

# *Theology* on *the Web.org.uk*

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes.  
Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit  
or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the  
copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the  
ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the  
links below:



*Buy me a coffee*

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



**PATREON**

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_expositor-series-1.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php)

*THE PASSOVER AND THE DAYS OF THE  
UNLEAVENED BREAD.*

THE many questions that are connected with this feast were frequently discussed but are not yet settled. There is something puzzling in nearly every religious feast, and the numerous different opinions about the original meaning of the Passover and the days of the unleavened bread prove that this feast is not to be excepted from the general rule. Most feasts of the so-called universal religions are transplanted from heathendom into the sphere of these religions. The student of the history of religion discovers many survivals of primitive religion in the feasts, for instance, of Christendom, but he is not always able to discern the original meaning of these survivals. The student of the religion of Israel very often is in the same condition. He clearly sees that there is something behind the feast he finds in the list of feasts that were to be celebrated every year by the worshippers of Jahve, but he not always finds out what it really is.

The various theories about the feast of the Passover and the unleavened bread bear testimony to the fact that the explanation of this feast still belongs to the realm of conjecture. Many scholars assume that the Passover and the days of the unleavened bread were two separate feasts (Benzinger), others maintain that they were two parts of one feast (Robertson Smith). The sacrifice of the Passover was explained as the offering of the firstlings of the herd (Robertson Smith, Wellhausen and others); as a propitiatory sacrifice that was offered as a substitution for the human male firstborn (Kuenen); as the sacrifice offered on the night of the passage of the sun through the equinoctial point (Vatke); as the lamb slaughtered at the ritual dances of the Hebrew spring-festival (Toy); as a sacrifice

in times of pestilence in order to protect the house (Marti) ; as the means by which the Israelites protected themselves from the destroying influence of the planet Mars (Benzinger), or from the evil spirits (Oort) ; as a sacrifice to the memory of the Exodus (Green and others). I know that this list is not exhaustive, but it is certainly sufficient proof that the original meaning of this feast is still an open question.

We do not meet with so many different theories if we study the literature about the days of the unleavened bread, but also here scholars disagree.

Wellhausen assumed that the unleavened bread was an offering of the corn of the new harvest. When the first sheaves were being reaped people did not take time to wait for the leavening of the dough. Therefore they baked unleavened bread. This presumably is the opinion that is prevalent among scholars. Another theory is defended by Holzinger. He supposes the unleavened bread to be the usual food of the Bedouins. In the desert the nomadic tribes were used to eat this bread, afterwards they kept up the custom of eating it at religious ceremonies.

In the following pages I will try to show that Passover and the days of the unleavened bread originally are two independent feasts ;

That Passover is the sacrifice by which the house is protected against the evil influences of the full moon in March ;

That the days of the unleavened bread are to be explained by the primitive animistic conception of the growth of corn.

## I.

The oldest list of Israelitic feasts is Exodus xxiii. 14 sqq. In the EXPOSITOR of July, August and September, 1909, I argued that this list belongs to the Mosaic period. In this list the feast of the unleavened bread is mentioned, but Passover is not found among the yearly festivals (xxiii.

15). "The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep, seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread."

Exodus xiii. contains a legislation about the days of the unleavened bread (*vv. 3-10*) and the offering of the firstborn (*vv. 11-16*). There is no mention of passover, in this chapter.

This cannot be explained if we would assume with Robertson Smith and Holzinger that Passover and the days of the unleavened bread were parts of one festival, for the command, "Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread," by no means implies the sacrifice of the Passover. If the legislation about the offering of the firstborn (that is mentioned in Exodus xiii. in connexion with the days of the unleavened bread) had anything to do with the Passover, there certainly would be an allusion to this feast.

Exodus xiii. is a piece of pre-exilic legislation that is older than Deuteronomy, and probably is to be assigned to the ninth or beginning of the eighth century (cf. *Alttestamentliche Studien*, iii.).

