

# Josiah Celebrates Passover

**Devotional Reading:** 2 Chronicles 34:8, 14-27

**Background Scripture:** 2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34:1-35:19

**Today's Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-19

## I. Preparation

### 2 Chronicles 35:1-6

**1 Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.**

**2 And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD,**

**3 And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders: serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel,**

**4 And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son.**

**5 And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the fathers of your brethren the people, and after the division of the families of the Levites.**

**6 So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses.**

1a. The beginning of this verse and the beginning of 2 Chronicles 35:19 form the

bookends of this account. The celebration of *passover* in this text was not only an act of obedience to the Law of Moses, but it was also an act of covenant renewal. Passover had not been celebrated for some time—or at least not in the manner that King *Josiah* intended to celebrate it. Hezekiah, who reigned over Judah from 716 to 687 BC, celebrated an extended Passover after he had renovated and reopened the temple.

Both observances, one by Hezekiah and the other by Josiah, are detailed for the readers of Chronicles (compare the much more condensed version in 2 Kings 23:22-23). And both were held *in Jerusalem*, the place where God put his name.

1b. The statement *they killed the passover* becomes clearer when we realize that the writer is talking about the Passover lamb. With the phrase *on the fourteenth day of the first month* (that is, sometime in late March or early April), the writer presents this Passover celebration as firmly rooted in the Law of Moses. Decades earlier, King Hezekiah deviated from the stipulation regarding *the first month*, but he had good reasons for doing so (2 Chronicles 30:1-20).

The record of Hezekiah's Passover observances in 2 Chronicles 30 and Josiah's Passover in 2 Chronicles 35 invited the postexilic readers of Chronicles (536 BC

and later) to renew the observance of Passover and reaffirm their covenant with God. The Passover celebrations of Hezekiah and Josiah were rooted in the state of the two men's hearts.

2. King Josiah established the agenda. We may look with great skepticism at church-and-state combinations today, but not so in ancient Israel. Here we see a king (a civic ruler) authorizing and directing *priests* (religious leaders) in their forthcoming role. Josiah placed the total weight of the monarchy behind the priestly *service*, as King Hezekiah had done.

3a. It's helpful to recall at this point that all priests are *Levites*, but not all Levites are priests. Since the Levites had a teaching role in Israel, the priests had that role as well. These teachers were responsible for guiding *Israel* in the lawful conduct of the nation's rituals. For that role and others, the Levites were expected to lead the way in being personally *holy unto the Lord*. To be holy is to be "consecrated" or "set apart" (1 Chronicles 15:11-14).

3b. This text begins with the first of a series of directives to the Levites. The reference to the need to *put the holy ark in the temple* recalls the initial placement of the ark there, some 336 years earlier. *David* reigned from 1010 to 970 BC, with his son *Solomon* reigning from 970 to 931 BC after him.

We do not know why the ark was no longer in the temple, but the culprit was probably evil King Amon, who reigned over Judah from 643 to 641 BC. The ark of the covenant was necessary for a complete reformation of the temple service. The temple was the resting place for the ark because God dwelt in it and was enthroned on the ark's cherubim. The ark represented the presence of God, and it also symbolized God's commitment to Israel.

3c. The Levites were the only ones au-

thorized to carry the ark. The original instructions were that they were indeed to carry the ark on their *shoulders* via poles. Thus, Josiah's directive here seems curious. Perhaps he was aware of the first disastrous attempt to transport the ark to Jerusalem and misunderstood what had caused the disaster.

3d. The Levites served *God* by carrying out their duties per those listed in 1 Chronicles 23:28-31. These duties changed when the immovable temple replaced the portable tabernacle.

4-5. The Levites were to prepare themselves for service by organizing themselves by their respective clans based on *the houses of their ancestors*. *David king of Israel* provided a list of these clans in 1 Chronicles 23:6-23, and *Solomon his son* followed the same pattern as documented in 2 Chronicles 8:14. Levites, like priests, rotated their service according to the *divisions* of their ancestral *families* per 1 Chronicles 24.

