

PASSOVER



Harry Whittaker

Published by:

Biblia

130 Hednesford Road Cannock

Staffordshire U.K.

1st Impression 1986

Printed by

North West Print Limited

Danefield Road, Sale, Cheshire.

Passover

	Page No.
1. A New Beginning	1
2. The Lamb	2
3. Unleavened Bread	4
4. The Sacrifice of Passover	5
5. The Passover Meal	8
6. What mean ye?	10
7. Not a bone broken	12
8. Passover Judgment	14
9. The Passovers of Jesus	19
10. Three Days and Three Nights	23
11. Did Jesus eat the Passover?	25
12. Other Passovers	30
13. Hezekiah's Passover	32
14. Second Coming at Passover	34

To my brothers and sisters in Christ who heard all this at an American Bible School. It was a week of fellowship that will not be forgotten.

For the sake of completeness chapters 10 and 11 have been included here from “Studies in the Gospels”.

1. A New Beginning

The Passover is a familiar story which belongs to Israel. It belongs also specially to Jesus and to his New Israel. In this running commentary on Exodus 12 all these aspects of meaning are to be touched on. But there will be special emphasis on the New Testament links with this impressive sequence of commandments given by God to Moses and Aaron.

The First Month —Abib, Nisan

First, Passover was to mean a re-organization of Israel’s calendar. Apparently up to this time the month Tisri began the year. Now, with a six months’ switch, the seventh month (Abib, Nisan) became the first, and the first became the seventh. Strangely enough (or is this to be expected?), for long generations the Jews have persisted in calling Tisri “Rosh Ha-Shanah”, the head or beginning of the year, presumably because of the important feasts associated with it – Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles.

There is here a plain intimation to the New Israel also that “Christ our Passover” is to mean a new beginning. It was a sound instinct (even though initiated by an apostate Roman church) which switched enumeration of the years from A.U.C. (*ab urbe condita*, the founding of the city of Rome) to the familiar B.C. – A.D., even though an error of 4,5, or 6 years was made in the process.

Individually all New Israelites should learn to make a new beginning. It is the world which celebrates natural birthdays (and even celebrates them with murder: Gen. 40:20-22; Mt. 14:6-10). Instead, in the spirit of Psalm 90:12, it is anniversaries of the New Birth which need to be marked by the New Israel with both rejoicing and devout thanksgiving.

Obscure N.T. Allusions

Paul has just this emphasis in two allusions to Ex. 12:18 which are completely lost in the English version. There the Hebrew text is literally: “In the first” (note AV italics), which Septuagint turns into an unusual verb meaning: “making a beginning with the offering of sacrifice.” It is this word which Paul uses in his remonstrance to the Galatians: “Having *begun* in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect in the flesh” (3:3). He seems to be comparing these Galatian Gentiles to those Gentiles who affiliated themselves with Israel in their departure from Egypt (Ex. 12:38). all saved by the blood of a Lamb.

Also, to the Philippians: “He which hath *begun* a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (1:6); i.e. as though reaching forward from Passover in Egypt to inheritance of the Land of Promise.

Meanings

Gesenius derived the name Nisan somewhat obscurely from Hebrew *netz*, making it the month of flowers. But the name of the next month Ziv means just that. On the other hand Passover is

traditionally associated with lilies, and hence the subscription Shoshannin to Psalms 44,68 which Thirtle has identified as Passover psalms. Certainly Ps. 68:6,7 makes specific allusion to the first Passover deliverance; and Ps. 44:22 laments that God's people, and not the lambs, are being slain. (More on this with reference to Hezekiah's Passover).

Hebraistically, it seems more likely that Nisan is to be connected with a verb meaning "to set out on a journey" (Ex. 12:37; 15:22; Ps. 80:8).

The other name for this month – Abib – means "ripening corn." It was the month of the barley harvest. On the day after the Passover sabbath the first-ripe sheaf of barley was waved before the Lord. (Lev. 23:10-14). If, early in Nisan, there was no sign of the first-ripe barley being ready on the 16th, an intercalary month was inserted into the year, thus setting Passover back by 29 days. The use of the old name Abib in Ex. 23:15 is a possible indication that that portion of the Law of Moses is a repetition of what belongs to a pre-Passover period.

The Septuagint version turns Abib into "the month of the new things," and it is with reference to this that Paul, in his allusion to "Christ our Passover" exhorts his readers to become "a new lump."

2. THE LAMB

The Passover lamb was to be without blemish, "a male of the first year... from the sheep or from the goats." It need not be considered just a coincidence that this feast took place in the first month under the first sign of the zodiac Aries, the *Ram*, for in Creation God appointed the constellations "for *signs* and for *seasons*" (Gen. 1:14), this last word *mo'edim* certainly having reference normally (in about 150 places) to holy convocations or feasts of the Lord, among which Passover was outstandingly important.

"From the sheep or from the goats" obviously means an ordinary lamb or kid, one like all the rest. The fitness of this detail in prefiguring Christ is evident enough when consideration is given to the dozens of places where the New Testament emphasizes how really and truly the Redeemer shared the frail human nature of those he came to save.

Yet, with the symbolism of sheep and goats in the Lord's familiar picture of the Last Judgment demanding that a distinction be seen between the two kinds (Mt. 25:33,34,41), how remarkable it is that at no time have the Jews shown any disposition to slay and roast and eat a Passover goat! Always a lamb! "I beheld, and lo ... a Lamb as it had been slain" (Rev. 5:6). How utterly unfitting it would have been for John to see a kid of the goats receiving the Book of Life.

This idea is made the stronger by the words: "without blemish." No lameness, no disease, no maggot in the skin. All well-pleasing to the offerer of the sacrifice and to the God of redemption who so appointed it for the saving of His people.

Peter's allusion to the Passover lamb clamours for attention: "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold (readily handed over by the Egyptians to their Israelite neighbours) ... but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the (Jewish?) world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Pet. 1:18-20; for more Passover allusions in this chapter, see v.2,4,5 RV, 13).

The Choosing of the Lamb

The lamb was to be set aside for its important role on the 10th day of the month. Such an endearing creature was bound to become a cherished member of the family, and not with the children only, so that by the time the 14th day came and the lamb had to be slain there would be real sadness and even tears at having to part with so delightful a pet.

Not only this general consideration but also the specific detail – the 10th day – has a pointed connection with the death of Christ, for it was “six days before the Passover” when Jesus came to that well-loved home in Bethany (Jn. 12:1), and there at the meal-table he was anointed by Mary with “ointment of spikenard, very costly.” Since the Passover meal was eaten on the 15th Nisan, then, reckoning back six days, and reckoning inclusively (as is the Jewish method; see ch. 10 on this), this day of special anointing must have been the 10th Nisan. In other words, Mary was consciously identifying Jesus as “the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.”

This would explain why the Lord voiced such deep appreciation of her action at the very time when she became a target for the criticism of the twelve:

“Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this.”

Here the word “kept” is not to be read as meaning “saved up” for this occasion. Reference to a good concordance will readily reveal that in John this Greek word is used of keeping a commandment (e.g. 8:51,55; 9:16; 14:21-24) – in this instance, the Passover commandment.

Other details in this moving incident chime in with the conclusion just reached. It has been maintained that there is contradiction in detail between the records in John and those in Matthew, Mark. The fourth gospel says Mary anointed the feet of Jesus, but the other gospels specify the anointing of his head. The fact is that both are correct, and both harmonize with the prescribed Passover ritual:

“Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; *his head with his legs*” (Ex. 12:9).

A very unusual and hitherto puzzling detail in Mark 14:3 now finds ready explanation. This gospel describes the ointment as “pistic nard” (see RVm). The adjective here makes no sense at all (note the vague guesses in RVm), until it is realised that Mark has made a beautifully descriptive word out of the Greek word for “faith.” Mary used “faith ointment” in her anointing of Jesus. Her act was more than an expression of thanks or adoration. She – and she only at that time? – had the faith to see Jesus as the true Passover lamb for the saving of God’s New Israel.

The Type continued

The prophecy embodied in the Passover lamb is made yet more impressive by an extension of the Passover ritual prescribed in Leviticus 23. There (v.10-14) Israel were instructed to wave before the Lord, on the morning after the Passover sabbath, a sheaf of first-ripe barley. Here is Christ the first-fruits of the resurrection. And, as counterpart to this, at Pentecost two wheaten

loaves baked *with leaven* were likewise to be presented before the Lord – an easy type of Jewish and Gentile sinners sharing the merits of the Lord’s sacrifice and resurrection.

With the sheaf of barley, at Passover, there was also to be offered “a he-lamb without blemish of the first year, for a burnt offering.” Since the burnt offering signified consecration to God, this is, in effect, Christ the Passover lamb raised from the dead and re-consecrated to the service of his Father. And in the year that Christ died, the day after the Passover sabbath was a Sunday – Easter Sunday! More on this in chapter 11.

“I beheld, and lo ... a lamb as it had been slain.” But now the Lamb is alive again, and has the right to take from the right hand of the Ancient of Days, a book, which is the Book of Life.

3. UNLEAVEND BREAD

There are certain features of the Law of the Passover which in later days Jews found very difficult of observance, so the rabbis concluded that such details belonged specially to what they called the Egyptian Passover and therefore need not be observed in the nation’s later celebrations – such items as:

- The sprinkling of blood on the door.
- The use of hyssop.
- Eating in haste.
- No going out of the house on Passover night.

Even so, traces of some of these ideas, including also the selection of the lamb on the 10th Nisan (already touched on), are to be found in the gospel narrative of the Lord’s death, as will be seen.

One commandment which the Jews treated as specially important was the repeated instruction about leaven:

“On the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses.” (12:18,19). Substantially the same commandment concerning this Feast of Unleavened Bread comes in 12:15; 13:6,7.

A Contradiction?

This observance was to be partly in commemoration of the haste with which the people left Egypt, taking their dough with them before it was leavened (12:34,39); and partly because of the symbolic meaning God wished them to associate with it:

“Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread therewith, even *the bread of affliction*” (Dt. 16:3).

There was appropriateness enough here, for nobody preferred unleavened bread to leavened, at least not for so long a time at once.

But a difficulty arises here, for Paul's incidental reference to this observance pointedly suggest a different interpretation:

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast (of unleavened bread), not with the old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with *the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*" (1 Cor 5:7,8).

Clearly there is a marked difference between the affliction of Egyptian bondage and the sincerity and truth of a devout Christian spirit. Can it be that Paul read "affliction" as meaning the rigour of self-discipline? This would be more in harmony with his own phrasing. (Or is it that, just as Is. 53:12 – "he was numbered with the transgressors" – is interpreted in three different ways in the New Testament, so also this Passover detail was intended to have more than one meaning?).

"No leaven in your houses"

From time immemorial the Jews have generalised this commandment regarding leaven to mean the exclusion of all kinds of dirt (for under both Old and New Covenants leaven is uniformly a symbol of corruption; e.g. Lev. 2:11; 6:17; 1 Cor. 5:8; Mt. 16:6,11; 13:33).

Accordingly it has long been Jewish practice to make a thorough spring-cleaning of the house before Passover; *and* before the meal itself every corner is searched with the aid of a lighted candle to make sure that no dirt remains – except for one small heap of dust deliberately left for this occasion. Then with dustpan and brush (a feather) this last specimen of "the old leaven" is carefully removed and thrown out. There can now be conscience-clear participation of the holy feast.

There was a great Passover (2 Chr.35) in the days of the prophet Zephaniah (1:1), who makes allusion to this part of the Passover ritual in words of solemn warning:

"I will search Jerusalem with candles, and will punish the men that are settled on their lees" (1:12; this last phrase with reference to the four cups of wine at Passover?).

Much more impressive is our Lord's own personal responsibility to this Passover practice. For at the first and last Passovers of his ministry he did a rigorous spring-cleaning in his Father's house at the very time when Jews everywhere were getting rid of "leaven" from their own houses.

It has become almost a dogma among the modernists that regarding this cleansing of the temple John has a serious chronological dislocation. Of course, they say, there was only one cleansing of the temple, in the last week, but John (or someone else – mistaken identity!) blundered in placing this at the beginning instead of the end of the ministry.

