

# 119

## MINISTRIES

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### **The Mo’edim: Passover & Unleavened Bread**

In the Bible, God gave his people special days to remember and celebrate every year. In Hebrew, these holy days, or holidays, are called *mo’edim*, which means “appointed times.” The purpose of these days is to remember what God has done in the past, and anticipate the fulfillment of his promises for the future. These holidays are described in numerous places in the Bible, but there is one chapter that conveniently lists all of them: Leviticus chapter 23. In that chapter, God makes it clear where these days come from:

#### **Leviticus 23:1-2 (NASB)**

The LORD [YHWH] spoke again to Moses, saying, “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD’s [YHWH’s] appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations—My appointed times are these:

God calls these holidays “my appointed times.” Many people call these days “Jewish holidays,” which is understandable since Jews are, by and large, the only people who keep them now. However, this passage makes it clear that these days are not just “the Jews’ appointed times,” but they are God’s appointed times, God’s *mo’edim*. These appointed times are valuable for everyone who believes in God, Jewish or otherwise. In fact, as we will see in this teaching, these holidays are packed with symbolism and moral lessons that are highly relevant to Christians. In this teaching, we’re going to focus on the *mo’edim* of Passover and Unleavened Bread. We will look at why these festivals were celebrated, how we can keep them today, and how they fit into Bible history and prophecy.

### **Why Are Passover and Unleavened Bread Kept?**

Let’s start our discussion of Passover and Unleavened Bread by looking at what these holidays are, and why they are kept. Here’s how these festivals are described in Leviticus 23:

### **Leviticus 23:5-8**

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's [YHWH] Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD [YHWH]; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. But you shall present a food offering to the LORD [YHWH] for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work."

So, Passover is observed on the fourteenth day of the first month, and Unleavened Bread is celebrated for seven days, starting on the fifteenth day of the first month. Also, the first and seventh days of Unleavened Bread are days of rest on which work is not to be done.

It's worth noting from the outset that the "first month" is not referring to January. Our modern calendar is based on the calendar that the Romans used, which did not exist when the book of Leviticus was written. In the Biblical calendar, the first month was in the spring, around the month of April, after Israel's cold and rainy winter had ended.

So, we know when Passover and Unleavened bread are celebrated, but why are we commanded to celebrate them? Well, the reason for these festivals goes back to the Exodus when God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and inflicted ten plagues upon the Egyptians. The tenth and most devastating plague brought death upon all of the firstborn in the land. However, there was a way to escape this death: every family that slaughtered a lamb and put the lamb's blood upon their doorposts was "passed over," and their firstborn did not die. This is described in Exodus chapter 12:

### **Exodus 12:5-13**

Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight. "Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's [YHWH] Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD [YHWH]. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

So, the Passover memorial commemorates this event, when God passed over the houses that were covered by the blood of the lamb. The seven days that follow Passover are called the festival or feast of Unleavened Bread, in which no leaven is to be eaten. That festival is described in the verses that follow:

### **Exodus 12:14-17**

This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD [YHWH]; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever.

While Passover commemorates God's judgment passing over Israel, the Feast of Unleavened Bread commemorates the departure of Israel from Egypt. So, why is unleavened bread eaten during this week? It's because that's what the Israelites ate when they left Egypt:

### **Exodus 12:33-34, 39**

The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders...

...And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

Now, what is "unleavened" bread? What makes bread "unleavened"? Well, "leaven" is an additive that causes dough to puff up and expand. At the time of the Exodus, people did not have modern leavening agents like baking powder. Their only leavening agent was yeast. In order to make bread that would rise, a sourdough starter containing yeast had to be added to their bread dough, and the dough had to be kneaded, and allowed to sit for several hours, to give the yeast a chance to grow. This growth of the yeast would cause the dough to rise, and once that dough was baked, it would produce a familiar puffed-up loaf of bread. When the Israelites hurried out of Egypt, they did not have enough time to knead their dough and let it rise. As a result, the bread they made was not light and fluffy, it was unleavened; it was dense and flat. So, during the week of this festival, unleavened bread is eaten to remind us of the bread that the Israelites ate when they were freed from Egypt.

## **How Can We Keep These Appointed Times Today?**

So, how can we keep these appointed times today? Let's start with Passover. As we've read, Passover was memorialized by each family sacrificing a lamb on the fourteenth day of the first month, and then eating that lamb as part of a meal. We see this described in Deuteronomy:

### **Deuteronomy 16:1-2**

Observe the month of Abib and keep the Passover to the LORD [YHWH] your God, for in the month of Abib the LORD [YHWH] your God brought you out of Egypt by night.

And you shall offer the Passover sacrifice to the LORD [YHWH] your God, from the flock or the herd, at the place that the LORD [YHWH] will choose, to make his name dwell there.

