

THE FEAST OF PASSOVER



There are seven, ancient Jewish feasts which have been observed by the Jews for over 3,000 years. God himself, ordained these feasts, after the children of Israel left Egypt and headed for the promised land. In the beginning, most of these Jewish feasts related to the annual seasons and the agricultural activities in Israel. For over two thousand years the Jewish people have relied on the Jewish calendar, which is a lunar calendar, to determine the dates of these feasts. On the Jewish calendar, each month begins with the new moon.

“These are the appointed feasts of the Lord”

LEVITICUS 23:4

Current Jewish Lunar Calendar Explained:

In order to understand the current Jewish calendar, one must realize that the moon revolves around the earth every 29.5 days. On the Jewish calendar, each month is either 29 days or 30 days. Because the Jewish calendar is based on the *phases* of the moon, the middle of the month will *always* occur when there is a full moon (the 15th of the month). The *end* of the month will happen when the moon is waning and will soon disappear from the sky. In ancient times, the

beginning of a new month could *not* be determined until the *first* sliver of the moon's crescent was visible in the sky, in Jerusalem. Of course, the phases of the moon are *now* calculated correctly by trained astronomers.

In ancient days, it was extremely important to know *when* the new month began. So, the Jewish people would watch the night sky for the first sign of the new moon. During the time of Jesus, the Sanhedrin required that two, reliable and independent eye witnesses give testimony that they had seen the new moon. Sometimes, cloudy or rainy conditions prevented the observation that a month had started. So, after hearing that two witnesses had observed a new moon, the Sanhedrin would declare that a new month had begun. Then, they would send messengers out to notify the people in the surrounding areas that the new month had started. It is crucial to understand that, for the Jewish people 2,000 years ago, all religious activities revolved around their lunar calendar. Many scholars believe that during the time the Jews were in captivity in Babylon, they adopted the lunar calendar from *that* culture, which became the Jewish lunar calendar used by the Jews today. In fact, the names of the months on the modern Jewish calendar, are the same names for the months used in the ancient Babylonian calendar. In the Bible, God never gave names to the months; they are only called the 1st month, 2nd month, etc. Recently, information discovered in the Dead Sea Scrolls, indicate that during the time of Jesus, there was also *another* group of Jewish people, the Essenes, who followed a *different* calendar, which was solar. The Essene calendar was in conflict with the calendar used by



The One New Man menorah

the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. So, these feasts began on different dates on the Essene calendar.

The Spring Feasts:

Each year, the annual cycle of feasts begins with the three spring feasts. These feasts are known as the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of First Fruits. The three *spring* feasts all occur in the month of Nisan, which is the **first** month on the Jewish **religious** calendar (which is different than the Jewish *secular* calendar, which begins a new year in the fall).

These three feasts begin on the 14th/15th of Nisan, and begin a weeklong celebration. Sometimes, the Feast of Passover, which is the first feast on Nisan 15, refers to the entire week and encompasses all three feasts. The original Passover lamb was killed on Nisan 14, but the meal was eaten that night, on Nisan 15.

The Feast of Passover (Pesach)

The Feast of Passover began on the fourteenth day of Nisan, and is a time to remember when God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in the land of Egypt. While the Israelites were slaves, God



sent Moses to tell the Pharaoh to let His people go. Because of Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelites gain their freedom, God sent ten plagues to Egypt as punishment.

Before the tenth and final plague came, God instructed the children of Israel to kill a one year old, perfect, male lamb and use the blood of the lamb to paint the door frames of each house, both the sides and the top. The lamb was then to be roasted with bitter herbs and then eaten with unleavened bread; bread which has been

cooked without yeast. (Exodus 12:1-12)

During the night, the death angel would visit Egypt and strike down every first born son where the blood was *not* visible on the door. But for the homes where the blood was applied, the death angel would pass over and the first born son would be spared.

That night, Pharaoh's first born son was killed, so Pharaoh made the decision to let the children of Israel leave Egypt. The following morning, the Israelites quickly packed and left with their entire families, their belongings and their livestock. The Egyptians even gave them gold and silver before they left. Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt and towards the land which was promised to Abraham, many years earlier.



Now, more than 3,000 years later, this event is remembered at Passover. Most Jewish people celebrate with a special meal called a Seder meal. For Christians, Jesus became our Passover lamb. His blood covers the 'door of our heart' and we are spared the judgement of God. When Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan, by John the

Baptist, John declared, 'Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world'. Jesus was the perfect, spotless lamb, slain from the foundation of the world.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15th of Nisan and lasts until the 21st of Nisan. When the children of Israel were told to prepare to leave Egypt, they did not have time to let their bread rise. So, they had to eat unleavened bread, which is bread made without yeast (which makes bread rise). Since this feast lasts seven days, there is always a Sabbath (a Saturday) during this feast.

