

A Study on the Nine References to the Passover

From Exodus to the Millennium — and Its Successor, the Lord's Supper

There are nine distinct references to the Passover in Scripture — eight past and one yet to come. Each carries its own character and its own lesson. The outline is as follows:

1. **Exodus 12** — The institution of the Passover.
2. **Numbers 9** — The Passover kept in the wilderness under special conditions.
3. **Joshua 5** — The Passover at Gilgal, in the land of possession.
4. **2 Chronicles 30** — The Passover in the days of Hezekiah: revival.
5. **2 Chronicles 35 / 2 Kings 23** — The Passover in the days of Josiah: normal order.
6. **Ezra 6** — The Passover in remnant times.
7. **Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22** — The last Passover; the Lord institutes the Lord's Supper.
8. **Acts and 1 Corinthians 5, 10, 11** — The Lord's Supper: practice and regulation.
9. **Ezekiel 45:21–24** — The Passover renewed in the millennium.

1. Exodus 12 — The Institution of the Passover

The Passover is formally named in Exodus 12:11: It is the LORD's Passover. He says in verse 13: When I see the blood, I will pass over you. Notice it is not when you see the blood, but when I see it. It is God's estimation and value of the work of Christ that counts — not our feelings or awareness, but His satisfaction with that blood. We rest on what He has said: I will pass over you. The blood on the door is for God's eye; those inside were not to be occupied with it but with feasting on the lamb, just as we feast upon the person of the Lord Jesus in remembrance of His work.

Verses 43–49 give the ordinance of the Passover: no uncircumcised person shall eat of it. Circumcision — the judgment and cutting off of the flesh — was the one absolute requirement. There was no exclusion for settler or visitor or stranger, except on this one condition. This is directly applicable today: whether within Christendom or without, no one who has not come to the judgment of self before God may eat at the Lord's table. And further: in one house shall it be eaten (v. 46); all the congregation of Israel shall keep it (v. 47). Not a select sect, not the church of one's personal choice — but in the one house, all the congregation together. God had chosen a place, and that place was to be honored.

Deuteronomy 12:13–14 amplifies this: Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest, but in the place which the Lord shall choose. The same chapter warns that they shall not do every man that which is right in his own eyes. This sets in sharp relief the state of much of Christendom today, where the question of the divinely appointed place is not raised, and the breaking of bread is treated as a matter of personal convenience.

2. Numbers 9 — Special Conditions in the Wilderness

The book of Numbers is the wilderness book. Here the Passover is kept in the wilderness — where we are now — and two special conditions arise. First: certain men had been defiled by contact with a dead body and feared they would be excluded from keeping the Passover. Second: the Lord Himself adds the case of a man who is on a journey afar off.

The men in the first case are to be commended. They are exercised souls — concerned that ceremonial defilement, contact with the dead (which speaks of the dead condition around us in this world), might disqualify them from the privilege. They go to the right source: they come before Moses and Aaron. God answers through Moses: yes, such a one shall keep the Passover — on the fourteenth day of the second month (vv. 10–11). A gracious provision for wilderness conditions.

The Lord then adds the second condition on His own, unasked: the man on a journey afar off. How easily our souls can slip away from the Lord — not all at once, but gradually, growing cold. The Lord takes notice of even a little chill in the heart. He is anxious for feet to be washed, as in John 13 — where, significantly, the Lord's Supper is not recorded at all. The Spirit of God, writing four distinct Gospel records, places the feet washing in John precisely to teach us that our walk must be kept clean before we come to remember the Lord, just as in Numbers a second month provision was made for those defiled in the wilderness.

But verse 13 is solemn: the man who is clean and not on a journey, and who forbears to keep the Passover — he shall be cut off from among his people; he shall bear his sin. This is a sin of omission (cf. James 4:17). For us, the Lord's Supper is not a matter of indifference. Do we love Him? Then we will be exercised about remembering Him, not carelessly, not routinely, but from the heart.

3. Joshua 5 — The Passover at Gilgal, in the Land

After forty years in the wilderness, the generation that had not been circumcised was circumcised at Gilgal before entering the land. Then, in Joshua 5, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month in the plains of Jericho — for the first time in the land of their inheritance.

Gilgal means rolling: the reproach of Egypt was rolled away there. The circumcision at Gilgal speaks of the judgment and putting away of the flesh — the recognition that flesh has no standing before God. And it is from Gilgal that they went forth to possess. Whenever they forgot that — as when they were defeated at Ai after Jericho — it was because they had not returned to that place of reckoning. The principle is unchanging: there is no spiritual victory without the practical application of the truth that the flesh has been set aside in the cross of Christ.

For us, our land of possession is in the heavenlies. The breaking of bread is properly kept in that heavenly place in spirit, in the place where the Lord was rejected — here in the world — but in the spirit of those who know themselves to be seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. They ate the old corn of the land on the morrow after the Passover (v. 11) — the resurrection food of Christ Himself.

