

## Israel's Passover Celebrations

### Introduction - Institution of the Passover

The institution of Israel's Passover began during their time in Egypt as slaves. Nine times the Lord sent plagues on Egypt to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites but when Pharaoh seemed ready to release the Israelites, his heart hardened and he refused. Finally, for the tenth plague, the Lord told Moses that he was going to slay all the firstborn in the land. In preparation to leaving the land of Egypt, the Israelites were told to prepare a specific meal for their journey. Exodus Chapter 12 describes this process starting with the taking of a one year old male lamb without blemish on the tenth day of the first month of the year. The lamb was then killed in the evening of the fourteenth day with the blood from the lamb used to sprinkle the front door posts and lintel (top). They were told to roast and eat the lamb that night along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs and then to eat it in haste, dressed and ready to leave on short notice. On that night, the angel of the Lord would pass through the land of Egypt, killing all the first-born in the land, except for the houses with blood on their doors, thereby "passing over" the protected houses. They were then told to keep the Passover feast on a yearly basis "throughout your generations" as a memorial of the angel of death passing over them. They were also told to eat unleavened bread for seven days (fourteenth day to the twenty-first day) and to remove leaven from their houses on the first day.

### Old Testament Passover Celebrations

The Old Testament describes six specific accounts of the Passover and its future celebrations, though more are briefly referenced. These instances include:

- (1) The actual passing over of the first born, the eating of the lamb before their journey out of Egypt, and the command to keep the Passover "throughout your generations" (Exodus Chapter 12).
- (2) In the wilderness of Sinai with Moses (Numbers Chapter 9).
- (3) When they reached the promised land at Gilgal with Joshua (Joshua Chapter 5).
- (4) During the reign of Judah's King Hezekiah (2 Chronicles Chapter 30).
- (5) During the reign of King Josiah (2 Chronicles 35).
- (6) Ezra's return to Israel from the Babylonian exile and the restoring of Solomon's Temple (Ezra Chapter 6). There were others mentioned in passing during the description of the celebration under King Josiah in 2 Chronicles 35:18 that were not detailed to an event or king ("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...").

## Old Testament Scripture Readings and Questions

### (1) Read Exodus Chapter 12

- a. For how long were the Israelites told to keep the Passover and how many times was this emphasized (which verses in Exodus 12)?
- b. When was the first mention of the Passover after the Exodus 12 account? Read that account.

### (2) Read Numbers 9:1-5

- a. When did this second instance of the Passover celebration take place?
- b. What happen to those “who were unclean through touching the dead body of a man”? Could they still keep the Passover? If not, could they still keep it at another time?
- c. What was the penalty for not keeping the Passover if one was clean and not on a journey?
- d. What were the additional requirements of the Passover celebration (read Deuteronomy 16:1-8)?

### (3) Read Joshua Chapter 5

- a. When did this Passover celebration take place (location, not the time)?
- b. Were the men born in the wilderness circumcised? If not, or if they were circumcised, why?
- c. When did they observe the Passover (time and place)?
- d. What did they do after they observed the Passover and what ended soon after that?

### (4) Read 2 Chronicles 30:1-30

- a. Who was the king during this celebration and how old was he? Who was his father and mother?
- b. Why is he considered a “good king” (and what contributed to this), even though his father was an “evil king”?
- c. What were the reforms he made in the kingdom of Judah? What was his first act?
- d. Had the Passover been kept before these reforms?
- e. What did the king send out (and where) in preparation for the Passover?
- f. How were the people that were sent out received?
- g. When was this Passover celebrated and why?
- h. Had all those that celebrated the Passover been properly cleansed? What did Hezekiah do in regards to this and what was the result?
- i. How long was the feast of unleavened bread kept during this celebration?

(5) Read 2 Chronicles Chapter 35

- a. What happen between the 12<sup>th</sup> year and the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Josiah?  
What areas did this occur? Read 2 Chron 34:3-7
- b. What had happened to the “house of the LORD” prior to this and what was done to correct the problem?
- c. What did the High Priest Hilkiyah find and why did it cause Josiah such distress?  
What did he do after this?
- d. How did Josiah’s Passover celebration compare with his great-grandfathers?
- e. What lessons can modern Israel learn as shown in the accounts of the preparation for the Passover by the two Kings of Judah?

(6) Read Ezra 6:19-21

- a. When did this Passover celebration occur and what was done in preparation?
- b. What did the priests and Levites do before the Passover and who participated in the Passover celebration?
- c. For whom was the rebuilt temple dedicated? Read Ezra 7:17.
- d. What was the difference between the returning exiles and the surrounding inhabitants of the land? Read Ezra 7:21.

### **Importance of the Passover for the Christian**

What can we as Christians learn from the Passover celebrations in Israel and Judah? Read 2 Cor. 7:1