



Having a Successful Passover

by Tim Kelley

Passover is the festival that I never looked forward to. To me, Passover - along with the Day of Atonement – were like English class in high school, you sit though it watching the clock, or in my case – the sun – waiting for it to be over. Yes, I knew they had meaning – things that could help me with my spiritual walk, but they lacked the things that I associated with “festivals”. They simply were not “festive”.

My first experience with Passover was in 1969. My parents had just begun attending a Sabbath-keeping church that also observed the Biblical festivals. One spring evening my father and mother loaded up my brothers and sister into the family’s Ford Country Squire station wagon and headed off to church on a weeknight – something highly unusual, especially since Mom and Dad were dressed up, but we kids were allowed to stay in our school clothes.

As we approached the little community building where the church met, we noticed that the doors and windows were covered with paper. Then, as Dad parked the car, he told us we would not be going in, but that he and Mom would be back in a few minutes. An hour and a half later, the doors to the building opened and people filed out, but not with the jovial handshakes and goodbyes that we were accustomed to. Instead, everyone was solemn and quiet.

Mom and Dad never said much about that evening, but the next day we again loaded up the car and headed off to Oklahoma City to observe the 1st Day of Unleavened bread with over 500 people who, unlike the previous night, were filled with joy and laughter. “What happened between last night and today?” I thought.

The next year, we children stayed home while Mom and Dad went to Passover, and it wasn’t until 1978 that I found out why Passover was such a solemn night. That year I was able to “sit in” on a Passover service and realized that the focus of the evening was on the last meal and crucifixion of Jesus and thus the solemnity of the evening . . . it was deemed “the Christian Passover”. Instead of the focus being freedom of the Israelite slaves, or treating Jesus’ crucifixion as a fulfillment of prophecy that paved the way to fulfillment of Yeshu’a major theme – the Kingdom of God, the “church” saw it as a solemn night.

After being baptized in early 1979, I actually observed my first Passover with my new bride and we continued to observe it in that fashion until 1997 when we “stepped out of the box”, keeping the Passover with a family who was observing the evening in a more “Hebraic” way. Since that time, I’ve spent countless hours studying the Passover and hosting it in our home or at other meeting places for our Hebraic community.

This year will mark Angie’s and my 19th Passover since we made a major shift in our Passover observance. Through these years we’ve had Passovers were when it was over we felt empty, and others where we filled with excitement and joy. As I continue to grow in my understanding of Passover, I’ve come to see that excitement and joy are the goal. When everyone leaves the service filled with joy, I believe we’ve had a successful Passover.

This study is intended to be a “Passover Host’s Manual” of sorts. It’s a compilation of thoughts and experiences derived from the past years of hosting Passover “celebrations”. It is not intended to be a “3 Step Formula” for having a successful Passover, but rather points to consider if you even hope to have one. These points include:

1. The focus of your Passover observance

2. What is required for a proper Passover observance
3. Suggestions on how to prepare for and conduct the evening's activities

Working through these points as you prepare for your Passover observance will help you provide a pleasing experience for yourself as well as your guests.

Your Passover Observance

As a host, you will be setting the tone of yours and your guest's observance of this very special evening. Thus it's important to know from the beginning what you intend to focus on during the evening. For the Jewish people as a whole, this has never been a question – the purpose of Passover was to retell the events that secured their freedom from Egyptian slavery. They developed customs, traditions, and an order of events (the "sedar") that became the standard for Jewish Passover observance around the world. The goal of each Passover sedar was to instill in their children's minds the fact that while as slaves in Egypt, God had remembered the covenant He had made with their father Abraham, and thus set out to all but destroy the kingdom of Egypt in order to release their freedom; and that the vehicle by which this was accomplished was the death of a year-old lamb.

Christians, on the other hand, have a bigger challenge. Passover observance by modern day Christians is relatively new, and Christian organizations who did observe Passover and the other Biblical festivals were considered "cultish" by their "Christian" friends. Christians also tend to focus on the belief that the Passover lamb was a precursor to sacrifice of Messiah Yeshua. What's more, when they see Yeshua having a meal on the evening of His betrayal and execution that in some ways resembles the Jewish Passover of today, they tend to focus on that meal instead of the original Passover theme of deliverance and freedom. As the host, you must determine if you're going to simply focus on the original Passover story, focus on Yeshua's last meal, or on both.

