

Deuteronomy 16:1-8
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“Observe the month of Abib [March/April – later named Nisan; see Neh 2:1] and celebrate the Passover [פֶּסַח *pesach* – *to pass over*] to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night [the Lord effected their deliverance from slavery in Egypt].² “You shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name [at the tabernacle or temple].³ “You shall not eat leavened bread with it [i.e., with the meat]; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember [זָכַר *zakar* – *remember, recall to mind*; cf. Deut 5:15; 7:18; 8:18; 9:7; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 32:7] all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt [the day of God’s deliverance was to influence their thinking and behavior all the days they lived].⁴ “For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning.⁵ “You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you;⁶ but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt.⁷ “You shall cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents [i.e., likely temporary sleeping quarters while they celebrated Passover].⁸ “Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly [i.e., a closing ceremony] to the LORD your God; you shall do no work on it.

Observations:

Moses directed Israel to observe the annual feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, both of which commemorated Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Moses opens this pericope, saying, “Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the LORD your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night” (Deut 16:1). The annual pilgrimage to celebrate the Passover was required under the Mosaic Law. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were often celebrated together. William MacDonald states, “The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were closely connected. The Passover is described in verses 1, 2, 5–7; the Feast of Unleavened Bread in verses 3, 4, and 8.

These feasts were to remind God's people of His redemptive work on their behalf."¹ The Passover marks the occasion when the angel of death passed over the homes which had the blood of the lamb applied to the lintel and doorposts. The Feast of Unleavened Bread memorialized the hurried departure from Egypt. This was to be an occasion where parents instructed their children about God's deliverance (Ex 12:25-27). Israel first celebrated the Passover one year after Sinai (Num 9:1-5), but Scripture is silent about its celebration until the second generation entered the land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua (Josh 5:10-11). Also, it appears the Passover was poorly executed during the period of the kings of Israel and Judah, but was properly executed under the leadership of King Josiah in 622 B.C. (2 Ki 23:22-23; 2 Ch 35:16-19).

God had blessed Israel with much prosperity, and the Passover feast was a time when His people could offer sacrifices to Him; sacrifices which were eaten by those who participated. Moses wrote, "You shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name" (Deut 16:2). Sacrifices from the flock were for the Passover meal, and sacrifices from the herd were likely extra offerings connected with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And these offerings were to occur at the place of God's choosing, which was first at the tabernacle and later at the temple in Jerusalem.

Moses continues to explain, "You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt" (Deut 16:3). Again, Passover and Unleavened Bread were closely connected festivals. Subsequent generations of Israelites were to "remember" an event which they never personally experienced, but which was known firsthand by that generation that came out of Egyptian slavery. They were to remember their parents' days of bondage as though they were their own. And they were to share in their parents' experience of deliverance by eating the Passover lamb on the very night their parents ate it, and for seven days to eat unleavened bread, which symbolized their affliction and hasty departure. Moses states, "For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning" (Deut 16:4).

¹ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 215.

The first Passover meal was originally eaten in the homes of the Israelites when they were in captivity in Egypt. But eating the meal in a home was not permitted by God to subsequent generations, as Moses wrote, “You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you; ⁶ but at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt” (Deut 16:5-6). Though the location for the reenactment was different, the animal, the day, and time of day was to be the same. The date was the fourteenth of Abib, the animal an unblemished lamb, and the time of sacrifice was to occur at dusk.

For the third time in this pericope, Moses tells them to sacrifice and eat the meal at the place of God’s choosing, saying, “You shall cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents” (Deut 16:7). The instruction for them to “return to your tents” likely refers, not to the tents they lived in while in the wilderness, but to temporary living quarters of those hundreds of thousands of Israelites who traveled great distances to be at the tabernacle or temple to celebrate this feast. This probably consisted of tents in temporary campgrounds located around the tabernacle.

Moses concludes this pericope, saying, “Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall do no work on it” (Deut 16:8). The Passover was celebrated on the fourteenth of Abib. The feast of Unleavened Bread started on the fifteenth of Abib and concluded seven days later, on the twenty-first day of the same month (Ex 12:18). And this final day was to be treated as a solemn closing ceremony, a day in which no work would occur.

God’s deliverance from Egypt was personally experienced by some of Moses’ audience, as they were part of the younger generation—under twenty—who could personally recall the exodus event (Num 14:29). They knew about God’s judgment on Egypt, the angel of death that passed over the homes of Israelites with the blood of the lamb on the lintel and doorposts, crossing the Red Sea, destruction of Pharaoh’s army, God speaking to them at Mount Sinai, His provision for their needs in the wilderness, and His judgment that fell upon them because of their parent’s rebellion. But there were many others who were either too young to remember all these things, or were born at a later time. God expected subsequent generations—by faith—to regard the Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread as their own, as their liberation was experienced through their relatives who came out of Egyptian captivity. This experience was to be replicated year after year, marking God’s deliverance, and experientially connecting each generation with its predecessors.

Present Application:

There is similarity between God's deliverance of Israel and the Church. Like Israel, we were once enslaved in a kingdom, the kingdom of darkness over which Satan rules (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor 4:4; 1 John 5:19), and we were helpless to liberate ourselves (Rom 5:6). But God reached into Satan's kingdom and disrupted his domain, calling out a people for Himself from among those who were enslaved, and this disruption occurred at the cross, where having "disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him [Christ]" (Col 2:15). Our freedom came when we responded positively to the message of the cross, believing "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3-4). The result was God "rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13-14). Our deliverance is complete, "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7), and we have been redeemed by the precious "blood of Christ" (1 Pet 1:19). And now we are "children of God" (John 1:12), brothers and sisters to the King of kings and Lord of lords. In addition, we have a new citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20), we are a kingdom of priests to God (Rev 1:6), and ambassadors of Christ who represent Him to a fallen world (2 Cor 5:20). Because of our new position in Christ, we are encouraged "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (Eph 4:1). And we look forward to future rewards for our life of faithfulness, knowing we do our work "for the Lord rather than for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve" (Col 3:23-24).