

the
Seven Celebrations of the Passover
Detailed in the Word of God

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The Passover was the first of the seven annual feasts of Jehovah in the Old Testament. The seven-day-long Feast of Unleavened Bread was continuous with the Passover. The inherent link between these two feasts was so strong that a casual mention of either feast could imply both of them together (Luke 22:1). There is also an obvious association between the Passover and the Lord's Supper of the Christian era, which was instituted during the Lord's last celebration of the Passover. Seven celebrations of the Passover are detailed in the Word of God:

**#1 The Passover as a Celebration of Redemption
(Exodus chapter 12)**

The Passover feast was initiated as a celebration of the redemption of the Israelites from the judgment that was to fall on the land of Egypt. God warned them that He was going to send an angel to destroy the firstborn of every household in the land that night. Those who believed that God's judgment was really coming could avoid it by killing a lamb and sprinkling its blood across the top and down the two sides of the doorways of their homes. When the destroying angel saw the blood of the lamb on the doorway, he would pass over that house without harming anyone within it.

1 Peter 1:18-19 indicates that the Passover lamb symbolized the Lord Jesus Christ. *"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* The Passover lamb had to be perfect because if Christ had had any sins of his own He could not have offered himself on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for our sins.

It is vital to understand that those who were not sheltered by the blood of the Passover lamb were not saved from the judgment that fell on the land of Egypt. Romans 3:23 reminds us that we have all

sinned, and Acts 17:31 warns us that God *“Has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness.”* Unless we shelter ourselves from that judgment by faith in the blood of Christ we will surely suffer the wrath of God against sinners throughout eternity.

After the Israelites had sheltered themselves behind the blood of the Lamb, they were to stay inside and feast on the goodness of the lamb. They were not to eat of it raw or even boiled in water. Since the lamb symbolized the Lord Jesus Christ, it had to be roasted with fire. As we partake of the Lord’s Supper we are to remember that Jesus experienced the full heat of the judgment of God against sin on the cross.

The Israelites were to eat the Passover with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 1 Corinthians 5:8 admonishes us to *“Keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”* In other words, we are to put all wickedness out of our lives before we partake of the Lord’s Supper. But even though we have tried to purge ourselves of wickedness, as we partake of the Lord’s supper we should bitterly remember that it was our sins that made it necessary for Christ to suffer on the cross.

The Israelites were to eat the entire lamb at the Passover feast. Every aspect of our Savior’s person is a suitable subject for our deliberations during the Lord’s Supper. They were to feast on it fully dressed and ready for the call to leave the land of Egypt. As 1 Corinthians 11:26 reminds us, *“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”*

Exodus 12:50-51 assures us, *“Thus all the children of Israel did; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies.”*

#2 Celebrating the Passover Out of Obedience to the Lord (Numbers 9:1-13)

The second celebration of the Passover recorded in the Word of God occurred the following year, while the Israelites were camped on the Sinai Peninsula. No special circumstances are noted. The Lord had instructed them to celebrate the Passover annually on the fifteenth day of the month of Abib, and they did it in obedience to the Lord’s command.

At this time provision was made for those who could not celebrate the Passover because of extenuating circumstances. Those who were ceremonially unclean or on a journey were permitted to celebrate the feast on the 15th day of the following month. Those who despised the Passover, or simply ignored it, were to be “Cut off” from the congregation of Israel.

When the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He directed his disciples to “Do this in remembrance of Me.” When contemplated in the context of Christ’s subsequent agonies at Gethsemane, this simple command becomes a privilege to the contrite heart.

We are not specifically told how often to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Some believe that Acts 20:7, *“Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...,”* implies weekly. Surely we ought to respond obediently, if not eagerly, to every opportunity afforded us to “Proclaim the Lord’s death.”

**#3 Celebrating the Passover
in the Enjoyment of the Blessings of God
(Joshua 5:10-12)**

The third celebration of the Passover recorded in the Scriptures occurred shortly after the Israelites had reached the Promised Land. They had been wandering in the wilderness for forty years because of their own unfaithfulness. Now God had finally brought them across the Jordan River to begin taking possession the blessings that He had promised them. They celebrated the Passover there on the plains of Jericho, and started feasting on the produce of the Promised Land on the very next day, during the associated Feast of Unleavened Bread. That was the last day for the Manna, for the wilderness journey was finally over, and they were already beginning to experience the blessings of the Promised Land.

