

Christian Faith and Practice through...Passover

“Don’t be stiff necked now, as your ancestors were. Instead, yield yourselves to Adonai, enter his sanctuary, which he has made holy forever; and serve Adonai your God; so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. For if you turn back to Adonai, your kinsmen and children will find that those who took them captive will have compassion on them, and they will come back to this land. Adonai your God is compassionate and merciful; he will not turn his face away from you if you return to him.” 2 Chron. 30:8,9

The next feast or festival coming up (March 28 2002 according to the Jewish calendar for this year) is Passover. For those of us who have decided to hear and obey and stop listening to the doctrines of men, this is an important occasion. And for those of us who are rookies at Torah submission, it might be a little difficult to tell exactly how we should remember this “appointed time.” This article is not intended as a lengthy discussion of the various details; rather, I just want to help get you started making more room for the Word of Yahveh in your lives.

This is probably the most complicated feast as far as Scripture references are concerned, and I imagine a whole book could be written about just this subject. Most of the practices involved with modern observation of the feasts and festivals revolve around food, fellowship, teaching, and prayer. I won’t go into a detailed discussion of the legitimacy of sacrifices here, or their presence or absence. As you continue, you will learn more and more, and can refine your practice as your faith is strengthened.

There are actually three feasts associated so closely together that many people refer to all three by the name Passover. The other two are the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Hag Ha’matzah, hawg-haw-mahts-ah) and First Fruits. First Fruits (HaBikkurim, pronounced haw-bic-er-eem) is an offering of the first part of the harvest. First Fruits also begins the countdown to Shavuot (shah-voo-oat or Pentecost to us Anglos), which is the day that the Law and the Spirit was given (a long time apart in some people’s reckoning, but more about that later). Together, these four are known as the Spring festivals.

Passover is on the 14th of the month of Nisan, sometime around the Gregorian March or April (the common calendar in use today). If you get a Jewish calendar it’s easier to keep track. Unleavened Bread starts on the evening of that day and goes for seven days (the first and last of which are Sabbaths), and First Fruits is on the first Sabbath after the end of Unleavened Bread. A lamb is sacrificed for Passover and a meal eaten, bread that has not “risen” (and it’s not even my pun – the best puns are from Yahveh) is eaten for seven days at regular meals (as well as a “sacrifice by fire” but we don’t do that anymore – although some people’s cooking could fall into this category!), and a “wave offering” is made of the first part of the harvest at First Fruits. Then seven complete Sabbaths are

counted (the counting of the omer) to set the time for Pentecost (the feast of Weeks Deut. 16:9-11).

An interesting fact to note is that Passover is pre-figured in the Garden by the clothing Yahveh made for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21-24), and also by the ram that was the substitute for Isaac (Gen. 22:8, 13, 14). Yahshua “fulfilled” this “appointed time” (boy is that a loaded term) on the execution stake when He offered Himself as the Spotless Lamb to pay the penalty for our sins. He is also The Unleavened Bread (hence the pun about “risen”), and He is also our “Wave Offering” and the First Fruits of Yahveh’s Harvest. If the Messiah is not seen in the Torah then a veil is still over the eyes of the observer, whether they are Jew or Gentile.

Exodus chapter 12 has most of the Scriptural specifics for the observance of this day, but Leviticus 23 has some more detail and so does Numbers 9:1-14.

- 1) On the tenth of the month get a lamb for each household, share if needed (verses 3 & 4).
- 2) It may be a sheep or goat, male, one year old (verse 5).
- 3) Keep it for four days (till the 14th of the month), kill it at twilight (verse 6).
- 4) Put some of the blood on the lintel and doorposts of the house (verse 7).
- 5) Eat the flesh, roasted, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (verse 8).
- 6) The complete carcass is to be roasted, not boiled or eaten raw.
- 7) Don’t leave any till morning, burn the remainder.
- 8) Eat it in haste, dressed, with sandals on and staff at hand (verse 11)
- 9) It is a permanent ordinance (verses 14, 17, 24, 42).
- 10) Eat unleavened bread for seven days (v.18). On the first day remove all leaven from the house. Do not eat any leaven during this time (verses 15, 19, 20).
- 11) Passover is the first day of Unleavened Bread (evening of 14th is the same as the start of the 15th), and a Sabbath (verse 16). The seventh day is also a Sabbath. These are in addition to regular Sabbaths if on different days.
- 12) When children ask why, we are to tell them of the Exodus (verses 26, 27; 13:8,14-16). According to Yahshua (and Paul) we are to do this in remembrance of Him (Luke 22:19; 1Cor. 10:16-21, 11:23-34).
- 13) Have a feast to the Lord on the seventh day of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 13:6)

