

פסח Passover

Modern-day Passover is an eight-day celebration that commemorates the deliverance of the Children of Israel out of Egypt. It actually includes three of the Feasts of the Lord: Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread and Feast of First Fruits. During the time of Jesus, this eight-day period was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (Mark 14:12)



The Passover and Unleavened Bread

Leviticus 23:4-14 These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. 5 On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the LORD's Passover. 6 And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7 On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. 8 But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it.

The Feast of First Fruits

9 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. 12 And you shall offer on that day, when you wave the sheaf, a male lamb of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering to the LORD. 13 Its grain offering shall be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering made by fire to the LORD, for a sweet aroma; and its drink offering shall be of wine, one-fourth of a hin. 14 You shall eat neither bread nor parched grain nor fresh grain until the same day that you have brought an offering to your God; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. NKJV

These feasts are in the first month of the biblical year, the month of Abib, which on the modern Hebrew calendar is called Nisan. A biblical day is from sundown to sundown. (Genesis 1:3) Passover is on Nisan 14 and it is the day that the Passover lambs were slaughtered by the priests in the temple. Nisan 15-21 is the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day of this feast in

biblical time was when the traditional Seder took place. (Exodus 12:1-7) During this seven-day period the Jews were to eat only unleavened bread (matzah).

The date of the Feast of First Fruits is different each year. It falls on the Sunday that follows Passover. (Leviticus 23:11) It is always during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. On this feast Jews were to take the first sheaf of the barley harvest and offer it to the Lord. Offering the first fruit to the Lord made the rest of the sheaves of the harvest holy to the Lord.

Spiritual Significance

The celebration of Passover, Unleavened Bread and Feast of First Fruits is eight days. Eight is the number of covenant. During the eight days of feasts, the last days of Jesus' life, God made the covenant of salvation for all mankind. Here is the timetable of events that ushered salvation into the world.

Sunday, Nisan 10, is the triumphal entry of Jesus as He comes to Jerusalem to present Himself as the Passover Lamb of God. (John 12:12-13) Exodus 12:3-5 "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the



household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats." NKJV

The next three days Nisan 11-13, the lambs were observed to make sure they had no disease or defect. Only a perfect lamb could be a Passover lamb. During these three days Jesus was teaching in the Temple area and being challenged and questioned by some Jewish authorities who felt threatened by Him. (Matthew 22:15-45) They were trying to find fault in Him but could not.

Most likely Jesus celebrated the Seder with His disciples at least one day before the rest of the Jews. The reason is that He celebrated it with His disciples in the home of an Essene*, which was a sect of Judaism that celebrated all the feasts on a different day than the rest of Israel celebrated them. Jesus probably celebrated the Seder on Nisan 13. It was during this Seder Jesus instituted communion. (Luke 22:20)

Nisan 14 was Passover, the day the Passover lambs were slaughtered. Several important things took place that day. Jesus was put on the cross at nine o'clock in the morning. (Mark 15:25) At the same time the lambs were being prepared for slaughter. At three o'clock in the afternoon Jesus died which is the exact time the priests began the slaughter of the Passover lambs. Note: Jesus suffered on the cross for six hours. Six is the number of man. Jesus suffered for all mankind

Sunday, Nisan 17, Jesus rose from the dead on the Feast of First Fruits. (Mark 16:9; Leviticus 23:9-14) During the Feast of First Fruits, the first sheaf of the barley harvest was presented to the Lord. Jesus was the first fruit of the first resurrection. (I Corinthians 15:20-23)

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15-21, Jews are commanded to eat only unleavened bread, which is matzah. (Exodus 23:15) Leaven refers to sin so the meaning of this feast is that God wanted the children of Israel not to commit sin. For seven days they were physically to do something that symbolized not committing sin (taking in sin) i.e. eating bread that contained no leaven (sin). (I Corinthians 5:6-8)

Jesus fulfills the first three Feasts of the Lord:

1. He fulfilled Passover by becoming our Passover Lamb slain for the sins of all mankind. (I Corinthians 5:7)
2. He fulfilled the Feast of Unleavened Bread because He was the one and only sinless one. (Hebrews 4:15)
3. The resurrection was on the Feast of First Fruits. (Luke 24:1-7)

The Seder

Traditionally the Seder was eaten on the first night of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which began at sunset following the slaughtering of the Passover lambs. The Seder includes telling the story of the deliverance of the Children of Israel out of Egypt in words and symbols following the instruction of the Haggadah, the traditional order of the Seder, and a meal.

