

Deuteronomy 16:1-8

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The Israelites are commanded to celebrate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread at the central sanctuary. This celebration will serve to commemorate the LORD's deliverance of Israel out of Egypt.

The first pilgrimage combines two feasts: the Passover, a commemoration of the sacrifice made by Israel at the end of the fourteenth day of the first month, right before their exodus from Egypt ([Exodus 12:1-6](#); [Leviticus 23:5](#)); and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a seven-day festival that begins on the fifteenth day of that same month ([Leviticus 23:6](#); [Numbers 23:17](#)). Since the Feast of Unleavened Bread occurred right after the Passover feast and since unleavened bread was also eaten with the Passover sacrifice, Moses at times referred to them interchangeably.

As Moses began his instructions regarding the first annual pilgrimage, he commanded the Israelites to *observe the month of Abib*. To *observe* (Hebrew “shāmar”) basically means “to keep,” “to watch,” or “to preserve.” It also occurs in the same form in [Deuteronomy 5](#) in the context of keeping the Sabbath ([Deuteronomy 5:12](#)).

The *month of Abib* is named after the Hebrew word “ābîb” which refers to ripe barley that is ready to eat, or “young ear” of barley or “new ears of grain.” This name for the month is used in [Exodus 13:4](#) and [Exodus 23:15](#). Thus, the *month of Abib* refers to the time when the grain (barley) had produced ears. This time roughly corresponds to March-April in our solar calendar. The Jewish calendar is lunar. During the Babylonian captivity, this month was renamed “Nisan,” a Babylonian term for *Abib* ([Nehemiah 2:1](#); [Esth. 3:7](#)).

On the fourteenth day of *the month of Abib*, the Israelites were to *celebrate the Passover to the LORD their God* ([Leviticus 23:5](#); [Numbers 28:16](#)).

The *Passover* (Heb. “pāsaḥ”) refers to the sacred Jewish observance that commemorates the night in which Yahweh killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians during the tenth plague, but “passed over” the Israelite homes that had blood on the doorposts, sparing the Hebrew firstborn children. ([Exodus 12:12-13](#)). Moses told the Israelites that the Passover was to serve as a testimony of their deliverance, for it was the time when *the LORD your God brought you out of Egypt by night*.

That this Passover celebration was to become a testimony for future Israelite generations is made explicit in the Exodus account where Moses declared, “When your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes’” ([Exodus 12:26-27](#)).

Verse 2 begins the detailed instructions as to how to celebrate Passover. First, Moses told them that they were to *sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd*. This explains the type of animal to be offered.

At this point, two changes need to be noted between the original account in Exodus and the Deuteronomy account here. The first difference is that, in the book of Exodus, the lamb — which could be taken “from the sheep or from the goats” — was the only acceptable sacrifice ([Exodus 12:3-6](#)). The reference to *sheep* and *goats* speaks only of the flock. However, the sacrifice in Deuteronomy is broadened to include animals from *the herd* as well. The *herd* refers to oxen, so the sacrifice in Deuteronomy includes oxen, sheep, and goats ([Deuteronomy 15:19](#)). This adjustment likely reflects God’s promises to bless His covenant people when they live in the land of Canaan. Since the Israelites were going to be blessed beyond measure in the Promised Land, their sacrifices could extend to include oxen, perhaps because the larger ox might be needed to feed the large and prosperous families.

The second difference is that the original Passover meal in Exodus was to be eaten inside homes. It was a family festival ([Exodus 12](#)). However, the sacrifice in Deuteronomy was to be offered *in the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name*, which was the central sanctuary. Thus it became a national as well as a family festival. This shift probably reflects God’s plan to unify Israel as a covenant community, one that worshiped and fellowshiped with the Suzerain (Ruler) God together in one specific location. Since Deuteronomy is the speech given by Moses just prior to Israel entering the land, this is a prospective command—at this point God had not identified the central place of worship.

Following the instructions regarding which animal is to be offered, Moses described the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He told them to *not eat leavened bread with it*. Instead, he told them that for *seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread*. The term *leaven* refers to yeast used in baking bread.

Yeast is responsible for causing the bread to rise and giving it good texture. Without yeast, bread has a texture more akin to a cracker.

The Israelites were commanded not to use yeast in making their bread for these festivals. In the Bible, yeast is a symbol for corruption and sinfulness ([Matthew 16:6](#); [1 Corinthians 5:6](#); [Galatians 5:9](#)). Just as a small amount of yeast permeates a whole loaf of bread, a little sin permeates a whole person.

The *unleavened bread* was also called *the bread of affliction* because it symbolized Israel's suffering as slaves as well as the fact that they *came out of the land of Egypt in haste*. When Pharaoh finally gave the permission to leave Egypt, they left immediately, and did not have time for their bread to rise.

