover lamb on the 14th. However, the story does make it clear that there was confusion over *how* to celebrate the Passover. Apparently, some of the Israelites had not properly consecrated themselves and so were unclean when they ate the sacrifice (2 Chr 30:18). These people did not eat “as it was written” (ככתוב, *kktwb*), suggesting there were written instructions that were not widely known. Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh to accept those whose hearts were in the right place in seeking God, even if they had outwardly failed to complete the proper purification (2 Chr 30:19).

The account of Josiah’s Passover in 2 Chr 35 is longer than the brief notice in 2 Kgs 23:21–23, explaining how they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the 14th of the first month (2 Chr 35:1, 6, 11; compare 2 Chr 30:15; Ezra 6:20) and describing how Josiah and his officials donated many animals to provide Passover sacrifices for all the people (2 Chr 35:7–9). The mix of animals for sacrifice included sheep, lambs, young goats, and bulls (see Deut 16:2). The priests then slaughtered the animals for the people, roasting the Passover sacrifice in fire, boiling the “holy things,” and serving the people (2 Chr 35:11–13). The people kept the Passover and then observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread (2 Chr 35:17). The narrator ends by praising Josiah’s Passover, noting “there was no Passover like it kept in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet” (2 Chr 35:18).

The last mention of a Passover observance in the Old Testament is the celebration of Passover that followed the dedication of the second temple after the Jews returned from exile in Babylon (Ezra 6:19–22).

Passover Regulations

As a sacred day, Passover is inaugurated in Exodus 12 in connection with Yahweh's deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The instructions for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are primarily given in Exod 12–13 with various reiterations found elsewhere throughout the Pentateuch (e.g., Exod 23:10–18; 34:18–25; Lev 23:4–8; Num 9:1–14; 28:16–25; Deut 16:1–8).

Exodus 12–13

The guidelines for the Passover observance are explicitly laid out in Exod 12 during the story of the first Passover and God's final plague against Egypt. The instructions immediately follow the scene where Moses warns Pharaoh about the coming 10th plague and the death of the firstborn (Exod 11). The story and the instructions are intertwined in Exod 12 because the instructions indicate both what Israel must do *right then* to protect against the deaths of their firstborn (Exod 12:1–14, 21–23) and what Israel must do *in the future* in commemoration of Yahweh's act of deliverance (Exod 12:14–20, 24–28). The instructions in Exod 12 also shift from Passover-specific instructions to details related to the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The instructions immediately relevant for Israel's survival of the 10th plague included:

- selecting a lamb (שֶׁה, *seh*), an unblemished male, for sacrifice—typically one per family—on the 10th of the month (Exod 12:3–5);
- sacrificing the lamb at twilight on the 14th of the month (Exod 12:6);
- putting the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel of the house (Exod 12:7);
- roasting the lamb with fire, not eating it raw or boiling it (Exod 12:8–9);
- eating the roasted lamb with unleavened bread (מַצּוֹת, *matstsoth*) on bitter herbs (מֵרִירִים, *merorim*) (Exod 12:8);
- eating all of the lamb that night and burning any leftovers (Exod 12:10);
- eating the meal in haste, ready to leave home at a moment's notice (Exod 12:11).

The blood on the doorposts and lintel was a sign that the people living in that house were trusting in Yahweh for deliverance (Stuart, *Exodus*, 278). In Exodus 12:13 Yahweh says, “And the blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and I will see the blood, and I will pass over you, and there will not be a destructive plague among you when I strike the land of Egypt” (LEB). Later, Moses warns the elders of Israel that no one should go out of their houses that night and that when Yahweh sees the blood on the doorway, He will “pass over” and “not allow the destroyer” to enter their houses (Exod 12:23).

Exodus 12 ends with a few more explicit stipulations related to the Passover observance:

- Outsiders—including foreigners, temporary residents, or non-Israelite hired workers—are not allowed to eat the Passover meal (Exod 12:43, 45).
- Slaves or foreigners living among the Israelites had to be circumcised before they could participate in Passover (Exod 12:44, 48).
- The Passover meal had to be eaten in one house and could not be taken out of that house (Exod 12:46).
- No bones of the Passover lamb were to be broken (Exod 12:46).

Instructions concerning future observances of the Feast of Unleavened Bread are found in Exod 12:14–20, interrupting the story of the first Passover and linking Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Passover proper took place on one night—the 14th of the month. The Israelites left Egypt that very night, provisioned mainly with unleavened bread (Exod 12:30–32, 39). The future commemoration of their departure, therefore, centered around unleavened bread (Exod 12:17–20; for more details on the instructions specific to unleavened bread, see this article: Feast of Unleavened Bread).

Exodus 13 continues instructions relevant to the Feast of Unleavened Bread but also offers further instructions about dedicating all firstborn to Yahweh (Exod 13:1–2, 11–16). The rationale for both sets of instructions is explicitly grounded in memorializing the exodus event (Exod 13:3–8, 14–16).

Although Exodus 12–13 presents Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a single integrated festival commemorating the exodus from Egypt, it is possible that the two were originally distinct celebrations (Sarna, *Exodus*, 57). Sarna explains: “Since the two festivals occurred in close propinquity to each other, and both coincided with the time of the Exodus, all three elements merged and were fused into a unified entity. The pre-Israelite ingredients were stripped of their former content and were invested with completely new associations and meanings connected with the events of the Exodus” (*Exodus*, 57).

However, the linking of the Feast of Unleavened Bread with the redemption of the firstborn in Exod 13 and Exod 34 provides another connection back to Exod 12, where the significance of Passover is linked to God’s deliverance of the firstborn of Israel when he struck down the firstborn of Egypt (Exod 12:12–13; compare Exod 13:15). Whether the holidays were actually distinct and eventually merged is a matter of debate as is the possible reason for such a merger (see McConville, “Deuteronomy’s Unification”; Levinson, “Hermeneutics of Tradition”).

Exodus 23 and 34

As noted, the Covenant Code’s laws about sacred time omit Passover (Exod 23:10–17), though the command of Exod 23:18 to not “leave the fat of my festival until morning” (**וְלֹא יִלֵּין חֶלֶב** **וְלֹא יִלֵּין חֶלֶב**, *wl' ylyn chlb chgy 'd bqr*) could be an allusion to the Passover sacrifice (Sarna, *Exodus*, 146; McConville, “Deuteronomy’s Unification,” 47). Similarly, further instructions about the pilgrimage feasts in Exod 34:18–24 include the Feast of Unleavened Bread and connect it again with the redemption of the firstborn and the deliverance from Egypt (Exod 34:18–20; compare Exod 13). The text then mentions the Sabbath and the other two feasts briefly (Exod 34:21–24). Only in Exod 34:25 is Passover explicitly mentioned in a way that directly links the ambiguous command of Exod 23:18 with the Passover sacrifice. The two verses are nearly identical except for two lexical substitutions and a syntactic shift, but the significant difference is in the explicit identification of “my festival” (**אִנִּי**, *chgy*) as “festival of the Passover” (**אִנִּי חֶלֶב**, *chg hpsch*).