Now, today, we cannot slaughter a Passover lamb. Why not? Because, as we just read, the lamb was supposed to be slaughtered “at the place that the LORD [YHWH] will choose, to make his name dwell there.” This is a reference to the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:20). The Torah is very clear that sacrifices are not to be offered unless they are offered at this particular place:

### **Leviticus 17:3-7**

If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD [YHWH] in front of the tabernacle of the LORD [YHWH], bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people. This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD [YHWH], to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD [YHWH]. And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the LORD [YHWH] at the entrance of the tent of meeting and burn the fat for a pleasing aroma to the LORD [YHWH]. So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.

So, we cannot offer a Passover sacrifice anywhere other than the temple. Since no temple is available at which to sacrifice, no Passover sacrifice can be made.

So where does that leave us? If we can't offer a lamb, how can we keep Passover at all?

Well, one thing we can still do, even without a lamb, is memorialize the events of the Exodus:

### **Exodus 12:14**

This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD [YHWH]; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.

So, how can we do this exactly? How do we hold a memorial? The Scriptures don't really say. They just say to have a memorial. Many people have a memorial by getting together for a meal in which there is teaching and discussion of the events of the Exodus. The most popular way of doing this is a Jewish tradition called a Passover Seder. *Seder* means “order,” and the Seder is a meal that is eaten in a particular order. The elements of the meal are designed to remind people of the first Passover. The Seder is a great way, though certainly not the only way, to memorialize the Passover. Some Seders have elements that don't have anything to do with Passover, and we don't necessarily recommend incorporating all of those elements into your memorial. But, for someone just starting to keep the Biblical holidays, it's pretty easy to start with a Seder or another tradition, and then customize the observance to meet your individual needs. Again, the only thing the Scriptures say is to have a memorial.

Now what about the week of Unleavened Bread? How can we keep that today? The Scriptures have seven basic commands regarding this festival:

- 1) Keep it for seven days, starting on the fifteenth day of the first month (Leviticus 23:6).
- 2) Eat unleavened bread during those seven days (Exodus 13:6).
- 3) Avoid eating leavened bread during those seven days.
- 4) Remove leavening from your house when the festival begins. These first four stipulations are all found in this one verse:

**Exodus 12:15**

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

There are some very practical concerns when it comes to avoiding leavening, and we will address that issue in some detail after this list. For now, let's continue:

- 5) Rest from your work on the first day and the seventh day (Leviticus 23:7-8).

**Exodus 12:16**

On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you.

- 6) Teach your children the reason you are celebrating this festival:

**Exodus 13:8**

You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD [YHWH] did for me when I came out of Egypt.'

- 7) Travel to the temple to appear before YHWH and give your firstfruits offering:

**Exodus 23:17-19**

Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord GOD [YHWH]. You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD [YHWH] your God.

Since there is no temple, there is no way to keep this particular command. There is nowhere to travel to in order to appear before YHWH. However, the other commands associated with the week of Unleavened Bread can be kept. We can remove leavening from our houses and we can eat unleavened bread. We can rest on the first and seventh days of the festival, and we can teach our children about what God did when he delivered Israel from Egypt.

If you're wondering how to get unleavened bread to eat, it's sold in some stores as "Matzah" (or "Matzos"), which is the Hebrew word for unleavened bread. The Matzah that is made today is basically a giant wheat cracker. You can also make your own unleavened bread by baking bread without adding any yeast or other leavening agents to it.

On the topic of leavening, there are some practical questions about how to avoid it and how to remove it from our houses. For example, what counts as leavening? The only leavening agent the Israelites had at the time of the Exodus was yeast, specifically, sourdough yeast. So, is it only sourdough yeast that we should avoid during Unleavened Bread, or are there other substances we should avoid also?

In our opinion, this question comes down to the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law. Ancient Hebrew has no word for baking soda or baking powder, which are modern leavening agents, because those substances were not used in ancient Israel. So, the Bible never technically prohibits eating those substances during the week of Unleavened Bread. The letter of the law only mentions *se'or*, the Hebrew word for yeast (Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, H7603), and *chametz*, the Hebrew word for bread in which the yeast has fermented and risen (ibid. H2557). We see both of these words used here in Exodus:

#### **Exodus 12:15**

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven (*se'or*) out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened (*chametz*), from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

These terms, *se'or* and *chametz*, refer to the leavening agents and leavened products that were available at the time of the Exodus, which were sourdough yeast and the bread made from it. Again, by the strict letter of the law, only bread made with yeast would be prohibited during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

However, when we consider the spirit or intent of the law, there is an argument that we should avoid other puffy breads also. The unleavened bread is meant to be a reminder of what the Israelites ate when they left Egypt (Exodus 13:7-8). Their bread was flat; it was not made to rise with yeast, nor was it made to rise with baking powder or baking soda. So, while modern leavening products are not technically prohibited, the spirit of the command seems to be to avoid any kind of puffed-up bread regardless of what particular substance causes it to rise. Ideally, we want the bread we eat during Unleavened Bread to remind us of the bread that the Israelites ate. For the record, we don't think that having baking soda in things like toothpaste or antacids counts as leavening, because those products have nothing to do with making leavened bread or memorializing the Exodus.

