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Pesach in the Wilderness
9: 1-14

Pesach in the wilderness DIG: Who feels excluded from this festival? Why would this first celebration of Passover since Egypt be so important to the Israelites? The first thing Moshe did to prepare for conquest was to celebrate the Pesach. Why was this an important thing to do?

REFLECT: Is your place of worship flexible in how things are done? Can you think of some examples? Can your place of worship be too flexible? How might either extreme hinder your relationship with God? How important is it that we stop and take time to remember the goodness of God?

God works with us where we are.

Throughout these early chapters of **Numbers** there is a topical presentation rather than a chronological arrangement of the material. They have been telling us the story of **the Israelite's** preparations to leave Mount Sinai. In the first four chapters of **Numbers**, **they** took **a census** (**to see link click An – The Levitical Census**) and assigned **the Levites** to **their** various tasks (see **Ar – The Four Camps of Levites**). **Numbers 7-10** is a flashback and relates how **Isra'el** was ready to depart from Mount Sinai. **Chapters 9** and **10** tell of the final preparation before the departure **from Saini** as a flashback **on the twentieth of the second month of the second year (10:11)**; the observance of **the** second **Passover** six days earlier **(9:1-14)**; **the pillar cloud and fire** as a guide **(9:15-23)**; **the trumpet signals** for assembling **the people** and **its leaders** and for breaking camp **(10:1-10)**; the order of march **(10:11-28)**, and a narrative relating a different marching order **(10:29-36)**.[136]



Pesach in the wilderness (9:1-5): The Torah is not necessarily in chronological order. The book of **Numbers** begins with the census on **the first day of the second month**, two weeks after the Egyptian **Passover** (see the commentary on **Exodus Bv – The Egyptian Passover**). **Numbers 9** begins several days before the second **Passover**. **ADONAI** commands them to keep **the Passover**. Why was it necessary for him to give this commandment when they have already received the instructions for **Pesach** in **Exodus 12** and **Leviticus 23**? The **Exodus** passage made the celebration of **the Passover** seem as if it is contingent upon **the children of Isra'el** entering the Promised Land. **And it will come about when you enter the Land which ADONAI will give you, as He has promised, that you shall observe this rite (Exodus 12:25). The Israelites** had not yet entered **the Land**. One might say that **they** were running behind schedule. The incident with the golden calf had already cost **them** eighty additional days, so **they** were more than two months behind where **they** ought to have been. By all rights, **they** should have already been in the Promised Land, preparing to celebrate **their** second **Passover**. Instead, **they** were still encamped at Mount Sinai.

ADONAI spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert in the first month of the second year after they had left the land of Egypt; he said, "Let the people of Isra'el observe Pesach at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day of this month, at dusk, denoting that period of time between sunset and true darkness, **which starts the fifteenth day of the month** because the Jewish day starts at **dusk**, **you are to observe it – at its designated time** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ke – Go and Make Preparations for the Passover**)**. You are to observe it according to all its regulations and rules." Moshe told the people of Isra'el to observe Pesach. So, they observed Pesach at dusk on the fourteenth day of the month in the Sinai Desert; the people of Isra'el acted in accordance with all that ADONAI had ordered Moshe.**

What we learn here is the difference between **God's** perfect will and **His** permissive will. Ideally, the Israelites should have been already in the Land of **Isra'el** celebrating their second Passover. However, they were still at Mount Sinai. Possibly some would have said, "There is no point in celebrating **the Passover** this year because we are not in the Land." But **God** works with us where we are. Presently, the world is an imperfect place, and we are imperfect people. We rarely find ourselves in ideal circumstances.

The Torah worldview is idealistic, but it is also very practical. Those living according to the Torah's teaching are much better equipped for dealing with **God's** permissive will than those who continually are continually legalistic. Life is full of detours and unanticipated delays. As some have said, "Life happens!" Things rarely work out the way we planned or imagined. Therefore, we follow Torah to the extent that we are able. If we cannot celebrate **Pesach** in the Land, we will keep it the wilderness. If we cannot keep the Sabbath in its fullness, we will keep it to the extent that we are able. Learning to be flexible and working with any situation that arises is a valuable coping skill for life in general, but it is a crucial talent for navigating the topsy-turvy world of Messianic Judaism. In a very real sense, all of our Passovers are in the wilderness. We will not celebrate any of the festivals according to the perfect will of **God** until **Messiah** comes.

