

## How Should We Observe Passover Today?

By Tim Kelley  
April 2, 2000

For many people, the Passover season is considered the most important of all the festival seasons. Indeed, in my background Passover was the one ceremony a person must not miss. It was a very solemn night, a service where you spoke little, if at all. You sat quietly in your chair and listened to the preacher recite a large number of scriptures - mostly from the book of John. When the service was over you left quietly and returned to your home where your children had probably been watching Charlton Heston portray Moses in "The Ten Commandments". Though you might not get home till 9:30 or 10:00 PM, you would often spend the rest of the evening cleaning out the leaven in your cabinets in preparation for the upcoming Days of Unleavened Bread.

This was my experience from about 1979 thru 1997. But in 1992 I began to question this practice of Passover observance. Our observance just didn't seem to fit the pattern God gave thru Moses in the book of Exodus. I began to see an apparent discrepancy between the book of John, which seemed to line up with Moses, and the synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. At the same time, I began to study into the "Hebrew roots" of the scriptures and became acquainted with the Jewish Passover Sedar.

What was Yeshua was doing on the night of his betrayal, and what did Paul later teach about the Passover and "Lord's Supper". Should we follow the "Jewish Seder" or develop our own tradition? I had to find out, so I began to study.

My path of study led me to set some guidelines for myself. The following is an outline of the basic train of thought that I used, and continue to use, to try to figure out the Passover issue.

1. What is Passover?
2. When is the Passover?
3. Did Yeshua change the timing of the Passover?
4. How do we keep the Passover today?
  - A. How was it kept in OT times?
    - a. The Exodus Passover
    - b. Subsequent Passovers
  - B. Should children be involved?
  - C. Did Yeshua change it into the "Christian" or "New Testament" Passover?
  - D. Does God give us clear instructions on what we are to do today?

The following summarizes some of my conclusions:

### What is Passover?

The Passover is the night we observe the children of Israel's deliverance from the slavery they had fallen into while sojourning in Egypt. Though the Passover season encompasses many events, there were three specific things that were required of the Israelites on that first afternoon and evening if they were going to save the life of their firstborn. So the first Passover must be broke into

three parts: 1) the killing of the lamb, 2) the application of the blood on the doorposts, and 3) the eating of the meal behind the blood covered door. If a family killed the sacrificial lamb, but failed to put the blood on the door, their firstborn would have been killed. If a family failed to kill a lamb, yet stayed inside their house, again their firstborn would have been killed. Clearly, you had to participate in all aspects of Passover in order to receive the protection from death.

There has only been one complete Passover, the one that occurred in Exodus. Israel was instructed to continue to observe Passover as a **memorial** of the first Passover. For the most part, they were always looking back. Yet God also intended for them to look forward, and those who heeded Moses's instructions, and really heard his words, understood Passover to be a picture of the ultimate sacrifice of The Messiah.

We find the fulfillment of the first two parts of the Passover picture with the death of Yeshua and the application of His blood on the altar. We are living in the third part of the Passover picture, we are presently behind the door, waiting for the death angel to pass over. The Passover has not been completely fulfilled. Therefore we, just as ancient Israel, must look back in remembrance and look forward to the completion of the Passover.

### **When is Passover?**

The timing of Passover can become an in depth study. Many have written many words to prove their point on the subject. For me, the question had to be answered in the following light, 1) when was the first Passover, and 2) did Yeshua change the timing of the Passover. I believe that in order to determine when any festival was to be held, you must go back to the Torah to see when God said to do things. My studies showed me that (contrary to my previous belief) the Passover Lamb was killed on the afternoon of Nisan 14 and eaten later that evening on Nisan 15.

After determining from the Torah when to observe any festival, you must then ask yourself "Did God really mean it when He said that He changes not" (Mal. 3:6) and "Did Yeshua really mean it when He said that He did not come to change anything in the law" (Matt. 5:18). If you really believe those words, then you will keep a festival at the same time as God told ancient Israel to do so.

As mentioned above, Passover has three parts to its observance. In ancient Israel, the first two parts took place in the afternoon and the final part took place in the evening. Therefore, to "keep" Passover, we must memorialize specific occurrences that spanned parts of two days.

