

Working Through the Unleavened Bread Issues—Part Four

The legitimacy of the spring holy day season as Christian doctrine cannot be overlooked or discarded. Certainly, the observances of Christ's memorial and the related days of the festival of unleavened bread are credibly within the practices and personal teachings of the apostles and Jesus.

When the time came for the Exodus from Egypt the blood of the Passover sacrifice was carefully placed on the lintels and doorposts of the houses.

Then following the Passover meal—hurriedly eaten with unleavened bread—the people of Israel anxiously waited until morning when they would begin their departure from Egypt, which suggests to us something about the days of unleavened bread.

For we find that the dough used to make bread for the Passover meal was unleavened, and the dough they took with them was also unleavened. So at no time did the Israelites make provision for eating leavened bread as the families assembled for their departure out of Egypt, which leads us to consider the historical circumstances surrounding Israel's exodus, and the eating of unleavened bread on the 14th of Nissan (Ex. 12:8, 34, 39).

Bring us to this question

Was the day of the Passover sacrifice and festival also a commanded observance for eating unleavened bread?

Now, the framework for the Spring festivals is established in Scripture, which designates the 14th of Nissan as the day for the Passover sacrifice, and this day is also to be memorialized, making it a day of observance (Lev. 23:5-6). “And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever” (Ex. 12:14).

Then in addition to the Passover observance, the Festival of Unleavened Bread is stated to be on the 15th of Nissan, and it is associated with two holy convocations and seven consecutive days of eating unleavened bread when leaven is also to be removed from the houses (Ex. 12:15-16).

This makes for an interesting pattern established in Scripture.

This same pattern is found in Numbers where we read: “And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the Lord. And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. In the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein:.. And on the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work” (Num. 28:16-18, 25).

Still another example is found in Deuteronomy, which states it this way: “Thou shalt therefore sacrifice the passover unto the Lord thy God, of the flock and the herd, in the place which the Lord shall choose to place his name there. Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou

eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life. And there shall be no leavened bread seen with thee in all thy coast seven days; neither shall there anything of the flesh, which thou sacrificedst the first day at even, remain all night until the morning” (Deut. 16:2-4).

Here the distinction is carried further by separating the Passover sacrifice on the “first day at even” from the following seven days of unleavened bread when leaven is not to be found in places of residence within the settlements. (Traditionally the Passover is understood to be the day that comes first in respect to the two distinctive festivals (Deut. 16:1).)

So the intention was to “eat no leavened bread” throughout the Passover festival as it is an extension and memorial of the Passover sacrifice, or simply, the seven consecutive days of eating unleavened bread are in addition to a day of eating unleavened bread that falls on the 14th of Nissan, when the Passover was sacrificed.

Let’s look at this pattern again in a different context, because it is fundamentally the way the season of unleavened bread and the Spring festivals are expressed in Scripture.

In Exodus we read that God instructed Moses to sanctify: “all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine” (Ex. 13:2).

This particular service has been referred to as the sanctification of the firstborn, and its establishment is based on the terrible event

that took place in Egypt—the death of the firstborn.

However, a commonly accepted conclusion places the sanctification of the firstborn on the Festival of Unleavened Bread. This conclusion is generally drawn from commentaries that place the Passover on the 15th of Nissan, and from the assumption this sanctification occurred about the time the people of Israel departed Succoth. (Dating the sanctification of the firstborn according to the journeys creates unsupported conclusions because the Israelites probably left Succoth on the 16th of Nissan or later.)

Therefore, we should take a closer look at this issue.

Now, Moses explained to the people of Israel that the sanctification of the firstborn was to be observed as an ordinance from year to year, and it was to be kept as a memorial for continuing generations. The significance of this memorial is found in what God was willing to do in order for the people of Israel to be freed from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 4:22-23; 13:9-10).

In this way future generations could explain how this was “done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt” (Ex. 13:8). [Author’s emphasis throughout.]

What we need to examine then is the ordinance carried out by Moses who commanded the people to “keep this service in this month [Abib/Nissan]” (Ex. 13:5).