In the Bible, yeast represents sin; Egypt *also* represents sin. So, when the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, they were delivered from a life of sin. They were called to be a holy people, set apart for God. Unleavened bread, also called Matzah bread, is made with only flour and water. If you look at Matzah bread, because of the way it is baked, it has stripes on it and tiny holes where it has been pierced to let the steam out.



Matzah Passover bread & wine

When Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples, this is the type of bread that would have been eaten. Jesus broke the bread (the matzah) and said that the bread represented his body. Later, before he was crucified, his back was beaten; Isaiah said that 'By His stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5). His hands were pierced by the Roman nails. For hundreds of years, the matzah bread, with its stripes and holes, represented the body of Christ even before the crucifixion took place!

The Feast of First Fruits

The last feast in the spring, the Feast of First Fruits, is the third of the seven annual feasts. This feast takes place on the first day *after* the Passover Sabbath; so this feast is always observed on a Sunday. This feast takes place in Israel at the time of the barley harvest; it is celebrated on the 16th of Nisan. Barley is the first crop to be harvested in the spring. During Biblical times, the priests of the Holy Temple would harvest the first sheaf of barley and bring it as a thanksgiving offering to God. This feast celebrated the beginning of the various grain harvests in Israel and also began the counting of weeks leading up to the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost, which occurred several weeks later.



After Jesus was crucified, buried, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, in 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, Paul states “**But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man (meaning Adam) came death, by Man (meaning Jesus) also came the resurrection for the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in His own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.**” (referring to the second coming of Christ).

What Paul is saying is that Jesus was the first one to rise from the dead; the *first* resurrection of the dead. But, those who believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah and the son of God, those believers who are dead will rise again as the *second* resurrection of the dead.

Jesus was the first fruit (the first harvest) and the believers will be the second harvest that will follow.

If you look at the timeline for these three spring feasts, you will see an amazing pattern. Remember that the Jewish day begins and ends at sundown.

Nisan 14/15	Nisan 15 - 21	Nisan 16/17
Passover	Unleavened Bread	First Fruits
<p>The Passover lamb is slain on Nisan 14th, before sundown. On the first Passover, the blood of the lamb was applied to the door of the house. At sundown, it became Nisan 15 and the Seder meal was observed and the children of Israel prepared to leave Egypt.</p>	<p>Before the start of Passover/ Unleavened Bread on Nisan 15, yeast is removed from Jewish homes and only matzah bread (which has stripes and is pierced) is eaten. No yeast is allowed in the bread for seven days, from Nisan 15 through Nisan 21.</p>	<p>The first harvest of barley was offered to God with anticipation of a later, greater harvest. This is observed on the first day <i>after</i> the Passover Sabbath, so this is <i>always</i> observed on Sunday, regardless of when Passover begins.</p>
<p>On Nisan 14, Jesus is crucified, the same day the Passover lamb is slain. The blood of Jesus is applied to the 'door' of our heart if we believe in Him. Believers can leave the land of Egypt (their sinful life). Many scholars believe this actually happened on Thursday afternoon.</p>	<p>On this day, Nisan15, Jesus' body is placed in the tomb, with stripes on His back and pierced hands and feet, there was no sin in Him; he 'took away the sins of the world'.</p> <p>Many scholars believe that Jesus' body was in the grave Thursday night, Friday night and Saturday night (3 full nights)</p>	<p>On this day, Jesus rose from the dead, as the 'first fruits' of those who have died. Those who believe in Him will <i>a/so</i> rise again, just as He did.</p>

Each of the seven Jewish feasts had a natural explanation. But each feast also held a prophetic meaning which was not understood when the feasts were ordained by God, more than 3,000 years ago. The

first three feasts were fulfilled in the exact order, and on the exact day, as shown above. The Feast of Pentecost was fulfilled 50 days after Jesus was crucified. On the Jewish calendar 2,000 years ago, after the Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot), there was a long summer period before the fall feasts started. During the summer, crops were planted, tended and then harvested towards the end of the summer. There were then three *fall* feasts which are celebrated as the harvest is completed. These three fall feasts have not yet been fulfilled, prophetically speaking.

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Shalom and God bless!