In another list of pre-exilic origin (*Lev. xxiii. 5-6*) Pesach and the days of the unleavened bread both are mentioned. There is no other connexion between them than that of time. Passover is celebrated on the 14th of Nisan, the feast of the unleavened bread on the 15th. They are mentioned as two separate festivals. In exactly the same way the feasts are mentioned in *Numbers xxviii. 16-19*, the list of offerings for the various holy days of the kalendar.

The post-exilic copy of Exodus xxiii. 14 sqq., Exodus xxxiv. 18 sqq., mentions Passover. Nevertheless it does not combine Passover with the days of the unleavened bread, but only alludes to the existence of this feast in another part of the text (*v. 25*).

Exodus xii. 1-14 (according to our opinion also a piece of pre-exilic origin and not of P) deals with Passover.

There is no allusion in these verses to the days of the unleavened bread. The command to eat the lamb with unleavened bread does not contain any reference to the religious duty of eating this bread for seven days. The verses xii. 15–20 prescribe the celebration of the days of the unleavened bread. They are inconsistent with the situation of the Exodus and evidently are a younger addition to the text.

So it can hardly be doubtful that the various legislations of the pre-exilic period agree in separating Passover and the days of the unleavened bread.

In Deuteronomy, however, we find the two feasts conflated into one. “Observe the month Abib, and keep the Passover . . . Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread therewith” (xvi. 1–3). Even here we see that Deuteronomy combines the two feasts in an artificial way. The days of the unleavened bread lasted seven days. The feast of the Passover was a feast of one night. Now xvi. 5–6 commands to sacrifice the passover at Jerusalem and to return home in the morning after the offering of the Passover, that is on the morning of the first day of the unleavened bread. Now it is very improbable that it was usual to travel on this day, for Leviticus xxiii. 7 calls the first day a day of holy convocation. Deuteronomy tries to conflate the two feasts, for it centralizes all religious feasts in Jerusalem. It could not possibly oblige the Israelites to stay for seven days in Jerusalem, as the barley harvest was waiting to be reaped. So even in the harmonising conflation of Deuteronomy the independent character of the two feasts comes to light.

In the post-exilic period the feasts practically were celebrated as one feast, for which the names Passover and days of the unleavened bread were alternately used

(2 Chron. xxx. 5). Hezekiah sent letters to the various tribes, that they should come to keep the Passover . . . (v. 13), and there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of the unleavened bread. Flavius Josephus mentions (*Antiq.*, lib. ix. 13, 3 and lib. x. 4, 5) the feast of the unleavened bread, that is called Passover. Matthew xxvi. 17 also identifies the two feasts. "On the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the passover ?" From this it is evident that the attempt of the Deuteronomic legislation to combine the two feasts into one has been successful. The fact that the Passover was to be eaten with unleavened bread was in favour of the conflation of the two feasts.

Yet it is certain that the feasts originally were independent of one another, for not only do the old Israelitic laws bear testimony to this, but also the fact that the feasts were not celebrated by the same people. Not everybody in Israel was allowed to eat the Passover. The celebration of this feast was confined to the Israelites and those strangers that were circumcised. "No uncircumcised person shall eat thereof" (Exod. xii. 43-50). The eating of unleavened bread, however, was compulsory for all people within the boundary of Canaan (Exod. xii. 19). "Whosoever eateth that which is leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a sojourner or one that is born in the land." "There shall be no leaven seen with thee, in all thy borders" (Exod. xiii. 7; Deut. xvi. 4). This difference cannot be explained if we would agree with those who hold the theory that Passover and the days of the unleavened bread are one feast. In our present investigation into the origin of these feasts, therefore, we shall discuss each of them separately.

## II.

Passover is celebrated on the 14th of Nisan. The lamb is slaughtered at the end of the 14th at sunset and it is eaten in the night of the 15th, the new day beginning after the setting of the sun. It is generally accepted that in the pre-exilic period no fixed date was prescribed. It is supposed to be one of the proofs for the later origin of the legislation dealing with the Passover that a date for this feast is prescribed. No date is mentioned in Deuteronomy (chap. xvi.), but Leviticus xxiii. 5, Exodus xii. 1 sqq., Numbers xxviii. 16 seq. command to keep the feast on the 14th of Nisan.