This suggests that Christians should participate in the Lord's Supper in the enjoyment of the many spiritual blessings that God has given us (Ephesians 1:3). 2 Peter 1:3-4 reminds us that *"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

**#4 Celebrating the Passover with Joy and Gladness
(2 Chronicles 29 & 30)**

2 Chronicles 30 recounts the fourth celebration of the Passover detailed in the Scriptures. King Ahaz had closed the Lord's temple and promoted idolatry and moral decline in the land of Judah. When Hezekiah became king, he encouraged the priest and Levites to sanctify themselves--presumably with the water of purification made from the ashes of the red heifer as described in Numbers 19. They cleansed and re-opened the temple, and initiated a joyful revival among the Lord's people.

Hezekiah's revival was crowned by a celebration of the Passover and its associated Feast of Unleavened Bread. They had to celebrate them according to the second-month provision, because it was done so hurriedly that there wasn't time enough for adequate preparations in the first month. Despite the fact that King Jeroboam had enticed the northern division of Israel to abandon worshiping at the temple over 200 years earlier, all Israelites from both divisions were invited to participate in this joyous occasion together.

Many of the Israelites who came to celebrate Hezekiah's Passover arrived too late to sanctify themselves as the Law required. Some of those from the northern division were probably unaware that the Law demanded it. But although they ate the Passover contrary to what was written, *"Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, 'May the good LORD provide atonement for everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he is not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.' And the LORD listened to Hezekiah and healed the people"* (2 Chronicles 30:18-20). Their genuine readiness of heart trumped their ceremonial disqualifications.

The thing that characterized Hezekiah's Passover and its associated Feast of Unleavened Bread was joy. *"So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments. And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the*

good knowledge of the LORD; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers” (2 Chronicles 30:21-22).

The joy of that revival was so great that *“The whole assembly agreed to keep the feast another seven days, and they kept it another seven days with gladness... So there was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem. Then the priests, the Levites, arose and blessed the people, and their voice was heard; and their prayer came up to His holy dwelling place, to heaven” (2 Chronicles 30:23-27).*

The joy and gladness with which Hezekiah’s Feasts were celebrated implies that the Lord’s Supper should be a happy occasion of fellowship between the Lord’s people, both with each other and with the Lord himself, for He is surely present with us. May we celebrate it in the joy of the Lord.

#5 Celebration the Passover According to the Book of the Law 2 Kings 22 & 23

King Hezekiah was succeeded by his son, Manasseh, who set about to reverse all of his father’s spiritual reforms. He seduced Judah to behave more wickedly than the original inhabitants of the Promised Land that God had displaced because of their iniquity. 2 Chronicles 33:12-17 records his repentance and his sincere attempts to undo the spiritual havoc he had caused after God restored him to his throne; but it is much easier to let go of the truth than to get things back on track. Genuine revival had to await Josiah’s reign.

Manasseh’s son, Amon, reverted to his father’s evil ways. When he died the people of Judah made his eight-year-old son, Josiah, king. Josiah was enthroned about 75 years after the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign. In the eighth year of his reign he began to seek the Lord, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah of its idolatry. In the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law while repairing the temple at the king’s command. Josiah read the “Book of the Covenant” to the people and made a public commitment to obey it. He encouraged his people to join him in personal commitments to diligently serve the Lord their God.

2 Kings 23 records the Passover that Josiah and his people kept in the eighteenth year of his reign. *“Then the king commanded all the people, saying, “Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant.” Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah” (2 Kings 23:21-22).*

What characterized Josiah’s Passover was that it was kept *“As it is written in this Book of the Covenant.”* Surely the lesson for Christians here is that the Lord’s Supper is not a venue for human innovation. It is, perhaps, the most sacred ground on which Christians tread, and we do well to walk softly. It was instigated by the Head of the church, and as the disciples learned at the transfiguration, God would have us to “Hear him.”

After recounting the details of the institution of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, the Apostle Paul added, *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” (Verse 26).* If the Lord’s Supper is indeed a feast of Christians rather than unbelievers, it is unlikely that many unbelievers would have been present to observe it. Perhaps, then, this proclamation of the Lord’s death is more to the angelic and other heavenly beings than it is to the unbelieving world.

Ephesians 3:10-11 tells us that God intended that *“The manifold wisdom of God might be made known (or demonstrated) by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* Just as the Old Testament is full of types and shadows that were put there for the church’s learning (Romans 15:4), the Lord’s Supper may be God’s demonstration of His wisdom to His heavenly creation. It is incumbent upon us, then, to partake of it *“According to the Book.”*

There may be some significance in the observation that Hezekiah’s joyful Passover was the greatest since the time of Solomon, but Josiah’s Scriptural one was the greatest since clear back to the times of the judges.

#6 Celebrating the Passover in Humility (Ezra 6:19-22)

Judah returned to idolatry after Josiah died. A dozen years after his death God punished his chosen people by allowing the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, to defeat them. The Babylonians, installed Zedekiah as king of Judah. Eleven years later, after Zedekiah double-crossed him, Nebuchadnezzar razed Jerusalem, tore the temple down, and carried many of the Jews to Babylon as captives. The Babylonians were conquered by the Medes and Persians in 538 B.C., and Cyrus, king of Persia, allowed the Jews to return to the Promised Land and rebuild their temple.

