



So You Want to Observe

Passover *Part 3*

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We've spent the past two sessions talking about the various Passover requirements in the Tnakh. We noticed that God was very specific in a number of ways when it comes to how Passover should be observed and who could observe it. We saw that:

- it must be killed and eaten in the place where YHVH placed His name
- the person who offered and eat it must be ritually clean
- the person who offered it must be circumcised

We also found that the first Passover was unique, never to be repeated. Things that were required for the first Passover were not necessarily required for subsequent Passovers. After rehearsing all the requirements and seeing that if a person were to offer and eat the Passover in a state of ritual uncleanness he would be "cut off" from his people (i.e. forced out of the camp), we saw that during the reign of King Hezekiah, many of the people did eat the Passover in a state of uncleanness and yet God forgave their violation of His instructions.¹ We determined that the reason for this was that the people who did observe the Passover – knowing that they were doing so in violation of the Torah – did so with a pure heart, longing to return to His ways.

With this background, I want to discuss some of our problems today in regards to keeping the Passover and how we relate to those who don't necessarily see things the way we do. Specifically, I want to discuss the various timing issues we have with Passover and with the so-called "New Testament Passover". Though most everyone agrees on the events that took place in the days and hours leading up to the crucifixion of our Messiah, there is much disagreement about the timing and the implications of such. This is understandable since we are 2000 years removed from the events and the culture of the day, but there also seems to be a contradiction between John's account of those events and the accounts of the other three gospel writers. These "contradictions" have helped shape a number of different views of when and how the Passover should be observed as well as when the Messiah was actually crucified

It's not my purpose to clear any of this. Instead, I want to touch on some of the problems, offer a reason why we might not be able to understand what is written, and then present a case that it's OK if we don't have all the answers.

So let's look at the three major questions and conflicts and how different conclusions can be drawn. We'll go in somewhat chronological order.

Early or Late Fourteenth –

For seventeen years, I "kept" the Passover on the early evening of the fourteenth of Aviv (Nisan). After participating in the service, complete with foot washing, my wife and I would return home to the kids and continue to "de-leaven" the house and cars in preparation for the beginning of the Days of Unleavened Bread which would begin the next evening, the fifteenth of Aviv. Because we (properly) understood that the Israelites began their journey out of bondage that next evening², we had a special evening that we called "The Night to Be Much Observed". Thus, we believed the Passover lamb was killed over 24 hours prior to the Israelites beginning their journey. Many people in the Hebrew Roots movement don't see it that way.

The question comes when trying to decide if the lamb was killed in the early evening of the fourteenth or later that next afternoon and stems from this passage:

¹ **Leviticus 7:20** ²⁰ *But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering that belongs to the LORD, while he is unclean, that person shall be cut off from his people.*

² Exodus 12:41-42 and Numbers 33:3

Exodus 12:6-8 ⁶ *And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.* ⁷ *And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.* ⁸ *And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread . . .*

What does the term “evening” mean in this passage? If you were to look up the word in Strong’s Concordance, you’ll find that it’s translated from the Hebrew word *erev* (Strong’s 6153). But a deeper search, using a lexicon, reveals that the actual Hebrew phrase from which the word “evening” comes is *beyn ha'arbayim*, a phrase that’s understood to mean “between the evenings” and is used a number of places in the Tnakh to refer to the afternoon.

I first became aware of this problem in the early 1990’s when I read in my Ryrie Study Bible the bottom notes that explained this. I was at church and the minister was talking about the Passover meal being on the early evening of the fourteenth of Nisan but my Ryrie notes said that the lamb was killed later that next afternoon. This sort of lodged in my mind, but I didn’t give it much thought until a few years later.

