

Working Through the Unleavened Bread Issues—Part One

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.

The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread have their beginnings in an historical event that took place in the land of Egypt more than 3000 years ago, and these festivals historically mark a terrible tragedy for the ancient Egyptians.

However, these same festivals marked a time of liberation for the people of Israel, which began with the Passover observance in Egypt when a young lamb was chosen from the flocks on the 10th day of the first month according to the Hebrew calendar. This first month was called the month of the Abib (barley/Spring), and it was affirmed by God to be the “beginning of months” for the people of Israel. It was also to be the “first month of the year,” and the designated month when the Israelites were to observe the Passover and begin their exodus from Egypt.

Now, the Passover lamb was kept until—as far as or up to—the evening beginning the 14th of Abib (hereafter, Nissan, sometimes "Nisan," from post-captivity period), and it was slain by the families—between the two evenings—and later the remains of the Passover had to be burned in the morning as they began their departure from Egypt.

And this raises a question.

When did the Israelites kill the Passover lamb?

Customarily a day that is reckoned by the Hebrew calendar begins at evening (dusk/sunset), and continues until the beginning of the next day at evening (dusk/sunset). Therefore the day, as a unit of time, is said to be fully come when dusk has given way to what is sometimes called nightfall, and this period of time between sunset and nightfall is understood in the expression “between the two evenings [‘*beyn ha’arbayim*’],” which is used to describe the period of time when the lamb was slain for the Passover (Ex. 12:6).

Therefore the Passover memorial began at the onset of evening or at sunset on the 14th of Nissan, and this is the period of time when the [lambs were slain](#), and their blood was placed above and on the sides of the doorways. Following this event came the Passover meal, which preceded the death of the firstborn at the “half of the night,” which caused the Egyptians to press the Israelites into leaving the land of Egypt, bringing us to the beginning of the Exodus.

Now, according to some Christian traditions the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt began in the evening on the day following the Passover, and according to the Hebrew calendar this would have been on the 15th day of the month Nissan (Abib). And in some traditions this evening is celebrated as the “night to be much observed,” in remembrance of the night the Israelites came out of Egypt (Ex. 12:42).

However, the Israelites did not begin to come out of Egypt on the 15th of Nissan.

How do we know this?

In what appears to be the final meeting between Pharaoh and Moses, [Pharaoh threatens to kill Moses if he should ever see him again](#). Then Moses related to Pharaoh that “all these thy servants shall come down unto me, and bow down themselves unto me, saying, Get thee out, and all the people that follow thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from pharaoh in a great anger” (Ex. 11:8). And what Moses said in anger to Pharaoh reflected what God had told Moses earlier that after the last plague Pharaoh will, “let you go hence... he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether” (Ex. 11:1). [Author’s emphasis throughout.]

And it happened just as God had said.

After the death of the firstborn, Moses and Aaron were hastily summoned before Pharaoh on the night of the Passover observance—the 14th of Nissan. And Pharaoh said to them, “Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as ye have said” (Ex. 12:31; 13:17).

Consequently, the “passing over” and the death of the firstborn initiated the decree, and the decree of Pharaoh marked the beginning of the Exodus. And so in Deuteronomy 16:6 we read that: “thou dost sacrifice the passover in the evening [Heb. ‘*erev*’], at the going down of the sun, at the season [appointed or fixed time] that thou camest forth out of Egypt.”

Notably, then, as part of that initial Passover observance, the instruction was to eat the

Passover sacrifice with unleavened bread, which they dutifully kept from becoming leavened until the morning and throughout the day into the beginning evening of the “night to be much observed” (Ex. 12:34, 39). And the symbolism of this unleavened bread appropriately reflected the meaning of the events that took place on the 14th of Nissan as the people gathered toward Ramesses to begin their concerted journeys out of Egypt.

Now after the people of Israel departed from the area of Ramesses “by their armies”—family and tribal groupings—beginning on the 15th calendar date of Nissan, they journeyed toward Succoth, which is thought to have been in the eastern delta region of Egypt. And of this day it says that “it came to pass the selfsame day, that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies” (Ex. 12:51). (The exact location of Ramesses and Succoth is considered uncertain.)

However, it would take the Israelites a few more days and journeys until they reached the Red Sea and crossed to the other side at the edge of the Sinai wilderness. In the meantime, they were led by a cloud during the day, and a pillar of fire by night, and they traveled along both day and night until they reached the Red Sea (Ex. 13:21; Num. 33:1-2). (See also, Deut. 16:1).

So, let’s review something.

The Exodus from Egypt coincided with the days of eating unleavened bread, but the Exodus certainly began on the 14th day of Nissan—following the time of the Passover sacrifice and the death of the firstborn in Egypt.

This implies that the days of eating unleavened bread began on the 14th of Nissan.