Once that determination has been made, you will then have to determine if you want the overall tone of the evening to be uplifting or somber. There again, the Jews have years of tradition that answers that question for them. Their years of tradition insure that the evening will be uplifting. Their goal for the evening is to involve their children in a series of steps designed to illustrate their path from slavery to freedom. It's their hope that the children will go to sleep that evening already looking forward to next year's Passover.

Christians, on the other hand, have to decide whether they see Yeshua giving His life for His people as a solemn event, or a joyful event. If "joyful" is the answer, they can focus on the redemption obtained by the Messiah's sacrifice as well as His goal of establishing the Kingdom of God on Earth. They can show that Yeshua's words that evening were intended to encourage his disciples to continue with the task they'd been given – spreading the word that Messiah had come and that the re-establishment the Kingdom of Israel was now possible. They can teach His words to the children in such a way that they not only see their freedom from bondage, but can also see the goal of His sacrifice – a Torah-based society of joy and peace in the coming Messianic Kingdom.

As a host, determining how you're going to approach whatever you've determined will be the focus of the evening will determine whether the your guests leave in somber or a joyful mood.

Passover Requirements

The Passover host not only sets the tone of the evening, he must also determine what aspects of the original and subsequent Passovers must be observed. This question must be considered in the light of the Torah as well as a person's view of Yeshua's sacrifice. Let me explain.

In reality, our Passover observances are not, nor will they ever be, the same as the very first Passover. There will never again be a time where the God of Israel will tell His people to take the

blood of a lamb, paint it on the door of their houses, and instruct them to sit in their homes eating that lamb while anticipating the death of their neighbor's firstborn child. That was a unique experience that will never happen again. Therefore, we do not really "keep" the Passover, instead we "remember" the Passover. In Hebrew, what we do is called a "zekar" (זָכַר – Strong's 2143) – a "remembrance". God continually instructs us to "remember" the Passover.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 12:14** 'So this day shall be to you a memorial (Heb. *zikrown*); and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance.

^{NKJ} **Exodus 13:3** And Moses said to the people: "Remember (Heb. *zekar*) this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this *place*. No leavened bread shall be eaten.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 15:15** "You shall remember (Heb. *zeker*) that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today.

Our Passovers are a memorial of that one event in human history, and like many events that happened to the Israelite people, it pictures a greater event that will happen at a later time. The first Passover actually pointed to two later events – the death and resurrection of the Messiah, and a great return of God's people to the land of Israel.

^{NKJ} **Jeremiah 23:7-8** " Therefore, behold, *the days are coming*," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,'⁸ but, 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land."

Our "zekar" – our memorial of Passover - should remind us that the first Passover - as well as the death and resurrection of the Messiah - took place as a result of God's power and strength. So too will the next Passover take place. Thus our memorial should be designed to help us remember what happened and should point us toward what will happen.

God did not intend for our observance of Passover to be a re-enactment of the first Passover, yet His instructions for our observance of subsequent Passovers are based on that very first Passover. So let's note the instructions He gave to the people who actually experienced that very first Passover. From what I'm able to see, God gave Israel seven specific instructions regarding the first Passover event. They were to:

1. choose a lamb that could be consumed in one evening by one family or shared between two or more neighboring families (Ex.12:3-5, 21)
2. kill the lamb at the door of their house on the afternoon of Nisan 14 (Ex. 12:6, 22)
3. spread the lamb's blood on doorposts and lintel of their house using a handful of hyssop (Ex. 12:7; 22)
4. prepare and roast the Lamb being careful not to break any of its bones (Ex. 12:8, 18, 46)
5. prepare bitter herbs and unleavened bread to be eaten with the lamb (Ex. 12:8; Num 9:11)
6. take the roasted lamb into their house and eat it along with the herbs and unleavened bread, not carrying any of it back outside, but consuming it all in one evening, and if they could not eat it all that evening, they were to burn the remainder in their home that evening (Ex. 12:10, 46; 34:25; Num. 9:12)

7. eat the lamb in haste, being ready to leave at a moment's notice, but being careful not to leave their house until summoned to do so (Ex. 12:11, 22)