Pesach Sheni (9:6-13): This section raises an issue not covered by the original **Passover mitzvah** of either **Exodus** or **Leviticus**. **But there were certain people who had become unclean because of someone's corpse, so that they could not observe Passover on that day. They** had become ritually **unclean**, and one who was in that state was not allowed to make **a sacrifice** or eat the meat of **a sacrifice** (see the commentary on **Leviticus Bk – Ritually Clean and Unclean Animals**). **So, they came before Moshe and Aaron that day and said to him, "We are unclean because of someone's corpse; but** why must **we** be kept from bringing the offering **for ADONAI at the time designated for the people of Isra'el" (9:6-7)?** In essence **they** were saying, **"Why should we be left out."**[137]

Moshe answered them, "Wait, so that I can hear what ADONAI will order concerning you." We may observe that **Moses'** response to the genuine needs of believing people is a mark of **his** spiritual leadership, **his** humility before **God**, and his desire to be the spokesman not only for **ADONAI** to **the people** but also for **the people** back to **ADONAI**. In this scenario we have not only a historical instance but also a template for how such decisions should be made. Another dramatic example

of this process is found later regarding the problem of the estate of **a father** who has **daughters**, but no **sons** (see **Ey – The Daughters of Zelophehad**).

ADONAI said to Moshe, "These **people** are right to ask. **They** can have **their** own **Passover**. But do it next **month**. The grace of **the LORD** can be seen, not only in the words of **His** response to **Moses**, but also in that **He** responded at all. We need to grasp again the concept of the audacity of faith: by what right, excepting only **God's** great grace, did **Moshe** dare to go before **YHVH**, **the Creator** of the universe, and request a provision for exception from **His** demands? All **God's** actions and words to **His** people were gracious, undeserved, and unmerited. That **He** spoke at all, was a mark of **His** condescension; that **He** spoke favorably in response to the request of **Moses** was astonishing. Throughout this section we have a sense of the ongoing wonder and grace.[138] **Tell the people of Isra'el, 'If any of you now or in future generations is unclean because of a corpse, or if he is on a trip abroad, nevertheless he is to observe Pesach. But he will observe it in the second month on the fourteenth day at dusk. They are to eat it with matzah and bitter herbs, they are to leave none of it until morning, and they are not to break any of its bones – they are to observe it according to all the regulations of Pesach' (9:8-12)."**

The rabbis disagree how far away from the Temple an Israelite must live in order to be exempt from observing the Passover on its appointed date in the first month. Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yose apply this exemption to anyone who cannot reach the Temple threshold, whereas Rabbi Akiba (more logically according to Ramban) applies to anyone living beyond the city of Modin (the home of the Maccabees), that is, a radius of 28 kilometers or 17.5 miles.[139]

But the Torah also warns that **Pesach Sheni** was not to be used as an alternative **Passover** except by those who were **unclean** or unable to make it to the Tabernacle/Temple. In the context of the last plague in Egypt, the penalty for failing to observe **the Passover** was death at the hands of **the Destroyer** (see the commentary on **Exodus Bx – He Will See the Blood and Pass Over that Doorway**). **The person who is clean and not on a trip who** intentionally **fails to observe Pesach will be cut off from his people; because he did not bring the offering for ADONAI at its designated time, that person will bear the consequences of his sin (9:13).**

As far as being **cut off from his people, rabbinic literature calls the penalty**

***karet*, or being "cutting off." In priestly literature, the penalty of *karet* was understood to include a series of related punishments at the hand of God, ranging from the immediate death of an offender, as in 20:17, to his premature death at a later time, and even to the death of his descendants. In Mishnah Sanhedrin 9:6 and Mishnah Keritot 1:2, this penalty was characterized as *mitah biydei shamayim*, or "death at the hands of heaven." Since in 7:20-21 *karet* is mentioned as childlessness, there is the implication that it took that course as well.**[140]