This is pathetic. Once the real point of the Lord's action is understood in the light of the Passover commandment, there is no reason at all why Jesus should not have cleansed his Father's house more than once. Indeed, since there were four Passovers in the ministry, it is almost a matter of surprise that the gospels do not tell of four, instead of only two, such occasions.

Paul's counsel on this Passover duty is very pointed. Only Jesus has the right to purge the Father's house of "leaven." The disciple is called upon to concentrate on *his own* fitness for the New Passover: "Let a man *examine himself*, and so let him eat ..." (1 Cor. 11:28). Not that a man is called upon to pronounce himself "without blemish and without spot" in his partaking at the Lord's Table, for in that case it would be a ceremony only for hypocrites. But he is required to bring to this sacrament a spirit of "sincerity and truth," not only "discerning the Lord's body" but also frankly acknowledging his own desperate need.

4. THE SACRIFICE OF THE PASSOVER

"The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening," that is, of the 14th Nisan. "Between the two evenings" (AVm), which is the literal reading of the Hebrew text, is a strange phrase susceptible of more than one interpretation.

The rabbis agreed that it means the hours between "the sun's decline" and sunset. But that first phrase is too vague to be of any use at all. In the time of Jesus, after bringing forward the evening sacrifice (normally mid-afternoon, about 3 o'clock, "the ninth hour") the slaying of the lambs began forthwith and went on until not long before sunset. Even so, because there were so many thousands of them, the task was only achieved by dint of having many priests on duty, all of them geared up to a superb piece of organization.

All the carcasses were drained of blood which was cast at the base of the altar of burnt offering, whence – percolating through the rock – it eventually mingled with the waters of the Kidron some hundreds of feet below.

Incidentally, the idea, sometimes urged, that our Lord ate the Passover meal (the Last Supper) twenty-four hours earlier than normal, is not tenable, for as sacrifices of the Lord all the lambs had to be slain in the temple court, and it is inconceivable that priests would permit the normal procedure to be anticipated by an hour, let alone a full day.

The Two Evenings

The commentators seem not to have noticed that in more than one place the gospels provide a fairly precise interpretation of "between the two evenings."

John says that the feeding of the five thousand took place at Passover (6:4). The sending away of the crowd to find food was suggested by the disciples "when even was come" (Mt. 14:15RV). For such a multitude, the organization of the people into groups, the distribution of bread and fish, the eating of the meal, and the gathering up of the fragments would be bound to occupy two hours at least. Then came the move to "take him by force and make him king" (Jn. 6:15), frustrated by Jesus sending away his disciples and then getting rid of this uncomfortably enthusiastic crowd. Matthew rounds off this long sequence with the astonishing words: "and when the evening was come, he was there alone" (14:23).

There can, then, be no manner of doubt that this gospel is deliberately directing attention to "the two evenings" on a very exciting Passover, fairly clearly defining the period as that between mid-afternoon and sunset.

It is interesting to note that when Abraham offered his covenant sacrifices this equally significant transaction took place between the two evenings (Gen. 15:12,17).

But most pointed of all is the remarkable fact that our Lord died on a Passover day “between the two evenings,” for “from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour” (Mt. 27:45) – from noon till 3 – and it was soon after daylight returned that Jesus made his great cry and died.

What kind of Sacrifice?

The lambs were to be slain by “the whole assembly.” Presumably in Egypt this was done by the head of each household in his own home. Thereafter this slaying took place at the altar of the Lord, but was still done by the head of each group sharing the lamb. Thus was emphasized more emphatically than in any other temple sacrifice that “the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” With unperceived dramatic irony the mob rejecting Jesus shouted the same truth: “His blood be on us and on our children.”

Whether in Egypt or in Jerusalem, the slaying of the lamb was to be regarded as a holy offering: “It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s passover” (12:27). “It is a passover unto (or, for) the Lord” (12:11 Heb.). Then, what kind of offering was it?

The smearing of the blood on side-posts and lintel of the door is comparable to the way in which, by specific instruction, the blood of a *sin offering* was smeared on the horns of the altar of burnt offering (Lev. 4:25) or was sprinkled before the veil (4:6) or on the Day of Atonement was splashed on the mercy-seat (16:15).

— But the eating of the lamb at a holy meal was, in effect, the sharing of a *peace offering* (Dt. 12:6,7).

And the final instruction to burn completely the remains of the Passover meal pointedly suggests the main feature of the *burnt offering* (Lev. 1:9).

The eating of unleavened cakes (*matzoth*) is like the *meal offering* (Lev. 2:5,6).

Thus the Passover was every kind of sacrifice combined in one. It is a fact which the believer in “Christ our Passover” rejoices in, for it surely means that whenever he comes to the Lord’s Table, whatever his great need there it is met in his partaking of Christ.

Does he feel acutely the need for forgiveness? Then Christ is his expiation, his sin offering.

Does he know the personal duty to begin afresh a life of complete dedication to God? Then Christ is his whole burnt offering. Without him there can be no re-consecration of one’s life.

Does he specially crave fellowship with the Lord and his family? Here that need is fulfilled in a Love Feast, a meal of holy fellowship, Christ our peace offering.

Would he, in thankfulness, dedicate special works of devotion to God? Then only in Christ, his meal offering, can such a gift be rendered untarnished by human weakness.

It is significant that the proper order of the sacrifices, as indicated in Leviticus, is carefully followed in the Passover instruction (Ex. 12:7, 8abc).

The Blood of the Lamb

Before sunset on that great day in Egypt the door of each Israelite home was smeared with the blood of the lamb. It was an open declaration of faith that, as God had promised release from this bondage, so He would most certainly perform.

It was not sufficient to say:

“My Egyptian neighbours will laugh at me if I do this. And, anyway, what difference can this strange operation make to my belief that I am covered by the virtue of this sacrifice? The lamb has been slain, Isn't that the important thing?”

The perverse Israelite who adopted such an attitude signed the death warrant of his son. Today the perverse “believer” who adopts such self-excuse regarding Christian baptism signs his own death warrant. So also the man who assures himself that he will be delivered whether he eats of the holy meal or not. Is anyone at liberty to play fast and loose with the sacraments of the Lord?

Again, this may be done not only in a spirit of blithe optimism but also as a deliberate turning away from Christ, expressing contempt for the all-important sacrifice he made for sinners. It is only close association with “the blood of Christ who ... offered himself without spot (Passover language!) to God” that can “purge your conscience from dead works” (Heb. 9:14). If instead a man treats lightly the sacrifice of Christ, “counting the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing,” it is as though he deliberately put the blood of the Lamb on the ground, thus “treading under foot the Son of God ... doing despite to the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29).

On the other hand, intellectual difficulties as to what possible connection there might be between the Passover blood and deliverance from Egypt, would in no way hinder the promised angelic protection. A man may fail to see what logical connection there might be between the forgiveness of his sins and the shedding of the blood of Christ two thousand years ago, and two thousand miles away; if he accepts the divine assurance about this, then he has nothing to worry about.

There is no *need* to comprehend and hold a closely-reasoned logical doctrine of atonement. Fervent faith in the *fact* of it is what is important.

Blood on the Door

It is not amiss to enquire why the blood should be used in the particular way commanded. Why not a cross or a circle put on the door itself? Or would not blood on the lintel only or on just one of the doorposts serve as good a purpose?

There is reason to believe that later generations were intended to see special meaning in this appointment, for the blood-stains took the form of a letter in the Hebrew alphabet – either כ (He; see Ps. 119:33), or ח (Cheth; 119:57).

The first of these suggests either of two possible intentions. All letter of the Hebrew alphabet have also a specific meaning. ה means “Behold!” – it was probably the Baptist’s ejaculation when he said: “Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Alternatively, ה is the main part of יה Yah, the divine Name which Yah Himself added to the names of Abram and Sarai.

Or, if the letter is read as ח (the distinction is a very fine one, easy to miss), then Cheth means “a fence.”

Then is it just a remarkable coincidence that, on the eve of Passover, Jesus prayed for his disciples, saying: “Holy Father, *keep* (ח) through *thy Name* (יה) those whom thou hast given me” (Jn. 17:11)?

Hyssop

It was specified that the blood should be applied by means of hyssop, the leaves functioning as a kind of brush, and the stem giving added reach for the lintel. Some months later the law of the leper (Lev. 14:4) required the use of hyssop when a leper was cleansed (hence Ps. 51:7). This may have been the re-statement of a law already known. But in any case at later Passovers the record would remind Israel that they were to see themselves as a race of lepers who had been “washed from their sins” and their “robes made white in the blood of a Lamb.”

It is obvious that in his record of the crucifixion the apostle John saw special Passover meaning in a bystander’s use of hyssop for the assuaging of the Lord’s thirst. The wine (vinegar), sponge and hyssop must have been provided (by whom?) for the relief of the crucified. The narrative (Jn. 19:28-37) has palpable Passover connections – wine, hyssop, death, sabbath, not a bone broken, the shedding of blood. Such details as these, not invented but pointedly set down to alert the reader’s understanding and conscience, are characteristic of John’s symbolic style and spiritual insight.

5. THE PASSOVER MEAL

The lamb was to be roasted (Ex. 12:8). No other mode of preparation was acceptable. Yet regarding this very detail certain modernists seem to take pleasure in exposing what they deem to be a direct contradiction in the Passover recapitulation in Deuteronomy 16. There, at verse 7, the word “roast” (AV) is different, and really means “seethe, simmer, or boil;” but Exodus says: “not sodden at all with water.”

The reconciliation of these varying instructions is simple. Exodus is about the Passover meal itself, whereas the other is about peace offerings eaten during the ensuing week of unleavened bread – as the rest of Dt. 16:7 clearly intimates: “and thou shalt turn in the morning, and go into thy tents.” This could not possibly be on the morning after the Passover proper, for in that case the journey home would be made on the special sabbath, the holy convocation. So it must refer to the holy convocation at the end of the week (Ex. 12:16).

“Roast with Fire”

In John’s gospel this emphasis on “roast with fire” is given an indirect application to the Lord Jesus. At the first Passover, of his ministry, when he cleansed the temple, “his disciples remembered (there and then, or after his resurrection?) that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (Jn. 2:17; Ps. 69:9). These words have to do with the action of fire (the verb comes in J1. 1:20; Ps. 78:63 LXX). So, in this Passover context, here is Jesus not only, like a diligent householder, removing all “leaven” but also by that very act condemning himself to be slain as a Passover lamb.

“In haste”

Originally the meal was to be eaten “in haste” (12:11), or possibly “in trepidation” (Ps. 31:22; 116:11; Dt. 20:3). If the latter meaning, this would be because of awe springing from the knowledge of impending divine action of a drastic character.

But not only “in haste.” Every individual was to be fully prepared to move off when the moment arrived – loins girt, shoes on feet, and staff in hand. Everything about that Egyptian Passover was stamped with urgency.

The same spirit should (but does not always) animate those who learn how, through the blood of the Lamb, they too may be delivered from bondage.

“And now why tarriest thou? (said Ananias to Saul of Tarsus no longer blind) arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling the name of the Lord upon thyself” (Acts 22:16).

So also the Ethiopian eunuch when he learned faith in Christ: “See, water! what doth hinder me to be baptized” (8:36).

It is difficult indeed to understand the leisurely casual spirit with which some drift towards baptism, as though it were not a matter of supreme importance.

It is difficult also to understand why those eager for baptism are kept waiting until they have concluded a twelve-months course of instruction.

In another of his Passover allusions Peter shows no sympathy for a perfunctory disposition: “Wherefore (because Holy Scripture speaks so emphatically about the sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall yet follow) gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your hope completely (absolutely) on ... the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13). Peter was not concerned with physical preparedness, but that the loins of the *mind* be girt about with truth.

Bitter herbs

Other elements of the Passover meal were, of course, the unleavened bread and also bitter herbs. The rabbis recommended that these last be mixed into a paste made to resemble the mortar used by Israelite slaves when building for their Egyptian task-masters – this because the

word “bitter” is the same as in Exodus 1:14: “And they (the Egyptians) made their lives bitter with hard bondage in mortar and in brick ...”

