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Keep the Passover

Exodus 12:1-2; Leviticus 23:5-8 and Deuteronomy 16:1-8

Keep the Passover DIG: What was the purpose of the Passover celebration? What were the Israelites to remember about ADONAI? When and where was the Passover to be celebrated? Why was that significant? What is the messianic significance of Pesach? How is Pesach fulfilled? What was the purpose of Hag ha-Matzah? When and where was it celebrated? How many days was it celebrated? After twilight on the fourteenth of Nisan, what special ceremony took place in the homes of observant Jewish families? How is the festival of Unleavened Bread fulfilled? What is the messianic significance of Hag ha-Matzah?

REFLECT: Why is it important to have the high holy days to remember God's festivals? What holiday do you and your family celebrate that is the most important to you? Why? What does Pesach mean to you personally, and why? Why is it important that Messiah lived a sinless life? What does that mean to you? When YHVH looks at you, what does He see?

The Passover was fulfilled by the death of the Messiah, and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread was fulfilled by the sinlessness of His sacrifice.

Observe the month of Aviv (the first month of the **Jewish** religious calendar,

later called **Nisan**, equivalent to March-April) **and keep the Passover to ADONAI your God, for in the month of Aviv** (see **Matthew 26:17**) **ADONAI your God brought you out from Egypt by night (Deuteronomy 16:1).** As **Isra'el's** is a lunar year, which is eleven days shorter than the solar year, it is bound to bring about a shifting of its **festivals** from their proper seasons. To overcome this, it is commanded here that **the Passover** should always be celebrated in **the month of Abib** (literally *the season of spring*), the season in which **Isra'el** was liberated from Egypt. Later, **Isra'el** changed to the Babylonian calendar when **the month of Abib** was renamed **Nissan**.

The Biblical Practice: There were two key elements. The first was the killing of **the lamb**. **You are to sacrifice the Passover** (Hebrew: *pesach*) **offering to ADONAI your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place ADONAI chooses to make His Name dwell (Deuteronomy 16:2).** From **the tenth to the fourteenth** it was to be tested to make sure it was without spot or blemish. **The lamb** would be slaughtered **at twilight** on **the fifteenth** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Ix – The Examination of the Lamb**), because the Jewish day starts at **twilight**, making sure no bones were broken. The next morning at 9:00 am **the priests** in the Temple would slaughter one **lamb** for the **sins** of the nation called the Chagigah offering. The second element was the eating of **the lamb (Exodus 12:8)** with **unleavened bread** and bitter herbs.

*Dear Holy Heavenly **Father, You** are Holy and pure and we must keep **Your** complete purity ever before our eyes. We are so used to thinking of **Your** great love, that sometimes we forget the awful pain and shame that **You** had to go through on our behalf as our sacrifice for **sins**. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21).** Praise **You** for **Your** willingness to take on human form and to suffer great shame and pain for us **(Philippians 2:6-11).** We bow in worship of **Your** great love and look forward to praising **You** forever. In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

You may not sacrifice the Passover offering within any of your gates that ADONAI your God is giving you. Rather, at the place ADONAI your God chooses to make His Name dwell, there you will sacrifice the Passover offering in the evening at twilight (see **Exodus 12:6) – the time of your coming out from Egypt. You are to cook and eat it at the place ADONAI your God chooses, then you will turn around in the morning**

and journey home (Deuteronomy 16:5-7).

The Jewish Observance: Again, there are two key elements. The first key element is **unleavened bread**. The Torah says the people should remove any **leavened** products from their households **(Exodus 12:15)**. This was to remind them that they had to flee Egypt so quickly that the bread in their ovens did not have time to rise. **Leaven** is a symbol of **sin** so **God** would not permit the symbol of **sin** to be in the **Jewish** home. Not only that, according to **Jewish** mitzvah, **a Jew** may not even own **leaven** during **the Passover** season. It also had to be striped and pierced. A particularly intriguing element unwittingly added by the rabbis is called the afikomen (a Greek word meaning *that which comes last*) ceremony. Three matzahs are placed in a special **Passover** bag known as *the matzah tash* that is only one bag, but contains three pouches. A piece of **unleavened bread** is placed in each pouch. Before the Seder, the middle matzah is broken in two and the larger half is wrapped in a white linen cloth and hidden away to be used later for *the afikomen* or the desert. The smaller half is used for the special benediction over the matzah just before **the Passover** starts. After the story has been told and **the Passover** ceremony is over, and in conjunction with the third and fourth cups of wine, the children try to find it and then it is removed from its hiding place, unwrapped, broken into small pieces the size of an olive, and distributed for all to eat. Before 70 AD the rabbis taught that after the story has been told **the Passover lamb** was supposed to be the last thing eaten. But after 70 AD there were no longer any "Temple approved" **lambs**, so the *afikomen* became the symbolic reminder of **the Passover lamb** and for this reason, it must be the last thing eaten. The rabbis later added numerous other elements, including green vegetables, a roasted egg, and *kharoset* (apple/nut mix).