Comparison of Exod 23:18 and 34:25:

23:18

34:25

Do not sacrifice (זבַח, *zbch*) with leaven the blood of my sacrifice

Do not slaughter (שחַט, *shcht*) with leaven the blood of my sacrifice

and do not leave the fat (חלב, *chlb*) of my festival (אֵגִי, *chgy*) until morning

and do not leave til morning the sacrifice (זבַח, *zbch*) of the festival of the Passover (אֵגִי הַפֶּסַח, *chg hpsch*)

Leviticus and Numbers

The longest legal discussions of sacred times in the Pentateuch come in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28–29. Despite their near-exhaustive coverage of “appointed times,” both passages allot only one verse to Passover, noting it falls on the 14th day of the first month (Lev 23:5; Num 28:16), before moving on to the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6–8; Num 28:17–25).

In Numbers, Yahweh reminds Moses that Israel should observe the Passover on the 14th day of the first month “according to all its decrees; and according to all its stipulations” (Num 9:3 LEB). The text does not expand on what those decrees and stipulations included, though Num 9:11–12 offer a summary of the basic requirements: eat the sacrifice along with unleavened bread and bitter plants, leave none of it until morning, and break no bones of the sacrifice.

The main addition that Num 9 makes to the instructions concerning Passover is the allowance for *another* Passover that could be observed on the 14th of the *second* month for anyone who had been unclean or traveling and unable to participate in the first Passover (Num 9:6–12). In making this allowance, Yahweh emphasizes that the *only* people eligible for the make-up Passover are those who had been unclean or away on a journey; all others who neglect the Passover have sinned and should be “cut off” (Num 9:13).

Deuteronomy 16

Deuteronomy 16:1–8 is the only legal text that noticeably modifies the regulations from Exod 12. For example, according to Exodus 12, the sacrificial animal must be a lamb (שֶׁה, *seh*) from the flock (צֹאן, *tson*), either from the sheep (כִּבְשִׁים, *kevasim*) or goats (עִזִּים, *izzim*; Exod 12:3, 5, 21). Deuteronomy extends the regulation to allow for the sacrifice to come from the herd (בָּקָר, *baqar*) as well as the flock (צֹאן, *tson*; Deut 16:2). In keeping with Deuteronomy’s focus on centralizing Israelite worship at one official sanctuary, the Passover sacrifice is to be offered at the central sanctuary, and the people are prohibited from offering it locally (Deut 16:5–6). In Exodus 12, the observance is centered on the home with the people eating the meal in their homes, sacrificing the lamb at their homes, and placing the blood on the door of their homes (Exod 12:3–4, 7, 22–23). In moving the Passover to the central sanctuary, Deuteronomy takes away “its old character of a domestic rite” (Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 192). The prohibition against leaven in the home (Exod 12:15) is also extended in Deuteronomy to a prohibition against leaven in the entire territory of Israel (Deut 16:4).

The most noted difference between the instructions of Exod 12 and those of Deut 16 concerns the proper method for cooking the sacrifice (see McConville, “Deuteronomy’s Unification,” 47; Levinson, *Right Chorale*, 258n7, 266). In Exod 12:8–9, the sacrifice is to be “fire-roasted” (צָלוּ אֵשׁ, *tsly 'sh*), and the text explicitly *forbids* eating (אָכַל, *'kl*) the meat raw or boiled in water (בָּשַׁל בַּמַּיִם, *bshl bmyim*). By contrast, Deuteronomy 16:7 commands that the sacrifice *should* be boiled (בָּשַׁל, *bshl*) and eaten (אָכַל, *'kl*).

The Hebrew verb בָּשַׁל (*bashal*) often indicates cooking food by boiling it in liquid (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21; 1 Sam 2:13–14; 2 Kgs 4:38; Ezek 24:3–5), but if this is the meaning of *bashal* in Deut 16:7, then the command completely contradicts the prohibition of Exod 12:9 (see Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 155). This oft-cited inconsistency relies on cooking by boiling in liquid to be the basic meaning of *bashal* (see Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 244n9). However, the basic meaning of *bashal* could simply be “cook” since the word is used regularly in contexts where the precise method of cooking is unspecified (Exod 29:31; 1 Sam 2:15; 2 Sam 13:8; Ezek 46:20, 24; Zech 14:21). In fact, the biblical writers seem to need to make it explicit when they mean “boil.” For example, the well-known prohibition against “boiling a kid in its mothers’ milk” specifically mentions the liquid to be boiled (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21). Similarly, the prohibition in Exod 12:9 explicitly states that boiling *in water* is forbidden: אַל-תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ. וְבִשַׁל מִבְּשַׁל בַּמַּיִם (al-tokhelu mimmennu na' uvashel mevushshal bammayim, “Do not eat from it raw or boiled, that is, boiled in water”).

The Akkadian cognate *bašālu* has a broad range of meaning and is used for various types of cooking as well as other processes that involve heating substances—boiling something in liquid, melting something, burning something, firing or baking clay or bricks, roasting meat, or cooking a meal (see *CAD*, s.v. “bašālu”). The Old Testament usage of *bashal* suggests “it may well have had an equally broad meaning in Hebrew” (Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 155). Notably, the Chronicler’s account of Josiah’s Passover appears to be cognizant of the tension between the commands in Exod 12:9 and Deut 16:7 since he states, “They cooked [or boiled] the Passover offering *with fire* according to the commandment” (וַיִּבְשְׁלוּ הַפֶּסַח בְּאֵשׁ כַּמִּשְׁפָּט, *wayvashshelu happensach ba'esh kammishpat*; Second Chronicles 35:13; emphasis added). Taking *bashal* to specifically mean “boiled,” the Chronicler’s statement is a bizarre and incoherent attempt at harmonization, producing a compromise between the two requirements that “conforms to neither” (so Levinson, *Right Chorale*, 258n7). On the other hand, taking *bashal* to just mean “cooked,” the Chronicler’s usage could be understood as a clarification intended to show that *bashal* may “refer to any kind of cooking, so the command does *not* conflict with Exod 12 (so Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 155).

Even if Deuteronomy does not present a challenge to Exodus’ regulation about cooking the Passover sacrifice, the combined adjustments in Deut 16:1–8 fundamentally transform the Passover observance into a large-scale event at the central sanctuary. As a ritual centered in the home, a lamb was likely the extent of what a single household could eat in one night, but with a combined feast, plenty of people were around to share the meat, allowing the sacrifices to include cattle (Deut 16:2). Furthermore, Deuteronomy provides the most integrated presentation of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a single festival (McConville,

Law and Theology, 113–14). Levinson summarizes how Deuteronomy modifies the Exodus Passover regulations: “The authors of Deuteronomy radically transform the paschal slaughter, originally an apotropaic slaughter of sheep or goats in the doorway (Exod 12:21–23, JE), into all but a normative sacrifice of cattle or sheep at the centralized altar (Deut 16:1–8). Not only do they void the original blood ritual, they *textually* rework the older protocol as well, in effect fusing it with the quite dissimilar norms proper to Unleavened Bread as a pilgrimage festival” (Levinson, *Right Chorale*, 219; emphasis original).