Such a detail bids the believer in Christ look for its counterpart in his own experience. It is surely this – when a man has become a thorough-going convert to faith in Christ he can look back on the former days and appreciate how completely he was then in bondage and without hope of anything better. But this great sense of relief is only possible if he knows that his sins are forgiven, and that he truly has gone forth to freedom.

Too many? Too few?

There was to be careful estimate that the company gathered at any one Passover meal must not be so large that any might go unsatisfied: “according to every man’s eating ye shall make your count for the lamb” (12:4).

So also – need it be said? – must be the spiritual meal for those gathering to celebrate the Passover of the Lord Jesus. If any go from the Lord’s Table with a sense of unsatisfied hunger, some servant of Christ has failed in his duty. It is a serious thing.

But there was also the other possibility – that “the household be too little for the lamb” (12:4). In that case, “let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls.”

There is an interesting principle here. There was to be true fellowship in this salvation specially with one’s nearest neighbours. In the life in Christ, what corresponds to this? What lesson is to be learned? Is this an instruction to the believer not to consider seeking fellowship with any ecclesia further away than that which is nearest to him? In these days of much “running to and fro in the earth” there is sometimes sore temptation to use one’s mobility, to satisfy spiritual selfishness. Or, *per contra*, should this principle be lifted away from geographical considerations, and be seen as an instruction to join in the holy meal with those who are “next neighbours” in the truest and best sense of the term?

Regarding this, one thing is clear: fellowship in the Lord’s Passover is essential; a brother in Christ is not at liberty to decide that he will “break a factious loaf in solitude.” On this the Passover commandment is explicit: “In one house shall it be eaten: thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house” (12:46). The one who does this forbidden thing declares by that act that his is a false fellowship. “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (1 Jn. 2:19).

Hebrews 2:14 appears to make an enlightening allusion to this Passover commandment about neighbours sharing: “For-as-much then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise (παράκλησις, as a next neighbour) took part (s.w. 1 Cor. 10:17,21) of the same (flesh and blood).” It would almost seem as though here literal flesh (of the Lamb) and literal blood (on the door) are referred to, though this can hardly be insisted on. But, remarkably, Jesus is alluded to not as the Lamb but as the next neighbour sharing in the feast and its benefits. With the other strongly emphatic phrases taken into account: “he *also himself*² likewise *took part*³ of the *same*,⁴” this must surely be the most forceful passage in all Holy Scripture concerning the true nature of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Who shall partake?

There is a remarkable triple emphasis on the comprehensive and yet exclusive character of the Passover:

“*All* the congregation of Israel shall keep it” (12:47). Since the context specifically mentions circumcision, this would include all the children. Passover was for the family. But—

“There shall no stranger eat thereof” (12:43).

“A sojourner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof” (12:45), that is, except he be circumcised (v.44).

It is easy to imagine that in the great Judaist controversy in the early church, the zealots for the Law would make a great play with such passages as these, applying them in a strictly literal sense, when instead, as concerning all other Passover details, the *spirit* of the commandment is what concerns those in Christ (Eph. 2:12,13).

Since a true baptism is what initiates a man into the New Israel, this must be the criterion to decide who is and who is not qualified to be present at the Lord’s Table. It is significant that *all* Israelites, regardless of personal character or standing, were not only urged but commanded to share in the Passover, for they were all bondslaves of Egypt. Then does it not follow that all who belong to the New Israel and know themselves to be in bondage to their sins and crave for deliverance should be not only welcomed at the New Passover but positively commanded not to neglect it?

6. “WHAT MEAN YE?”

No less than four times it was urged that in the rising generation there should be a spirit of earnest enquiry concerning Passover and all that it stood for:

“And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? that ye shall say ...” (12:26).

“And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying ...” (13:8).

“And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this, that thou shalt say unto him ...” (13:14).

“And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean these testimonies ...? then thou shalt say unto thy son...” (Dt. 6:20,21).

To this persistent questioning the answer is always the same: Cruel bondage in Egypt, a great deliverance, the Lord’s mighty hand!

All through the centuries this feature of the Passover ritual has never been neglected. At an appropriate moment in the course of the meal one of the children present, prepared beforehand, puts this question to the father of the family: “What mean ye by this service?”

The rabbis laid it down that “the more fully he explains, the better.” But in practice the answer is always given in the very words of the Exodus record.

Psalm 78 is surely a Passover psalm, for its emphasis on instruction of children is unequalled anywhere else in Scripture:

1. “Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.
2. We will not hide it from their children,
3. shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord ...
4. ... which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children,
5. that the generation to come might know them, even the children that should be born,
6. who should arise and declare them to their children: that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God...
7. and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation ..”

The rest of the psalm, another 64 verses, develops that final admonition into an awe-inspiring and frightening catalogue of Israel’s bleak unfaithfulness from which continued Passover observance was intended to save the nation.

“It shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes” (13:16).

The spiritual intention behind this exhortation is plain for all to see. Yet today Israel is content with the letter of the commandment whilst sadly letting slip its real purpose. A leather thong round the forearm and a phylactery on the forehead both have prominence in an elaborate ritual performed by many who now and for long years have believed that God only does for them what they do for themselves. Yet this faithless philosophy was vetoed from the very first Passover: “No manner of work shall be done, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you” (12:16). Justification by works – that incurable Jewish way of life – was forbidden from the very first day of their new existence.

How the New Israel needs to learn similar lessons regarding their better Passover!

From earliest days children should be present at the Breaking of Bread service and, however they divert their restless minds during most of the proceedings, as soon as they are capable of any degree of understanding, there should be insistence on all such things being put aside when parents are offering thankful prayer and are sharing the tokens of a new and better deliverance. In how many homes is the need to have this brief period of special solemnity simply explained to the children?

The Lord’s first Passover

In all this Jesus set the example. At his first Passover after *bar-mitzvah* he seemed to display remarkably little parental respect by his over-stay in Jerusalem. Yet when, on the third day,

those distracted seekers tracked him down he was in his Father's house. "Wist ye not that I must be among my Father's men?" (this is the only sensible translation of the familiar words).

Some have filled out for themselves a mistaken mental picture of the situation. He was not precociously making these learned men look foolish by the religious conundrums he fired at them. Rather, he was – of course – fulfilling his true part at Passover, asking: "What mean ye by this service?"

No doubt he was already learning, when only twelve, that there was a greater slavery than that in Egypt, a bondage calling for the sacrifice of a Lamb "without blemish and without spot."

Years went by, and at another Passover Mary lost her boy once again in Jerusalem. On that dire day did she find comfort from the memory of how on that earlier occasion she had found him on the third day, and among his Father's men?

Haggada

This re-telling at Passover of the story of an ancient deliverance the Jews have always called Haggada, the Shewing-forth, taken from the key word in the asking ritual: "And thou shalt *shew* thy son in that day ..." (Ex. 13:8).

It was with reference to this that Jesus assured his disciples that already provision was made for *their* Haggada in his absence from them. They would have their special Passover celebration, and at it the Comforter "will shew you things to come ... shall receive of mine, and shall *shew* it unto you" (Jn. 16:13,14).

More generally this stands true at every Breaking of Bread service: "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do *shew forth* the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Yet another allusion to Haggada is lost to the readers of Peter's first Epistle through variation in translation:

"... the things which are now *reported* (shewn) unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Spirit" (1:12). It is only a context of several other Passover allusions which ensures this interpretation. And "the things" Peter had in mind were "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (1:11).

7. NOT A BONE BROKEN

It was certainly the custom in the time of Christ (although lacking explicit Passover commandment) for the celebration to be concluded with the singing of what was called the Hallel, or at least a portion of it. The Hallel was the sequence of Psalms 113-118.

The hymn sung by the Lord and his eleven (Mt. 26:30) was almost certainly this, even though (see chap. 11) their supper came twenty-four hours before the Jewish Passover. Twelve resonant men's voices singing in unison would raise an impressive hymn of praise.

Psalms 116-118 would be specially appropriate to the solemnity of this occasion during which Jesus had been making it more plain than ever that his mortal hours were now numbered:

“The cords of (a sacrificial) death (see 118:27) compassed me about, and the pains of Sheol gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul ... What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord ... Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints ... I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid ... I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me ... I will not fear: what can man do unto me? ... I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over to death.”

Infringing the Sabbath

Two other details of the Passover ritual call for attention.

“That which remaineth of it (the roasted lamb) ye shall burn with fire” (12:10). This is remarkable, for that night and next morning would be part of the special sabbath (12:16). Some months later the Law given through Moses was to mete out the ultimate penalty to a man gathering sticks for a fire on the sabbath (Num. 15:32ff). Also, it was on that 15th Nisan when Israel were bidden take up their burdens and begin their migration.

Can it be that there is here a designed hint to teach those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb that they are not to regard themselves as bound by the forms and precepts of the Law?

Not a bone broken

Of much more pointed significance is the warning: “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof.”

Until this is considered with reference to Christ it appears to be of no consequence at all. But on the day of crucifixion it became a most vital item of Passover observance.

After the ninth hour (= 3 p.m.) the rulers of the Jews made a special journey to Pilate’s headquarters to press the urgency of having the corpses of the crucified men interred before sunset and the beginning of the sabbath. Considering the strength of Jewish convictions regarding such things the request seemed very reasonable.

But why did these enemies of the Lord ask that the legs of the three victims be broken? If they wished to ensure that the men, if not already dead, would die very speedily, why use such a strange method to hasten this end? Why not do what the Roman soldier, detailed to this task, actually did to Jesus – apply a violent spear thrust to the region of the heart?

It has been urged, rather artificially, that breaking the legs with a mallet would immediately throw the entire weight of the body on to the arms in such a way as to make breathing almost impossible. Thus death of an already much weakened man would quickly ensue.

This is a fallacy based entirely on imagination, for a man can hang by his hands for an almost indefinite period and continue breathing without any difficulty. Such an explanation springs from lack of appreciation of the motives of those evil rulers.

Seen from a different angle the situation becomes much more intelligible.

These men were in a panic. They had succeeded in getting this Jesus of Nazareth condemned and crucified, but only to realise as the day dragged on, that, in one respect after another, impressive correspondences had been piling up between the ritual concerning the Passover lamb and the death of the Man they feared and hated. Now they began to see that he was likely to do them more damage in his death than in his life, for his disciples would be left with a superb Biblical weapon to use against them.

They would have proof galore that this Jesus *was* “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”

But now their proposal, agreed to by Pilate, would leave them free from worry. For, if such claims were made on Jesus’ behalf they would triumphantly scotch them with the pungent quotation: “Neither shall ye break a bone thereof.” But Pilate caused his bones to be broken, so that settles it – this Nazarene is no Lamb of God!

And of course Pilate readily acceded to the request because he was quite incapable of appreciating its theological over-tones.

Yet here is one of the most remarkable of all the impressive examples in the Bible of the operation of the Ways of God’s Providence. That Roman legionary broke the legs of the first and the third, and came to Jesus last of all. Why should he do such a strange thing as that? Then a quick glance made it immediately evident that Jesus was dead already. He could be left. No need to break his legs. Then what kind of impulse was it which caused the soldier suddenly to raise his spear and thrust it under the ribs of this corpse, thus in his ignorance providing the ground for the yet future fulfilment of another Scripture: “They shall look on him whom they pierced?”

The priests had sought to vitiate one prophecy, yet instead, all inadvertently, they provided the fulfilment of another. And before the day was out, the knowledge of this would add considerably to their consternation. They went to their beds frightened men.

“His Body broken...”?

It is now of some importance to enquire why apparently Paul refers to the body of Jesus as broken (1 Cor. 11:24) – and he who wrote thus was no longer Saul the Pharisee!

It will not do to urge, as some have attempted, that Paul had in mind the breaking of the Lord’s body, but *not* of his bones. Then what was broken? – his flesh? But whoever talked of breaking flesh? This is a gross misuse of language.

Others have taken refuge in the textual reading, unworthily adopted by not a few modern versions (e.g. RV, RSV, NEB): “This is my body which is for you” – an insipid reading, at best!