Obviously the origin of Passover cannot be discussed without entering into the question whether the fixed date is an innovation or not. The theory that Passover is the feast of the offering of the firstlings of the herd, for instance, admits no fixed date, so we are obliged to enter into some detail of the critical analysis.

Exodus xii. 1–14 is supposed to be of post-exilic origin and is assigned to P. If we compare these verses to the post-exilic rites of Passover, as known from Ezra vi. and 2 Chronicles xxx. and xxxv., we discover that these are different from the rites mentioned in Exodus xii. Consequently it is very improbable that Exodus xii. 1–14 is to be assigned to the post-exilic period. The Passover is slaughtered by the head of the family in Exodus xii. 4–6, but in 2 Chronicles xxxv. 10 sqq., Ezra vi. 20 it is killed by the Levites. Exodus xii. supposes that it is sacrificed at the door of the house (*v.* 7, cf. *v.* 22, where it is killed on the threshold, נֶתֶן); in the post-exilic period it is sacrificed in the temple. In Exodus xii. the lamb is roasted; *v.* 9 forbids to seethe it; 2 Chronicles xxxv. it is “sodden in the fire.” This expression seems to harmonise with the command of Deuteronomy to seethe the sacrifice (Deut. xvi. 7) and the command of

Exodus xii. 8 to roast it. If Exodus xii. is post-exilic, we expect that 2 Chronicles xxxv. would have used the expression of this chapter. The meat of the ordinary sacrifices was sodden, consequently Deuteronomy used this term for the way of preparing the Passover, for it wanted to reform the Passover into a regular sacrifice as was done in the Jerusalem temple. We only understand the harmonising term of 2 Chronicles if we assume that this part of the reformation of Deuteronomy was a failure. In the post-exilic period the lamb was still roasted, but in deference to Deuteronomy this was not called "to roast" (Exod. xii. 8), but "to seethe in the fire." The only reference to the post-exilic period in Exodus xii. 1-14 is verse 2, which mentions the post-exilic calendar. But this verse separates verse 3 from verse 1 and is admittedly a later addition to the text (cf., for instance, Bäntschi, *Exodus*, p. 89).

If we are compelled to assume that Exodus xii. is of pre-exilic origin, it must be assigned to the pre-Deuteronomic period. If it had been written in the exile, it would have alluded to the temple or the Ohel Moed as the proper place for killing the Passover. Now we can only admit that the chapter is not aware of the Deuteronomic reformation of the feast. This implies that a pre-Deuteronomic legislation prescribed a fixed date for the keeping of the Passover.

For this reason it is not probable that those theories about the origin of the feast are right, that suppose that it was not kept regularly every year nor at the same date of the year. According to Kuenen (*Godsrd. v. Isr.*, i. p. 501) every father brought a sacrifice to Jahve on the eighth day after the birth of his firstborn son. We do not see how this sacrifice could become a yearly festival; for even if the Israelite had several wives, he could only bring such sacrifices a few times in his life, and it is perfectly unin-

telligible how this feast was celebrated every year at the same date, without any connexion with the real birthday of the persons to be redeemed by the sacrifice.

Wellhausen's presumption that Passover is the festival of the firstlings of the herd cannot be admitted. There is not the least reference in the legislation about the firstlings to Passover, nor in the legislation about Passover to the firstlings. Moreover, the Passover is not offered to Jahve, but it is eaten by the Hebrew family, and not a bit of it is to be left or to be sent out of the house (*Exod. xii. 43 sqq.*). The firstborn son, however, is to be redeemed with a lamb that is to be given unto Jahve, and the firstborn animals are also to be given unto Jahve (*Exod. xxii. 28 seq.; xiii. 11 seq.; xxxiv. 19 seq.; Num. xviii. 14*). This does not mean that the blood is sprinkled on the sideposts of the door, nor that the whole of the lamb is eaten by the Israelites, and that nothing of the whole animal is offered to Jahve.

