

Summary of what we learned from our discussion of Passover in the Bible:

The central story of Passover, as written in Exodus, requires that a lamb be slaughtered in one's own home, its blood placed on the lintels. Lest we think this applied only to the Passover in Pharaoh's Egypt, the text declares that no, this is a statute "for all time." The sacrificial meat is restricted among males to those who have been circumcized, but this leads to an aside that is important for subsequent generations, namely that citizens and non-citizens must be considered evenly in the eyes of the law.

Exodus also includes the requirement that we eat only unleavened bread "Matzoh".

The book of Leviticus adds the idea that the 7-day festival is bookended by "holy" days--in other words, work is not permitted on the first as last days of the festival.

Passover is also mentioned in the book of Numbers, and there we find the one and only reference to the requirement that the sacrifice be eaten with "bitter herbs."

Finally, for the Torah, Passover is mentioned in a lengthy passage that emphasizes that the sacrifice can only be made in "the place the LORD your God shall choose." There is no discussion of how this can be reconciled to the requirement stated in Exodus that the sacrifice should occur in a person's home. Note that three biblical books say nothing about restricting the sacrifice to the Temple.

The book of Joshua discusses at length the first Passover after the Israelites have crossed the Jordan. One topic that interested us, but which receives no resolution in the book itself, is how the Israelites could have observed the festival while in the wilderness given that the males were not yet circumcized. But Joshua does add one detail that may be of interest: popcorn is considered unleavened grain! At least as far as Joshua is concerned, we can eat popcorn on Pesah!

The hour concluded with a note about Psalm 114 speaking of "When the Israelites left Egypt" as key to the later liturgy of the Passover Haggadah, and we also noted two passages in the Christian Bible that demonstrate that early Christians were well aware of some of the requirements for celebrating Passover.

Next time: Passover in the Mishnah!