These devices are unnecessary once it is noticed that the Greek participle “broken” is continuous in form. But to speak of the Lord’s body as being continuously broken makes no sense at all.

Try again:

“He took bread: and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this (i.e. this *bread*) which is (now) being broken for you is (i.e. represents) my body.”

There is now no hint of contradiction of the Passover prototype.

A much-needed lesson

It still remains to ponder the symbolic meaning behind this insistence that no bone be broken. Several trenchant passages make the meaning plain but unpalatable.

“We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones” (Eph. 5:30 – a pointed reference to the *risen* Christ: Lk. 24:39).

In his enunciation (in the same epistle) of basic truths, Paul puts first this foundation truth:

“There is one Body” (4:4).

It is this Body which is not to be broken. Those who do break it either set themselves in the same class as evil priests glad to see the bones of Christ broken, themselves meantime keeping themselves clean (sic!) that they might eat a worthless passover; or else they are like Pilate who casually conceded his own connivance, knowing no better.

Through a long chapter of blunt and almost brutal logic (1 Cor. 12), Paul begins from “The Body is one, and hath many members,” and goes on to argue through one illustration after another that, far from being despised and severed, all members must cohere in a harmonious working. Some organs may be deemed to have neither practical use nor ornamental value. Nevertheless they are not to be severed, even though diseased and something of a hindrance (you are to amputate only for gangrene; 2 Tim. 2:17). Indeed, Paul argues very pointedly that less comely parts of the Body are to be made more comely by an undeserved amount of attention and care.

Alas, how this aspect of Passover and New Testament symbolism has gone ignored through the past century. It is surely the greatest sin of the Christadelphians Body that it has, time and again, tolerated massive surgical operations which Holy Scripture bluntly forbids. It is a sin unforgiven because unrepented of. Nay, there are some – shame on them! – who positively glory in the dismembering that has taken place. What sort of blood is on their door posts?

8. PASSOVER JUDGMENT

The first Passover was an impressive occasion of protection and deliverance for Israel and of judgment on the Egyptians. It is summarised in one pregnant verse:

“The Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians: and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you” (12:23).

Here, “pass over” does not mean “pass by.” *Pasach*, whence Pesach, the normal Jewish name for Passover, is a rare verb which carries the idea of motion to and fro. The clearest example of its use is Isaiah 31:5: “As birds flying, so will the Lord defend Jerusalem ... and passing over he will preserve it.” The picture here is of a mother bird fluttering over its young in the nest in order to protect them. Mephibosheth, Saul’s little son, “fell and *became lame*” (2 Sam. 4:4). With a dislocated hip or knee joint he moved with an ungainly side-to-side motion. So also Elijah’s reproach of the people: “How long do ye go halt (like the uneven to-and-fro shambling of a lame man) between two opinions?” (1 Kgs. 18:21). And, in the same chapter, the priests of Baal “leapt upon the altar” (v.26), going up and down or from side to side in a frantic religious frenzy.

Remarkably the LXX translates the two occurrences of *pasach* in Exodus 12 in two different ways. In verse 13 its Greek equivalent means “to roof over, or shelter.” (Paul’s use of this word in 1 Tim 6:8 may well be a Passover allusion).

Angels at work

It is now possible to see that Israel were being promised that on their first Passover two hosts of angels were to be busy, with different assignments from the Almighty.

There were protecting angels – called here by the Covenant Name of God – who hovered over every Jewish home in protection.

And there were destroying angels whom the former did not “suffer to come in unto your houses to smite you.”

Bible readers are familiar enough with the first of these ideas – “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Ps. 34:7) – but are often less at home with the other. Yet Psalm 78, a historical psalm, is quite explicit in its reminiscence. After mention of several of the plagues in Egypt, there is this:

“He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels (RV: angels of evil).”

These angels manipulating the plagues of God’s wrath in Egypt were not wicked angels. There are *no* such beings. “Are they not *all* ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:14).

Even destroying angels are not really angels of *evil*, for are they not doing what God wants them to do? Therefore, in the ultimate sense, it cannot be evil. But it is called this by men and in Scripture because that is how it appears to finite human minds. “I make peace, and I create evil: I the Lord do all these things” (Is. 45:7) is a very profound truth.

In Egypt, that night, there were, then, two hosts of angels on duty: those guarding and protecting Israelite homes, and those charged with the sinister duty of slaying the firstborn where there was no faith in a Passover sacrifice, no faith in the blood of a lamb.

In Gethsemane

It was to this solemn fact that Jesus referred when he forbade Peter's strenuous defence of his own person in Gethsemane:

"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall even now give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt. 26:53).

At that Passover all the twelve legions of angels who had, many years before, protected twelve tribes of Israel, and all the destroyers also, were now at the beck and call of one man, to protect him and to smite his adversaries.

But no! At this time he was not the Israel to be saved, but the Lamb to be slain, the Firstborn to die for the sins of the fathers: "This is your hour, and the power of darkness (the angel who slays in the night)" (Lk. 22:53).

Passover Suffering

There is a close link, quite lost in English translations between Passover (Heb: *pesach*; Gk: *Pascha*) and the Greek word for "suffer" (*paschō*). In his sustained allusion to Isaiah's prophecy of the Suffering Servant of the Lord (1 Pet. 2:21-25), the apostle Peter does not directly quote how Jesus was "led as a lamb to the slaughter" but the phrase: "when he suffered (*paschōn*), he threatened not," was surely designed to remind readers of what Peter himself had to be reminded of on the night of arrest, that his Lord's role then was to be slain as a Passover Lamb.

In one of the earliest warnings Jesus gave of his inevitable death there was a veiled hint to his disciples that the crisis would come at Passover: "Likewise also (i.e. like John the Baptist) shall the Son of man suffer (*paschein*) of them" (Mt. 17:12). But until the time came this detail was probably lost on them.

This word play on *suffering* at *Passover* comes several times in the gospels (see especially Lk.22:15), but is somewhat disguised by the form of the Greek verb.

"Go not out"

There was strict instruction that "none of you go out at the door of his house until the morning" (12:22). Instead, it was to be "a night of watching unto the Lord" (12:42 RVm).

Watching for what? The only possible answer can be: watching for the promised divine deliverance. Their alertness was to be an expression of complete faith that within a matter of hours they would all go forth to freedom. This faith showed itself in action – not only in the smearing of blood on the door and in the eating of a holy meal, but also in loins girt, shoes on feet, staff in hand, and in alert confident demeanour.

The appropriate exhortation to the Lord's New Israel as the day of his greater deliverance draws near is so obvious as to need no underlining. Those who, in spirit if not in word, say: "My Lord delayeth his coming," and choose eating and drinking which has no relation at all to the Lamb of Passover, may indeed be saved in the time of crisis, but if they are it will be only through the surpassing grace of Christ rather than their own deserving.

That ominous warning that no man "go out of the door of his house until the morning" *must* be the rule for all, without exception. There has been no lack of instances of individuals reacting from an uncomfortable ecclesial situation by weakly choosing the easy way out, dissociating themselves from the fellowship of the rest. Even though it be protested that "I haven't lost my faith; I just choose not to assemble with the brethren," there is, in such a case, a wilful flouting of a basic principle of Passover deliverance. To go out of one's house, for *any* reason at all, is to seek refuge in darkness and to invite the stroke of "the destroyer, the power of darkness."

Egyptian firstborn smitten

At midnight the blow fell. The stroke of "the destroyer" was felt in every Egyptian home (including also "them that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh"; Ex. 9:20). It was not sufficient to be vaguely sympathetic to the cause of Israel. Did not Jesus warn: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves and for your children"? (Lk.23:28).

That night "there was a great cry in the land of Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead" (12:30). All suffered, "from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne ..." (v.29). It was the father of this Pharaoh who had decreed that the little sons of the Israelites should be fed to the crocodiles of the Nile (1:22; cp. Rev. 12:4). And now the hand of the Lord reached out to that royal house, and the firstborn son of Amenhetep IV died.

Caiger, in "Bible and Spade" and Marston, in "The Bible comes alive" have drawn attention to a remarkable inscription, long buried at the foot of the Sphinx. On it the next Pharaoh, Tuthmosis IV tells that in his time he had cleared the sand from the sphinx, and why he had done so: "When a boy he had fallen asleep under the Sphinx, and dreamed she told him that one day he would become king of Egypt, and that he was then to clear the sand from her feet."

It is clear that at the time of the dream this Tuthmosis was not the heir to the throne. The Bible story explains how the death of the firstborn cleared the way for his accession.

In haste

In a wave of national terror "the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste; for they said, We be all dead men" (12:33). This last expression, very abrupt, perhaps means: "All of us (have) corpses." This people with (their) national obsession regarding care for the dead, were all too busy with burials to care what the Israelites might do. So they "went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn" (Num. 33:3,4RV).

But the people, asking (12:35 RV) their Egyptian neighbours for portable valuables in lieu of the houses and furniture and gardens they were leaving behind, went out from their bondage

with a great accumulation of “jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment,” much of which was to be devoted some months later to glorifying the sanctuary of the Lord in the wilderness (35:22-24).

The haste when Israel left the land was in the panic-stricken Egyptians rather than in themselves: “they sent them out in haste.” It was a fitting foreshadowing of a like deliverance for God’s New Israel:

“Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel shall be your rearward” (Is. 52:15). The allusion here to the pillar of cloud and fire, both leading and protecting Israel, is not to be missed.

The Lord’s Firstborn

Israel’s firstborn, saved by the blood of the lamb, were to be thenceforward devoted to God or redeemed with a special payment of atoning silver. In Christ there is an entire “ecclesia of firstborns” (Heb. 12:23), saved through him who is “the mediator of the new covenant” and its “blood of sprinkling.”

How can they all be “firstborn”? Only because they are in Christ, having put on Christ, who is “the firstborn of all the (new) creation” (Col. 1:15).

On a lower level this principle operates strongly in the family. Many a time over it has been the gratifying experience of parents that where the firstborn child takes readily to the Truth in Christ, the rest as readily follow that good example. And conversely, alas. It is not for nothing that the Law put so much emphasis on the double portion assigned to the firstborn (because of more than double responsibility).

Egypt’s Passover

PHARAOH

Thou foolish, vain and flinty hearted man,
to think the majesty divine
is less than thine,
to hurl defiance at the heavenly throne
and count it lower than thine own,
to steel thy heart against the King of kings,
thou puny thing!

O creature of the dust
learn that thou must
prostrate thyself before the Lord of lords
or, at his word,
proclaim thy worth
forever voiceless
from thy mouldering earth.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Heavy falls the Angel's hand
upon that self-indulgent land;
the haughty pride that once defied
the God of heaven, silent lies,
its heart as lead,
its firstborn dead.

Darkly stark that fateful night
of swiftly sure Angelic might;
nor does the morning's dawning light
dispel the dreadful deadly cloud
that like a shroud
enwraps the land
with clammy hand.

With broken-hearted, flowing tears,
the anguished cries, in flaming fear,
reach out to gods that are so near
yet do not care,
nor even hear.

They are alone,
each grieving home.

(Philip Jones)

9. The Passovers of Jesus

The ministry of Jesus lasted rather more than three years – “a time, times, and an half”? – thus including four Passovers. The indications about the first, third, and fourth of these are indisputable. There is some argument about the second (Jn. 5:1), but that there was another Passover about that time (whether Jn. 5 is about one or not) seems to be required by the cornfield controversy described by the other gospels (Mk. 2:13 etc.).

The brief notes included in this chapter will be restricted to details of special Passover interest. To write a complete study of all the incidents involved would call for a separate volume.

The First Passover: Jn. 2:13ff.

- a. John always calls it “The Passover of the Jews” (2:13, 5:1; 6:4; 11:55). And since by “Jews” he always means the rulers of the people, this phrase betrays a marked lack of sympathy with men who exploited the feasts of the Lord for their own advantage, and who also, in spite of their original worldly-wise decision, used the Passover to ensure the slaying of the Lamb (Lk. 22:1,2).
- b. “Jesus *found* in the temple ...” suggests the idea of search. But no search was necessary, for the trafficking was open and blatant. But at Passover, in every Jewish home there was a

search in order to find and exclude every form of “leaven” (Ex. 12:19 etc.) By his word “found” John seems to be hinting at a like procedure by Jesus in his Father’s house.