So, what service or function did Moses and the people perform that sanctified the firstborn as God commanded, which became an ordinance from year to year?

As it was God who actually sanctified the firstborn, it was Moses and the people who carried out the service of sanctification, and “Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said unto them, Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the bason, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the bason; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning. For 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. And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons forever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the Lord will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service” (Ex. 12:21-25).

This is the service that sanctified (separated) the firstborn of the people of Israel. It was the sacrificing of the lamb and the striking of the blood on the lintels and the doorposts. Therefore by faith, Moses, with the people of Israel, kept this Passover “and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them” (Heb. 11:28).

This act of sanctification was necessary to save the lives of the firstborn while they were in Egypt, but it didn’t mean God intended to slay the firstborn year by year. It is the ordinance of sacrificing the lamb and striking the blood to the lintels and doorposts that would continue to rehearse the sanctification of the firstborn year by year as a memorial (Ex. 13:10). (This was eventually superseded

by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for those who accept the blood of Christ.)

In this context, the people were instructed to tell future generations that when “it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem” (Ex. 13:15).

This slaying of the firstborn of Egypt was in the half of the night following the time referred to as “between the two evenings” when the Passover sacrifice took place on the 14th of Nissan. It was the same day God sanctified the firstborn of the Israelites by the blood that was placed upon the lintels and doorposts. Therefore, God said, “all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed [sanctified] unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the Lord” (Num. 3:13). In a manner of speaking God then had an invested interest in the lives of the firstborn in perpetuity, and they in turn were indebted to God (Lk. 2:22-24).

It is inarguably then the 14th of Nissan when God sanctified the firstborn through the service of Moses because it is the same day the firstborn of Egypt died, and it is also the same day Pharaoh commanded the Israelites to leave Egypt. It was also the day beginning the Exodus and the appointed time—following the Passover sacrifice and the death of the firstborn—when the people of Israel began to come “out of Egypt” (Ex. 13:4; Deut. 16:6; Ps. 136:10). (Pharaoh’s decree

marked the beginning of the emancipation of Israel from Egyptian bondage.)

What then does this have to do with the days of eating unleavened bread?

In regard to this day of sanctification of the firstborn, Moses told the people to: “Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place...” (Ex. 13:3).

Thus, if we view the sanctification of the firstborn in respect to the pattern established in Leviticus and Exodus, then we see that this is a day to be remembered in which “this service in this month” was performed (Ex. 13:4). And of this day and service (work/labor) Moses told the people to sacrifice the Passover and place the blood of this sacrifice on the lintels and the doorposts (Ex. 12:26-28). (We could say Moses was addressing the day about which he was speaking and not the day in which he was speaking, because the instruction regarding the sacrifice came before the Passover.)

Importantly then Moses was not speaking of the day the people came out “by their armies” —on the 15th of Nissan—when the families of Israel began their concerted journey out of Egypt during the seven consecutive days of unleavened bread beginning on the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 13:6-7; a distinct ordinance). Because the people of Israel departed “from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians” (Num. 33:3).

Consequently, as this sanctification is an ordinance related to the firstborn it is not

stated to occur during the Festival of Unleavened Bread or on a designated Sabbath. It is associated with the day God slew the firstborn of Egypt and the beginning of the Exodus, and it is part of the memorial of the Passover festival in which the people placed the blood on the lintels and doorposts before the firstborn were slain in Egypt.

Therefore, on the day Moses and the people sanctified the firstborn by the sprinkling of the blood “there shall no leavened bread be eaten” (Ex. 13:3).

The implication is that an observance of eating unleavened bread began at sunset on the 14th of Nissan, because “thou shalt not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leavened bread” (Ex. 23:18). (See also Ex. 34:25.)

Traditionally this is understood to mean that leaven could not be in the houses while they were being marked by the blood of the sacrifice, but given that leaven is not to be found in the houses during the seven distinct days of unleavened bread, this is understood by the statement of Moses to mean that an uninterrupted observance of eating unleavened bread began at the time of the Passover sacrifice.