Passover and the Pilgrimage Festivals

The Passover was followed immediately by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the combined observance became one of the three seven-day pilgrimage festivals along with the Feast of Weeks (also called “Shavuot” from the Hebrew **תִּשְׁבֻּעַת**, *shavu'oth*, meaning “weeks,” or “Pentecost” from the Greek **πεντηκοστή**, *pentēkostē*, meaning “fiftieth”) and the Feast of Booths (also called “Sukkoth” from the Hebrew **סֻכּוֹת**, *sukkoth*, meaning “booths”).

Agricultural and Historical Significance

These festivals have both agricultural and historical significance for biblical Israel and later Judaism. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread fall in the spring, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread likely began as a celebration of the spring barley harvest. The Feast of Weeks is associated with firstfruits (Exod 34:22), and the Feast of Booths is an autumn harvest festival (Lev 23:39–43). While Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorated the exodus event itself—Israel’s departure from Egypt (Deut 16:1–8), the Feast of Weeks, which was celebrated seven weeks or 50 days after Passover, was later associated with the events at Sinai (approximately 7 weeks into the Israelites’ journey; Exod 19:1–3) and involved covenant renewal (*Jubilees* 6:17–22). The Feast of Booths came to be linked to Israel’s time of wandering in the wilderness (Lev 23:42–43).

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Many scholars working on the Pentateuch have considered the biblical rationale for Passover to be a late retrospective explanation that took advantage of “the coincidence of the spring festival with the exodus, already accepted by the older tradition” (Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 88). In other words, Passover was originally a different sort of ritual observance that was combined with the Feast of Unleavened Bread because they happened to fall at around the same time. This conception of the biblical account as offering a *post facto* rationale for the observance led to the advancement of many speculative theories placing the “true” origin of Passover in various primitive sacrificial rituals of pre-Israelite nomads (see Hess, *Israelite Religions*, 181–82).

Wellhausen believed all the festivals of ancient Israel originated in agriculture—“the basis at once of life and religion” (*Prolegomena*, 91–92). But the Passover itself had no connection to agriculture at all; Wellhausen put its origin and preservation among pastoralists who maintained a connection to the wandering wilderness lifestyle common before Israel settled in Canaan (*Prolegomena*, 93). Passover came to be observed more widely under the influence of Josiah’s reforms after it was connected with the Feast of Unleavened Bread through the legal revisions of Deut 16:1–8 (Levinson, *Right Chorale*, 219).

Further, the absence of Passover in the list of festivals from the Covenant Code (Exod 23:14–17) suggests the observance was initially separate from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Other biblical passages related to Israel’s sacred days present the two as separate but sequential observances (e.g., Lev 23:5–8; Ezek 45:21; Ezra 6:19–22).

The hypothesis that the cult centralization program of Deuteronomy was the impetus for the combination of Passover and Unleavened Bread is grounded in a “broad consensus of scholarship over the last two centuries,” building on the conclusion of W. M. L. de Wette that the book of Deuteronomy should be connected with Josiah’s reforms (2 Kgs 22–23; Levinson, *Right Chorale*, 256). Josiah’s reforms emphasized the centralization of worship—also the main innovation or modification that Deuteronomy makes to previous law codes (see Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation*). Following the centralization hypothesis, Passover was transformed from a local observance centered on the family and the home to a pilgrimage festival centered on the temple; in the process, Passover came to be merged with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was already a pilgrimage festival (Prosic, *Development*, 36).

However, this reconstruction of events has not gone unchallenged (see McConville, *Law and Theology*, 99–110; Prosic, *Development*, 35–71). Prosic argues that centralization resulted in a division, not a combination: “If we posit the opposite hypothesis about Passover’s origin from the usual one, namely, that it is not a combination of two originally independent feasts, the request to observe only the first day in the central temple points to a quite different direction of the festival’s development from what is usually assumed. It is an indication that the centralization ‘splintered’ the festival because of the division forced upon its spatial organization. The division would explain the duality of its designation and the Bible’s indistinct and alternative use of both Passover sacrifice and Unleavened Bread as its names” (Prosic, *Development*, 42). She concludes that the biblical texts present a single festival throughout and do not reflect the combination of two distinct festivals (Prosic, *Development*, 69).

McConville also rejects centralization as the impetus for the unification of the two events, primarily because of the possibility that they may have been linked prior to Deuteronomy (“Deuteronomy’s Unification,” 50–53). In his monograph on Deuteronomy, McConville argues, “The amalgamation could have occurred at an early stage ... prior to Deuteronomy” and that the writer of Deuteronomy inherited “an already amalgamated feast” (*Law and Theology*, 103). He sees Exod 23:18 and 34:25 as evidence that Passover was a pilgrimage festival prior to Deuteronomy and asserts that the “very juxtaposition of regulations regarding Passover and Massot” (e.g., Exod 12:21–27; 13:3–10) suggests an already combined feast (McConville, *Law and Theology*, 104–05).

Passover in the New Testament

Passover appears to have been kept more consistently and regularly in Second Temple Judaism. The Jewish historian Josephus, writing in the late first century AD, mentions Passover frequently, summarizing biblical material but also discussing later observances (e.g., *Antiquities* 2.311–314; 3.248–251; 14.18–28; 17.212–223). According to Josephus, the Passover feast drew great crowds of Jews to Jerusalem (*Jewish War* 6.420–27), and these large gatherings made the Roman authorities nervous (*Antiquities* 20.105–107; compare Mark 15:6–15). This description is

consistent with the New Testament presentation of Passover as a well-attended festival (e.g., Luke 2:41; John 11:55).

The Synoptic Gospels only record Jesus traveling to Jerusalem once to celebrate Passover, a journey that coincides with narratives of the passion week (see Matt 26:2, 17–30; Mark 14:1–2, 12–26; Luke 22:1–2, 7–23).

John’s gospel mentions three different Passovers, two during Jesus’ ministry and the last that coincided with the passion week (John 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1, 13:1–5; 18:28, 39; 19:14). John describes Jesus traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the first and third Passovers (John 2:13, 23; 12:1, 12; 13:1). The second Passover is likely the temporal setting for the bread of life discourse (John 6:4, 22–71) and manna is part of the discussion (John 6:31, 49). In the rich symbolism of John’s gospel, the unleavened bread of the festival, celebrated year after year, is sharply contrasted with Jesus, the eternal bread of life (John 6:35).

Even though all three Synoptic Gospels present the Last Supper as a Passover meal, the details of the meal are incidental to their narratives. We learn only that they “reclined at table” (Matt 26:20), drank wine (Matt 26:29), and dipped bread (Mark 14:20; see more below). Only Luke mentions the sacrifice of the Passover lamb in connection with the Last Supper (Luke 22:7).