- c. Hitherto Jesus had sought no publicity at all. It is remarkable that it was mighty indignation at religious abuses by those who should have known better which goaded him into action. “The Lord whom ye seek (irony!) shall suddenly come to his temple” (Mal. 3:1). One moment Jesus was utterly unknown. The next he was the most exciting individual in Jewry. The word for “poured out” (v.15) is the same as in Mal. 3:3 LXX. All the first seven verses in that chapter have marked relevance.
- d. “He drove them all out of the temple” (v.15) echoes Hosea 9:15. In the same chapter, verse 5 has this: “And what will ye do in the solemn day (*mo’ed* once again), and in the day of the feast of the Lord?” Note also v.7: “The days of visitation are come . . . the prophet (is reckoned) a fool, the man of the Spirit (is accounted) mad.” Amongst the animals driven out, there is no mention of Passover lambs! Did Jesus let them stay?
- e. “For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (v. 17) has already been shown to have a special Passover connection (Ex. 12:9, 10). But in Ps. 69:9 the conjunction “for” makes a link with the previous verse: “I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother’s children.” Here, then, is an indication that this first cleansing of the temple was what caused estrangement between Jesus and the rest of the family.

The Second Passover: Jn. 5

By calling this unnamed feast “*the* feast of the Jews” (RVm) John puts it with the other Passovers, also called “the feast of the Jews.” The final proof that it was Passover lies in the sequence of Passover allusions in the discourse of Jesus to the Jewish leaders.

Moses commanded: “Ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever” (Ex. 12:24). When children asked: “What mean ye by this service?” there was to be full and careful explanation. Here is the source of the Lord’s allusion: “The Son can do nothing but what he seeth the Father do: for what thing soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (v.19). And the next verse makes explicit reference to the Haggada, the shewing forth: “The Father loveth the Son, and *sheweth* him all things that he himself doeth” – according to Ex. 13:8: “Thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying...”

“For as the Father raiseth the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” (v.21). Both halves of this verse are to be taken in some figurative sense, for Israel had had no experience of the Father literally raising the dead, or of the Son doing so during the first year of his ministry. The reference is to the way in which God raised up His dead nation of Israel, buried in an Egyptian grave (cp. Ez. 37:12). Now Israel was in need of a new resurrection from their present spiritual inanition.

The figure is continued: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead (Israel) shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (v.25). For some it would mean “life” and for others “damnation,” just as the testing discipline of Passover obedience and wilderness journey meant inheritance of the Land for some and shameful death in the wilderness for others.

All this development of ideas was a sequence appropriate to Passover.

But, more than this, the minds of these leaders listening to Jesus should have been prepared for such claims as Jesus made by the *sign* to which the Bethesda invalid had borne witness. So many details in the miracle are recorded because John had a symbolic mind, and would fain teach his readers the same outlook:

A pool with *five* porches (v.31-37,46,47), approached from the way of the Passover lambs.

It is called ‘the place of God’s loving-kindness.’

An angel of blessing is at work (Ex. 12:23; 14:19), so that the water is disturbed (Ex. 14:21, 22).

Those first through the water are saved, but those who come after are lost (Ex. 14:28).

This man continues, however, to be like faithless Israel, wandering in a wilderness for 38 years.

But Jesus gives him the blessed alternative of going forth free and healthy, with his bed on his shoulder, like Israel with their kneading troughs (Ex. 12:34).

It was a wasted Passover. The Lord’s visual aid was lost on them.

The Third Passover: Jn. 6:4ff.

On this occasion Jesus miraculously fed the multitude in the wilderness. Next day in the synagogue at Capernaum discussion inevitably centred on comparison with Moses’ provision of manna in the wilderness soon after the Passover in Egypt. A large part of John 6 is taken up with this.

But there is one section of the Lord’s discourse which palpably comes away from that idea. In verses 53-56 there is repetitious emphasis on “eating my flesh and drinking my blood.” Except for this, “ye have no life in you.”

Clearly the Lord’s language is intensely figurative in meaning. But it may be taken as fairly certain that here Jesus was bidding his hearers see him as the Passover Lamb, the God-appointed means of lasting deliverance. Just as he wanted them to rise above their present clamour for more God-given meals in the wilderness and to see him and his teaching as the true Food of God, so also he would wean them from slavish adherence to a traditional Passover ritual and persuade them that the deliverance, which they had not yet got, was to be found in partaking of *him* as the true means of salvation.

But there was a significant difference between the Passover language used by Jesus and the instructions bequeathed to the nation by Moses. Whereas they were to roast and eat the flesh of the lamb, after first putting its blood on the door or, in later days, pouring it out at the base of the altar, Jesus now required that they “eat the flesh of the Son of man, and *drink* his blood.” Why the difference? – a horrifying difference to Jews raised on the prohibitions of the Law.

To make sense of this, the idiomatic use of “flesh and blood” in Holy Scripture needs to be recognized. Two examples are sufficient to illustrate.

When Peter made his great confession about the Messianic status of his Master, Jesus commented with approval: “Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven” (Mt. 16:17).

And Paul, after his Damascus conversion, “conferred not with flesh and blood ... but went into Arabia” (Gal 1:16, 17).

In these places there is no reference to literal flesh and literal blood. Clearly the expression stands for human nature in its weakness and waywardness.

But concerning Jesus “my flesh and *my* blood” means the kind of human nature they experienced in *him* – weakness, limitation, temptability, all of these certainly; but not the wilfulness and sin which are a normal characteristic of all other “flesh and blood” people.

Not only was Jesus a son of man, born of a woman, but he was also Son of God, ever emerging victorious over his lower nature, though not without “sweat as it were great drops of blood,” not without “strong crying and tears.”

At this Passover Jesus would fain teach his materialistic people to learn the idealism of “eating his flesh and drinking his blood,” that, by a special intimacy with himself sharing *his* human nature which, for all its inheritance of propensity to sin, rose above that to a complete fulfilment of the will of his Father. In him it was a veritable fact, the greatest of all marvels in a ministry of marvels. In them, and in all other disciples, it remains an ideal only, and one towards which there is minuscule progress except a man eat and drink Christ.

There is here, also, for sure, a preparatory appointment of the New Passover, the sacrament of Bread and Wine which is the outward symbol of all the idealism Jesus was then trying to inculcate. Here is the explanation of the lack of mention of Bread and Wine in John’s account of the Last Supper. To have inserted it there would have been repetitious.

The Last Passover

A fair number of the Passover allusions in the last few chapters of the Gospels have already been touched on. But for completeness sake (if such be possible!), others are added here briefly.

- a. In spite of much bungling from commentators, there can be no doubt that at the Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, *two* animals were involved. “The Lord hath need of *them* ... and they set him thereon (*epano autōn*: upon *them*; Mt. 21:3,7). Yet certainly it was the “foal of an ass” which Jesus rode into the city. Thus the complete picture requires that first he mounted the older animal, but it rejected him, so instead he took to the unbroken colt “whereon never man sat.” This animal bore him passively through an excited crowd which was shouting Hosannas and waving garments and branches of trees. It is one of the unrecognized miracles of the ministry.

Fairly evidently in this incident there is prefigured the rejection of Jesus by Jewry (in spite of this flash-in-the-pan enthusiasm), to be followed by a ready acceptance of him by Gentiles. There is much else in this context demanding such an interpretation.

Why is this item catalogued here? Because with seeming irrelevance the Passover Scripture in Exodus 13 includes this: "Every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a Lamb"! (v.13).

- b. At the Last Supper the disciples invited Jesus to make a searching examination for the traitor. One after another they asked: "Lord, is it I?" (Mt. 26:22). According to long-established Jewish custom, at this New Passover there must be careful scrutiny to exclude all "leaven" (see chapter 3). Here is its counterpart.

By and by Judas "went out, and it was night" (Jn. 13:30). But Moses had commanded: "None of you shall go out at the door of his house" (Ex. 12:22). But Judas did, in order to join the "Egyptians", and he became their firstborn.

- c. "This is my body." When Jesus used these words the disciples could hardly fail to recall that the familiar rabbinic phrase to describe the lamb was "the body of the Passover."
- d. Moses commanded: "Ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations ... an ordinance for ever" (Ex. 12:14). The Jews have not done this; they have not been able to do it because deprived of their temple, for the sacrifice of the Passover was to be "at the place which the Lord thy God shall choose" (Dt. 16:5,6). True, a Passover of sorts has continued, but with various other modifications from what was prescribed. Today there is no lamb. Instead, a leg of lamb or even a shank bone, and a roasted egg. It is not a Passover.

Instead Jesus has instituted a New Passover, concerning which he said: "Do *this* in remembrance of me." This Passover has gone on ceaselessly. The principle of Moses' commandment has been followed.

And so it will be, always. For Jesus spoke of "drinking it (the symbolic cup) new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29). "I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Lk. 22:16).

Since the crucifixion the Jewish Passover has been nugatory, but the New Passover goes on for ever.

- e. "It shall be unto you for a memorial," said Moses (Ex. 12:14). "In remembrance of me," said Jesus. Israel remembered their coming out of Egypt, an experience once and for all behind them. Disciples remember Jesus, a suffering Saviour who lives for ever.

The normal association of ideas of the word "memorial" is with the Covenant Name of God – the Old Testament has scores of examples of this. The New Passover is a memorial of "the New Covenant in my blood."

- f. In Gethsemane Jesus bade his disciples "watch with me." For them it was to be "a night of watching" (Ex. 12:42). But they didn't watch. So it was only by the gracious mediation of their Lord (Jn. 18:8) that they were not given over to "the power of darkness."

For Jesus there was “an angel from heaven strengthening him,” one of those angels who passed to and fro over the houses of the people of Israel. Without that ministry would “the destroyer” (Ex. 12:23) have utterly destroyed *him*?

- g. How many times did Pilate say: “I find no fault in him”? Some say three times, some say five. But whichever it was, the Lord’s enemies were being bluntly reminded that there stood before them “a Lamb without blemish and without spot.”
- h. The custom of releasing a notable prisoner at Passover shouts for a Passover interpretation. The Greek text of Mk. 15:6 seems to imply that this was *Pilate’s* custom. There are clear indications that he had “done his homework” about Jewish religious practice. He had taken the trouble to find out why Passover was kept, and this release of a prisoner was his tactful gesture, allowing the Jews to see re-enacted the deliverance of Israel from their Egyptian prison. And the one released was as undeserving of his freedom as Israel proved themselves to be by their rebellious spirit in the wilderness.
- i. “We have a law, and by our law he ought to die” was the bitter shout of the Lord’s enemies (Jn. 19:7). There was a poignant dramatic irony about these words. *They* meant one thing, but John, faithfully recording all such details, meant something different. Did not their Law say that at Passover a Lamb must be slain?
- j. The law of the feasts of the Lord (Lev. 23:12) commanded that on the morning after the Passover sabbath there must be offered “an he lamb without blemish of the first year for a burnt offering unto the Lord.” It was as though the Passover lamb was come to life again (cp. Ex. 12:5) and was being re-consecrated to God.

The counterpart to this was enacted on the Passover Sabbath when Jesus rose from the dead. Hence his words to Mary: “Touch me not (do not keep on holding me), for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God” (Jn. 20:17).

That present tense “ascend” is a strange way of referring to what was to take place six weeks later. Both the language here and the type in Leviticus seem to require that the token of the Lord’s sacrifice be presented *that day* in the very presence of God. It is surely not an error to infer that immediately after this encounter with Mary, Jesus did ascend to heaven, there to display the evidence in pierced hands and feet and side that he was “the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.” Angels and archangels saw it and adored.

10. THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS

Traditionally Jesus was crucified on Good Friday and rose from the dead early on the morning of Easter Sunday, the intervening sabbath being also a Passover sabbath and therefore spoken of as “a high day” (Jn. 19:31). With this view all the chronological references agree, except one: “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt. 12:40).

These words appear to be explicit and to require that Jesus lay in the tomb a full seventy-two hours, a period which cannot possibly be found between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning.

