

# Easter – The Passover History

This Week's Feature Article by Jack Kelley

The Feasts of Israel have both a historical and a prophetic fulfillment. Since Passover is coming this week let's review the account of the world's oldest continuously celebrated Holy Day from these two perspectives.

First, here's the background. God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham. But before Abraham could actually take possession, the Canaanite people still had 400 years to decide if they were going to repent of their pagan ways and return to God. He already knew they weren't going to decide in His favor and He would have to evict them, but He was committed to giving them the 400 years first. So it would actually be Abraham's descendants who would take possession of the land. In the interim, God said, they would migrate to Egypt and eventually become enslaved there. When the 400 years were up, God would bring them back to give them the land and would also give them the wealth of Egypt, as compensation for their time of slavery. **(Genesis 15:13-21)**

To make sure there was no confusion about this, God repeated His promise to both Isaac **(Genesis 26:2-3)** and Jacob **(Genesis 28:10-15)**, Abraham's son and grandson.

When the time came, God called Moses to be the deliverer of the Jewish people **(Exodus 3)** and appointed his brother Aaron to help him bring Abraham's descendants back to the Promised Land **(Exodus 4:14-17)**. But when they approached Pharaoh, he flatly refused to let the people go **(Exodus 5:1-3)**. After nine judgments that nearly destroyed Egypt **(Exodus 7:14-10:29)**, God told Moses and Aaron how to prepare the people so they could protect themselves from the 10th and final judgment, the death of the firstborn.

## The Historical Fulfillment

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. **(Exod. 12:1-5)***

From the dawn of the Age of Man until that time, the month of which the Lord spoke had been the 7th month, called Nisan. In the announcement above He ordered a 6-month shift in their calendar. The 7th month was now the 1st. Because of their dependence on agricultural cycles, the Israelites retained their original calendar, with its Fall beginning, and super-imposed this new calendar over it. From then on they had a religious calendar, beginning in the Spring, and an agricultural calendar, beginning in the Fall. (That's why Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, comes in the Fall.)

*Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the*

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*sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire-head, legs and inner parts. Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover. (Exod. 12:6-11)*

Until the 14th means through the end of the 13th, just like a present marked “do not open until Christmas” can't be opened until the 24th is over. Jewish days begin at sunset in line with the Biblical account of Creation, “*There was evening and there was morning...*” As the sun was setting on the 13th, the Lambs were to be slaughtered and roasted. Some of the lamb's blood was to be painted on the lintel and post of the door to each family's house. Then, when the lambs were cooked, they were to be eaten in haste, along with some unleavened bread and bitter herbs (horseradish). Thus, the Passover meal was the first meal of the 14th, eaten after the sunset that marked the beginning of the day. It was a quick meal, more like a sandwich really, bearing no resemblance at all to the leisurely and sumptuous festival meals of today.

*“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn-both men and animals-and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt. (Exod. 12:12-13)*

After their hasty meal, around midnight, the destroying angel passed through Egypt and the firstborn of man and animal perished. The angel passed over homes where the doorposts had been painted with lamb's blood, sparing the people huddled trembling within. They weren't spared because they were Jewish, or because they had eaten lamb for dinner. They were spared because they had the faith to paint their doorposts with blood. They were saved by faith through the blood of the lamb.

Many years later, when the Passover Seder had become a traditional celebration, it became common for the participants to dip a finger into their wine glass to collect a drop of wine which they then let fall onto their plate. They do this for each of the 10 plagues of Egypt, each time saying, “We are saved by the blood of the lamb.”

*“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD -a lasting ordinance. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat-that is all you may do.*

*“Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether*

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*he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.” (Exod. 12:14-20)*

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the 15th and lasted through the 21st. No yeast could be used in any food preparation, nor could any be present in the house during that time. When they settled in Israel, since the 15th was a major feast day and special sabbath, after the ceremonial “lamb sandwich” was consumed, the rest of the 14th was spent in preparation because no work could be done after sundown. Any yeast found in the house was discarded, and the bulk of the food purchasing and preparation was done. It became known as Preparation Day.

From that day till this, the Lord’s Passover has been celebrated, one of the most dramatic displays of His power ever seen. During the meal they drink four special cups of wine, one each for the four promises God made to Moses from the burning bush.