That's the entire Passover event. The rest is the exodus from Egypt. God did however, give three more instructions, but they only pertained to subsequent Passover "remembrances". These additional instructions showed that:

8. they were to teach their children what Passover is all about (Ex. 12:26)
9. they were not allowed to let a foreigner eat the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:43)
10. their males must be circumcised before they may eat it (Ex. 12:48)

We know that the Israelites followed those first seven edicts, but how many of them did they follow the next year as they ate Passover under the shadow of Mount Sinai? To find out, we must study the account of that Passover – the one that took place just days before the Israelites departed the mountain.

^{NKJ} **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 terms "rites" and "ceremonies" come from the Hebrew words "chuqqah" (חֻקָּה – Strong's 2708) and "mishpat" (מִשְׁפָּט – Strong's 4941). These words mean "something prescribed" and "judgments" respectively. From that we see that what governed that second Passover observance was a combination of certain statutes that were prescribed by Torah and other things that had to be determined by making a judgment. Looking back at the list of seven things that were required for the first Passover, it's clear that most of them could be performed that next year, but there were some things that were probably not necessary. For instance, items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 were probably classified as "chuqqot" – prescribed actions. On the other hand, since the Israelites were no longer in bondage, nor did they fear the coming of the "destroyer", and were certainly not anticipating a speedy exodus. Thus it's safe to assume that a judgment was made that item 3 (spreading blood on the doorposts) and item 7 (eating the meal in haste) were not necessary and therefore not part of that second-year Passover.

There was though a new instruction that, though not necessarily Passover related, did affect that 2nd year observance of Passover. That new instruction prohibited a man who had become unclean due to touching a human corpse from coming back into the camp until he could be declared "clean".

^{NKJ} **Numbers 5:2** "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. ³You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell."

Being confined to living outside the camp of Israel during the Passover season would prevent a man from being at his home where he was instructed to kill the Passover lamb. Thus lepers, those with a discharge, and people defiled by a human corpse were unable to observe the Passover. Therefore YHVH added an 11th statute – the 'second month Passover' - whereby a man who could not come to his home for Passover would be able to keep Passover the next month, giving him time to become ceremonially "clean".

^{NKJ} **Numbers 9:9-11** ⁹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or *is far*

away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD's Passover. ¹¹ On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it.

As the end of the wilderness journey drew near, YHVH added one more instruction that profoundly affects how Passover is observed today.

^{ESV} **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. And in the morning you shall turn and go to your tents.

This 12th instruction required a person to kill and eat his Passover sacrifice at a prescribed place; he could no longer do it at his own home. The prescribed place was the Tabernacle. This was a drastic change – basically moving the Passover from an individual's home to the tabernacle. Because it became a Tabernacle service, it now required the assistance of the priesthood; and since not everyone could make the pilgrimage to Shilo or wherever the Tabernacle might reside, those Israelites could only observe portions of the Passover service.

Though not a new Passover instruction, another big change took place during the reign of King Solomon when he dedicated the Temple -

^{ESV} **1 Kings 8:28-29** . . . have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place.

When God acknowledged Solomon's prayer by sending fire to the altar and setting up residence in the Temple, He forever established His name at the Temple in Jerusalem. His people were from that point forward required to kill their designated Passover lamb at the Temple though it's understood that they could eat it anywhere within the walled city of Jerusalem. That restriction is still with us today.

With these 12 instructions we have the entirety of God's instructions pertaining to Passover and its subsequent observance. Did God later allow anyone, be it a king, judge, or prophet, to alter these instructions? Let's see -

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 12:32** "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