The second key element is the wine. Each person will drink four cups of wine. First, the cup of blessing; second, the cup of plagues; third, the cup of redemption; and fourth the cup of praise with which the family sings **Psalm 113-118**. Later in history, the rabbis added a fifth cup called the cup of Elijah **(Malachi 4:5)**.

During the time of **Messiah**, the **Jewish** observance had changed somewhat. The slaughter of **the lambs** began at noon at the Temple on **the fourteenth of Nisan (Exodus 12:6)**. Three Levites, standing over three **lambs**, lifted the jaws of the little animals and, with a single stroke, drew sharp knives across the three throats. By ritual, the killing had to be done in one stroke and the victim must not utter a sound. This would point to **the Lamb of God** who would be slaughtered that very next day **and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His**

mouth (Isaiah 53:7).

Inside the Nicanor Gate in the Court of the Women, **the priests** were lined up all the way up to the bronze altar. They stood in two rows, one row holding golden bowls and the other row the silver bowls. In these the blood of **the Passover lambs**, which each **Israelite** slew for **himself** (as representative of **his** family), was caught by one of **the priests**. The bowls were then passed from **priest** to **priest** until they reached **the priest** who was nearest to the bronze altar.[371] **That priest** took the bowl and sprinkled the blood in one motion at the base of the altar. **He** then received another full bowl of blood and returned the empty one back to be filled again. During this entire ceremony the Levites would keep chanting the *Hallel,* which is **Psalms 113-118**. They chanted until all the sacrifices for the first group were completed, and then went on to the second group, then on to the third until they all had their lambs sacrificed and the blood spilled at the base of the altar. **It is estimated that up to 275,000 lambs were sacrificed in Jerusalem at the Passover during the time of Messiah.** We can only imagine the stench, the blood and the flies.

Finally, warm water was poured over the sacrifices as they hung from racks and flayed in the court of the women. The wool was sheared carefully from **the lambs**. When this was done, the carcasses were examined by other **priests** for imperfections. If any were found to have moles, cysts, or discolorations of any kind on the skin **they** were rejected. Three **priests** signaled that the sacrifices were acceptable and, in an instant, the slaughtering Levites cut the bellies of the hanging lambs with a single downward stroke. They removed **all the fat on the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver and both kidneys with the fat on them (Exodus 29:13; Leviticus 3:4** and **9:10)**.

These **internal organs** were placed upon the bronze altar (48 feet square and 15 feet high) and the offering remained steaming and burning on the embers until it was consumed. Caiaphas, as befitting the presiding officer of the Sanhedrin, stood composed in his **priestly** robes loaned to him from the Roman governor. He saw **the priests** rub salt into the flesh of **the lambs**, and, in silence he saw them remove **the shoulder, and the meat from the head** of each animal as an offering to **the priests** of the Temple – for **ADONAI said that is their inheritance among their fellow Israelites (Deuteronomy 18:3)**.[372]

The Messianic Significance: This feast was fulfilled by the death of **Messiah**. **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** pictures **the Messiah** coming as a **lamb** to the slaughter. The New Covenant passages also clearly connect **Messiah** with **the Passover Lamb (John 1:29, 35-36; First Peter 1:18-19** and **Revelation 5:12)**. Not only is **Yeshua** identified with **the lamb itself**, Paul identifies **Him** with the whole **Passover Feast (First Corinthians 5:7)**.

The afikomen ceremony also points to **Messiah**. In this ceremony the middle matzah is removed, a picture of the incarnation when **the Second Person of the Trinity** became man in the person of **Yeshua**. It is broken in two pictures. His death when **Yeshua** came to this part in the ceremony, **he** said: **This is My body broken for you (Luke).** It is then wrapped in white linen. The gospels make it quite clear that when the body of **Yeshua** was removed from the cross he was wrapped in linen cloth. It is then hidden for a time, a picture of His burial. Then it is removed from its hiding place and unwrapped, a picture of the resurrection. Pieces are broken off and distributed to the members around the table, a picture of **John 6** where **Yeshua** said we must all partake of **His** body. In that same chapter **Yeshua** clearly interprets the “eating” of **His** body as believing that **He** is **the Messiah**.