Passover and the Lord’s Supper

All four gospels give an account of the “Last Supper” Jesus shares with His disciples before He is arrested (Matt 26:17–25; Mark 14:12–21; Luke 22:7–13; John 13:1–30). In the Synoptic Gospels, this meal is explicitly identified as Jesus celebrating the Passover with His disciples, and it is the only Passover mentioned in the Synoptics. John does not explicitly connect the Last Supper with a Passover observance due to his symbolic chronology that has Jesus’ crucifixion coincide with the slaughter of the Passover lambs (John 19:14, 36).

All the Synoptic Gospels record Jesus’ institution of the “Lord’s Supper” during this Last Supper (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:12–25; Luke 22:14–23). While there is debate over whether this Last Supper actually coincided with the Passover and whether the Last Supper was even a Passover meal, Routledge has demonstrated that the Passover celebration provides the best context for understanding the significance of the Last Supper (Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” 203–22; on the debate, see bibliography at 205n7).

The question of whether the Last Supper was a Passover observance arises in part because the Gospel writers only mention the bread and wine, not the “other traditional elements such as the lamb and bitter herbs” (Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” 204). However, this absence of detail should not be emphasized against the explicit statements that Jesus and His disciples were preparing to “eat the Passover” (Matt 26:17; Mark 14:12, 14; Luke 22:8, 11, 15). While the Lord’s Supper was instituted at Passover, the observance of the Lord’s Supper was not linked to ongoing observance of Passover. For example, Paul points to “the theological significance of Christ as the Passover lamb, but he does not link this with his instructions about the Lord’s Supper” (Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” 204; 1 Cor 5:6–8).

Christ as Passover Lamb

The Gospel of John explicitly links the crucifixion of Christ with the symbolism of Passover, presenting the fact that Jesus’ legs were not broken as a fulfillment of Exod 12:46 (John 19:31–36). The symbolism of the Lord’s Supper also substitutes Christ himself for the Passover

elements as the symbol of redemption (for the link between unleavened bread and redemption, see Routledge, “Passover and Last Supper,” 216).

The Apostle Paul uses Passover and the observances associated with the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a metaphor for Christian moral purity in 1 Cor 5:6–8. In referring to Christ as “our Passover lamb” who “has been sacrificed,” he represents the Christian life as a period of permanent festival observance where all leaven (representing sexual immorality) must be removed (Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 83–87).

Other New Testament texts also associate Jesus with the Passover lamb, though the allusion is more subtle than with 1 Cor 5 or the Gospel of John (e.g., 1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:6, 9, 12). The adoption of this imagery points to an understanding of the sacrifices of the Passover lamb as the remembrance of God’s past act of redemption that foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Lamb of God as God’s ultimate act of redemption.

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Unleavened Bread, Feast of

(חַמַּטְסוֹת לֶחֶם, *chag hammatstsoth*). The springtime festival that the Israelites celebrated annually in conjunction with the Passover (פֶּסַח, *pesach*).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread in the Old Testament

Unleavened bread (חֶמֶץ, *matstzah*) is a flat, round, quick-baking bread made from flour and water with no leavening agent. The Israelites ate unleavened bread as part of the Passover meal and the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed (Exod 12:1–20; 13:6–7; 23:15; 34:18; Lev 23:5–8; Num 28:16–25; Deut 16:1–8). This annual festival, which began with Passover (on the 14th day of Abib, later called Nisan), served as a reminder of God’s rescue of His people from slavery in Egypt (Exod 12:17, 26–27; 13:3–16; Deut 16:3). Stuart proposes that commemorating the exodus helped sustain the Israelite community by prompting them to remember their common history and the foundations of their common beliefs (Stuart, *Exodus*, 282).

Several biblical passages offer different details for when and where the Israelites were to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Despite these differences, each account indicates that the festival originated in ancient times and was held annually in the springtime (Prosic, *Development*, 32). As Prosic points out, “In the sacred history of the Israelites almost every important stage includes a Passover celebration” (Prosic, *Development*, 75).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread in Premonarchic Israel

Exodus. In Exodus 12, when the Israelites were still in Egypt, God gave the following instructions for the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exod 12):

- At sundown on the 14th of Abib, the Israelites were to sacrifice the Passover lamb and spread its blood upon the doorposts of their homes (Exod 12:1–7).
- The Israelites were to roast the lamb—not boil it—and eat it in haste (Exod 12:8–11).
- The Passover feast was a permanent ordinance (Exod 12:14).
- The Israelites were to remove leaven from their homes (Exod 12:15), eat unleavened bread for seven days, and observe a holy assembly on the first and seventh days (Exod 12:15–16, 19–20). Anyone who ate leaven during this period was to be cut off from the congregation of Israel (Exod 12:15, 19).
- The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a permanent ordinance (Exod 12:17).
- The unleavened bread signified that the Israelites were to leave Egypt in haste, with no time to wait for bread to rise (Exod 12:39).
- No foreigners or hired help were to eat the Passover meal, but a circumcised sojourner or slave could eat of it (Exod 12:43–49).

Vogt argues that Exod 12 may preserve “material written by Moses” and was “directed toward the exodus generation itself” (Vogt, “Passover,” 36–37). As support he notes that Exod 12 contains unique elements that were not part of celebrations after the exodus, such as the spreading of blood on the doorposts (Exod 12:7) and eating hastily in preparation for travel (Exod 12:11; Vogt, “Passover,” 37). In contrast, de Vaux argues that the Feast of Unleavened

Bread is based on an early Canaanite agricultural festival and was not celebrated until Israel was in Canaan (de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 491).

In Exodus 13, which is set shortly after the Israelites' departure from Egypt, God instructed the people to continue to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread when they took up residence in the promised land. He offered the following instructions:

- The Israelites were to eat unleavened bread for seven days and observe a feast to the Lord on the seventh day (Exod 13:6).
- No Israelites within the borders of the land were to possess leaven for the duration of the festival (Exod 13:7).
- As part of the festival, the Israelites were to remind their children of how God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt (Exod 13:6–8).
- The Israelites were to dedicate their firstborn sons and animals to the Lord, sacrificing their beasts and redeeming their sons (Exod 13:1–2, 11–16; 34:18–19).

The instructions regarding the redemption of the firstborn here recall the redemption of Israel's firstborn sons in Egypt and emphasizes dedication to the Lord. Fretheim notes, "It is the firstborn theme that is the decisive focus of Passover night, from which the consecration of the firstborn naturally follows" (Fretheim, *Exodus*, 148).

Later, when the Israelites were at Sinai and received the law, the Lord commanded them to observe three annual feasts at the chosen place "before the Lord" (Exod 23:14–19; 34:18–20; Deut 16:16):

1. the Feast of Unleavened Bread
2. the Feast of Firstfruits (or Weeks)
3. the Feast of Ingathering (also called Booths or Tabernacles)

Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 16 instructs the Israelites on how to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread while living in the promised land. The instructions generally resemble those of earlier accounts, calling for the Passover to be celebrated in the month of Abib (Deut 16:1) and for leaven to be removed from the community for the duration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Deut 16:4). However, the account is unique in its description of the unleavened bread as "the bread of affliction" (Deut 16:3). It is also unique in its emphasis that the Israelites were to sacrifice the Passover lamb and eat the feast only "in the place where the Lord chooses"—a command repeated five times in the passage (Deut 16:2, 6, 7, 15, 16). In contrast, earlier accounts seem to indicate that the Israelites celebrated the Passover feast in their homes (e.g., Exod 12:1–7).