The fixed date is not in agreement with Professor Marti's theory, that among the ancient nomad Hebrews the practice existed of sprinkling the door-posts with the blood of a sheep for protection against pestilence. Here it remains unexplained how this practice became fixed. Marti was perfectly right in observing that the blood of the Passover is to protect the house against some evil, but if this practice is a regular one, the danger must also be a regular one. We do not see how the Israelites could protect themselves against pestilence, or some other evil of that kind, by eating the Passover always at the same date, when there was not the least danger of pestilence or any other sickness.

Pesach, passover, means "to pass," "to spare." It cannot be proved that the verb means to dance. Pisseeah means "to have a limp," and there is no evidence that a certain ritual "limping" was practised at the Passover. The theory of Professor Toy is therefore not very probable (cf.

p. 448). The mysterious character of the sacrifice remains also unexplained.

The Israelitic tradition has connected this with the Exodus. Jahve will pass over the houses of the Israelites (Exod. xii. 13, 23). Obviously this is a later interpretation of the feast by the worshippers of Jahve. The oldest tradition we find in Exodus xii. does not mention the Passover. Exodus xii. 29–34 describes the Exodus and is inconsistent with the celebration of the Passover. In Exodus xii. 22 none is permitted to leave the house before day-break; verse 31, Moses and Aaron are called by Pharaoh in the night and the Israelites leave at once during the night. They have not yet eaten unleavened bread, as was commanded in verse 8. The unleavened bread they ate afterwards was explained by the fact that they were in great haste and had to take their dough before it was leavened. Verse 29 continues Exodus xi. 4–8. There can be no doubt that the original form of Exodus xii. was written before the Passover was interpreted as a commemoration of the Exodus. We therefore easily understand that the oldest legislation in Exodus xxiii. does not mention the Passover. It cannot be explained why this feast is not classed among the annual festivals if it originally was a commemoration of the Exodus.

Exodus xii. 42 calls the Passover a ליל שְׁמָרִים, that is, a night of waking (not a night much to be observed, as the Revised Version translates). This implies that the night of Passover was regarded to be dangerous. It was not safe to sleep. Even now the Passover is celebrated by the Jews by telling stories and singing songs until very late hours. If anybody falls asleep, he is to be awakened (Schröder, *Religiöse Gebräuche des Judentums*, p. 189 sqq.).

It has been rightly suggested by Benzinger that the rites of the Passover must be connected in some way with

the date of the festival. The critical analysis of the school of Wellhausen has obscured this fact by assigning the pre-exilic legislation on the Passover to the priestly author.

The suggestion of Vatke, that Passover originally was the night of the passage of the sun through the equinoctial point, points in the same direction. We do not understand, however, why the 14th of Nisan was fixed for this passing, which took place on various dates of the old Hebrew year. The fact that the sacrifice is killed at sunset and eaten during the night seems not to be in favour of the theory that the festival has anything to do with the sun.

The 14th of Nisan is the date of the full moon in the days of the spring equinox. Benzinger suggests (*Archæology*, ii. p. 393) that it was believed that Mars would kill the cattle on this night. Neither in the Old Testament nor in the Assyrian religion is there any proof for the soundness of this theory, for no allusion is made to Mars or any other star in any chapter dealing with the Passover. All we know is (1) that this night was regarded as very dangerous, not for cattle but for men. Therefore the house was protected by the sprinkling of the blood on the door-post. Nobody was allowed to leave the house during the whole night (Exod. xii. 22), no part of the Passover was to be brought out of the house. The lamb was slain at sunset. From this it is evident that the dangerous time began with the setting of the sun and ended at daybreak. (2) That this danger is connected with the full moon. The full moon of Pesach is alluded to in Psalm lxxxi. 4 ("Blow the trumpet at the full moon, on our solemn feast day"; cf. v. 4 seq., which refer to the Exodus).