Furthermore, in **the Jewish** observance there are four cups of wine. Luke does not mention all four cups but does mention two. The first cup is in **Luke 22:17-18**, the cup of thanksgiving over which **the Passover** observance begins. The third cup is mentioned in **Luke 22:20** and is called the cup of redemption. For **Jews** it symbolizes the physical redemption brought about by the blood of **the Passover lamb** in **the** Egyptian **Passover**. Now it symbolizes our spiritual redemption from the enslavement of **sin**. **Yeshua** clearly identified **Himself** in terms of the **Jewish** observance of **the Passover**.

A Practical Guide for Believers in Messiah: On **the fourteenth of Nisan**, final preparations for **the Passover** Seder must be made. A traditional Seder plate and

ceremonial items will also be needed. *The zeroah* is **a lamb** shankbone representing **the lamb** sacrifice. If no **lamb** shankbone is available, a turkey or chicken bone that has been roasted by fire may be substituted. *The baytzah* is a roasted, hard-boiled egg representing the burnt offerings of the Temple period (see my commentary on **Exodus Fe – The Burnt Offering**). *The maror* (bitter herbs) is usually horseradish, which is a reminder of the bitterness of slavery to **sin**. *The kharoset* (the sweet apple/nut mix) is a wonderful reminder of the sweetness of our redemption, and *the karpas* (parsley), a green vegetable, speaks of life. A kiddush cup (goblet) for each person plus the cup of Elijah with its own place setting is also needed to prepare the Seder table. A matzah tash (afikomen bag) and a ceremonial washing bowl of water are also essential items.

Each reading participant will need a *haggadah* (Hebrew: *the telling*) for the Seder, which is a **Jewish** instructional guide that sets the order and commemorates **the Israelites' Exodus** from Egypt. If the leader feels comfortable, it is possible to use a traditional *haggadah* available through any **Jewish** bookstore. Many believers, however, prefer to use a messianic **Jewish** *haggadah*. These contain most of the traditional reading, but are also accompanied by relevant New Covenant passages and explanations. One recourse I recommend to messianic believers is *The Messianic Passover Haggadah* by Lederer Messianic Ministries. It is a quality messianic *haggadah*. Lederer also has a very helpful preparation guide for the Seder.

Pesach officially begins as **the sun sets** on the fifteenth of Nisan. Since most of the **Jewish** communities outside **Isra'el** celebrate the first two nights of **Passover** with a traditional Seder, many messianic believers have different types of Seders each night. Many messianic congregations have a large community Seder the first night of **Pesach** for their members and to reach out to those who need to hear the message of redemption. The second night is usually spent at a smaller home Seder with family and close friends. But whatever your options, I encourage you to make plans to celebrate this wonderful festival.

The Seder is the focal point of the celebration of **Passover**, yet it is an eight-day holy day. The Torah says we are to remove **the leaven** from our homes and eat matzah during this time. For some, this might be the ultimate inconvenience. What? No bagels for eight days? Yet, when spiritually appraised, even something like eating matzah crackers for a week can be an uplifting experience.

Remember the symbolism. It is not just spring house cleaning; it is to remind us of

our need for spiritual cleansing and repentance. Hence, every time we eat a matzah sandwich during **Pesach**, we are reminded of the meaning of the holy day. Every time we long for a **leavened** cookie we are reminded of this great spiritual truth!

It is my prayer that **Pesach** will become a source of joyful celebration as believers experience **Messiah** our **Passover** in an intimate and practical way. **Therefore, celebrate the feast not with old hametz (leaven), the hametz of malice and wickedness, but with unleavened bread – the matzah of sincerity and truth (First Corinthians 5:8).**[373]

But secondly, the festival of unleavened bread was to be celebrated for seven days after Pesach. The two feasts were considered as one lasting for a total of eight days.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread or Hag ha-Matzah

Hag ha-Matzah, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, is recorded in **Leviticus 23:6-8**. This is the biblical name for this feast found in **Exodus 23:15**, and emphasizes the necessity of the absence of **leaven** (also see **Matthew 26:17**; **Mark 1** and **12**; **Luke 22:7** and **John 1:9**).