The 12 Passover Instructions

1. choose a lamb that could be consumed in one evening by one family or shared between two or more neighboring families (Ex.12:3-5, 21)
2. kill the lamb at the door of the house on the afternoon of Nisan 14 (Ex. 12:6, 22)
3. spread the lamb's blood on doorposts and lintel of the house using a handful of hyssop (Ex. 12:7; 22)
4. prepare and roast the Lamb being careful not to break any of its bones (Ex. 12:8, 18, 46)
5. prepare bitter herbs and unleavened bread to be eaten with the lamb (Ex. 12:8; Num 9:11)
6. take the roasted lamb into the house and eat it along with the herbs and unleavened bread, not carrying any of it back outside, but consuming it all in one evening, or burning (Ex. 12:10, 46; 34:25; Num. 9:12)
7. eat the lamb in haste, being ready to leave at a moment's notice, but being careful not to leave their house until summoned to do so (Ex. 12:11, 22)
8. teach the children what Passover is all about (Ex. 12:26)
9. do not allow a foreigner to eat the Passover lamb (Ex. 12:43)
10. males must be circumcised before they may eat it (Ex. 12:48)
11. have a "second-month" Passover for those who had been ceremonially unclean or on a journey (Num. 9:9)
12. kill and eat the lamb at the place YHVH has placed His name (Deut. 16:5)

This command was given just days or maybe a few weeks before Moses died. The way I read this and other verses¹, no one can add to or take from the Passover instructions found in the Torah. Obviously, a person or leader can make judgments based on the circumstances pertaining to how, or if certain statutes might be performed, but he cannot simply add another or take away any Passover statute.

There's an example in the scripture of a man who did make a judgment about Passover observance and it appears that God was OK with it. It's the case of King Hezekiah who made a one-time judgment call and deviated from the Torah by moving the normal observance of the Passover to the second month, allowing Levites to perform the sacrifice, and allowing some who were unclean to eat the Passover lamb². These were all a result of extenuating circumstances, never-the-less, Hezekiah repented of his actions and acknowledged his and the people's guilt. Hezekiah did not add to or take away from the Torah, but instead made a one-time judgment call that a deviation from the Torah was necessary.

The Jewish people were faced with a Passover decision soon after the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. At that time, it was determined that since there was no longer a Temple, and since there was no longer a viable priesthood, the killing and eating of a designated Passover lamb could no longer be performed. The destruction of the Temple made it impossible to perform Items 1, 2, 4, 6, 9, and 10 . . . basically everything that had to do with the designated Passover lamb. They didn't nullify or "do away" with the laws, they just determined that those instructions could not "legally" be performed. As a result, various substitutions for the lamb were established. The traditional Jewish seder plate is an outgrowth of those substitutions.

This leads us the question of the so-called "Christian Passover". If Yeshua, on the night He was betrayed, was adding to the Passover instructions, one has to ask if He was violating the Torah in doing so. On the other hand, if He was simply offering a different substitution for the Passover lamb³, or better yet, providing a clearer meaning as to what the Passover lamb actually symbolized and how to remember it, then He is not adding to Torah. This, as well as the instruction to wash each other's (of the disciple's) feet must be considered within the context that evening and the Torah. What's more, if a person believes the Passover lamb was a symbolic representation of Yeshua, and Yeshua's blood and body are represented by bread and wine (the "new covenant in My blood"), he must then decide if items 9 and 10 still have relevance. With all that said, it is the hosts' responsibility to determine what he's going to include in the Passover program – which of the twelve statutes will govern his Passover observance.

Regardless of which statutes are applied to our Passover observance, it's clear that one of the major purposes of the Passover remembrance is to teach the children about the events of that night and that week. According to the Jewish people, and confirmed by the Torah, one of the purposes of Passover is to teach the children about Redemption through the Blood of the Lamb. Quoting from an article about the use of the Jewish "haggadah", Wikipedia says –

The Haggadah (Hebrew: **הַגַּדָּה**, "telling"; plural: Haggadot) is a Jewish text that sets forth the order of the Passover Seder. Reading the Haggadah at the Seder table is a fulfillment of the Scriptural commandment to each Jew to "tell your son" of the Jewish liberation from slavery in Egypt as described in the Book of Exodus in the Torah ("*And thou shalt tell thy*

¹ See also Deut. 4:1-2

² 2 Chronicles 30

³ Presumably to take affect after the Temple was destroyed

son in that day, saying: *It is because of that which the LORD did for me when I came forth out of Egypt.*" Ex. 13:8).⁴

This is further reiterated in Exodus 12 –

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

In order to follow this Torah mandate, the host would probably want to include all the Torah-based requirements that can be legally performed, and may want to include elements of those that cannot. For instance, he might want to encourage his guests to buy whatever they need for the Passover on the 10th of Nisan to commemorate the day the lamb was chosen. They might also want to start their Passover get-together in at mid afternoon (to coincide with the slaying of the lambs) to talk with the children about why the lamb was taken and why it was sacrificed. They could also simulate Item 7 (do not go out of the house) above by announcing that the doors of the house will be closed once the meal begins and not be opened (except for an emergency of course) until the service ends.