The differences between this account and earlier accounts have given rise to various views on the unity and observance of the feasts. De Vaux and Butler view the differences as indicating that the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally two separate festivals that were later combined (de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 488; Butler, *Joshua*, 60–61). Alternatively, Prosic, Tigay, and McConville support the idea that two cohesive festivals were divided by the requirement to celebrate the Passover at the temple in Jerusalem. Prosic proposes that the command to celebrate the Passover at the chosen place arose during the reign of Josiah and "splintered" these originally cohesive festivals (Prosic, *Development*, 42). Tigay suggests that

after the Israelites celebrated the Passover sacrifice at the chosen place, they traveled home for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and held a local assembly on the final day. In his view, “Such local gatherings may well have been the earliest forerunners of the synagogue” (Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 156). McConville agrees on the order of the celebration and emphasizes that the whole land of Israel served as the location of the combined festival, since it was celebrated both at the chosen place and within homes and communities (McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 272–73).

Joshua. Joshua 5 records that, upon crossing the Jordan River, the Israelites celebrated the first Passover within the promised land. According to this account, all of the Israelite males underwent circumcision while camped at Gilgal. The Israelites then celebrated Passover on the 14th of Abib. Although this account does not specifically state that the Israelites also celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Josh 5:10 records that “on the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate some of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain” (Josh 5:10–12 NASB). This feast served as an important symbol of a new beginning for the Israelites in the new land. Howard notes, “The Passover celebration in Joshua would now mark Israel’s entrance into Canaan just as it had earlier marked Israel’s exodus from Egypt” (Howard, *Joshua*, 153).

1 Samuel. First Samuel 1:3 records that Elkanah, the father of the prophet Samuel, traveled with his family to Shiloh each year to celebrate a “feast to the Lord.” It is possible that the “feast to the Lord” in this passage refers to Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, though this interpretation is debated. Support for viewing the feast in 1 Sam 1:3 as the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread includes:

- Both 1 Samuel 1:3 and Judg 21:19 use the phrase translated as either “from days to days” or “year after year” (מִיָּמִים וּמִיָּמִים, *miyyamim yamimah*) to describe a feast in Shiloh (McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 58). This phrase first appears in the Bible in Exod 13:10 in the instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread and, in Hengstenberg’s view, may be a reference to or title for the feasts (Hengstenberg, *Dissertations*, 65–70).
- Second Chronicles 35:18 compares the Passover under King Josiah to the celebration of the Passover in Samuel’s time, stating, “No passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel” (NASB).
- The story of Hannah dedicating her firstborn son, Samuel, to the Lord in 1 Sam 1–2 seems to be thematically linked to the Passover in its emphasis on the dedication of every firstborn son (compare Exod 13:1–2, 11–15).

Klein cites Driver’s proposal that Elkanah’s sacrifice may have taken place at the new year, which aligns with the month of Abib, when the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread were celebrated (Exod 12:1–2; Klein, *1 Samuel*, 10). However, Klein also suggests that Elkanah’s annual pilgrimage may have been “a private, personal pilgrimage distinct from the requirement for males to appear three times a year before Yahweh as part of a national festival” (Klein, *1 Samuel*, 6).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread during the Monarchy and Exilic Period

Recorded celebrations of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread during the monarchy and postexilic period include:

- King Solomon declared his intention to observe the three annual pilgrimage feasts—the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Booths (2 Chr 2:4; 8:12–13).
- King Hezekiah held a great celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem where people from Judah and Israel were so filled with joy that they celebrated for two weeks (2 Chr 30:20–23).
- King Josiah renewed celebrations of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread as part of his religious reforms (2 Kgs 23:21–23; 2 Chr 35:17–19).
- Ezra records that the exiles who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple joyfully celebrated the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ezra 6:19–22).
- Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple includes the celebration of the annual feasts, including Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ezek 45:17–25).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread in the New Testament

The Gospels provide several examples of Jesus celebrating the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread in Jerusalem:

- Luke 2:41–52 records that at age 12 Jesus joined His parents on their annual trip to Jerusalem for the Passover.
- The book of John records Jesus celebrating three separate Passovers in Jerusalem during His ministry (John 2:13–25; 6:4; 11:55–19:42).
- Each of the Gospels portrays Jesus’ final meal with His disciples as a celebration of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matt 26:17–19; Mark 14:1, 12–16; Luke 22:1, 7–13; John 13).

Scholars debate whether Jesus’ last meal was actually held on the night designated for the Passover feast. Rosen proposes that the Synoptic Gospels viewed Passover as beginning on the morning of Nisan 14, while the Gospel of John viewed Passover as beginning at sunset on Nisan 14. Thus, the Synoptic Gospels portray Jesus’ crucifixion as occurring the afternoon of Nisan 15, but by John’s reckoning it was still Nisan 14 until sundown, so Jesus was crucified that day. Therefore, all of the Gospels would portray the Passover meal taking place on Nisan 14, but they record Jesus being crucified on different days (Rosen and Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*, 156). Alternatively, France suggests that if Jesus’ last supper was held the night before Passover, it would not have included a lamb, which would have been slaughtered the next day, the day of Jesus’ death (France, *Matthew*, 984).

During Jesus’ final celebration of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread, He equated the bread with His body and the wine with His blood (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:23–25; Luke 22:19–20; see also John 6:30–58). Because this commemorative meal was meant to recall the first Passover, Jesus was identifying His blood with that of the Passover lamb, whose blood saved the firstborn of Israel, and His body with the unleavened bread that sustained the people as they escaped from slavery (see Stein, *Luke*, 540). The next day, Jesus died on the cross as the

lambs were slaughtered for the Passover sacrifice, leading to the interpretation that “Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7 NIV).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread Today

Today, the term “Passover” refers to both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Passover is the most widely celebrated feast among Jewish people around the world.

Traditionally, Jewish families carefully remove leaven from their homes and gather at sunset for a Passover seder service and meal. Many Jewish families continue to eat unleavened bread for the next seven days.

The seder observance recalls God’s rescue of His people from Egypt by incorporating wine, unleavened bread, and other symbolic foods. Participants in the seder service often read from a haggadah guide and, traditionally, recite or sing the hallel psalms (Pss 113–118) on the first day of the festival (Silber and Furst, *A Passover Haggadah*, 4). Since the Roman destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, the Jewish people have not sacrificed Passover lambs.

Strassfeld explains that the symbolism of Passover teaches Jews that their history is a timeless present, “an event in which we participated and in which we continue to participate. We are meant to re-experience the slavery and the redemption that occurs in each day of our lives. It is our own story, not just some ancient history that we retell at Passover” (Strassfeld, *Jewish Holidays*, 7). Christians also remember the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread during the traditional Maundy Thursday communion service held before the Easter weekend. The Christian communion rite is a more frequent reenactment of Jesus’ last meal with His disciples, a continual remembrance of Jesus’ body and blood being sacrificed for His people (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:24–25).