Historically, the application of **Pesach Sheni** occurred during the reign of **Hezekiah (Second Chronicles 30:1-27).** After the reestablishment of worship in **the Temple**, messengers were sent throughout Judah and the Israelite territories to the North inviting **the Israelites** of all **the tribes** to celebrate **the Passover**. Matters of purification and distance are both cited in the text as the reason some were unable to celebrate **Pesach** in **the first month**. An adequate number of ritually pure priests were not available to carry out the festival, and many people were so remote when the initial invitation was sent out that they were unable to travel to Jerusalem in time. Thousands of Jews gathered in Jerusalem, and the priests were enlisted to carry out their duties for those who were not ritually clean. **Hezekiah** prayed that **ADONAI** would bless **the people** who ate **the Passover**, and **God** responded faithfully.[141]

Some Messianic communities have begun hosting a special event on **Pesach Sheni** to remember **the mitzvah** of **Nicodemus** and **Joseph of Aramathea** (see **The Life of Christ Lx – The Burial of Jesus in the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea**). **They** were the two secret believers among the Great Sanhedrin who removed the Master's body from the cross. **Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus** then **wrapped the Lord's body with the spices, in strips of clean linen cloth**. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. **They** washed **the body** as best **they** could before placing **it** in the tomb.

But, by touching **the body** of **the Master**, both **men** rendered **themselves** ritually **unclean**. As a result, neither of **them** would have been allowed to partake of **the Passover** that evening. Both **Nicodemus** and **Joseph** were **men** of prestige and influence. **They** both could have sent servants to take care of the burial of **Yeshua** so as not to forfeit **their Passover Seders** that evening. However, those two obscure disciples of **the Master** showed **their** love and devotion by attending to **His** body personally.

One month later, somewhere in Jerusalem, **on the fifteenth day of the second month**, **Nicodemus** and **Joseph of Aramathea** sat down to make their Seders. Perhaps, as **they** reclined at a table together, **they** lifted **the third cup** (see **The Life of Christ Kk – The Third Cup of Redemption**) and gave thanks to the resurrected **One**.

The foreigner and Pesach (9:14): If a foreigner is staying with you and wants toobserve Pesach for ADONAI, he is to do it according to the regulations and rules of Pesach – you are to have the same mitzvah for the foreigner as for the citizen of the land. Gentiles were forbidden to make **a Passover sacrifice** or to eat from **the Pesach sacrifice** unless they were circumcised. An uncircumcised Gentile might still participate in the other elements of the Seder; in other words, the bitter herbs, the matzah and the wine, but he would not be able to eat **the Pesach** lamb. This prohibition is, of course, irrelevant in a world without a Temple or **sacrifice** on the bronze altar.[142]

This was the last **Passover the Jews** celebrated until **Joshua** led them into the Promised Land nearly forty years later **(Joshua 5:10)**. Because of **their** unbelief and **rebellion** at **Kadesh-Barnea** (see **Bv – The Sin of Kadesh-barnea**), the people twenty years old and older were rejected by **Ha'Shem** during **Isra'el's** wilderness wanderings. After their forty year trek when they reached the Promised Land for the second time, **the Passover** was celebrated at Gilgal after the circumcision of the males born in the wilderness. When **Joshua** led the new generation into Canaan, the males received the sign of the covenant (see the commentary on **Genesis En – Every Male Who Is Eight Days Old Must be Circumcised**), and **ADONAI** restored **His people** into **His** good favor **(Joshua 5:2-9)**. It was a new beginning for **Isra'el** in **their** new **Land**.[143]

*Dear Heavenly Father, Praise **You** for **Your** love in passing over those covered by the blood at **the Passover**. Thank **You** for **Messiah Yeshua's** great offer of sacrificing **Himself** as **the Lamb of God (John 1:29)** so you can pass over those who love **You**. **Your** gift to those who love you, of **Messiah's** death, satisfied the demands of death because of **sin (Romans 6:23)**. So graciously **You** then bestow **Messiah's** righteousness **(Second Corinthians 5:21)** on **Your** children so they can enter into **Your** holy heaven and have a relationship with you living in them.* ***Yeshua answered and said to him: If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him (John 14:23).*** *Just as the first thing Moshe did to prepare for conquest was to celebrate **the Pesach**, so the first thing **Your** children should do to*

*prepare for conquering temptation and problems, is to prepare their hearts to celebrate **Messiah's** death and resurrection so **You** could pass over our sins and bestow **Messiah's** righteousness on those who love **You**. In **Messiah Yeshua's** name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*