For this reason, and for this reason only, some have not hesitated to declare false the tradition that Jesus died on a Friday. Instead they insist that his crucifixion was on a Wednesday, that Thursday was a Passover sabbath and Saturday an ordinary sabbath. Thus, if Jesus rose any time after sunset on Saturday, he lay in the tomb three full days and three full nights.

The idea is an attractive one, especially to those dominated by the wholesome principle that “the Bible means what it says.” Of course, the Bible does mean what it says, usually, normally. But there are occasions when what appears to be intended as starkly literal must actually be interpreted in a figurative or idiomatic fashion. The instance now under consideration can be shown to be such.

A Basic Argument

At the outset the idea of a period of three full days and nights is ruled out completely by the words of one of the two disciples who talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus on the afternoon of the day of resurrection: “And besides all this, today is *the third day* since these things were done” (Lk. 24:21). This is decisive. If Jesus had lain in the tomb for at least seventy-two hours, that disciple ought surely to have been saying “the fourth day” or even “the fifth day,” since Bible times are normally reckoned inclusively (e.g. Jn. 20:26).

For this reason *alone*, the literal interpretation of Matthew 12:40 must go, though there are also the additional problems created by such passages as “raised the third day” (Matthew 16:21) – the phrase comes *no less than ten times*; and of course the knotty question as to why the women left their attempt to attend to the body of Jesus until the Sunday when they could have done what they deemed to be needful on an intervening Friday.

A Bible Idiom

This “seventy-two hours in the grave” theory would never have arisen, based on one verse only, if there had been proper recognition of the common Bible idiom that “three days and three nights” is another way of saying “the third day.” There is no lack of evidence to support this conclusion:

- a. The chief priests came to Pilate saying: “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, whilst he was yet alive, *After three days* I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until *the third day* ...” (Mt. 27:63,64). Here they interpreted the first phrase by the second, unless indeed their mathematics was so lamentably weak that they were unable to see that the guard should extend to the *fourth* day.
- b. Esther bade the Jews fast with her “three days, night and day”; yet it was “on the third day” that she went in to the king (Esther 4:16; 5:1). Again the second phrase interprets the first.
- c. “They continued three years without war between Syria and Israel,” and yet war broke out again “in. the third year” (1 Kgs. 18:1,2).
- d. Shalmanezar began the siege of Samaria in the *fourth* year of Hezekiah, and took it “*at the end of three years*” in the *sixth* year of Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 18:9,10). This example is

particularly useful as demonstrating that a period which included part of the fourth year, the whole of the fifth year, and part of the sixth year is reckoned as “at the end of three years.”

- e. Rehoboam said to the deputation: “Come again unto me *after three days*.” But this is also reported as: “Come again to me *on the third day* (2 Chr. 10:5,12).
- f. It was “after six days” that Jesus took the three disciples to the mount of transfiguration (Mt. 17:1). But in Luke 9:28 it is “about an eight days after.” The one period is reckoned exclusively and the other inclusively.
- g. “After three days” (Mark 8:31) becomes “the third day” in what is unquestionably the parallel passage (Mt. 16:21).
- h. Joseph put his brothers in prison “three days,” yet he brought them out “the third day” (Gen. 42:17,18).
- i. The Jubilee blessing promised to Israel “for three years” covers part of the sixth year, the whole of the seventh, and part of the eighth (Lev. 25:21).
- j. Release of bondservants “at the end of every seven years” (Jer. 34:14) was actually after “he hath served thee six years.”
- k. “Enoch, the seventh from Adam” is another example of inclusive reckoning (Jude 14).

The Passover Type

There is also a further argument on this question which to some may be of no consequence at all, but to others will be utterly decisive. If the Passover details in Leviticus 23:5-12 do not settle fully and clearly when it was that Jesus died and when he rose from the dead, then they present a very awkward incongruity.

	N	
14th	D	Lambs slain
	N	Passover meal,
15th	D	
	N	
16th		Passover Sabbath. Sheaf of first fruits and Lamb without blemish offered.

The slaying of the lambs began in the temple court at 3 p.m. and continued until 5 p.m. approximately – the times of the death and burial of Jesus. The lamb offered on the morning of the 16th Nisan was, in effect, a replica of the Passover lamb (compare Ex. 12:5 and Lev. 23

v18) – as though it were the Passover lamb come to life again and re-consecrated to God! Thus it was a clear type of the risen Jesus, as also was the sheaf of the first fruits.

With the tabulation just given the following representation of the conventional view of Easter may now be compared:

14th	9 p.m.	The Last Supper
	12 p.m.	Arrest.
	9 a.m.	Crucifixion.
	3 p.m.	Death and Burial. (Passover lambs slain).
15th	9 p.m.	Israel's Passover meal.
16th	6 p.m.	Passover Sabbath ends.
	5 a.m.(?)	The Resurrection.
	6 a.m.	The women at the tomb.
	3 p.m.	The walk to Emmaus.

The correspondence thus established disallows any theory of Jesus lying in the grave three full days and three full nights, and indeed any chronological scheme other than that which has been the traditional interpretation of the gospel account – Friday to Sunday morning.

11. DID JESUS EAT THE PASSOVER?

It is a question on which the highest experts and cleverest scholars differ. Some are emphatic that the Last Supper was a true Passover meal. Others are just as confident that it was an ordinary supper, taken twenty-fours before the Passover celebrations. One of these two must be correct.

The compromise suggested by some, that Jesus and the disciples ate the Passover twenty-four hours earlier than normal simply will not do. The lambs must be slain at the temple (Dt. 16:5,6), and it would have been an outrage against all Jewish sentiment to have asked for the slaying of the lamb before the proper time or to have killed it privately elsewhere. And, anyway, Luke's record says the Last Supper was on "the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed" (22:7). That settles! So this desperate expedient of an explanation must be disallowed.

There are lots of indications that the Last Supper took place on the night before the Passover.

At first sight, there appears to be strong evidence in the gospels for both points of view. Here is a summary.

Evidence that the Last Supper was a Passover meal:

(Here, for convenience, the words of Luke's Gospel are used, but most of the points have parallels in Matthew and Mark):

- A. Luke 22:7,8: "Then came the day of unleavened bread when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go prepare us the passover that we may eat."
- B. v.13: "and they made ready the passover."
- C. v.15: "with desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer."
- D. Mention of two cups by Luke (v. 17,20) suggests the ritual Passover, which actually included four.

Evidence that the Last Supper took place on the night before Passover:

- a. John introduces his account with the words: "Now *before* the *feast* of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come ... (ch. 13:1); and v.2 continues: "and supper being ready" (not "ended", as in AV; the Greek participle, and also v.26, both prove AV to be in error here).

John 13:29: "For some of them thought ... that Jesus had said unto him (Judas), Buy those things that we have need of against the feast: or that he should give something to the poor." But immediately after the slaying of the lambs in the temple court, the Passover sabbath began (Lev. 23:6,7); so if this was the Passover celebration, no shops would be open at that time. And the needs of the poor, for the feast, would have been dealt with long before then.

- b. Joseph of Arimathea "bought fine linen" for the interment of Jesus (Mk. 15:46). This goes along with (a), and is a useful corrective to the assertion sometimes made that the synoptic gospels say one thing, and John says another.
- c. "For that sabbath (the day after the crucifixion) was an high day" can only mean that it was the Passover sabbath (Jn. 19:31).
- d. The chief priests "went not into the judgement hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover" (Jn. 18:28), that is, in the evening after the crucifixion.
- e. "And it (the day of crucifixion) was the Preparation of the Passover" (Jn. 19:14). The word "Preparation" was normally used for Friday, as the day on which preparation was made for the sabbath. Edersheim ("The Temple" p. 188) makes the point that the rabbinic writings never use the name "Preparation" for the day preceding the Passover sabbath, but commonly use it for Friday. This "Preparation", then, was the Friday preceding an ordinary sabbath which in this year coincided with the Passover sabbath (the 15th Nisan, in the earliest hours of which, just after sunset the Passover was eaten).

Mark 15:42 and Matthew 27:62 say the same thing.

- f. The citation of the foregoing details is hardly necessary, since if Jesus did actually partake of the Passover, then all the irreligious and blasphemous transactions associated with his arrest and interrogation, the convening of the Sanhedrin and his trial, the rousing of the mob and the release of Barabbas, the crucifixion and the subsequent deriding of Jesus by the priests and elders – all of these took place on the Passover sabbath which should have been given over to holiness and special religious observance. Is such a conclusion credible?
- g. A different kind of fact which will carry special weight with those who are impressed with the accuracy of Old Testament prophecy. If Jesus did *not* keep the Passover, then his death on the cross at the ninth hour coincided precisely with the time when the Passover lambs began to be slain in the temple court. Thus he became “The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” And, as already indicated in the previous study, his resurrection would then coincide in point of time with the special offering in the temple of another identical lamb along with the wave-sheaf of first fruits barley on the morning after the Passover sabbath (Lev. 23:11,12).
- h. For the first three hundred years after the apostles all the early Christian writers who comment on this point say that the Last Supper was *not* a Jewish Passover. Chrysostom (350-400) was the first to teach that it was. And until the 9th century the church uniformly used *leavened* bread at the Eucharist.
- i. Jewish tradition, preserved in the Talmud, says that Jesus died on the 14th Nisan.
- j. If Jesus had actually eaten the Jewish Passover, would not this have provided a powerful argument for the Judaizers in the first-century church that Christians should do the same?
- k. The walk of Jesus and the eleven to Gethsemane was an infringement of Exodus 12:22. It may be argued, of course, that this commandment was regarded as being in abeyance at that time. But would not the Law of Moses be more mandatory upon Jesus than current tradition?
- l. In the gospel accounts of the Last Supper there is no mention, not even the slightest hint, of the lamb which was the main feature of the Passover meal. Jeremias, the chief modern advocate that the Last Supper was a Passover, dismisses this with the observation that “this silence is no longer surprising, when we reflect that Mark 14:22-24 is *a cultic formula, not purporting to give a description of the Last Supper, but recording the constituent elements of the celebrations of the primitive church.*” A typically modernist way of evading uncomfortable evidence! (And what about the other three records?).
- m. It is very clear from John 13:5 that the group betook themselves to the supper table without any foot-washing taking place first. Because of the high-festival character of the Passover it is very difficult to believe that the disciples would contemplate beginning their Passover meal without prior attention to this detail.

Thus, the evidence for dissociating the Last Supper from the Jewish Passover is fairly considerable and of solid quality.

But there remain difficulties which demand explanation. And until such explanation is available it can hardly be said that the case is completely made out.

The most obvious objection springs from the familiar words of the Lord when at the table with the twelve:

“With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Lk. 22:15,16).

How could he use such language except at a Passover celebration?

For answer it is only necessary to read the words again with somewhat different emphasis: “With desire I have desired to eat *this* Passover with you before I suffer,” that is, this new and better Passover, the Breaking of Bread which he was about to share with his disciples.” This reading, it must be agreed, sounds right. On the other hand, two difficulties make the alternative, superficial, reading unacceptable.

The Lord’s Hebraism is an idiomatic way of saying: “I have intensely desired to eat this Passover with you ...” But can any reason be assigned why Jesus should so specially wish to share a Jewish Passover with the twelve? This is a real difficulty. But on the other hand his eagerness to hold this unique Breaking of Bread “this Passover” – with them calls for no explanation at all. More than this, he made this Passover specially his own by a most telling play on words: “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover (*pascha*) before I suffer (the Greek word for ‘suffer’ is *paschō*),”

Also, the questions are not to be evaded: What is it which Jesus will partake of anew in the kingdom? – of the roasted Passover lamb, or the Bread and Wine symbolic of his own sacrifice? Which is it that will be “fulfilled in the kingdom of God?” – the Jewish Passover, or this new Passover, the Breaking of Bread. Not possibly the former, for it was not a fulfilment, nor ever can be. In essence every detail of the Jewish Passover looked *back* to the great deliverance from Egypt. On the other hand, the Breaking of Bread is just as much forward looking as it is a “remembrance,” a “shewing forth of the Lord’s death *till he come*” (1 Cor. 11:26). And fulfilment in the kingdom of God is explicitly promised: “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Mt. 26:29).

