



So You Want to Observe

Passover

by Tim Kelley

God is in the process of drawing His people back to Him, and as He does so, more and more people are becoming interested in their "Jewish" roots. Naturally, they want to learn everything they can about the people and the customs of the first century Jewish people, the ones who wrote the scriptures and became the first believers in Yeshua the Messiah.

As they begin to give up the religious customs they had been participating in for years, there is a desire to replace the non-biblical festivals with those God-ordained festivals like Passover, Rosh Hashanna, and Sukkot. Every spring many "messianic" groups host Passover "sedars" for those who are new. Some of these are described as "teaching" sedars, while others are billed as "the Passover". Quite often these Passover services attract large crowds of people anxious to observe this "Jewish" tradition.

As Passover becomes more and more prevalent within the Messianic community, there are things to consider before a person hosts or attends a Passover Sedar. Like Shavuot, Yom Teruah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot, Passover is one of the many *Moedim* (festivals or appointed times) YHVH has given His people. These festivals were given to help the Israelites remember important events in their history and to point them toward future events that pertain to the salvation of His people and the coming Messianic Kingdom. For the most part, people from all nations were invited to observe the festivals. In fact, Zechariah says:

Zechariah 14:16 *And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.*

The festivals are a way for all people to honor The King, but unlike many of the other festivals, Passover has a special "covenantal" aspect that the others do not. Whereas most of the festivals are open to "the public", it seems that YHVH reserves Passover for His covenant people – those who have answered His call and become part of His bride, His special called out ones. Instead of a banquet, it's like a private meal with your closest friends. And to keep it sort of private, YHVH puts restrictions on who can attend, and even more importantly, who can eat of the meal.

So, let us take a look at what God has said about who may and how we should keep Passover. We will discuss the various Passover requirements listed in the Torah to see how they apply to us. In a later study, we will focus in on a very unusual Passover that took place nearly 1000 years after that first Passover meal. Finally, we will notice a few things the Apostle Shaul had to say about Passover observance.

The first Passover was in conjunction with the Exodus story, and the Exodus took place because YHVH remembered that He was in covenant with Abraham.

NKJ Exodus 2:23-25 *Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. ²⁴ So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. ²⁵ And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God acknowledged them.*

It's important to realize that there has only been ONE Passover. What we observe today is not really the Passover. Instead, what we observe is a REMEMBRANCE of the Passover . . . the night that YHVH protected His people from the destroyer. Notice the instruction given by Moses:

Exodus 12:25-27 *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.*

The Passover that we observe today is a night to remember the events that led to the freedom of the children of Israel from their Egyptian captors. Over and over again throughout the Torah as well as the Tnakh, God instructs His people to remember that fateful night. That night, along with the subsequent forty year wilderness journey, was a pattern that God gave us to understand how He will again save and gather His people at the end of the age.¹ Along with the Passover meal, a special seven-day period of abstaining from eating bread with leavening is given as another way to remember this event. Again Moses stated:

Exodus 13:3 . . . *Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten.*

It was this very first Passover that was to be memorialized by the observance of all subsequent Passover festivals.

Exodus 12:14 *And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.*

The Hebrew word for *remember* is *zekar* (זָכַר - Strong's 2142) which means to *call to mind*. The word picture derived from the individual Hebrew letters could indicate a person driving the thought into our head. It's something God wants ingrained in our mind – never to forget.

That very first Passover was unique – never to be duplicated. It had very specific requirements that were never required after the first. For instance:

- The lamb had to be killed at the door of the individual's house whereas at subsequent Passovers, the lamb was killed at the Tabernacle and later at the Temple.
- The blood of the first Passover lamb had to be painted on the doorpost and lintel of the house as a sign. After that time, the blood was splashed onto the side of the altar.
- To insure that the people would be ready to leave, they were told to eat the meal in haste and be fully prepared to leave that night.

Thus, the *zekar* that we observe today is not the same as the first Passover. Never-the-less, the subsequent Passovers have a lot of meaning and should follow the first as close as practical. They still pertain to a covenant people and thus it's very important to YHVH that they be observed.

Knowing that the Israelites would eventually enter the Promised Land, and thus come in contact with other non-Israelite people, He established some rules to ensure the "sanctity" of Passover, the first of which is listed in Exodus 12:

Exodus 12:43-49 *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 servant 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.**"*

In this passage we find additional Passover regulations not found in those pertaining to the first Passover. They are:

- None of its bones can be broken
- No foreigner shall eat it²

Though the text seems to be somewhat contradictory in regards to a *foreigner* and a *stranger*, it can be easily explained. In verse 43 where it says "no foreigner shall eat of it", the Hebrew word is *ben-neker* (Strong's 5236)

¹ Jeremiah 16:14-15 speaks of a greater Exodus that will pale in importance to the end-time Exodus.

² It's assumed that some of the Egyptians did kill a lamb in order to save their own firstborn. These Egyptians were probably not circumcised.

or literally "son of a stranger". The stranger in this case implies a person who is hostile to Israel and Israel's ways. It may also imply an idol worshipper. In verse 45, the words are *toshav* and *sakiyr* (Strong's 8453 and 7916 respectively). A *toshav* is an immigrant or a person just passing through, and a *sakiyr* is someone hired for a season or maybe even a mercenary. In this case, that person is not really interested in following the God of Israel. On the other hand, the *stranger* in verse 48 is a *ger* or *guwr* (Strong's 1615 and 1481). The *ger* is a person from a foreign country who wants to dwell with you. The implication is that the *ger* has assimilated into the culture of the host country, thus in many respects he has become a Hebrew, a term that implies that the person has changed his life and now walks in the ways of the God of Israel. The term *ger* is oftentimes translated *proselyte* in the LXX.