6a. The verse outlines three instructions along with the rationale for their implementation. Regarding the phrase *kill the passover*.

6b. Priests and Levites had been expected to *sanctify* themselves for their tasks for Hezekiah's Passover several decades earlier. Since this was only one of several tasks assigned to them, they were required to purify themselves following the sacrifice. This was an issue of setting a person or thing apart for a sacred task, rooted in the original sanctification of Aaron, his sons, and their priestly line.

6c. The first four words in this partial verse translate an uncertainty in the original Hebrew text. This kind of uncertainty is known as a textual variant. Some manuscripts have wording that translates as what the Levites were to do to prepare their *brethren*; others have wording that translates the text as directives for preparing the sacrificial lamb for those Judeans.

## II. Celebration

### 2 Chronicles 35:16-19

**16 So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.**

**17 And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days.**

**18 And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.**

**19 In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept.**

16a. This verse sums up the various preparatory details of 2 Chronicles 35:7-15. All told, at least 41,400 animals were available for sacrifice in Josiah's Passover. This was more than twice the number for Hezekiah's Passover earlier. A considerable number of animals were needed to feed all the people since the celebration involved meals.

16b. The Old Testament lists four types of blood sacrifices: the burnt, peace, sin, and guilt offerings. These are discussed throughout the book of Leviticus. Two of those four types are present here. The Passover animal sacrifice was a peace offering. One thing that distinguished this type from *burnt offerings* was that meat was available to eat from peace offerings, but not from burnt offerings. Bulls were often used for burnt offerings, and the whole animal was burned up to God. It was a dedicatory offering where the worshipper gave God everything and expressed total commitment.

17. The meals continued throughout the week that followed as part of *the feast of unleavened bread*. Technically, this feast is distinct from Passover. But since the two occur right next to each other on the Jewish calendar, they are treated as a single celebration, practically speaking.

18a. *Samuel*, considered the last of the judges and the first of the prophets, served as a judge from 1067 to 1043 BC (1 Samuel 7-9). Thus, there had not been *such a passover as Josiah kept* for over 400 years! It dwarfed Hezekiah's Passover. It probably did so as well regarding the first Passover after return from exile, some 106 years later. No figures for the number of animals sacrificed are given for the latter, but comparing numbers at two dedications of the temple may be insightful: Solomon's dedication of the first temple involved some 142,000 animals, while the dedication of the second (rebuilt) temple involved a little over 700 (Ezra 6:17)—a magnitude comparison of about 200-to-1!

18b. When we read that the attendees included *all Judah and Israel*, we remember that those two designations identify the southern kingdom of two tribes and the northern kingdom of 10 tribes. Many members of the latter had been exiled 100 years earlier. Thus *all . . . Israel* would refer to the few who had not been taken.

19. This note serves as a bookend to 2 Chronicles 35:1. The abbreviated account in 2 Kings 23:24 adds this assessment:

Moreover the workers with familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

# Involvement Learning

## Josiah Celebrates Passover

### Into the Lesson

Write in the space below your favorite memories of a childhood holiday tradition and why that memory is special.

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Write down a family holiday tradition that began when you were an adult. What made that memory special?

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Let's look at a Passover celebration that took place under King Josiah and think about how to apply lessons from it to life today.

### Into the Word

Compare and contrast Josiah's preparations for Passover in 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-21 with the original instructions in Exodus 12:1-30 and Numbers 9:1-14; 28:16-24. What steps, if any, did King Josiah miss in his Passover preparations?

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Which steps, if any, do we simply lack information about either way?

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Determine what is being "consecrated" as you compare and contrast 2 Chronicles 35:1-6, 16-21 with Leviticus 11:44; 20:7; 2 Chronicles 29:34; 30:2-3, 15; Ezekiel 44:19; 46:20.

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### Key Verse

Josiah kept a passover unto the LORD in Jerusalem: and they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month.  
—2 Chronicles 35:1

### Into Life

What physical preparation can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

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What spiritual preparation can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

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What physical consecration can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

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What spiritual consecration can I initiate for worship and kingdom service?

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### Thought to Remember

Embrace God's rituals.