### **Did Yeshua Change the Passover?**

Many believe that Yeshua changed how and when to keep the Passover. As mentioned above, God does not change nor did Yeshua come to change the law. Therefore, what was He doing on the night before He was sacrificed? Since He was to become the true Passover lamb, could He have been "keeping" the Passover on that last night of His life? If so, how did He kill His lamb for the Passover dinner? How would He have been able to observe the requirement to sacrifice His lamb at the place The Lord chooses (the Temple in Jerusalem - Deut. 16:2-6; 1 Kings 8:29) if all Israel, including the priesthood, was preparing to kill their lamb on the next day? I don't think it would have likely or even possible for Yeshua to have a 'different' Passover than the rest of His fellow countrymen. So what was he doing that evening?

Old and New Testament sources, as well as Jewish sources written soon before and after the time of Yeshua indicate that the eating of bread and wine during meals was a part of Jewish life. The eating of bread and wine was considered to be a symbol of the acceptance or remembrance of a covenant relationship. Bread and wine was eaten by a bride and groom in a Jewish betrothal ceremony. It was always a part of the "Jewish Seder", or set order of Passover services.

Since the Jewish people in the first century were quite familiar with the concepts surrounding the bread and wine, Yeshua used the occasion of His last supper with them to teach them the significance of what they had been doing all along. Yeshua did not add the drinking of wine and the breaking of bread to the Passover service, He only gave its true meaning. Therefore, the next night, when his disciples were eating their Passover meal (after His death), they would be able to look back on the night before, and on the experience of His sacrifice, and see how Yeshua, in those past few hours, had fulfilled, or filled up the law and given it more meaning.

### **How do we "keep" Passover today?**

The Exodus Passover - God only gave one example in the Old Testament of how Passover was to be kept. The head of a family (or group of families if there were not enough in one family to eat the entire lamb in one night) was to take the lamb that was kept in the family home for the previous four days and kill it at his home "between the evenings", take its blood and paint it on the doorposts and lintel of the door of his house. The family was to stay in the house, be dressed and ready for travel, and eat the lamb along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. As they ate, they were to be watching for the "death angel" to pass over their homes.

Subsequent Passovers - The next year, after Israel had received the Torah at Mt. Sinai, they were again instructed about the Passover. This Passover was different from the first in that their lambs were killed at the tabernacle instead of their homes, and the blood was splashed on the altar at the tabernacle and not on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. There was also a requirement that prohibited those who were in a state of "corpse uncleanness" from participating in the Passover (since they would be forbidden from approaching the tabernacle). These subsequent Passover celebrations were designed to remind them of the day they came out from under their bondage in Egypt. After this time, we see no clear instructions in the Old Testament concerning how Passover was to be kept, therefore the last recorded Passover requirements are what we should strive for.

### **Should children be involved in the Passover?**

Children were obviously involved in the first Passover . There is no indication whatsoever that they were excluded from eating that first lamb. On the contrary, this was a service for the parents and the family.

*(Exo 12:3-4) Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: {4} And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.*

*(Exo 12:43 & 47) And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the Passover: ...{47} All the congregation of Israel shall keep it.*

*(Exo 12:24) And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for*

*ever.*

After this first year, the parents were to use the occasion of the Passover to teach their children how God had delivered them from death through the blood of the lamb.

*(Exo 12:25-27) And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as He hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. {26} And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? {27} That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshiped. (See Ex. 13:1 - 8).*

Before any person could eat the Passover, he would have to be circumcised. Presumably, once the males in a family were circumcised, everyone in the family could eat it (Ex. 12:43-49). These instructions were given in the context of future Passovers, since we can assume that the Israelites did not own slaves while in Egypt.

Throughout the five books of Moses, God repeatedly tells Israel that they are to be a model for the nations so that those they came in contact with would want to be a part of Israel and share in her blessings. Israel was "set apart" or made "Holy" for that purpose. For those who wanted to "join in" with Israel, there were two basic requirements: 1) they had to obey the laws of Israel, and 2) they had to be circumcised. After that, they were considered full Israelites (baptism was added later, about 200 BCE.). Therefore it seems apparent that if a person wanted to keep Passover, he had already developed a desire to follow the laws of God. Exodus 12:48 indicates that when the leader of a household (including his servants) wanted to be a part of Israel and keep the Passover, he and his servants must be circumcised, then the entire household would keep the Passover.