The Last Supper or a Passover Sedar –

If you were to Google “Passover controversy” you would find that the most discussed topic is whether a person should observe Passover or Easter; but the second most discussed topic is whether Yeshua was eating some sort of meal, maybe even a special “graduation” meal, or keeping a Passover sedar on the night He was arrested. There are plenty of arguments on both sides, and many attempts to resolve the issue. For some, this is the issue that led them to reach the conclusion they did in the previous topic we discuss – the “early or late fourteenth”.

The confusion comes from what appears to be contradictions between John’s account of what happened that evening and the following day, and the “synoptic” gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. If we were to rely solely on John’s account we would probably conclude that Yeshua was either keeping something other than a normal Passover sedar, and we would base our conclusion on the thought that the Jewish leaders wanted to remain pure for that evening’s Passover sedar.

On the other hand, if we based our view on the synoptic gospels, we would conclude that Yeshua did keep a regular sedar meal. This, of course, would mean that He would not be able to die at the same time the Passover lambs were killed. For those who want Yeshua to fit the Passover “type” (which many of us do), we have to move the sedar up to the early fourteenth so that Yeshua’s crucifixion still takes place on the fourteenth, though not when the Passover lambs were supposed to be slain³. There’s also some who believe that Yeshua kept a Passover at the same time the Jewish people did, but that He was slain the the day after the Passover (the fifteenth of Aviv) or even the day after that (the sixteenth of Aviv), thus making his crucifixion coincide with the timing of the Jewish determination of the Wave Sheaf Offering.

A number of claims have been made over the years to help bolster some of these views:

- the Jews were keeping Passover on the wrong day (which would have indicated that Yeshua’s parents as well as He himself did so for most of His lifetime)
- John wrote many years after the event and may have forgotten some of the details
- there were a number of Passover options available based on the (supposed) calendar issues of the day
- a person condemned to death could keep Passover early
- Yeshua changed the Passover

As you can see, problems abound when we try to figure it all out.

Three Days and Three Nights –

I was taught that a person had to correctly understand that “three days and three nights” meant a literal 72 hours if he were going to be able to prove that “Jesus is our Savior”. Though this might seem to be quite

³ If a person determines that there is a proper time the lambs are to be killed, he cannot say that Yeshua was eating a properly killed lamb and still die at the proper time the lambs were to be killed.

elementary, it's not. The scripture is not real clear about the meaning of the phrase "three days and three nights".

For instance, Esther called for a three day, three night fast before going into the king's chamber, but she went in on the third day – obviously before the full 72 hour time frame was complete. And even though Yeshua said He would be in the "heart of the earth" for three days and nights, he often stated that He would be resurrected "on the third day". In fact, when his disciples encountered the risen Messiah on the road to Emmaus, they stated that it was still the third day since the events of His death and resurrection had begun.

Why did the gospel writers leave us with these apparent contradictions? How can we truly understand Yeshua's sacrifice if the timing doesn't seem to fit? More importantly, how could they teach that Yeshua was the Passover if He didn't fit the type? Quite simply, they understood that the role of Messiah was wide and varied. The following are a couple of their views.

Lamb of God –

There is a clear connection between Yeshua and the Passover Lamb. The Apostle John offers that at His crucifixion, His bones were not broken so that He might fulfill the Passover picture.

^{ESV} **John 19:35-36** ³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness- his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth- that you also may believe. ³⁶ For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."

Paul uses the image of the Messiah as the Passover lamb to motivate the Corinthians to walk in holiness, probably by implying their covenant relationship to the Torah by the death of Messiah.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:7** Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

In the book of Revelation, John again refers to Yeshua as the Lamb of God that was slain⁴. Thus, a pretty good case could be made that Yeshua was a fulfillment of that Passover sacrifice. As we've studied in the past, the Passover sacrifice was one that provided redemption to the Israelites. It freed them from the bonds of Egypt and provided them an opportunity to return to the Promised Land. It was not a sin sacrifice. When the Jewish people thought of the Passover, it was that concept of redemption that often came to mind, and that is what the apostles taught about Yeshua.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:13** ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"-

Sacrifice for Sin -

But Yeshua looked at His sacrifice as more than just redemption. At His last meal he taught His disciples that would become a sacrifice for sin that would enable the establishment of the New Covenant . . .