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Firstfruits

(בִּכּוּרִים, *bikkurim*; ἀπαρχή, *aparchē*). The first and best part of the harvest of crops or processed produce, animals, and firstborn sons. “Firstfruits” also refers to ceremonies in relation to the initial portion of the harvest. It is also used figuratively in reference to: Israel as a nation, the believing remnant within Israel, the 144,000 in Rev 14, Christians in general, certain individual Christians, Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Literal Usage in the Old Testament

For Israel, the concept of “firstfruits” meant putting the Lord first in every part of life. That included the harvest, the shepherding of flocks, and child-bearing—especially in regard to the feasts and sacrificial system of the Law of Moses. The firstfruits were used for the support of the Levitical priests. It was their inheritance among God’s people (Deut 18:4). Deuteronomy 26:1–11 specifies how individual firstfruit offerings were to be brought before the Lord.

During Passover, all Israelites were to “bring the first sheaf” of their harvest to the priest for him to “wave the sheaf before the Lord” (Lev 23:10–14 HCSB). This is referring to the barley harvest, which began several weeks before the wheat harvest. Exodus 34:22 tells of the firstfruits of the wheat harvest during the feast of Pentecost, which is elsewhere called “the day of firstfruits” (Num 28:26 HCSB).

Figurative Usage in the Old Testament

Jeremiah 2:3 contains the only non-literal use of “firstfruits” in the Hebrew Bible. Early in his ministry, Jeremiah announced to Judah: “Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest” (HCSB). The mention of holiness infers that the primary meaning is that Israel is *best in quality, spiritually speaking*. However, the sense that Israel might be the initial part of the Lord’s spiritual harvest cannot be excluded.

Figurative Usage in the New Testament

The term ἀπαρχή (*aparchē*) is used in the New Testament in reference to a wide range of subjects called “firstfruits.” The nuance of *best* from the Old Testament usage is seen in Jas 1:18, where Christians are called the “firstfruits” of God’s creation. The remaining uses all emphasize the shade of meaning of the “first part of a larger harvest.”

Christ being raised from the dead is the “firstfruits” of the future resurrection (1 Cor 15:20, 23). Paul calls Epaenetus and the household of Stephanas “the firstfruits of Achaia” (i.e. among the first to believe in Christ in southern Greece; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15 HCSB). In Romans 8:23, the Holy Spirit is the “firstfruits” of all the spiritual riches believers will have in the presence of the Lord.

The remaining two uses play off the only figurative use in the Old Testament (Jer 2:3). In Romans 11:16, the believing remnant (“firstfruits”) of Israel is said to be “holy,” echoing Jer 2:3. A few verses later, the promise is laid out: A time will come when “all Israel will be saved” and made holy (Rom 11:26–27). The 144,000, earlier said to be Israelites (Rev 7:4–8), are described as having been “redeemed from the human race (i.e. all humankind) as the firstfruits for God and the Lamb” (HCSB). This is just before the mention of “the eternal gospel” (Rev 14:6) and the harvest of salvation and judgment (Rev 14:14–20).

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Paschal Feasts

The Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are closely related and ran consecutively (Lev 23:4–8). The Feast of Weeks followed seven weeks later, and connected the remembrance of the exodus (at Passover) with the bounty of the conquest.

Passover. The Passover was established in Exod 12 prior to the Sinai covenant. It is technically non-Levitical, but Levitical statutes expanded regulations for the Passover.

Of all the feasts of Israel, the Passover is the clearest example of God’s election and grace. The Passover celebrates God’s divine grace and deliverance of the faithful during the time of the exodus, the story of which is recounted during the feast. By “passing over” the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, God allowed the firstborn of Israel to live (Exod 12:21–31). Kline suggests that the emphasis of Passover is not on the passing of God over the Israelites but on His “covering” the Israelites through the blood on the doorpost. This interpretation makes the Passover an atonement feast like the Day of Atonement, and may be contradicted by passages such as Exod 12:12–13 (Kline, “Feast of Cover-Over,” 498–500).

Passover was originally celebrated on the 14th day of Abib (which in postexilic times was called Nisan). Initially celebrated within households, the establishment of the temple demanded a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Deut 16:5–7). Passover excluded foreigners and hired help, but circumcised resident aliens could participate (Exod 12:45–49). The feast was austere, and demanded a specific menu and procedure:

- The lamb from the sacrifice was the main course. It was to be roasted by fire and completely consumed (Exod 12:7–10). The lamb was to be treated carefully, and could not have any broken bones (Num 9:12).
- Bitter herbs were served, signifying the bitterness of the Israelites’ struggles in Egypt.
- Only unleavened bread could be used. Initially, this was caused by the inability to wait for the bread to rise (Exod 12:39). Later, the absence of leaven represented purity from sin.
- Participants in the Passover feast were to be fully dressed for travel, anticipating God’s deliverance (Exod 12:11).

The Passover meal was later expanded to include:

- Spring greens dipped into a cup of salt water, representing the passage through the Red Sea (salt water) and entrance into the land (spring greens).
- Roasted eggs to symbolize a peace offering for the temple.
- Charoset, which is made from chopped fruit and nuts. This was intended to be visually similar to the mortar the Hebrew slaves used to build bricks for the Egyptians.

The Passover traditionally also included wine. After the destruction of the temple, a roasted lamb’s shank was presented on a plate rather than lamb meat. Called the *zeroa*, this is not eaten; it is a reminder that the temple—where the sacrifice would have been performed—was gone (Zimmerman, *Celebrating Biblical Feasts*, 66).

Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week-long remembrance that consecrated the coming season. It may be considered an extension of the Passover feast

rather than an independent holiday. The biblical texts intertwine the two feasts, with the Passover celebrated on the first day of the feast—the 14th of Abib—and the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrated on the following day (Exod 13:3–10; Lev 23:4–8). The Feast of Unleavened Bread continued for seven days and required daily offerings. The feast demanded a rejection of leavened bread from the Israelites' meals, households, and storage places (Deut 16:4). It concluded with a convocation and rest from laborious activity (Lev 23:8).

While the Feast of Unleavened Bread was not a pilgrimage feast, it was often celebrated in Jerusalem, since Passover's pilgrimage would have already occurred. This feast likely included the waving of the firstfruits, signaling the dedication of the coming growing season (Exod 34:26; Lev 23:10–14).⁴

⁴ Swann, J. T. (2016). [Feasts and Festivals of Israel](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Passover

The name given to the chief of the three great historical annual festivals of the Jews. It was kept in remembrance of the Lord's passing over the houses of the Israelites (Ex. 12:13) when the first born of all the Egyptians were destroyed. It is called also the "feast of unleavened bread" (Ex. 23:15; Mark 14:1; Acts 12:3), because during its celebration no leavened bread was to be eaten or even kept in the household (Ex. 12:15). The word afterwards came to denote the lamb that was slain at the feast (Mark 14:12–14; 1 Cor. 5:7).