The Biblical Practice: It is quite simple and two things should be noted. First, it is a feast that lasts for seven days immediately following **Passover**. **The Passover** was one day, followed immediately by the seven days of **the Feast of Unleavened Bread**. Since they are back-to-back, there are actually eight holy days.

No **leaven,** or **hametz**, can be eaten for these seven days. **You are not to eat chametz with it. For seven days you are to eat matzo with it, the bread of affliction – for you came out from the land of Egypt in haste. Do this so that all the days of your life you will remember the day when you came out from the land of Egypt. No chametz should be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, and none of the meat you sacrifice on the evening of the first day may be left overnight until the morning (16:3-4).**

Exodus 12:15-20 introduces **the feast** in conjunction with **the Passover** since the two festivals come back-to-back. Not only were they forbidden to eat any

leaven, they were forbidden to have it in their homes. The punishment for anyone who ate **leaven** or failed to clean it from their homes **must be cut off from Isra'el,** meaning they should be executed!

Exodus 23:14-15 declares that this one of the three pilgrimage festivals.

Leviticus 23:6-8 declares that on the first and seventh day no regular work.

Numbers 28:17-25 emphasizes the various sacrifices and the special sacrifices which were mandatory for this feast.

Second Chronicles 39:23-27 records how King Hezekiah kept the feast.

Ezra 6:21-22 states that it was also kept in the days of **Ezra**.

Ezeki'el 45:21-24 prophecies that it will be observed during the Messianic Kingdom. Not all the festivals will be observed during the thousand-year reign of **Messiah**, but this one will. It is mentioned only one place in the B'rit Chadashah where **Yeshua** observed it: **Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the Torah-teachers were scheming to find a way to arrest Yeshua and kill him (Mark 14:1).**

The Jewish Observance: Two things should be noted. First, it follows the biblical practice of not eating **leaven** for **seven days**. **For six days you are to eat matzot. On the seventh day there is to be a solemn gathering for ADONAI your God – on it you are to do no work (16:8).** There are specially prepared foods made for this occasion containing **unleavened bread**. The first, **sixth**, and **seventh days** were considered more holy, and they would only cook as much food as was needed, not more. Secondly, there is a liturgy that is followed with specific scriptures to read each day.

The first day of Unleavened Bread (more holy), the full Hallel is said.
Leviticus 22:26-23:44 that deals with seven holy seasons
Numbers 28:16-25 that deals with the sacrifices
Second Kings 23:1-9 and **21-25** that deals with **the Passover** of Josiah

The second day of Unleavened Bread, the first intermediate day
Exodus 13:1-16 that deals with the mitzvot of **unleavened bread** and the first born

Numbers 28:19-15 and a shortened version of the Hallel is said.

The third day of Unleavened Bread, the second intermediate day
Numbers 28:19-25 and a shortened version of the Hallel is said.

The fourth day of Unleavened Bread, the third intermediate day
Numbers 28:19-25 and a shortened version of the Hallel is said.

The fifth day of Unleavened Bread, the fourth intermediate day
Numbers 28:19-25 and a shortened version of the Hallel is said.

The sixth day of Unleavened Bread (more holy)**,**
Exodus 13:17-15:26, the crossing of the Sea of Reeds
Numbers 28:19-25

Second Samuel 22:1-51 (see my commentary on **the Life of David Eh – David's Song of Praise**), and a shorter version of the Hallel is said.

The seventh day of Unleavened Bread (more holy)**,**
Deuteronomy 15:19-16:17
Numbers 28:19-25
Isaiah 10:32-12:6 and a shorter version of the Hallel is said.

The Messianic Significance: Whenever the word **leaven** is used symbolically in Scripture it is *always* a symbol for **sin**. That is why **God** would not even allow this symbol of **sin** to be eaten by **the Jewish people** during this feast or to have it in their homes or to have it anywhere in the land of **Isra'el**.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is fulfilled by the offering of the sinless blood of **Messiah**. When **Yeshua** was offered up as a sacrifice and shed **His** sinless blood, the moment **His** blood was spilled outside **His** body, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** was fulfilled. **Hebrews 9:11-10:18** emphasizes the sacrifice of the innocent, sinless blood. The point here is that the blood of goats and bulls could never take away **sin**, but required human blood that was innocent. Only one **Person** had sinless, innocent blood – **Jesus Christ**. And once you accept **Messiah** as your personal **Lord** and **Savior**, all the sinlessness of **Yeshua**, the righteousness of **Christ**, is transferred to your spiritual bank account. Therefore, when **YHVH** looks at you, **He** doesn't see your **sin** . . . **He** sees **His Son**.