Superstitious opinions about the influence of the moon have always been very common in Israel. Even at the present day the Jews have to salute the new moon by addressing it as soon as they see it. We do not know

for what reason the night of the full moon of March was considered to be exceedingly dangerous. Perhaps this reason was already forgotten in the pre-exilic period as the worshippers of Jahve interpreted this "night of waking" as a commemoration of the Exodus.

### III.

The common interpretation of the days of the unleavened bread has connected this feast with the harvest. The theory of Holzinger, that the unleavened bread is to be regarded as a survival of the former nomad life, has not many supporters. Most scholars feel convinced that Passover and the days of the unleavened bread are two separate feasts. For this reason Holzinger's theory is impossible. It is, moreover, not at all probable that the usual food of the Bedouins once consisted of unleavened bread (ash cakes). The burghul that is prepared with leavened meal at the present time is very common among the Bedouins. Furthermore, the nomad life cannot help in the solution of the puzzle of the Passover, for the good reason that the Israelites never were pure Bedouins.

Therefore it seems justifiable to connect the days of the unleavened bread with the agricultural life and the reaping of the barley in the spring. Here, however, we meet some difficulties which are not explained by the present interpretation of the feast and are generally overlooked.

During the days of the unleavened bread "no leaven shall be seen with thee in all thy borders" (Exod. xiii. 6, 7; Deut. xvi. 4; Exod. xii. 15-18). This is not the same command as "thou shalt not eat leavened bread." On the first day of the feast "ye shall put away leaven out of your houses." What is the meaning of this? A most thorough search is made by ritual Jews of later days for every small piece of bread they might find in the corners

of the cupboards or rooms, and this had evidently been done as early as the time of Exodus xiii. 6, 7. This question is not answered by the common interpretation.

It is generally accepted that unleavened bread was the favourite food during the harvest. People did not take time to wait for the slow process of leavening the dough. But if this is true, how can we explain the astonishing fact that the unleavened bread was not baked from new harvest, but from the meal of the harvest of the last year? We know from the Mischna that this was done not as an exception, but as a rule (*Pesachim*, ii. 5). So it is impossible to agree with the interpretation of the unleavened bread as given by Wellhausen and others.

Obviously it was necessary to bake the unleavened bread from meal of the former harvest. It was not permissible to eat anything of the new harvest before the sheaf was offered to Jahve (*Lev. xxiii. 14*). This was not done before the 16th of Nisan, so it would have been impossible to eat bread on the 15th, if this bread was to be prepared from barley of the new harvest, as is suggested by Wellhausen (*Prolegomena*, iii. p. 88).

On the other hand, it is beyond doubt that the days of the unleavened bread are a harvest festival. Deuteronomy xvi. 9 says that on the first of these days the sickle was put into the standing corn.

We at once see the meaning of these days if we bear in mind the conception of primitive mankind about the growth of the crops. Everywhere we find the belief that all living things have "a soul," a "living power," within them. If this power leaves men, animals or plants, they die. Every plant contains a living soul, and cutting of the plant, that is killing the plant, is an attack on this soul. Now the harvest of the year to come depends upon the corn that is reaped this year. If it is not sown, there

will be no harvest; and if it is sown and it does not grow, there will be no harvest or a very poor one. Consequently we find everywhere in the world the survival of old harvest customs, which aim at protecting the soul of the corn of the harvest of this year for the seed of the year to come.

According to A. Musil, *Arabia Petraea*, iii. p. 301, the present Moabite fellah buries the last sheaf of his harvest in the field.