A detailed account of the institution of this feast is given in Ex. 12 and 13. It was afterwards incorporated in the ceremonial law (Lev. 23:4–8) as one of the great festivals of the nation. In after times many changes seem to have taken place as to the mode of its celebration as compared with its first celebration (comp. Deut. 16:2, 5, 6; 2 Chr. 30:16; Lev. 23:10–14; Num. 9:10, 11; 28:16–24). Again, the use of wine (Luke 22:17, 20), of sauce with the bitter herbs (John 13:26), and the service of praise were introduced.

There is recorded only one celebration of this feast between the Exodus and the entrance into Canaan, namely, that mentioned in Num. 9:5. (See JOSIAH.) It was primarily a commemorative ordinance, reminding the children of Israel of their deliverance out of Egypt; but it was, no doubt, also a type of the great deliverance wrought by the Messiah for all his people from the doom of death on account of sin, and from the bondage of sin itself, a worse than Egyptian bondage (1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29; 19:32–36; 1 Pet. 1:19; Gal. 4:4, 5). The appearance of Jerusalem on the occasion of the Passover in the time of our Lord is thus fittingly described: "The city itself and the neighbourhood became more and more crowded as the feast approached, the narrow streets and dark arched bazaars showing the same throng of men of all nations as when Jesus had first visited Jerusalem as a boy. Even the temple offered a strange sight at this season, for in parts of the outer courts a wide space was covered with pens for sheep, goats, and cattle to be used for offerings. Sellers shouted the merits of their beasts, sheep bleated, oxen lowed. Sellers of doves also had a place set apart for them. Potters offered a choice from huge stacks of clay dishes and ovens for roasting and eating the Passover lamb. Booths for wine, oil, salt, and all else needed for sacrifices invited customers. Persons going to and from the city shortened their journey by crossing the temple grounds, often carrying burdens ... Stalls to change foreign money into the shekel of the temple, which alone could be paid to the priests, were numerous, the whole confusion making the sanctuary like a noisy market" (Geikie's Life of Christ).⁵

⁵ Easton, M. G. (1893). In [Easton's Bible dictionary](#). New York: Harper & Brothers.

First-fruits

The first-fruits of the ground were offered unto God just as the first-born of man and animals.

The law required, (1.) That on the morrow after the Passover Sabbath a sheaf of new corn should be waved by the priest before the altar (Lev. 23:5, 6, 10, 12; 2:12).

(2.) That at the feast of Pentecost two loaves of leavened bread, made from the new flour, were to be waved in like manner (Lev. 23:15, 17; Num. 28:26).

(3.) The feast of Tabernacles was an acknowledgement that the fruits of the harvest were from the Lord (Ex. 23:16; 34:22).

(4.) Every individual, besides, was required to consecrate to God a portion of the first-fruits of the land (Ex. 22:29; 23:19; 34:26; Num. 15:20, 21).

(5.) The law enjoined that no fruit was to be gathered from newly-planted fruit-trees for the first three years, and that the first-fruits of the fourth year were to be consecrated to the Lord (Lev. 19:23–25). Jeremiah (2:3) alludes to the ordinance of “first-fruits,” and hence he must have been acquainted with the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, where the laws regarding it are recorded.⁶

⁶ Easton, M. G. (1893). In [Easton's Bible dictionary](#). New York: Harper & Brothers.

PASSOVER.

The Passover of Ex. 12 concerns (1) the original historic event of Israel's deliverance from Egypt; (2) the later recurrent institutional commemoration of that event (*Mishnah Pesahim* 9:5). Closely conjoined, though separate, are (3) the prohibition of *LEAVEN, symbolizing the haste of that unforgettable night of exodus, and (4) the later dedication of the *FIRSTBORN, with statutory offerings, commemorating those first-born divinely spared in the blood-sprinkled houses. Moses quite possibly adapted more ancient ceremonies, Unleavened Bread being an agricultural festival, Passover nomadic and pastoral (*EBr*, 1974, Makropaedia, Vol. 10, pp. 219f.). Passover may have had original links with circumcision, demonism, fertility cult or the first-born oblation (*cf.* H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel*, 1967, pp. 47ff.). Until AD 70, Passover was celebrated in Jerusalem, in any house within the city bounds, and in small companies; the lamb was ritually slaughtered in the Temple precincts. When Temple and Palestinian nation were both destroyed by war, Passover inevitably became a domestic ceremony.

The *SAMARITANS still meticulously observe their ancient N Israelite Passover ritual annually on Mt *GERIZIM, in close conformity to the Pentateuch, keeping Passover and Unleavened Bread entirely separate entities. Unlike the Jews, they still employ a lamb. The slopes of Gerizim are now used, as the summit is ritually defiled by a Muslim cemetery (*EBr*, Mikropaedia, vol. 4, p. 494). They buttress their claims by the variant reading 'Gerizim' in place of 'Ebal' in Dt. 27:4, also by referring Dt. 12:5, 14; 16:16 to Gerizim, not Zion.

There was for some time a rival Samaritan temple on Gerizim (*cf.* R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, E.T. 1961, pp. 342f.), though its precise dates of functioning are disputed (*cf.* also John Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans*, 1964, *passim*).

I. In the Old Testament

Ex. 12, the natural starting-point of study, suggests the following principal considerations.

1. Passover (Heb. *pesah*) comes from a verb meaning 'to pass over', in the sense of 'to spare' (Ex. 12:13, 27, *etc.*). This affords excellent sense; there is no need to jettison the time-honoured view that God literally passed over the blood-sprinkled Israelite houses, whilst smiting the Egyptian ones. The term is used both for the ordinance and for the sacrificial victim. *BDB* note another verb with the same radicals, meaning 'to limp', which has suggested alternative theories (*cf.* T. H. Gaster, *Passover: Its History and Traditions*, 1949, pp. 23–25); but *KB* modify this conclusion.

2. Abib, later called Nisan, the month of the ripening ears and of the first Passover, was made in honour the first month of the Jewish year (Ex. 12:2; Dt. 16:1; *cf.* Lv. 23:5; Nu. 9:1–5; 28:16).

3. Was the Paschal victim customarily a lamb, as popularly conceived? In Dt. 16:2 the choice of animal is unquestionably wider; in Ex. 12 it depends on exegesis. The Heb. word *seh* (v. 3) is restricted by *BDB* to the sheep and goat categories, irrespective of age; *KB* restrict it further to lamb or kid. There is some controversy as to the meaning of the phrase *ben-šānâ* (v. 5), lit. 'son of a year'. Some take this to signify a yearling, 12–24 months in age, *i.e.* a full-grown animal (*cf.* Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley, *Hebrew Grammar*, section 128 v; G. B. Gray, *Sacrifice in the OT*, 1925, pp. 345–351). But the traditional exegesis, which takes 12 months as the upper, not the lower, age-limit, is by no means disproved. Talmudic evidence seems to limit the legitimacy of the

Passover victim to the sheep and goat families, following Exodus rather than Deuteronomy (*cf. Menaḥoth* 7:6, with Gemara). The choice of lamb or kid, lamb or goat, is several times asserted (*Pesaḥim* 8:2; 55b; 66a), yet the over-all evidence does suggest a certain preference for the lamb (*Shabbath* 23:1; *Kelim* 19:2; *Pesaḥim* 69b; *etc.*). One ruling excludes a female animal, or a male which has passed the age of 2 years—which would lend tacit support to the yearling interpretation (*Pesaḥim* 9:7). Yet a contradictory passage declares categorically that a Passover offering is valid from the eighth day of its life (*Parah* 1:4). If the universal use of a lamb cannot be certainly demonstrated from Scripture or Talmud, it is at least clear that this acquired strong consuetudinary sanction. It is of interest and significance that the Samaritans, following age-old precedents, sacrifice a lamb on the slopes of Mt Gerizim to this very day.