In Egypt, the Israelites had no time to prepare *leavened bread* or to cook it when the Suzerain (Ruler) God was about to redeem them from the hand of the Egyptians. As stated before, the normal process of making bread involves mixing *leaven* into the dough to give it texture and volume when it bakes. However, during the night in which Yahweh "struck all the firstborn" of the Egyptians ([Exodus 12:29](#)), Pharaoh and the Egyptians "arose" and "called for Moses and Aaron" (and all the Israelites) urging them to leave Egypt ([Exodus 12:31-33](#)). So, "the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls bound up in the clothes on their shoulders" ([Exodus 12:34](#)). Therefore, the Israelites were to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread *so that they may remember all the days of their life the day when they came out of the land of Egypt*.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was to last *for seven days* (v. 4). During that time, there were two requirements. First, *no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory*. Leaven could be used in bread-making the rest of the year but not these seven days. Second, *none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning*. The *evening of the first day* was the evening of Passover, and there was to be no part of the sacrificial animal (such as the Passover lamb) left over for a meal the next morning. This would reflect the original Passover sacrifice the Israelites made in Egypt ([Exodus 12:8-9](#)).

Again, this verse shows how the two feasts were tied together. The Passover was celebrated *on the evening of the first day*, then the Feast of Unleavened bread was to begin the next morning (v. 8).

This Passover sacrifice could not be offered in just any location, however. The people were *not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the LORD your God is giving you*. The first Passover was celebrated in the home. But now that they would be living in towns and cities in the Promised Land, Moses told the people that they had to celebrate this most important celebration in the LORD's presence *at the place where the LORD your God chooses to establish His name* (v. 6), that is, the central sanctuary. God's command makes it clear to Israel that their conquest of the land is certain. At this point they are on the west side of the Jordan River and have not even entered the land.

The Suzerain God was the One who would choose a site where the Israelites could meet with Him, fellowship with Him, and worship Him together as a covenant nation. There, the vassals (Israel) would *sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that they came out of Egypt*. Doing so would be a constant reminder to them of how they ate the original Passover sacrifice in haste when the Suzerain (Ruler) God was about to redeem them from the hand of Pharaoh ([Exodus 12:8](#)). For many years God chose Shiloh for a central place of worship. It was later moved to Jerusalem after David's conquest of the city.

Not only were the Israelites to sacrifice the Passover animal at the central sanctuary, they also needed to *cook and eat it in the place which the LORD your God chooses*. Having spent the night in their tents at the place of the central sanctuary celebrating the Passover, the Israelites were then commanded *to return to their tents in the morning*. The reference to *tents* probably refers to the temporary housing provided to worshippers who came to the central sanctuary to celebrate Passover.

Once back at their tents, the people were to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Moses told them that for *six days you shall eat unleavened bread* (v. 8). Then, *on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the LORD your God; you shall do no work*. The seventh day, the end of the feast, was to be observed like a Sabbath day. On that day, the Israelites were prohibited from working in order to celebrate and reflect on their deliverance and redemption from slavery in Egypt. They were to gather to worship the Suzerain God to show their gratitude to Him for His mighty redemptive acts. And they were to celebrate and enjoy one another's company. They were brothers and neighbors. They were to love one another as they loved themselves. Getting together for an extended period to worship and fellowship together was a means to create national unity and community.

The Passover feast, like all the feasts, foreshadow events that Jesus accomplished or will accomplish in the future. Passover is a foreshadow of Christ's death; He was crucified on the very day and hour that the Jews would be sacrificing their Passover Lambs.

It was important for the Israelites to assemble at the central place God chose on the three pilgrimage feasts in part because God intended to visit Israel during these feasts in the future in the final central place God chose, which is Jerusalem. Roughly one thousand five hundred years after Moses, Jesus visited Jerusalem on Passover to lay His life down as an atonement for the world. He was the true and living Passover lamb.

Jesus told His disciples after He rose from the dead to remain in Jerusalem until they received power from on high. Fifty days after Jesus rose from the dead was the next pilgrimage feast called the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost (from the Greek word for fifty). It is then that the Holy Spirit visited Jerusalem to indwell those assembled. The Holy Spirit writes the Law on the hearts of all who believe, which is a major feature of the new covenant Jesus initiated. The Feast of Tabernacles (also called the Feast of Booths) is the last of the pilgrimage feasts. This feast might have its ultimate fulfillment in the future when Jesus Christ returns to earth a second time. Jesus will return to Jerusalem and set up His kingdom to dwell among men for one thousand years ([Zech 14:4](#); [Revelation 20:4-5](#)). And then, in the new earth, Jesus will dwell among His people, and be their living temple ([Revelation 21:1-3;22](#)).

Biblical Text

¹ Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night. ² You shall sacrifice the Passover to the Lord your God from the flock and the herd, in the place where the Lord chooses to establish His name. ³ You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt. ⁴ For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the evening of the first day shall remain overnight until morning. ⁵ You are not allowed to sacrifice the Passover in any of your towns which the Lord your God is giving you; ⁶ but at the place where the Lord your God chooses to establish His name, you shall sacrifice the Passover in the evening at sunset, at the time that you came out of Egypt. ⁷ You shall cook and

eat *it* in the place which the Lord your God chooses. In the morning you are to return to your tents. ⁸ Six days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly to the Lord your God; you shall do no work *on it*.