On each table is a Seder plate that is used to help tell the story of the Jews' miraculous deliverance. There are six items on the plate:



1. Parsley that represents the hyssop that was used to put the blood on the doorpost and lintel so the death angel would pass over. It is dipped in salt water to remember the tears shed in Egypt and the Red Sea that swallow up their enemies.
2. Lamb shank symbolizes the sacrifice of the Passover lamb whose blood protected them from the death angel.
3. Bitter Herbs symbolize the bitterness of their slavery in Egypt.

4. Charoseth, an apple mixture, is a symbol of mortar representing the clay bricks made by the children of Israel while they were in slavery in Egypt.
5. Roasted egg symbolizes the sacrifices that can no longer be made in the temple. Also some commentators say it represents the new life God gave the children of Israel when He delivered them from Egypt.
6. Very salty water symbolizes the tears shed in Egypt.

Matzah, unleavened bread, is eaten during the Seder. Modern matzah is pierced and stripped representing the sinless body of Jesus Christ that was “wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.” Not only are Jews instructed not to eat any unleavened bread during Passover, they are not to even have it in their homes. Prior to Passover the house is cleaned from top to bottom to make sure there is no leaven left in it. (Exodus 12:15) This is probably where the idea of “spring cleaning” came from.



At each Seder table there is a place set for the prophet Elijah. Usually a special cup called the “Elijah Cup” is used. Elijah is the prophet that will announce the coming of the Messiah. This is a symbol of the Jewish expectation of the coming of the messiah. At the end of each Seder someone opens the door to see if Elijah has come. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah and announced that Jesus was the Messiah. John 1:29 “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (NIV) Jesus spoke about John the Baptist and Elijah. Matthew 17:11-13 “Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that he was talking to them about John the Baptist.” (NIV)



After the dinner concludes, the final piece of matzah is eaten and the third cup of wine is drunk. This cup is called the “cup of redemption.” This is when Jesus instituted communion with His disciples. 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 “In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” NIV

At the end of the Seder the words “**Next Year in Jerusalem**” are spoken in unison and then a hymn is sung. Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn at the end of their Seder and then departed for the Mount of Olives. (Matthew 26:30)

*(Essenes were one of the three main sects of first century Judaism.) As we look at the community a Qumran, presumed to be part of the sect of Essenes, we need to evaluate their lifestyle, religious practices, and theology. We also need to look at the community’s relevance to modern Christianity in the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

What characterized the community of Qumran? The members of this community were separatists. They abandoned the world. The community was a monastic group made up of primarily of men; although, there has been evidence of women and children being part of the community found in the nearby cemetery. New members were indoctrinated by taking an oath of loyalty to the group after a three-year probationary period. The members of Qumran community had all things in common, that is they did not consider property to be owned by the individual, but by the community. The members of the community shared their meals together, shared the community's work, and prayed together. The members of the community would pray at least twice daily. They followed a solar (365-day) calendar instead of the traditional Jewish lunar calendar. The Essenes practiced ritual washings (baptism), which has caused some to hypothesize that John the Baptist may have been an Essene or had been influenced by the sect. "John the Baptist was born to aging parents Elizabeth and Zechariah — and many people believe that he was brought up at the Qumran community when his parents died. Part of their charitable work was to care for the orphans of the priests." Some have even suggested that Jesus was part of, or influenced by, the Essene group.

The Essenes believed, as the Pharisees did, in the Torah and in purity. They believed in one

God. They believed that there would be two messiahs—one priestly, one political. The Essene community of Qumran held a belief in other spiritual beings (angels) that were of lesser degree than God. They saw themselves as the "Sons of Light" who would one day battle against the "Sons of Darkness." The Essenes saw themselves as the only true form of righteousness and true followers of God. They did not follow the practices of Temple sacrifice because they saw the leaders of the Temple as 1) being corrupt, and 2) not being of the rightful priestly line. Prayers, hymns, and the study of the Law replaced the sacrifices as the Essene form of worship.

From the Qumran Community by Cleve A. Johnson

There was also a community of Essenes in Jerusalem. They lived in the upper city and had their own gate into the city. This gate was discovered in the excavations of Jerusalem. The upper city is the traditional site of the upper room where Jesus held the Seder with His disciples.