4. On the Passover night in Egypt, the lintels and side-posts of all Israelite doors were smeared (apotropaically, some suggest) with the victim's blood. This was carried in a basin, Heb. *sap*, v. 22 (which could also, with slight change of exegesis, mean 'threshold'), applied therefrom with hyssop, the foliage of the marjoram plant, a common emblem of purity. See further N. H. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival*, 1947, pp. 21ff.

5. The phrase 'between the two evenings' in Ex. 12:6 (also Ex. 16:12; Lv. 23:5; Nu. 9:3, 5, 11) has been accorded two variant interpretations, according to variant community practice—either between 3 p.m. and sunset, as the Pharisees maintained and practised (*cf. Pesaḥim* 61a; Josephus, *BJ* 6.423); or, as the Samaritans and others argued, between sunset and dark. The earlier time, as Edersheim points out, allow more leeway for the slaughtering of the innumerable lambs, and is probably to be preferred.

6. Ex. 12:43–49 excludes Gentiles from participating in the Passover, but not of course proselytes, who were expected, even obliged, to conform fully.

The whole drama and inner meaning of Ex. 12 is concentrated into seventeen pregnant Gk. words in Heb. 11:28.

The Passover of Dt. 16 differs in important minor respects from that of Ex. 12. The blood emphasis has disappeared; an essentially domestic ceremony has become a more formal sacrifice at a central sanctuary with a wider choice of victim; v. 7 stipulates boiling, not roasting, the animal; Passover and Unleavened Bread, here termed the bread of affliction, are integrated more thoroughly than in Exodus. This is development, event changing to institution, not contradiction; moreover it approximates better to the NT evidence concerning Passover. It is not necessary to assume a great time-gap between the passages; the changed circumstances could have been prophetically foreseen in the wilderness period. It is further recorded that a second Passover, celebrated a month later, was instituted for the benefit of those who had been levitically unclean at the time of the first (Nu. 9:1–14).

Passover was celebrated in the plains of Jericho during the Conquest (Jos. 5:10f.). In the observances of Hezekiah (2 Ch. 30:1–27) and Josiah (2 Ch. 35:1–19), the proper place is considered to be the Jerusalem Temple. Hezekiah's ceremony takes advantage of the legitimate second Passover mentioned above, because the people are not gathered in Jerusalem, and the priests are not in a state of levitical purity, at the earlier date. The brief reference of Ezekiel (45:21–24) deals with Passover in the ideal Temple of his conceiving. The three points of interest are the fuller participation of the secular leader, the fact of a sin-offering, and the complete change-over from family celebration to public ceremony. The victims specified include bullocks,

rams and kids. The prescriptions of Deuteronomy are considerably extended, though not in any new thought-pattern.

Jewish usage in the last days of the Herodian Temple is reflected in the Mishnah tractate *Pesahim*. The people gathered in the outer Temple court in companies to slaughter the Passover victims. The priests stood in two rows; in one row each man had a golden, in the other each man a silver, basin. The basin which caught the blood of the expiring victim was passed from hand to hand in continuous exchange to the end of the line, where the last priest tossed the blood in ritual manner on the altar. All this was done to the singing of the *Hallel* (Pss. 113–118). The celebrating companies were generally family units, but other common ties were possible, such as that which bound our Lord to his disciples.

II. In the New Testament

In NT times, all Israelite males were expected to appear in Jerusalem thrice annually, for the Feasts of Passover, of Weeks or Pentecost and of Tabernacles. Even Dispersion Jews sometimes conformed; the temporary population of the Holy City (cf. the Pentecost gathering of Acts 2) could swell to almost 3,000,000 according to Josephus (*BJ* 6.425)—a figure reduced to the more realistic 180,000 by J. Jeremias (*Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 1969, pp. 83f.). After candlelight search for the forbidden leaven, and other careful preparations (cf. Mk. 14:12–16 and parallels), the Paschal supper proper was taken reclining. It included the symbolic elements of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, some minor condiments and four cups of wine at specified points. The stipulated ritual hand-washings were carefully observed. The table (more probably the floor) was cleared before the second cup of wine, the story of the Egypt. Passover and Exodus recounted in a dialogue between father and son (or some suitable substitutes). The dishes of food were then brought back, part of the *Hallel* was sung, the second cup of wine followed. Then came the breaking of bread. In the Last Supper, it was probably at this point that Judas received the sop, and departed into the night to betray his Master (Jn. 13:30). On that fateful night, it may be assumed that the institution of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist was associated with the third cup of wine. The singing of the *Hallel* was completed with the fourth cup—doubtless the hymn of Mt. 26:30. It is assumed here that the Last Supper did coincide with the statutory Passover, despite the denials of certain expositors. A. Plummer, *e.g.* (*Luke*, ICC, 1896, pp. 491f.), postulates an ante-dated Passover, 20 hours before the lambs were slaughtered, maintaining that at the proper time Jesus was dying or dead. Others suggest a Passover Qiddush, or ritual purification meal in anticipation. J. N. Geldenhuys argues at length that the Last Supper was itself the Passover, that it was held on the 14th of Nisan, the day before the crucifixion, that there is no contradiction whatever between Synoptics and Fourth Gospel, when the relevant passages are correctly expounded. The Passion, he says, is to be dated on or about 6 April, AD 30. Variant views will be found in other standard commentaries.

The symbolism, 'Christ our Passover', 'Lamb of God', is familiar from NT usage. We have seen that the traditional lamb, if not provable in all instances, has widespread precedent. It is laid down in Ex. 12:46 and Nu. 9:12 that no bone of the Passover victim is to be broken. This small detail is typologically fulfilled when it is reverently applied to the crucified One (Jn. 19:36).

After the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70, any possibility of slaughtering a victim in ritual manner utterly ceased, and the Jewish Passover reverted to the family festival it had

been in the earliest days—the wheel had turned full circle. Whilst church and synagogue eventually went their separate ways, the habit of celebrating Passover would continue for some time among certain Christians, particularly those of Jewish or proselyte background. But the Lord's Supper came to replace the Jewish ordinance, just as baptism came to replace circumcision.

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⁷ Stewart, R. A. (1996). [Passover](#). In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer, & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (3rd ed., pp. 871–873). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.