One of the things that is different between Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23 (and other texts) is that we don’t splash some of the blood on the doorposts and lintel. Also, the meal is supposed to be eaten in haste (Ex. 12:11), but some people have turned it into a four to six-hour ordeal through tradition and custom. Three of the seven feasts (Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles) are called “pilgrimage” feasts where everyone is supposed to go to the “place where He puts His Name” (Deut. 16:16), but according to Deut. 12:21 (cf. Deut. 14:24-26) if that place is too far away we can do them at home.

So, Passover is on the 14th (March 28th this year [2002] - the day starts at sundown in the evening) of Nisan (more on months in a minute), and Unleavened Bread starts on the 15th, and goes for seven days (eve. of 3/28 is start of 15th of Nisan). The first day (the 15th or 3/29) is a Sabbath, and the 21st (April 5th) is also a Sabbath in addition to regular Sabbaths (every time we turn around, rest). This year according to the Jewish calendar, Passover (Pesach or peh-sock in Hebrew) is on March 28th (evening) of the Gregorian calendar and Hag HaMatzah goes from March 29th (evening) until the evening of April 5th. Between the two calendars, and with days starting and ending at sundown, there can be some confusion; I know I have to stop and think and I STILL get confused. I hope I have written this down correctly and I haven't confused YOU. So we stop eating leaven on the 28th (also a Sabbath) and we can eat it on the evening of April 5th (another Sabbath). On the 27th, before the feast starts, we go through our house and remove all the leaven.

Nisan	14 th	15 th – 21 st	First (reg.) Sabbath
March/April	3/28 (eve)	3/29 (eve) – 4/5 (eve)	4/6 (eve. Of 4/5)
	Pesach	Hag HaMatzah	HaBikkurim

From HaBikkurim (First Fruits), seven complete Sabbaths to May 17th Shavuot (Pentecost). Check www.wholebible.com for updated dates for the current year.

The calculating of months for Israel's calendar used to be by watching for the new moon. Every so often a month was added to the year to adjust for the drift between the cycles of the moon and the agricultural season (driven by the sun). Sometime around the beginning of the fourth millennium (just after the time of Yahshua) someone calculated the cycles of the moon mathematically, and now the Jewish calendar is set up around this calculation. The only problem was, this removed Yahveh as the coordinator of the cycles, and some people are now thinking of giving Him back His place by going back to the original style of watching for the new moon. Another problem with using the lunar cycles to regulate the calendar is that the months are out of sync with the Gregorian calendar, which is based on the movements of the earth around the sun. This is why Yahveh's appointed times move around compared to the calendar mostly in use today (the Gregorian).

I am not an expert in all the details of timing, or procedures, or comparisons to other events. And even if I were this would not be the place to discuss all the nuances. Much is in flux right now as we read the Word and try to understand what it means. All I know is what I read and what I have learned from several of my teachers. I have not done an exhaustive study although I am sure there is much to be gained from such. You can begin to put some of these things together also, as you gain understanding and familiarity with the Word. This is one of my major points in teaching: start somewhere, and add more as you understand. Don't hesitate to begin doing as much as you can for fear of not knowing enough. Fear doesn't have a place in our relationship with our Father except the kind that is from reverence, respect, and worship.

There are questions of who may eat of it (Ex. 12:42-45, 48, 49), exactly what circumcision means (Gen. 17:1-15; Rom. 4:9-12; 1Cor. 7:18; Col. 2:6-14), where to eat it (Deut. 16:2, 5 compare to Ex. 12) and where did the scriptures command an egg on the plate anyway? How do we balance Exodus 12:49 (“The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger that sojourns among you”) with Exodus 12:43 (“No foreigner is to eat of it”)? It is my view that as adopted sons, in the household of faith, we are free to partake of the Pesach without penalty, as long as we ARE of the household of faith (1Cor. 11:23-34). As I’ve said before, balancing these things will deepen your understanding, strengthen your faith, and enhance your relationship to the Father and each other.