One example of a stranger who sojourns with Israel is that of Ruth, a Moabite who loved Naomi, her mother-in-law, and wanted to live like her. When Naomi announced that she was leaving Moab to return to Israel after the death of her husband and her sons, one daughter-in-law decided to stay in the Moabite culture and worship their gods, but Ruth exclaimed:

Ruth 1:16 *"Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."*

For a stranger (a *ger*) to want to sojourn with Israel and to keep the Hebrew Passover was to imply that the person wanted to be a part of the covenant relationship that the Israelites had with YHVH through the promises made to Abraham. The sign of a person's commitment to that covenant was circumcision. Thus, to keep Passover, the person had to be circumcised. In this case, circumcision became a sign of the stranger's change of heart, for it is a person's heart that YHVH wants, not a physical act.

Once that person was circumcised, it says that he could "draw near". The Hebrew word *karab* - קָרַב - translated *draw near* in the text is the root word from which we get *korban*, the term for the sacrificial offerings in Leviticus. Thus, a person's change of heart and the subsequent sign of circumcision was what YHVH expected in order for a person to draw near to Him, and once a person did so, he was considered to be as Hebrew as one *born in the land*.

There again, getting into the Hebrew helps us understand this concept a little better. The Hebrew for *one born in the land* is *ezrawck* - אֶזְרָאֵץ - which literally means "a tree that has sprung up from the land (of Israel)". This was an interesting concept, especially as you consider the times. Because the Israelites had been held captive in Egypt for more than 200 years, there were no native born Israelites! They were all born in Egypt – even Moses. What's more, there would be no native born Israelites for at least 40 more years. Thus, in the early years after Israel did take the land, a non-Israelite person who turned to YHVH, the God of Israel, could be considered *more Hebrew than the Hebrews*.

The next instructions pertaining to subsequent Passovers are found in the Book of Numbers:

Numbers 9:2-3 *"Let the children 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 rites and ceremonies you shall keep it."*

The rites for the subsequent Passovers were given in Exodus 12, beginning in verse 43. The Hebrew word is *chukkah* which means *ordinances*. In addition to the ordinances, certain judgments (*mishpata*) that may have been made along the way must also be taken into account. For instance, Leviticus 27 instructs the Israelites to bring all their offerings to the tabernacle.

Leviticus 17:3-4 *If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, ⁴ and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people.*

Thus, the Passover sacrifice was moved to the Tabernacle³. In addition, the priests now played a role in the Passover sacrifice by sprinkling the blood on the altar.⁴ With this move, other ordinances apply such as those

³ Numbers 28-29 include the Passover with all the other offerings that are to be made to YHVH

⁴ Leviticus 17:5-6; 2 Chronicles 35:11

found in Leviticus 22 which prohibit a person approaching the *Holy things* while in a ritually unclean state including that which takes place when a person comes in contact with a corpse.⁵

Since the Passover sacrifice was moved to the Tabernacle, this caused a problem for those who were unclean. On the first anniversary of the Passover in Egypt, there were men who had become unclean by coming in contact with a corpse. Thus they were unable to keep the Passover. Knowing the importance of Passover, they asked Moses what could be done. Moses deferred to YHVH who said:

Numbers 9:10-11 *"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 . . ."*

Thus YHVH provided a way for His people who are unable to observe the Passover in the first month to do so in the second month. He extended this grace to those who unintentionally became unclean as well as those who were on a journey and could not make it back to the camp in time to observe it at its proper time.

The final Passover instructions found in the Torah are in Deuteronomy 16.

Deuteronomy 16:5-7 *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.*

Once Israel came into the land the Tabernacle was placed in Shiloh.⁶ Later, the Ark of the Covenant was moved to the City of David and later, placed in the Temple in Jerusalem. God placed His name originally in Shiloh⁷, but at the completion of the Temple, placed His name in Jerusalem.⁸ God instructed Israel to kill, roast, and eat the Passover lamb at these places. They could not kill the lamb at the tabernacle then take the carcass outside the city to eat it.

To review, we find that:

- The first Passover was unique. There has been no Passover like it since
- All subsequent Passovers are to remember the first
- Along with many of the instructions pertaining to the first Passover, God gave these instructions for each subsequent Passover
 - Anyone who eats it must be circumcised
 - It must be killed in the place YHWH placed His name
 - The priests play a role in the sacrifice
 - A person must be ceremonially clean to kill the Passover
 - It must be eaten in the place YHVH placed His name

There are three primary reasons we do not kill a Passover lamb today. They are:

1. The Temple, the place where the lambs are to be killed, no longer exists
2. Without the Ashes of the Red Heifer, we are all in a state of ritual impurity and thus cannot approach the Temple
3. Without the Temple and the Ashes of the Red Heifer, there is no active priesthood to take part in the sacrifice

Thus, we observe the Passover without the lamb. In Jewish circles, a shankbone is used to represent the lamb, while in Christian and Messianic circles, the symbolic bread and wine is used as a substitute.⁹

So, if you want to observe Passover, these are things to consider. We will discuss the matter of circumcision next time. Shalom Alechem!

⁵ See Numbers 5:1-4

⁶ Joshua 18:1

⁷ Jeremiah 7:12

⁸ 2 Chronicles 6; 1 Kings 8:16-25

⁹ Mark 14:22