In the Luke passage under consideration the double meaning behind the use of “Passover” is more readily appreciated, for it can also be seen to run through the preceding verses:

“Then came the day of unleavened bread when the (Jewish) Passover must be killed (i.e. the 14th Nisan), And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover that we may eat.” Jesus certainly meant the new Passover, but of course Peter and John would be thinking in terms of the Jewish feast.

Even so, “when the Passover must be killed” appears to introduce a chronological difficulty until it is realised that the 14th Nisan began at sunset of the previous day; so it would be (say) between 6 and 7 p.m. when this was done, and not (as is usually assumed) sometime in the morning. Bullinger was the first to draw attention to this rather important consideration.

Thus, Jesus and the other ten would follow an hour or two hours later to share an ordinary meal together in the upper room where, according to the disciples’ expectation, they would all be keeping Passover twenty-four hours later.

From this point of view all the details fall readily into place.

The results of this part of the investigation can now be set out in summary form thus:

14th Nisan "The Preparation"	Night	6	Peter and John go ahead to make passover arrangements
		9	Jesus and the rest follow to the same room.
			The Last Supper, an ordinary meal, takes place.
		12	Arrest in Gethsemane
		3	Illegal trial during night
	Day (Friday)	6	Formal trial by Sanhedrin, and then by Pilate.
		9	Crucifixion.
		12	
		3	Death of Jesus, Slaying of the passover lambs begins.
			His burial.
15th Nisan Passover Sabbath	Night	6	
		9	Passover meal eaten by the nation.
		12	
		3	
		6	
	Day (Saturday)	9	
		12	
		3	
		6	
		9	
16th	Night	12	
		3	
			Resurrection
	Day (Sunday)	6	
		9	
		12	
		3	
		6	Emmaus.

It is now worthwhile to consider *why* Passover language should be so emphatically associated with the gospel narrative of the Last Supper.

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us," wrote Paul (1 Cor. 5:7). At a very early time the church appropriated to the sacrifice of Jesus the language of the Jewish Passover. When the outstanding instances of this are assembled, they become quite impressive.

- a. "The cup of blessing which we bless" (1 Cor. 10:16) was the name given by the Jews to one of the four cups of wine at the Passover feast.
- b. "Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.. Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples." To the disciples these words meant one thing, (as already intimated), but in the mind of Jesus they had a different connotation. For him it was to be the memorial feast of a greater deliverance than that of Egypt. And it is this sense, doubtless, that the author of the gospel meant when he wrote significantly: "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover *must* be killed" – for in retrospect he could see that it not only behoved the Christ to suffer, but to suffer *then*, on the 14th. No other time was fitting.

- c. "And when the hour was come" (Lk. 22:14) might seem to refer to the Jewish Passover, yet quite certainly it meant the hour of the Lord's tribulation and glory: "The hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee." A superb *double entendre*!
- d. Compare also the intensely dramatic force of these words: "The feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill *him* (the Lamb of God)" (Lk. 22 v's 1 & 2). To the student who reads with his eyes open, the gospels abound in delicate touches of this kind – nuances which so easily lose their flavour when one attempts to explain them.
- e. "This is my body." Compare the Mishna's reference to the roasted lamb as "the body of the Passover."
- f. "He broke it and gave it to the disciples"; the action was very similar to a certain part of the Passover ritual, on which the Mishna also has this comment: "The poor have not whole cakes, but broken pieces."
- g. "Ye do *show forth* the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26) is a clear allusion to Exodus 13:8: "Thou shalt *show* thy son in that day ...", a part of the Passover ritual called the Haggadah, the showing forth. The verbal connection is very marked.
- h. The sop given to Judas probably came to be compared with the bitter herbs dipped in the sauce and shared by all participants at the passover table.
- i. It may be possible to go further and see in the searching of the hearts of the disciples a counterpart to the searching of the house for leaven (Ex. 12:19).
- j. "Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup" (1 Cor. 11:27,28). The warning reads like a direct and more searching counterpart to the responsibility laid upon every Jew to be purified for the Passover (John 11:55).
- k. Peter's allusions in his First Epistle appropriate Passover language in quite a systematic fashion:
 - I. "Redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1:19).
 - II. "Obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ" (v.2; Ex. 12:22).
 - III. "Guarded by the power of God through faith unto salvation ..." (v.5; Ex. 12:23).
 - IV. "Not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold" (handed over by the Egyptians; Ex. 12:35).
 - V. "Gird up the loins of your mind" (v. 13) is obviously Ex. 12:11.

12. OTHER PASSOVERS

The Wilderness Passover

Apparently the feast was observed only once during the forty years in the wilderness. At least, there is no mention of any other, and circumcision, the prior necessity, was evidently neglected (Josh. 5:5).

This wilderness Passover was held at Sinai immediately after the consecration of the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:2; Num 9:1).

But there is a large unanswered problem here. If there were about two million in that wilderness multitude, how did they contrive to sacrifice between 50,000 and 100,000 first-year male lambs?

Joshua's Passover

This was held after the crossing of Jordan at Gilgal. First, circumcision was insisted on, according to the Passover commandment: "No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof" (Ex. 12:48). With their Passover meal they ate unleavened cakes made of Canaan corn (Josh. 5:11). But apart from the meal itself, the most characteristic feature of Passover belonged to Rahab and her house. In place of blood on lintel and door posts, she had a scarlet line at her window, the sign of protection as a reward for faith. When destruction was carried through the city, she and hers were safe.

Josiah's Passover (2 Chr. 35:1-19)

Apart from the declaration that "there was no Passover like to that," this keeping of the feast seems to have been singularly featureless. The narrative leaves on the mind an impression of exceptionally great care that all the punctilios of the ritual should be scrupulously observed, probably because of the tremendous impact made on the mind of the king by the reading of the newly-discovered copy of the Book of the Law (2 Kgs. 22:8-13).

Indeed, the fact that as soon as Josiah died, slain in battle, the entire nation slid into apostasy at breakneck speed seems to suggest that this Passover depended almost entirely on the king's own personal enthusiasm and that of a mere handful of devout men like Shaphan and Hilkiah, the father of Jeremiah. The immense number of animals given by the king seems also to imply that there was vastly more zeal in the king than in the mass of the nation.

Ezra's Passover (Ezra 6:19,20)

The new temple was finished in the last month of the 6th year of Darius, and so within weeks it was possible for the first true celebration of Passover to take place since the last few years of Solomon's temple.

Even so, the text seems to imply that not all of those who had returned from Babylon took the trouble to participate; the celebrants were "all such as had separated themselves ... from the

filthiness of the heathen of the land.” But for those who did participate it was an outstandingly joyful occasion.

Peter’s Passover: (Acts 12)

Herod was currying favour with the common people by letting loose persecution against the brethren in Judaea. First, James, one of the leading apostles, was beheaded. The next victim on Herod’s list was Peter. But it was Passover. So until the full week of the holy feast was over Peter was a well-guarded prisoner. This delay was Herod’s tactful concession to the people’s religious susceptibilities.

The brethren, much distraught at the apostle’s danger, made each night “a night of watching unto the Lord” (Ex. 12:42 RVm). There was prayer without ceasing.

Deliverance came. One of those protecting angels of the Lord (Ex. 12:23) came to the sleeping apostle in his cell.

“Rise up quickly” – it was a time for Passover haste.

“Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.” Again it was a Passover commandment – “loins girded, shoes on your feet” (Ex. 12; 11).

Then Peter followed the angel, as Israel had followed the same angel in a pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 14:19). Thus he came out of bondage to safety.

On the other hand there was Passover judgment – not on Herod’s firstborn, but on Herod himself. “The angel of the Lord (the ‘destroyer’ this time; Ex. 12:23) smote him,” and he died in great agony.

A.D.70

Jesus, about to suffer at Passover, paused to warn those who pitied him concerning the wrath that would inevitably fall on the city: “Then shall they say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.”

Jonah, the prototype of death and resurrection, had proclaimed: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

Now, in a time of greater death and resurrection: “Yet forty years, and Jerusalem shall be overthrown.”

It began at Passover. The army of Titus closed in on the city at a time when it was overcrowded with worshippers confident not only of Passover protection but also of the city’s strong defences and vast stores of food.

Nebuchadnezzar’s siege had lasted a full year. But now, for the elect’s sake, the days of misery were shortened. Just five months later, a period clearly traceable in Bible prophecy, the city fell to the Romans, and there was carnage indescribable.

Earlier, Jesus had warned: “When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then let them which be in the midst of her depart out.” What must have sounded at the time like lunatic advice turned out to be the best possible.

The opportunity for flight came. The advice was heeded. Faithful believers went for their lives to the nearest city in the territory of the Agrippa to whom Paul preached, and thus found safety – not through their own resourcefulness, but through the protecting care of a Passover angel. But all through the siege, and in its end, “the destroyer” treated the chosen race as though they were so many ignorant faithless Egyptians. Such misery, such suffering!

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but for your children.”

All this was foretold by Amos:

“The songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day, saith the Lord God: there shall be many dead bodies in every place ... And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation ... and I will make it as the mourning of an only Son ... I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it” (Am. 8:3; 10-12).

What a contrast with that first Passover in Egypt!

13. HEZEKIAH’S PASSOVER

(2 Chronicles 30)

Seven years before the death of Ahaz the northern kingdom had been completely overrun by the armies of Sargon II. His father, Shalmanezzer V, had begun a protracted siege of the capital, Samaria, but had not lived to see the city capitulate. The northern tribes had not been consolidated as an Assyrian province. Sargon was too fully occupied in ceaseless fighting on his other borders, so after the cream of the population had been deported, the territory between Galilee and the Mediterranean was left a disorganized no-man’s-land. The Syrians had had too many batterings from the Assyrians to find the vigour to fill the vacuum by expansion southwards.

So when Hezekiah came to power, he immediately saw his opportunity to bring the remaining people of the Ten Tribes back to the God of their fathers. It was evident also that a united Israel would be in a much better position to resist any further Assyrian aggression.

Quickly he conceived the plan of getting all the people, from all the tribes, to join in a mighty Passover of thanksgiving and re-dedication. The fact that, at the re-dedication of the temple, sacrifices were offered for “all Israel” shows fairly clearly that this idea of Hezekiah’s was in his mind from the start. He set the scheme going without a moment’s delay. Nevertheless the cleansing of the temple proved to be too big a task, so that when Passover time came, no one was ready.

However, certain emergencies preventing participation in the Passover were covered by what has come to be known as “the little Passover,” held a month later, by the permissive ruling of Moses’ Law. (Numbers 9:10). Guided by the prophets in their midst (30:12; 29:25), Hezekiah

and his counsellors agreed to make use of this alternative, and decided on a major effort to bring all the twelve tribes to Jerusalem for a Passover, in the second month.

“Come to Zion!”

So messengers went out from Jerusalem to every corner of the country with appeals and exhortations that with one heart the people “turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” The king’s admonition was very forthright in character: “Be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see.” The allusion was to the double spoliation of northern Israel which had already taken place. At least twenty years earlier, Tiglath-Pileser had taken off into captivity the tribes of the east bank of Jordan (1 Chronicles 5:26). More recently Shalmanezzer and Sargon had meted out similar treatment to their compatriots on the west of Jordan (2 Kings 17:6).

The letter from Jerusalem put the issue with the simple logic of faith: Apostasy and captivity were cause and effect; then, conversely, “if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that led them captive, so that they shall come again unto this land” (cp. Psalm 106:46).

The Response

This wholesome appeal met with a very mixed reception. Some “laughed the messengers to scorn, and mocked them.” The lesson of recent bitter experiences was not learned yet. Others, however, “humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.” These came from Asher, Manasseh, Zebulun, Issachar and Ephraim. A like enthusiasm swept through Judah (including Benjamin and Simeon, which also belonged to the southern kingdom), carrying with it many who hitherto had gone unaffected by Hezekiah’s reforming zeal so that for the first time since the coronation of David (1 Chron. 12:38) the people were “of one heart.” It was “an exceeding great congregation” which assembled for that Passover – not unduly great compared with what the nation could have mustered, had there been unanimity and no captives in distant lands. But certainly, when the dark and evil days of Ahaz were brought to mind, it was a multitude to marvel at.