Some people go to extremes to remove leaven from their houses. They will clean everything from top to bottom (this is where the idea of Spring cleaning comes from), and even use a feather to dust everything so there will be absolutely no particle of leaven in the dwelling. But some people take this trouble to remove leaven from the home and do not even think of removing the sin from their lives, which is what the removal of leaven represents. As a matter of fact, we should concentrate on the removal of sin from our selves more than finding microscopic traces of yeast or baking soda in our home. Check out the example of King Josiah in 2 Kings 23:21-25 where he celebrated the Passover AND removed sin from the Land.

Have you ever wondered how Yahshua could both eat the Pesach meal and BE the Pesach lamb? It is because the literal meaning of “twilight” (Ex. 12:6) is “between the two evenings.” Therefore He could eat the Pesach meal on the first evening, as long as His execution took place before the second evening. By the way, He had to be in the ground three days AND three nights, so the conventional Christian teaching of a Friday execution and a Sunday resurrection is wrong, no matter how you combine the days and nights.

I want you to notice that the sacrificing of the lamb on Pesach in Exodus 12 is not in connection with the Temple at all; it was done at home. Later, when Israel was in the Land, it was to be done at the “place where I put my Name” (Deut. 16:2,6). Exactly where this is at the present day can be debated still. It has been known to mean “the place where the Temple is,” but if I understand the Word properly then WE are the Temple, so what does this really mean? This is something that needs more study. Apparently, if the place where He puts His Name is too far away, we do it at home as evidenced by Deut. 12:21.

In 2 Chron. 30:17 Hezekiah prays that the Lord will not hold the sin of eating the Passover in a way other than prescribed by Temple ritual against the people, and God does not strike them. Although I wouldn’t go so far as to say we could do what we want, there appears to be some leeway. I have not actually done this yet, but I am working up

to buying a lamb or kid and slaughtering it, and I may do it this year. It is not a pleasant prospect to find a perfect lamb or kid, feed it and care for it for four days while it wanders around the back yard bleating, become attached to it, then slaughter it myself. However, at least one meaning that is shown by this is that the sacrifice for sin is very, very personal, and the price for my disobedience is very, very hard to pay.

One year we attended a Seder (the word means “order” and is the traditional form of the meal) at our church. Unfortunately, it was just treated as a novelty, which removed some of the meaning. Another year we did a Seder at home that was very good. Last year my wife bought some prepared lamb and we roasted it and ate it with a meal and some bitter herbs (horseradish) and unleavened bread. I had a staff at hand, and we ate it in haste. This year I may try to purchase a lamb or kid and go the whole route; if we can we will try to find a family or two to share it with, because it is quite a bit of meat for one meal. The main point I’m trying to make is this is a growth process, and I add more as I understand more. If you would like to participate with us let me know.

For leaven removal, our family makes it a project to read the ingredients on all the food in the house and remove the ones with leaven, yeast, or baking soda. You can take them to the garage or storage building if you want – just remove them from the house and don’t eat them during Hag HaMatzah. Bring them back afterward if you want, until you get used to planning so you don’t buy a bunch before hand. You would be surprised at how many foods are made with leavening. You can use the standard matzah wafers or any other bread without leaven for the week.

Remember, don’t allow the details to distract you from beginning to making room for this feast. Start somewhere, even if you just mark the day on the calendar, read the story of the Exodus and perhaps the story of the execution of the Messiah, and have a nice meal. Get a Jewish calendar and you can start keeping track of the placement of the appointed times with your family, and try to purchase one of the excellent books written to help with celebrating and “keeping” this appointment with our God and Messiah.

May Yahveh bless your efforts and produce much fruit through your practice.
Bruce Bertram

“Obey and pay attention to everything I am ordering you to do, so that things will go well with you and with your descendants after you forever, as you do what Adonai sees as good and right. When Adonai your God has cut off ahead of you the nations your are entering in order to dispossess, and when you have dispossessed them and are living in their land; be careful, after they have been destroyed ahead of you, not to be trapped into following them; so that you inquire after their gods and ask, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I want to do the same.’” (Deut. 12:28-30 CJB)