This view is supported by Moses’ instruction for those who were required to wait until the following month to observe the Passover. For God had told Moses to “speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If any man of you or of your posterity shall be unclean by reason of a dead body, or be in a journey afar off, yet he shall keep [do or observe] the passover unto the Lord. The fourteenth day of the second month at even [between the two evenings] they shall keep it, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs” (Num. 9:10-11).

Here we find the people were to “keep” the Passover, and “eat it” with unleavened bread, with the intention of observing the ordinance of eating unleavened bread beginning at sunset between the two evenings, before the death of the firstborn. It is expressed in the same manner as one is to do the Feast of Weeks and do the Feast of Tabernacles, which are observed for the duration of the day and days respectively (Ex. 34:22; Deut. 16:13.). (The Feast of Tabernacles is a seven day observance, apart from what is sometimes called the Last Great Day, with the inference being that there are eight days of tabernacling respective to the season.)

From this perspective we have no contradiction with the historical accounts written by Mark and Luke who stated that the Passover sacrifice occurred on a (first) day of unleavened bread, because the sanctification—by the sprinkling of blood—took place on the Passover. This also receives support in the typology of [Jesus’ life](#): “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14). (See also, Eph. 1:7.)

The Apostle Paul also noted that Jesus is our Passover because of his willing sacrifice for us and thereby we are sanctified by his blood: “For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14).

Now we should also look at this from the perspective of the calendar because in Exodus we read that: “In the first month, 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” (Ex. 12:18).

Some may conclude by this verse that we should reckon the days from the 14th of Nissan to the 21st of Nissan—evening to evening—by how we reckon the Sabbath day, and the reckoning of the Day of Atonement. This conclusion finds some support from tradition because Hebrew is an ancient language, which naturally means the understanding of some statements found in Scripture have become subject to various interpretations within Rabbinic traditions.

However, what we need to consider is that Scripture doesn’t tell us that there are only seven days of eating unleavened bread, and it does not tell us to count successive calendar dates from ending evening to ending evening in the way we reckon the length of a day. Similarly, we don’t find in Scripture that there are only seven days of tabernacling to be accounted for with the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:33-36; Num. 29:35).

What we have in the recorded account of Exodus are eight successive days (measured evening and morning) that are reckoned to eight successive calendrical days (dates). Thus, it is the dates and the respective days that form the eight successive evenings on the calendar, and so we have a date to date reckoning, not an evening to evening reckoning, when we count the days of eating unleavened bread from the 14th to the 21st in respect to the calendar—giving us eight complete days (nights included).


We can take an example of counting days in this manner from the time of David.

There was a time when David was in conflict with King Saul and he spoke to his friend Jonathan about missing the time of the new moon celebration when Saul expected David to be there for the occasion. David was going

into hiding for three days, and he said to Jonathan, “Behold, tomorrow is the new moon... but let me go that I may hide myself in the field unto [‘*ad*,’ meaning “until”] the third day at even [‘*erev*’]” (I Sam. 20:5, see also verses 19 and 35).

Now we understand from this example that David is counting three days and he is including the day in which he spoke to Jonathan until the ending evening of the third day. So even though he counted up to the third day at even, he did not exclude the first day at even from the count. So we have three successive days and evenings completed before Jonathan saw David.

So in respect to Exodus 12:18 we are simply counting from the first date on the calendar to the last date on the calendar—making for eight complete days of eating unleavened bread, which does not contradict the reckoning of the days of eating unleavened bread as stated by Mark and Luke (Ex. 12:20).

We may conclude then from the historical perspective that God sanctified the firstborn through Moses on the day of the Passover, which was the 14th of Nissan, and that festival was to be observed as a memorial—in part—by observing the eating of unleavened bread beginning with the sacrifice at sunset on the 14th of Nissan.  **(End of four-part series.)**

The influence of Rabbinic tradition allowed for the assumption that when one ate bread during these days it ought to be unleavened, with no emphasis on the requirement to eat unleavened bread, but to neglect the eating of unleavened bread under such a pretense would fail to memorialize this season as the days of unleavened bread.