At the appropriate time, “between the two evenings” (Exodus 12:6) – that is, between the time of the evening sacrifice and sunset (Matthew 14:15,23) – an immense number of lambs were slain, and that night the feast was observed with great rejoicing.

The seven days of the feast of unleavened bread were also kept with undiminished enthusiasm, although observance of it was not obligatory. The people took great delight in the splendour of the fine musical service Hezekiah had re-instituted. Besides this, the “Levites, that taught the good knowledge of the Lord,” were encouraged to use their opportunity to the full.

Enthusiasm

The holy week ended, people were loath to go home. This Passover had stirred them beyond all they had thought possible. So the suggestion came up spontaneously that their re-dedication to God should be signified by continuing their Bible School for another week, precisely as in the

reign of Solomon when the temple was first dedicated (1 Kings 8:65). This idea was adopted with enthusiasm.

There was no puritanical hairshirt austerity about this extended service of God. For all, it meant not only holiness and thanksgiving for the memory of God's providence in the past, but also an intensely joyful acceptance of present benefits. To help this spirit of godly festival, the king and his princes donated immense numbers of oxen and sheep for peace-offerings. These, sanctified by dedication at the altar, meant rich feeding for these worshippers in addition to the fine spiritual fare they enjoyed.

Irregularities

This extension of the feast for a second week was by no means the only irregularity at this Passover. Strictly, "the little Passover" was for those defiled by contact with the dead or for those who had been away from home on a journey at the normal feast time (Nu. 9:10). It could hardly be said that these two special exemptions covered more than a very small proportion of that great multitude. Nevertheless the spirit of that rule was invoked to cover the other unusual circumstances of this great occasion.

Then, too, the Law prescribed that the people themselves were to be responsible for the actual slaying of their Passover lambs (Ex. 12:6). But since many of them were not ceremonially purified for the feast – "for the thing was done suddenly" – the slaying of the lambs was taken over for such people by the Levites.

Yet more seriously, "a greater part (Heb.) of the multitude of the people ... did eat the passover otherwise than it was written" – that is, because of their uncleanness. Aware of this, Hezekiah foresaw the possibility of plague breaking out among the people in the same way that retribution had come on Israel in the wilderness (Ex. 30:12; Num. 14:37; 16:46; 11:33). So he took on himself the priestly responsibility of intercession on their behalf. In the Holy Place of the temple was a gallery over its east door which was used as the royal oratory. By ascending to it, without actually entering the Holy Place, the king could look down on the priest burning incense before the Lord, could contemplate all the awe-inspiring detail of the Cherubim of Glory inwrought in the tapestry of the veil, and could plead more directly for divine help and blessing than in any other way.

This Hezekiah did: "The good Lord pardon every one (Heb: especially) 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." That simple expressive prayer was heard, and thus the people were saved from the stroke of God.

There is something quite marvellous about the spirit which actuated both king and people in this extraordinary Passover. What a contrast between their repeated unpenalised infringements of the letter of the Law now and the frightening retribution meted out on other occasions. Nadab and Abihu – the nameless sabbath-breaker – Korah, Dathan and Abiram – Achan – Uzzah – the young men at Bethel: such a dire, though incomplete, catalogue rams home the needful lesson: "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me."

Fine Religious Spirit

Yet at this time Hezekiah and his people “had faith in God and did as they pleased” (Luther’s paradox). Nowhere could the lesson be better taught or learned that *motive* is all-important. Where circumstances are difficult, let a man express the spirit of God’s commandment as well as he is able, and the Almighty will graciously take the rest as read.

Thus “there was great joy in Jerusalem.” The people were aware that in several respects they had not kept the commandment as strictly as they ought, yet they knew themselves to be accepted by God and forgiven for their pious monarch’s sake. “Since the time of Solomon, the son of David the king of Israel (the time when the temple was first dedicated), there was not the like in Jerusalem.”

Even Gentiles shared the intense religious fervour of the occasion. Not only strangers living in Judah but also others belonging to outlandish tribes who had been brought in by the Assyrians to replace the thousands deported from Israel – these too were given a warm welcome to all the religious celebration except the actual eating of the Passover (for that they had to be circumcised; Ex. 12:48,49). So although Israel was not fully gathered, the royal Servant of the Lord was glorious in the eyes of God, becoming a light to the Gentiles (Is. 49:5,6).

The great commemoration of past deliverance came to an end. Faith was restored. Once again the people truly believed that the God of their fathers was with them – Immanuel! The priests pronounced a solemn blessing from God, and sent them happy to their homes.

14. THE SECOND COMING AT PASSOVER?

Before settling down to detail in this chapter, it is perhaps desirable to remind the reader of a feature of Bible prophecy which rarely receives the careful attention it deserves.

It is this:

Practically all Bible prophecy has a discernible relevance to the times and events when it was first written. Thus, for example, it is possible to expound all the diverse and profound chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy with reference to the exciting events of his day, especially regarding the reign of king Hezekiah. Similarly a big proportion of the psalms light up most impressively when the historical circumstances which led to their composition are taken into account.

But that is only half the story – and the lesser half, at that! For detailed study and the authority of the New Testament combine to require a further reference of these prophetic Scriptures to the purpose of God in Christ, either in his first or second advent, or maybe both. So it is imperative also to study those chapters of Isaiah afresh seeking the more important Messianic meaning. And Psalms of David and Hezekiah must also be studied as Psalms about Messiah.

In this two-fold approach to prophecy the twin interpretations are found to be consistent. They lean on each other. Very often the latter-day fulfilment can be helped out considerably by the earlier contemporary reference about which there is often more clear-cut knowledge.

It is to be expected, then, that just as such outstanding events as Sennacherib's invasion and Hezekiah's grievous sickness and the great Jubilee of his reign loom large in both history and prophecy of the time, so also such an important feature as Passover observance (see the previous chapter, and 2 Chr. 30) is almost sure to find copious mention also.

Sennacherib and Passover

So tremendously successful was Hezekiah's great Passover that it is impossible to believe that it was not followed by others, even though they are not specifically mentioned in the history. Indeed it can be inferred, with a high degree of probability, that Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem took place at Passover time, so that those among the nation whose piety took them from all parts of the country to the sanctuary of the Lord found themselves provided with safety and salvation in the only city which the ruthless Assyrian was unable to capture. The destruction of Sennacherib's army was another Passover deliverance, a mighty angelic stroke on behalf of the desperate oppressed people of God.

The Passover passage in Isaiah 31:5, already discussed in chapter 8, has an immediate Assyrian context:

"As birds flying, so will the Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and *passing over* he will preserve it... Then shall the Assyrian fall with the sword, not of a mighty man; and the sword, not of a mean man, shall devour him; But he shall flee from the sword, and his young men shall be discomfited ... saith the Lord, whose fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem" (31:5,8,9).

There is no lack of passages of this sort.

"Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept (the only feast of the Lord observed at night-time is Passover) ... And the Lord shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the Lord shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod." (30:29-31).

"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be over past (all of this is Passover language). For, behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain" (26:20,21).

"Look upon Zion, the city of our *set feasts*: (Passover?): thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down" (33:20) – Jerusalem, the only city Sennacherib could not capture.

"Woe to Ariel, to Ariel (the hearth of God), the city where David dwelt! add ye *year to year* (*Passover is in the first month*); *let the feasts come round*" (29:1). The next seven verses all have obvious relevance to the siege of Jerusalem and the decimation of the Assyrian army.

And when the history (37:37) says that "Sennacherib *departed* ... and dwelt at Nineveh," there seems to be a play on "Nisan" in the Hebrew text.

This is by no means all the evidence available to suggest that the great deliverance from the brutal Assyrian enemy took place at Passover time, but there is surely enough here to be going on with.

A Further Fulfilment

The next important step is to observe that the first five passages out of those just quoted all seem to have definite reference to a greater deliverance of Jerusalem in the Last Days. In each case the context seems to require this; and indeed it is expected that most readers of these words will need little persuading that such is the case. It looks very much as though the entire complex of thrilling events in Hezekiah's time was divinely designed to foreshadow a yet more exciting fulfilment in the time of the Lord's coming.

If that is the case, then may it also be tentatively inferred that since the crucial time was a Passover when the great enemy railed against Jehovah and His anointed, and judgement was meted out against his impiety, so also will be the main shape of events yet to come? And if that be so, would it not seem to follow that the future crisis to which the prophecies look forward will also take place at a Passover?

Other Scriptures

Researching elsewhere in Scripture, one encounters other indications suggesting the same conclusion.

First, Joel: "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain (or, a teacher of righteousness – a remarkable but possible alternative; see AVm), and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the latter rain *in the first month*" (2:23) – and there follows an impressive picture of Messianic blessing after Israel's final tribulation.

Jesus was born, very probably, at about the time of the early rains just after the Feast of Tabernacles. And this prophecy seems to indicate that he will come again at the time of the latter rains just before Passover. This conclusion finds support in the references in the next verse to Pentecost ("floors full of wheat") and to Tabernacles ("wine and oil").

When Hezekiah persuaded many from the northern tribes to come to Jerusalem for Passover, because the cleansing of the people was not completed in time the feast was held a month later (2 Chr. 30:13, 15).

So very many things in Hezekiah's reign are given a Messianic meaning by Isaiah that it becomes legitimate to consider whether his important late Passover will not also have a corresponding fulfilment in the Last Days. (See "Hezekiah the Great," HAW, ch. 22).

Psalms 75 is a pointedly Messianic prophecy with a vivid picture of the cup of judgment in the hand of the Lord (v.8; cp. Rev. 14:10). There is also this: "When I shall find the set time (RV), I will judge uprightly" (v.2). Here "set time" is the word *mo'ed* which (about 150 times) refers to one of the feasts of the Lord.

So also in Ps. 102:13: “Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time (*mo'ed* again), is come.” Thus, judgment on the great enemy of God’s Israel and blessing on Zion are both to fall on a feast of the Lord – the same feast? a Passover like that so strongly implied in Isaiah? “At midnight (cp. Ex. 12:29) I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments” (Ps. 119:62).

Daniel and Habakkuk appropriate the same terminology in their prophecies of the end time:

“Behold, I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed (*mo'ed*) the end shall be” (Dan. 8:19).

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time (*mo'ed*), but at the end it shall speak, and not lie” (Hab. 2:3).

Is it not remarkable that so many prophecies use such specific nomenclature about the Last Day? Even if they didn’t, one could surely expect that the divine time-table would be geared to the holy occasions which saints in Israel set such store by? And this instinct is reinforced by the pointed Passover references made by Isaiah time after time.

The last witness on this matter shall be the apostle Peter:

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, *be diligent*, that ye may be found of him in peace, *without spot and blameless*” (2 Pet. 3:14). Here are two Passover phrases (from Ex. 12:5,11 LXX) which in his Greek text Peter is careful to put side by side in order to reinforce the Passover idea. It looks as though he too was guided to expect the Lord’s coming at Passover.

There remains, however, one other consideration which could slightly affect the conclusions reached in this chapter.

Jesus referred to himself as “a noble-man *going into a far country* to receive for himself a kingdom.” But the law of Moses took account of such circumstances. It laid down that a man “in a journey afar off yet shall keep the passover unto the Lord on the fourteenth day of the *second* month at even” (Num. 9:10,11).

Thus there is the possibility of the Lord’s return coinciding with the “little Passover” one month later than normal.

THE LAMB OF GOD

*Great God of the wind,
of the earthquake and fire,
who flashes the lightning
or bids it retire,
who crashes the thunder
or quiets its ire,
who speaks in the storm
or the still, small voice
or the gentle Lamb,
the man of thy choice.*

*O Lord, when thine anger
is seen in the plagues,
when the mountains surge
and the wild waves rage,
when defiant actors
on the worldly stage
are destroying themselves
in the wars they wage,
let thine angels grant us
a peaceful calm,
preserved from evil
and kept from harm,
that we may then
hear thy still, small voice
through that Paschal Lamb,
and with him rejoice.*

Philip Jones