The temple was rebuilt under the leadership of Ezra the Scribe. Those who were old enough to have seen the original temple were naturally disappointed with the foundation of the new one, which must have been quite inferior to the massive foundation of Solomon’s temple. Nevertheless, the people rejoiced when the temple was finally finished.

The sixth celebration of the Passover recorded in the Scriptures occurred after the temple worship had been re-established. *“And the descendants of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were ritually clean. And they slaughtered the Passover lambs for all the descendants of the captivity, for their brethren the priests, and for themselves. Then the children of Israel who had returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the LORD God of Israel. And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel” (Ezra 6:19-22).*

The recurrent theme in this brief account of Ezra’s Passover is that most of the participants were survivors of the captivity. The Lord had graciously brought them back to the Promised Land, but the fact that they were still under the rule of a foreign government proved that they were still under the disciplinary hand of God. But in spite of God’s discipline, they could still celebrate the Passover with all their brethren who would separate themselves from the filth of the land, and they did it in the joy of the Lord.

The lesson for Christians is simple. The church is fractured into countless denominations that are anything but the testimony to Christian unity that the Lord prayed for in John 17:20-23. Many of its auditoriums ring with false doctrines and the justification of wickedness. God has essentially removed its sign gifts of tongues and prophecy. Nevertheless, those who humble themselves under the mighty

hand of God's discipline and repent can joyfully celebrate the Lord's Supper with all their like-minded brethren who separate themselves from the filth of the world to seek the Lord.

#7 Celebrating the Passover in Communion with Christ **Luke 22:1-22**

The seventh and last Passover described in the Scriptures was the one where Christ instituted the Lord's Supper on the evening before He was crucified. The Passover prophetically pointed forward towards the crucifixion. The Lord's Supper, or Breaking of Bread, was designed to look backwards in remembrance of the crucifixion.

Luke's account of that last Passover begins with the Lord's command for Peter and John to *"Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat"* (Luke 22:8). This naturally brought up the response, *"Where do you want us to prepare it?"*

The Lord's mysterious answer to "Where" may be symbolic:

When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready" (Luke 22:10-12).

Perhaps it suggests something like:

"I'll send you someone who will lead you according to the water of the Word of God (Ephesians 5:26) to where you should prepare to take the Lord's Supper. Do it there."

At any rate, surely we should hope to find a place where we can partake in the Lord's Supper as Josiah's Passover implies, *"As it is written in the Book of the Covenant."*

The largeness of the room might suggest a non-exclusive setting that makes room for all the children of God. Romans 15:7 admonishes us, *"Receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."* The upper-ness of the room suggests that the place where we fellowship should insist on a standard of sanctification that is above the level of the world around it. As the Apostle Paul instructed, *"I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner — not even to eat with such a person"* (1 Corinthians 5:11). The symbolic significance of the unleavened bread prescribed for the Passover is explained in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8. *"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."*

When they finally came to the table, Jesus announced, *"With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"* (Luke 22:15). Surely this stated longing of our Savior should entice us, even if simple obedience doesn't, to participate in the Lord's Supper. As Galatians 2:20 puts it, He is *"the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

During the celebration of that Passover, where they feasted on the lamb with bitter herbs as usual, Jesus used the unleavened bread and the traditional common cup of wine to instigate the Lord's Supper. The bread was declared to represent his body, which was given for us. The wine represented his blood,

which ratified a new covenant of grace and forgiveness, in contrast to the previous covenant of Law, which condemned everyone under it.

The Lord's Supper was generally celebrated in association with what was called the Agape Feast. Because of fleshly abuse of this literal feast, the Apostle Paul instructed the church to satisfy their hunger elsewhere so they could concentrate on the spiritual aspects of a more symbolic celebration of the Lord's Supper. (1 Corinthians 11:20-34). The inspired use of the same introductory phrase, "*When you come together,*" for the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) and the Open Format meeting (1 Corinthians 14:26) may intimate that the Open Format meeting of 1 Corinthians 14:26-39 was the intended format for this reformed celebration of the Lord's Supper. Whatever the format used, each participant is to examine himself before he eats the bread and drinks of the cup of the Lord.

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Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper is a celebration of our redemption--only with the emphasis on our Redeemer. May we respond obediently to the Lord's yearning for our fellowship in it. Let us partake of it in compliance with the Word of God, participating joyfully, humbly, and in appreciation of our spiritual blessings. May we consider it a privilege to remember our Lord and proclaim his death in the Breaking of Bread until He comes. □

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