This blood needs to be applied and sprinkled somewhere. It could not be sprinkled

in the Most Holy Place of earthly Tabernacle, or the Temple, for that was merely a copy of the original. The writer to the **Hebrews** says it was necessary to cleanse the heavenly Tabernacle. As a result, at some point, **Yeshua** sprinkled the heavenly Tabernacle for the purpose of cleansing it. Whereas the earthly Tabernacle could be cleansed with the blood of animals, the heavenly tabernacle required something more – sinless human blood. This accomplished three things. First, the heavenly Tabernacle was cleansed; secondly, the **sins** of the Righteous of the TaNaKh were removed before leading the captives to heaven **(Ephesians 4:8)**; thirdly, the **sins** of the B'rit Chadashah believers are forgiven and removed permanently upon faith in **Yeshua**, we are justified.

Another implication of **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** is in **First Corinthians 5:6-8** where it is stated that believers are to keep **it** by a holy walk. Believers should purge out the **leaven** in our lives because **Messiah**, our **Passover Lamb**, was sacrificed for us. Again, **leaven** is a symbol of **sin**. Even believer's **sin**, this **leaven** in our lives, must be purged. When a person accepts **Jesus** as his or her **Passover** sacrifice in fulfillment of **the First Feast**, and is at the moment **born again (John 3:3)**, he or she experiences the regenerating work of **the Ruach ha-Kodesh (the Spirit of God)**, is baptized into the body of **Messiah**, and placed into the family of **God** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ Bw – What God Does For Us at the Moment of Faith**). Once a believer is in the family he or she can never be disowned. However, fellowship within the family can be broken by **sin** or by **leaven** in the believer's life. The means of purging out the **leaven** is confession: **If we confess our sins, He is faithful to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (First John 1:9b).** By means of confession we can purge our lives of **leaven**. In that way, we can keep **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** in its spiritual sense.

A Practical Guide for Believers in Messiah: Those who desire to enter into the full celebration of the holy day begin before the arrival of the Seder by cleansing all **leaven** from the house. Floors are swept, vacuumed and mopped. Cupboards are cleared of **leavened** products and cleaned. Pots and dishes are thoroughly washed to remove any possible fragments of **leaven**. The spirit of the Torah is to remove all **leaven** from our houses **(Exodus 12:19-20)**. This is also symbolic of the spiritual cleansing of our hearts **(First Corinthians 5:6:8).**

My suggestion, in that spirit of freedom, is to adapt the preparation to a comfortable degree. For some, this may mean all of the above cleaning. For others, it may mean a cursory cleaning to merely symbolize the truth of **the Passover**. Let everyone be

convinced in his or her own mind **(Romans 14)**.

After the general cleaning in the first weeks of Nisan, the attention becomes more focused as the day of **Pesach** approaches. After **twilight on the fourteenth of Nisan (Exodus 12:6)**, a special ceremony called *bedikat khameytz* (the search for **the leaven**) takes place in the home. The last little bits of **leaven** are found and removed. The details are intriguing. Since the house has previously been cleaned, the leader of the house must purposely hide some **leaven** (bits of cookie or bread) in various places. Then the leader takes a feather, a wooden spoon and a lighted candle, and the family begins searching for the final **leaven**. This can be a great time to get children or grandchildren involved because it's a game like hide-and-seek.

The spiritual lessons are quite striking, however. **The leaven (sin)** must be cleansed from our dwellings (and **hearts**). The method itself is informative. The light of the candle (**the Word of God**) illumines our **sin, "I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You" (Psalm 119:11). The leaven** is scooped onto the wooden spoon for removal (like the wooden cross of **the Messiah**). The following morning, this last bit of collected **leaven** is burnt outside the home (in a can or bag) to symbolize its final destruction. This symbolizes **Messiah's** destroying sin **outside the camp (Hebrews 13:12-13)**, and making freedom from the power of sin available for all who believe.

On the day of **the fourteenth of Nisan**, as the first day of **Passover** approaches, final preparations for the Seder must be made. By now, the preliminary arrangements, such as shopping for "Kosher for **Passover**" products (**Matzah**, wine or grape juice, and any other **unleavened** food substitutes) should be completed. These customs may seem strange to the uninitiated, but the deep spiritual truth will be evident to discerning believers in **Yeshua**. Even something as unusual as the search for **the leaven** can become a meaningful ceremony for those whose hearts have been cleansed by **the Messiah**.[374]