Here's why.

The days of unleavened bread are considered by some to fall from the 15th day of the month to the 21st day of the month Nissan—accounting for seven days of unleavened bread as it relates to the Festival of Unleavened Bread. Yet others conclude that the first day of unleavened bread begins on the calendar date of the 14th of Nissan—on the same calendar date as the Passover observance—and from this date they begin to count seven days of unleavened bread.

So, how would they come to the conclusion that the days of eating unleavened bread began on the 14th of Nissan?

In Leviticus 23:6 we note that unleavened bread as a festival is sometimes transliterated as *'hag ha-matzot,'* which can be understood to mean the [Festival] of Unleavened Bread. Although we do find in the *Jewish Study Bible* that *'hag'* also means “pilgrimage,” a practice highlighted in the life of Jesus and his disciples. (The word *'hag'* has the same meaning as the Arabic word *'Haj,'* which is the name of the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, and the word *'matzot'* (plural) is where we get the name for the commonly used cracker-like bread called Matzos.)

Moreover, the Festival of Unleavened Bread is stated specifically to be a one-day festival, which imparts its solemnity to the observance of the days of unleavened bread, and the Passover, and the first of three seasonal times when the people were to appear before God in sacred assemblies (Deut. 16:16). Because according to Leviticus 23:6 the Festival or Pilgrimage of Unleavened Bread falls

specifically on the 15th of Nissan: “And in the fifteenth day of the month is the feast” (Num. 28:17).

Consequently this festival falls on the self-same day God brought the tribal groupings of Israel “out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 12:17).

So it is the "days" of unleavened bread that set the parameters for the fixed time and season that commemorates the Israelite exodus from Egypt, and not the Sabbaths of this season, because the holy convocations are directly associated with, and reckoned by, the days of unleavened bread (first day/seventh day) that are associated with the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

In other words, the Festival of Unleavened Bread falls on the 15th day of the month, but it doesn't say it falls on the first day of eating unleavened bread, and Leviticus 23 only gives us the foundational components of the unleavened bread season, and not the means to reckon them to the Hebrew calendar. Simply, the holy convocations are said to be on the first day and the seventh day respectively, but it doesn't tell us clearly when the first day of unleavened bread falls according to the calendar in regard to the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Typically, people assume that the days of unleavened bread are associated directly with the 15th of Nissan, assuming also that the days of unleavened bread must begin with the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

However, if we look closely at Scripture we see that seven days of unleavened bread are also associated with the Passover sacrifice, without any mention of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, with the example being: “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. (Deut. 16:2-3). (This is not using “Passover” in the sense of the entire unleavened bread season.)

The way this reads then indicates that there are seven days of eating unleavened bread beginning with the Passover, and so this would seem to lend support to those who claim the days of unleavened bread begin on the 14th day of the month, instead of the 15th day of the month Nissan. Another verse cited for this conclusion states that: “Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel” (Ex. 12:15).

The pivotal phrase in this verse is the “first day,” which is considered by some people to be the same day as the Passover sacrifice, by reason of the immediate context of the Passover memorial, and this same conclusion is understood from the Passover sacrifice that occurred on the “first day at even,” in the context of seven days of unleavened bread (Deut. 16:4).

This gives us something to think about regarding the number of days the people were to eat unleavened bread.

So, how many days were the people of Israel to eat unleavened bread in this season of the year?

As the days of unleavened bread are not dated by the Sabbaths or the Passover festival, and there is conflicting conclusions regarding the starting date for the days of eating unleavened bread, we must therefore find a way to reckon them to the calendar dates. Therefore to answer the question we must examine the one place in Scripture that gives us specific calendar dates in which to account for the days of eating unleavened bread, and also relatively the holy convocations, the Passover sacrifice, and the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

This place is found in Exodus 12:18.

And so we read that: “In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, in the evening [Hebrew, ‘*erev*,’ meaning, “sunset”] ye do eat unleavened things until the one and twentieth day of the month, at evening” (Ex. 12:18, YLT).


Here we have eight calendar dates in which to account for the days of eating unleavened bread, and also a sacrifice/festival, a festival, and two holy convocations.

This then requires some interpretation—like it or not—to determine how the days of eating unleavened bread fit into the scheme of eight calendar dates.

And here is why.

If we count the seven days of unleavened bread on the calendar from sunset to sunset, because Exodus 12:18 does say “at even,” which is sunset, then we could conclude that the days of unleavened bread fall on the 14th day of the month until the 20th day of the month, which would exclude the 21st day of the month Nissan (assuming seven days of eating unleavened bread). But then if we

count the days beginning with the first evening, counting evening to evening, then the days begin with the 15th day of the month Nissan and end on the 21st day of the month Nissan.

But which method of counting the days of eating unleavened bread is correct? 
(Continued in part-two of this series.)