We discuss leavening in much more depth in our teaching, [The Leaven of Heaven](#).

## **Passover and Unleavened Bread in Prophecy**

While the explicit purpose of Passover and Unleavened Bread is to memorialize the Exodus from

Egypt, these days are also prophetically significant. Jesus, or Yeshua as he was called in Hebrew, was crucified on the fourteenth day of the first month—the same day that the Passover sacrifice was offered:

### **John 19:14-18**

Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, “Behold your King!” They cried out, “Away with him, away with him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” So he delivered him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus [Yeshua], and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus [Yeshua] between them.

So, Christ was crucified on the same day that the Passover lamb was sacrificed. The Passover lamb in Egypt was a foreshadowing of what the Messiah would do later on. Just like the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites from death in Egypt, Christ’s blood saves us from the death that is brought about by our sin:

### **1 Peter 1:18-19**

...you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

### **John 1:29**

The next day he saw Jesus [Yeshua] coming toward him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Passover is a yearly reminder of the salvation we have in Christ. It’s a time to reflect on the price that was paid for our salvation, and the love that God showed us when he redeemed us from our sins and gave us new life.

Passover is also a good time to contemplate our commitment to YHWH. God required those who ate the physical Passover lamb to be physically circumcised (Exodus 12:43-49). They had to bear the sign of God’s covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:11), a covenant of faith and commitment to God (Romans 4:11-12). As we memorialize the Passover and remember YHWH’s salvation—not just of the ancient Israelites, but also of the whole world through Christ—we should also remember that we must voluntarily partake in this salvation. We must put our faith in God, and follow where he leads, just like Abraham did. As Paul said:

### **Galatians 3:7-9**

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

This reminder of our commitment to God leads right into the symbology of Unleavened Bread.

Once we've been saved by Christ's blood, which is symbolized in the Passover, we are then free from our slavery to sin and death, just like the Israelites were freed from their slavery to the Egyptians. Paul speaks about this in Romans:

### **Romans 6:4-11**

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus [Messiah Yeshua].

Now that we have gone through this spiritual Passover and have been freed from sin and death, we strive to keep ourselves unstained by the world (James 1:27), to consider ourselves "dead to sin." Paul also refers to this as symbolically being "unleavened" in 1 Corinthians:

### **1 Corinthians 5:7-8**

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Once we've been redeemed from our old ways, from our malice and evil and sin, we don't want to return to those ways. We want to stay pure and true, "unleavened" like Paul says. We want to walk in obedience to God, not in disobedience as we did before we were saved. When we eat unleavened bread during this festival, it's a yearly reminder for us to stay free from sin, and not enslave ourselves to the ways of the world again.

Passover and Unleavened Bread are not just celebrations of God's salvation of Israel during the Exodus, they also symbolize the salvation we have in Christ. Far from being "done away with," or "only for the Jews," these festivals are more relevant today than ever. Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of these days, has come, and they remind us of the new life we have in him.

## **Conclusion**

Let's recap everything we covered in this teaching:

- God gave his people *mo'edim*—appointed times—for them to keep as a reminder of his great works.



- Passover is an appointed time during which we remember God saving the Israelites from the plague of death in Egypt, when death passed over every house that was covered with the lamb's blood.
- We can keep Passover today by memorializing the Exodus from Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month.
- Passover is also a memorial of the salvation we have in Yeshua, because that's the day on which he was crucified. Christ's blood saves us from death, just like the lamb's blood did during the Exodus.
- Unleavened Bread is a seven-day festival which memorializes Israel going free from their slavery.
- The first and seventh days of Unleavened Bread are days of rest. The whole week is a time to avoid *leavened* bread and eat *unleavened* bread. The unleavened bread reminds us of the bread the Israelites ate when they went free.
- Unleavened Bread also reminds us of the freedom from sin that we have in Christ. The leavening of malice and evil has been removed from us, and now we can be "unleavened," full of sincerity and truth.

We hope this teaching has been a helpful introduction to these mo'edim. Keeping God's holidays is a great blessing, and we would encourage you all to take Paul's advice and "celebrate the festival" (1 Corinthians 5:8).

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching. Remember, continue to test everything. Shalom! For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at [www.testeverything.net](http://www.testeverything.net)

**Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.**

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