4. 2 Chronicles 30 — Hezekiah: Revival

Hezekiah's keeping of the Passover is marked by two things: the largeness of his heart and the graciousness of God's response. He sent letters to all twelve tribes — embracing the whole nation in his love and zeal — inviting them to come to Jerusalem and keep the Passover. The response was mixed: some mocked; but a great congregation came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun, and others. They had not cleansed themselves according to the requirements — yet Hezekiah prayed: The good Lord pardon everyone that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah and healed the people.

Significantly, this Passover was kept in the second month — not the first. That was the wilderness provision of Numbers 9 for defilement. Revival, when it comes, avails itself of God's gracious provision for a ruined condition. It is not kept in the ideal first month of proper order, but in the second month of God's mercy. How much He overlooks in all our weakness. As man, He ever lives to make intercession; as the Holy Spirit, He intercedes within; and the Lord's word in John 17 — Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am — has been on His lips since the ascension. He has waited longer than any of us.

5. 2 Chronicles 35 / 2 Kings 23 — Josiah: Normal Order

The Passover in Josiah's day was kept on the fourteenth day of the first month — in normal order, as appointed. There was no Passover like it from the days of Samuel the prophet. Josiah's zeal was complete: he purged the land of idolatry from top to bottom, even going to Bethel where the rebellion had originally started and destroying the high places there. And yet the prophet Jeremiah shows us that the hearts of the people were not entirely with the Lord. Josiah's zeal was genuine and sovereign —

God worked in his heart from the age of eight. But outward order and inward condition are not the same thing.

This is a reminder that the right keeping of the Lord's Supper requires more than proper external form. The ordinance must be kept with sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8). And zeal in external things does not exempt from what the Spirit of God is doing in the soul. It is good to be zealously affected in good things — but the inward state must answer to it.

6. Ezra 6 — Remnant Times

After the captivity, the temple was rebuilt under Zerubbabel. Sixty years later Ezra came up. The Passover was kept on the fourteenth day of the first month — in proper order — but by a small remnant, fifty thousand or so, in the midst of a vast empire. Yet they had purified themselves; they had separated themselves from the filthiness of the nations of the land to seek the Lord God of Israel. And they kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the Lord had made them joyful.

This is a picture of our day. We are in remnant times. The captivity has happened; things are in ruin outwardly. But a remnant can keep the Passover — now the Lord's Supper — in the right order, on the right day, with purified hearts, in separation from what defiles. And God gives joy. That joy is not dependent on numbers or outward impressiveness. It is the Lord's gift to those who seek Him in simplicity.

7 & 8. The Last Passover and the Institution of the Lord's Supper

The seventh reference is the last Passover, recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22. The Lord, knowing that He was about to be the fulfillment of all that the Passover had foreshadowed, graciously institutes the Lord's Supper in its place. It is significant that only in Luke do we have the express words this do in remembrance of me. Each Gospel writer, under the Spirit's guidance, presents this from a different angle. Luke is the Gospel of the Son of Man, and it is there that the personal appeal of the Lord — this do in remembrance of Me — is most direct.

The Lord's Supper is the successor to the Passover for this present age. The Passover looked back to Israel's redemption from Egypt; the Lord's Supper looks back to Calvary. But it is not a matter of obligation in the same sense as the Passover was for Israel. For us it is the response of a loving heart. The Lord is looking for that heart response — not the grudging fulfillment of a duty, but the willing love of one who remembers Him.

1 Corinthians 11:26 states: For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do proclaim the Lord's death. The as often as is not a specific regulation of frequency — it is the Spirit of God leaving

the expression of love to be what it ought to be. Giving also is left to the same principle: every man as he purposeth in his heart, not of necessity or grudgingly. That is the character of the Lord's Supper. It is a feast of love, freely and fully entered into by those who love Him.

1 Corinthians 5:7–8 calls the Lord Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us, and the keeping of the feast connected with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. The apostle uses Passover language here because he is addressing a matter of governmental responsibility — collective sin in the assembly that had not been judged. The assembly, like Israel putting leaven out of the house before Passover, was to put out that which defiled. In chapter 11 the same feast is addressed from the standpoint of individual responsibility: let a man examine himself. Both the collective and the individual dimensions must be maintained throughout our sojourn — seven days, the whole of it.

9. Ezekiel 45:21–24 — The Passover in the Millennium

The final reference to the Passover in Scripture is in the millennium. In the first month, on the fourteenth day, Israel will keep the Passover again — not the Lord's Supper, which is our particular privilege and will not be observed in the kingdom, but the Passover itself. The Lord is on His throne in Jerusalem; the nations are subdued; Israel is restored. They will keep the Passover on its appointed day, first month, fourteenth day, as instituted in Exodus 12. God does not alter His word.

And there is a wonderful depth in this. Israel will keep that feast then not merely looking back to the Exodus from Egypt, but looking back to Calvary — to the one who is now reigning, who was once the Lamb slain. The Lord who is the subject of the Passover will be present in the midst of those who keep it. What a day that will be.

*Let us keep the feast — not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,
always in remembrance of Him.*