^{ESV} **Matthew 26:28** ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Just days later, He went on to show his disciples that they would proclaim forgiveness of sins was brought about by His suffering . . .

^{ESV} **Luke 24:45-47** ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.

But like we said earlier, forgiveness of sins is not a Passover theme. The original Passover had nothing to do with forgiveness of sin. Instead, the Passover theme is redemption – YHVH fulfilling His covenant promise to Abraham. Never-the-less, the writers of the New Testament understood forgiveness of sin in the death of the Messiah, and forgiveness of sin is a Yom Kippor theme.

⁴ Rev. 5:6, 13:8

Leviticus 16:15-16 ¹⁵ "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat. ¹⁶ Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins.⁵

The writer of Hebrews, in preparing the people for worship without the Temple, understood that in addition to redemption, Yeshua's sacrifice was a fulfillment of the Yom Kippor sacrifice as well as that of the Red Heifer sacrifice:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 9:11-15** ¹¹ But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹² he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls (Yom Kippor) and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

There are many more passages we could cover, but suffice it to say, the disciples of Yeshua understood that when Messiah came, he would play many roles. You might say that, since their understanding of God's word was somewhat broader than ours, they had a much bigger box in which to place the role of the Messiah. Therefore, when the events played out during His last few hours, they were able to come away from that experience knowing they had seen the coming of the much prophesied Messiah, which – according to Yeshua – is exactly what God intended. And it's because they were able to see all the roles of the Messiah played out in His last few hours that we don't have to be all concerned about the details.

It is God's intent that we learn about Messiah from the testimony of His disciples, for without their testimony, we have nothing. Just think about it . . . how could we ever prove that the Messiah was in the grave for three days and three nights? There's no way! There were no videos taken, we were not there to note the time of day He was placed in the grave, and we were not there when the stone was miraculously rolled away. We can't prove it one way or another, and I really doubt any of us would stake our lives on claim. But because they witnessed the events, they were willing to stake their life on it, and most of them died for that same reason.

Roughly fifty days after Yeshua's sacrifice, the Apostle Peter, a man who was tremendously moved by what he had seen in the past few weeks, made this statement to many of his Jewish brothers:

^{ESV} **Acts 2:22-23** ²² "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested (proven⁶) to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know- ²³ this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

Did you notice what Peter said? These mighty works, wonders, and signs were done in their midst to prove to them that Yeshua was Messiah. They were not done for our benefit, but for theirs.

Yeshua was very clear about how He intended for us to believe in His Messiahship. It was through the testimony of those with whom He came in contact with for 3 ½ years. On the night before He was crucified He stated:

^{ESV} **John 17:18-20** ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word . . .

The disciples understood their role, so when Judas died, they felt compelled to replace him as a witness . . .

^{ESV} **Acts 1:22** ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us - one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection."

⁵ It was permissible for the Israelites to use either a lamb or a goat for the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12:5)

⁶ Strong's #84 - apodeiknumi {ap-od-ike'-noo-mee}

Yeshua understood that we would not have all the answers, and in some ways, that's good. As I've often said, if God gave us all the answers we'd have no room to plead ignorance . . . we would have no excuse. Instead of answers, we have the words of eye-witness who were willing to die for what they saw. Thus, when we read their words, compare those words with the prophecies, and add in the faith that their testimony is true, we can better understand what Yeshua is trying to teach us.

Passover is a unique sacrifice and a unique event. We know that, even though we are to look back at the Passover in Egypt, we also look forward an even greater Passover. It won't be the same, but it will be similar. In our Passover sedars, we should be careful to not force Yeshua into our Passover box, but instead trust that His disciples truly understood who He was and what He did for us.

Shalom Alechem