*“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD , and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.(1. Sanctification) I will free you from being slaves to them (2. Deliverance), and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment (3. Redemption). I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”(4. Acceptance) (Exod. 6:6-7)*

He freed His people from the bonds of slavery, defeating the world’s most powerful country without an army, without a single casualty among His own, by the power of His outstretched arm. Over a million former slaves walked out of Egypt the next morning carrying the wealth of their former captives, back wages for their hard labor. The sick were healed, the lame walked, and the weak were made strong. Not a single one was left behind. It was most likely the greatest healing miracle of all time.

## Prophetic Fulfillment

In the first chapter of John’s gospel, Jesus was introduced as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Throughout His ministry people proclaimed Him as Israel’s Messiah, but only on one day did He encourage it. On the Jewish calendar, it was the 10th day of the first month. We know it as Palm Sunday. Through out Jerusalem Passover lambs were being selected, but on the Mount of Olives The Passover Lamb was being welcomed into the city with shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 21:9)

From then until the end of the 13th He received the most aggressively intense questioning of His ministry. He was being carefully scrutinized for some defect in His teaching until finally “no one dared ask Him any more questions.” (Matt 23:46)

After sundown brought the Passover, called Preparation Day in His time, he ate an abbreviated Passover meal with His disciples, stopping at the 3rd cup, the Cup of Redemption. It was a Thursday, the 14th of the month, and before the day was over He had been arrested, tried, convicted and executed by crucifixion. The Passover Lamb had been put to death on Passover. *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed, Paul would later say (1 Cor. 5:7).*

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Just before He died, knowing that all had been completed and so the Scriptures would be fulfilled, He asked for a drink. (**John 19:28-29**) In taking the wine they offered, He drank the 4th Cup of the Passover, the Cup of Acceptance. *“I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”* From that day forward, anyone Who accepted His death as payment for their sins would in turn be accepted into the family of God and receive eternal life. They are saved by faith through the Blood of the Lamb.

Earlier a group of Jewish officials had asked Jesus for a miraculous sign to prove that He was who He claimed to be. He said, *“A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”* (**Matt. 12:39-40**). They would get their sign but only after they had put Him to death. And it would be unmistakable. No one had ever come out of the grave in a resurrection body before.

The day following the crucifixion would Friday the 15th, the first Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a special Sabbath where no work could be done (**John 19:31**). Knowing this, the chief priests asked Pilate to hasten the deaths of the condemned men so they could get them off their crosses before sundown. But Jesus was already dead. He had died at three o'clock and though His body was still on the cross, His spirit was already in Sheol, the abode of the dead. Day one.

At sundown it became Friday the 15th, and with it Night One, followed in the morning by Day Two. Saturday the 16th was the regular weekly Sabbath and again no work could be done. It began with Night Two and in the morning became Day Three. Then at sundown it was Sunday the 17th, Night Three. Three days and three nights, just as He had prophesied.

At sunrise Sunday morning the 17th, the Feast of First Fruits was being observed at the Temple when the women came to the tomb where He'd been laid to rest (**Matt. 28:1**). It was their first chance to anoint the body for burial since both Friday and Saturday had been Sabbaths. But the tomb was empty. He had risen, the First Fruits of the First Resurrection.

The two disciples who met the Lord on the road to Emmaus that Sunday (Resurrection Day) help us to confirm this sequence (**Luke 24:13-35**). At first they thought the Lord must have been a very recent visitor to the area when He asked them to explain why they were so sad. In the course of the discussion they indicated it was the third day since the crucifixion. It being Sunday, the previous day, Saturday, would have been the 2nd day since it happened, and Friday would have been the first day since, making Thursday the day it happened.

By His death, He freed His people from their slavery to sin, defeating Heaven's most powerful adversary without an army, without a single casualty among His own, by the power of His sacrificial life. Billions of former slaves will walk out of this world one day soon, receiving wealth beyond measure. The sick will be healed, the lame will walk, and the weak will be made strong. Not a single one will be left behind. It's the ultimate fulfillment of the Passover Prophecy.

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Shabbat Shalom. May the peace of the Sabbath rest upon you, and may the Grace of our Lord Jesus abide within you, both now and forever more. 04-16-11