We know from Assyrian and Egyptian texts that the old Semites had the same conception of the growth of the corn, etc., as primitive mankind holds in our days. In the cuneiform inscriptions the corn, palms, etc., are determined as "god," that is, they are written with the determinative sign "god." On several occasions we find small altars standing in the threshingfloor of the Egyptians (A. Erman, *Aegypten*, p. 575). We may assume that also the old Hebrews must have had the same ideas about the growth of plants. It is beyond doubt that sacred trees were of much importance among them (Gen. xxi. 33, etc.), so it is highly probable that they may have also practised harvest customs of the same kind as are met with all over the world. Some customs of the population of the Dutch Indies seem to be very helpful for the understanding of this old Hebrew harvest festival.

The great thing during the harvest is to prevent the soul of the corn from flying away. Therefore the present Moabite fellah does not measure his harvest without the utmost care. He covers his mouth with a bandage, nobody is allowed to speak, otherwise the "blessing" might fly away. Whistling, too, is forbidden. Every time that some sacks are transported to the barn, some greens are placed on the ground of the field, that the blessing may not be frightened (Musil, l.c., p. 305).

During the harvest of the rice in the Dutch Indies it

is not allowed to cook rice on or near the fields, where the harvest is reaped (A. C. Kruyt, "De Rijstmoeder in den Indischen Archipel," *Communications of the Academy of Sciences at Amsterdam*, iv. 5, p. 363 sqq.), nor is it allowed to do anything that might frighten the soul of the rice. If the soul of the plant knows that the corn is to be killed, to be cooked or baked in order to be eaten, it might fly away. Indecent language, too, might frighten the soul of the rice. A sheaf of the rice is brought home, some food and water are offered to the soul of the rice. In the next year the grains of this sheaf are mixed with the grains that are sown. One of the essential things is to confine the soul of the plants that are reaped within a single sheaf, in order to be able to eat the rest of the harvest without danger for the harvest of next year.

Obviously the leavening of the meal is a kind of putrefaction. Leavened bread, therefore, is not "clean." It is not allowed to offer the blood of a sacrifice to Jahve with leavened bread. In the same way the unclean leavened bread might frighten the soul of the newly reaped barley, and we understand that the use of leavened bread was to be avoided in the days of the harvest. Unleavened bread or roast corn (Josh. v. 11) was only permitted.

If we assume that the unclean character of leavened bread is the reason of this so-called feast, it is easily understood that not only the Israelites but that everybody within the boundary of Israel had to avoid the leaven. And it also becomes perspicuous why "there shall no leaven be seen with thee, in all thy borders." The "blessing" of the coming harvest is endangered by any leaven, to whomsoever it might belong.

The barley ripens in the spring. Of course the date of the days of the unleavened bread originally depended upon the time the barley was ready for being reaped.

Exodus xxiii., therefore, does not mention "a fixed date"; nor does Deuteronomy do so. For this reason Deuteronomy could not give a date for Passover, this feast being regarded as the beginning of the days of unleavened bread. Afterwards, however, the conflation of Passover and these days bound the official harvest feast to a fixed date, the 15th of Nisan. Passover was connected with the full moon and could not be removed.

The days of the unleavened bread were a feast in honour of Jahve, not by the unleavened bread, but by the sheaf that was offered to Jahve (Lev. xxiii. 10 sqq.). The custom of eating unleavened bread may have been much older than the Jahvistic religion. In the pre-exilic period the old customs of Passover and of the unleavened bread were sanctified by the priests of Jahve by transplanting the old rites into the sphere of the Jahvistic religion.

B. D. EERDMANS.

#### *THE DEPENDENCE OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY UPON NON-JEWISH RELIGIONS.*

THE idea that early Christianity was in some respects influenced by extra-Jewish religions is repugnant to some even now. It is held that Christianity would be depreciated by such a contact. But evidently, this would only be the case provided that all other religions are false religions and that Christianity, therefore, if dependent on them, would to this extent be proved false too. Now, it is true that former generations sometimes regarded these other religions in this way; but the more enlightened have always observed that there were at least some glimpses of the truth beyond Christianity. The last prophet of the Old Testament proclaimed: "from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same *my* name is great among