Keep in mind that without a Temple in Jerusalem, there is no way we can keep the Passover as it's shown in scripture. Therefore, strive to include as many of the scriptural mandates as possible and be confident that you've done your best.

Suggestions for a Successful Passover

After you've determined the tone of your Passover celebration, and have determine the various elements you're going to include, it's time to put it together into a program. The following are things I've observed over the years that help make a successful Passover.

- **Come up with a plan.** Passover is not the time to "wing it". You've invited guests into your home to observe one of only seven God-given festivals. By accepting your invitation, they are expecting to do just that – observe the festival. Make sure you know what's going to happen and when. The Jewish people usually follow a 14 or 15 step "sedar" (Hebrew for 'set order') and they read it out of a "haggadah", a small booklet that explains all the sedar parts. There are many Jewish as well as believing (Messianic) sedars on the internet that can be freely downloaded. You might want to obtain one and make adjustments as necessary. Whatever you decide to use, be ready to explain every portion of your plan – including things that others might suggest had been left out.
- **Share your plan with your guests well in advance.** You don't want to be faced with puzzled looks when you do something that someone was not expecting. If asked to add to or delete an item from the plan, take it into consideration and be able to offer pros and cons as to why you will or will not be able to accommodate them. Even though some of your guests will never look at your plan before they arrive, at least you can say that you tried!
- **Include others in the evening's activities.** Though you will probably dominate the entire evening, try to get others to participate in advance. Assign various tasks to your guests. For instance, I always like to give the task of explaining the plagues to another person, but **beware!** You must give that person a time frame. Talking about the plagues can go on for more than an hour. I like to limit it to 20 minutes – 2 minutes per plague.
- **Try to keep it down to two hours.** I say "try" because I know how hard it is to eat a multi-part meal while at the same time trying to teach various Passover lessons. People like to

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haggadah>

fellowship and it's hard to break in and get their attention. Obviously, if you're starting in the late afternoon, you will probably go longer than 2 ½ hours, but you could fill that time by having your guests help with the Passover preparations.

How do you keep the time down? By being organized. A well designed plan along with constant communication between you and those who are assisting will help keep everyone within their time frame.

- **Avoid embarrassing your guests - provide guidelines in regards to dress.** Because Passover is one of the moedim⁵, it's traditional that everyone dresses nice and modest. If you provide a dress code, everyone will know what's expected.
- **Avoid "dead" time** – If you've ever listened to the radio or watched TV, you've probably notice that you hardly ever have a blank screen or more than just a moment of silence. That's because those in media know that when there is nothing happening, people get distracted and oftentimes wander (off to another radio or TV station). Such is the same with your audience. Other than times when you're relaxed at the table and there is vibrant conversation, keep the program moving. Not surprisingly, the usual cause of dead time is the host getting involved in a conversation and losing track of time.

While gathering information for this article, I ran across a web page that I thought would be helpful for those who are hosting Passover this year. It's part of a tourism web site, but it talks about participating in a Jewish seder. It's entitled "Passover Do's and Don'ts for Non-Jews"⁶. As its title implies, it is designed to prepare the inexperienced "gentile" for his first Passover Sedar, but it provides a glimpse into what the Jewish people consider to be appropriate behavior for the evening.

Hosting a Passover celebration is a huge task and an awesome responsibility, but with proper study, planning, and input, it's not overwhelming. I hope this study can be a help to those of you who have offered to serve in that capacity, and will help bring joy and excitement to your Passover guests.

Shalom Alecheim

⁵ Literally "appointed times" – the Biblically mandated festivals along with certain other times.

⁶ <http://brooklyn.about.com/od/Easter-Passover-Spring-Holiday/tp/12-Passover-Dos-and-Donts-For-Non-jews-What-To-Expect-When-You-Attend-A-Seder.htm>