It has been taught that since "strangers" were prohibited from eating the Passover (Ex. 12:43), children and those who are "not baptized" may not eat it. If this were the case, it would be in contradiction with the previous verses in Exodus 12. The word "stranger" is the Hebrew word "ben nekhar" which means "son of a stranger". A ben nekhar was a non-Israelite who temporarily lived in the land among the Israelite people, usually for the purpose of commerce. He did not profess the religion of Israel and did not identify with the historical experiences of the Israelite people. Just as we in America would not invite a patriotic Englishman to our Fourth of July celebrations, God was not inviting those of other nations (maybe a patriotic Egyptian) to his freedom celebration. Since our own children and the children of the Israelites have an interest in the freedom of our nations (America and Israel), it is appropriate that they participate in the festivals designed to memorialize them.

We have other examples of children taking part in Passover (1 Samuel 1:4). We also know that Yeshua at age twelve, went up to Jerusalem to keep Passover with his parents.

But don't our children have to be "called"? All of Israel was called for a purpose (Deut. 4:5-8) and according to Paul, God's callings are irrevocable (Rom. 11:29). We who have joined ourselves to the olive tree of Israel (Rom. 11) are therefore called and set apart (made holy) just as Israel was called and set apart. We and our children receive the promises that accompany belief in God and The Messiah (Acts 2:38-39). Our children therefore, simply for the reason that they are our children, are also "set apart" and "holy" (1 Cor. 7:14).

We see so many cases of Yeshua reaching out to little children and likening believers to little children (Matt. 7:11, Matt. 18:2, Matt. 19:13, John 13:33). It would seem out of character for Him to not have us include them in the celebration of freedom that we enjoy through His sacrifice. Since there is no evidence that children were present at "the Last Supper", doesn't this show that children should not attend Passover? If that's the case, then women shouldn't attend either since there's no evidence any women were present either. Instead of the lack of children (and women) being a case for no children at Passover, I think this helps to make a case for this "Last Supper" being simply a supper with his disciples and **not** a Passover.

If you look at Passover as a remembrance or memorial of the freedom from slavery and the penalty of sin and not as a renewal of the covenant, it becomes easier to see that God would not want us to separate our children from such a wonderful and meaningful celebration.

### **Did Yeshua change the Passover into a "New Testament Passover"?**

There again, does God change and did Yeshua come to change, add to, or take away from the law. If He wanted us to only break some bread and drink some wine but not eat a meal, He would be taking from the law. If He added new symbols, He would be adding to the law. And if He moved the time up a few hours, He would be changing the law. As I said earlier, I think the bread and wine were always a part of the Passover, Yeshua just revealed its true meaning, just as He Himself became the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover lamb.

What about foot washing? There again, I don't think that He was keeping the Passover on the night He was betrayed and the night He "introduced" foot washing (there's a lot of evidence that it was customary in first century Israel for a servant to wash the feet of a man's guests when they came into a home to eat). I think that Yeshua, on the night He was betrayed, showed us how we should continually memorialize him throughout the year. Shortly after His resurrection, Yeshua's disciples "remembered" him through the breaking of bread (Luke 24:13-35). Paul said that whenever (look up the word "often" [hosakis-G3740] to see how it's used elsewhere in the NT) you break bread and drink wine, it should be a proclamation of the sacrifice of The Messiah (1 Cor. 11:26). I'm sure that His disciples, on the night after Yeshua's crucifixion, thought a little more about the meaning of the cups of wine they were drinking during their Passover celebration.

### **Does God give us clear instructions on how we are to observe Passover today?**

The only clear instructions I can see are in Exodus 12, Numbers 9, and Leviticus 16. According to those instructions, we are to memorialize our freedom from slavery. By connection then, we should memorialize the one, Yeshua, who freed us from the bondage of spiritual slavery, sin and death. It appears that God also instructed us to use that night to teach our children about these same things.

We cannot, or should not, kill a "sacrificial lamb" today since we cannot fulfill the command in Lev. 16:2 to kill it in the place where He has placed His name (the temple in Jerusalem). Therefore, the bread and wine are now a 'remembrance' of the lamb, which after the first Passover, was only a picture of the true Lamb of God.

I don't think we have any "new instructions" in the New Testament, neither from Yeshua or Paul. Though the Jewish Seder and the actions of Yeshua on the night of His betrayal have some

similarity, there is ample evidence to show that it was not.

Therefore, I think we should try to follow as close as possible the pattern given in the Torah, adding (as a tradition) only what we can to make the night more meaningful to our families, and only as it glorifies God and Yeshua.

**Conclusion:**

This is my position on Passover as it stands today. I'm continuing to look at my belief, and modifying my position as information comes to light. The pattern we have, both in the Old and New Testaments fit together so well that I can't, at this point, see how it could be any other way. So, as for me and my house, we'll serve God this way.