

Ezra 6:19-22

After the second temple was finished, a joyful dedication ceremony was held (6:15). A month later, the Jews celebrated Passover (**Ezra 6:19**).

Passover was the most important festival in the Hebrew calendar. It was the first of three feasts at which all males were obliged to attend, the other two being the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. There is the sense of a new beginning about this period. In God's providence, the returned Jews were forced to consider their future less in terms of a nation with political aspirations and more in terms of what they could see on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Summary

In Ezra 6:19-22, a month after the celebration of the dedication of the second temple, the Jews celebrated the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

1. Redemptive Sign vs. 19

The first thing to note is the celebration of Passover and Unleavened Bread. Passover had not been celebrated since the destruction of the temple, two generations earlier. In the time of Moses, the firstborn in every Egyptian household died (**Exod 12:1-30**) but where the blood of the Passover lamb was on the door of the homes of the Israelites, they were spared.

Passover also has an important collective aspect. The death of the passover lamb meant the safety and security of the entire covenant community.

Passover signaled several aspects of redemption: the satisfaction of God's justice, the propitiation of God's wrath, the substitutionary value of the blood of the lamb for both individual households and the covenant community at large.

2. Levitical Work vs. 20

On Passover day, between the ninth and eleventh hours of the day, the lambs were sacrificed. All the people, given the extent of their sins that had caused the exile, were considered unclean and the entire ritual of sacrifice was performed by the Levites. There may have been up to 70,000 worshipers, requiring seven thousand lambs, each brought to the temple area by a head of household.

The 74 Levites, dressed in white linen, would have a lot of work to do.

The poured out blood of the passover lamb propitiated God's wrath, satisfying his justice in relation to those who claimed its protection. It was propitiatory because it was substitutionary. The NT takes up the refrain of these earlier Passover rituals (**1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29; cf. v. 36**). Passover clearly pointed to the provision of a substitute, a perfect Lamb, who would bear the wrath that sin deserves and stand in the place of sinners.

3. True Israel vs. 21

The Passover lamb was eaten not only by those “who had returned from exile” but “also by every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the LORD, the God of Israel” (**Ezra 6:21**).

The exiles reached out to all the faithful, whoever they were.

Here is a pattern of repentance (a turning away from sin) and faith (a turning toward God). This was true of Israelites “according to the flesh” (**Rom. 9:3**) as well as for non-Israelites who now lived among them.

God’s people consists of all those who make a credible profession of faith and who worship the one true God according to the Scriptures.

There was, on that Passover day in 516 B.C., a true spirit of biblical catholicity.

God was preparing his covenant people for a period of history that would culminate in the appearance of THE Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ, of which these lambs were merely a type.

4. Festive Joy vs. 22

The final thing of note in this Passover celebration, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed it, is the description of the attendant joy (**Ezra 6:22**).

First, the Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted for seven days. Secondly, particular mention is made in the Passover ritual of the providence of God in redeeming Israel from Egypt and the Israelites were again engaging in an exodus, this time from Babylon. Thirdly, the most immediate cause of their rejoicing was the reminder they heard in the Hallel psalms (**Pss. 113-118**) sung by the Levites.

These words were a reminder that the Israelites were God’s special people, with whom he had entered into covenant and to whom he had promised a Deliverer.

Sixty to seventy years later, the prophet Malachi would preach in Jerusalem.

At the end of his book is a promise to the effect that before the Messiah comes, God will send Elijah (Mal. 4:5).

The NT interprets this as being fulfilled by John the Baptist (**Matt. 11:10–14; 17:10–13**), who announced to the world the identity of Jesus of Nazareth: “Behold, the Lamb of God” (**John 1:29, 36**).

Jesus is the Passover Lamb, slain on behalf of his people (**1 Cor. 5:7; Luke 22:15–16**).

There is also an aspect of Passover that has yet to be fulfilled.

Jesus the Passover Lamb was slain to ransom people from every nation, tribe, people, and language (**Rev. 7:9**). So the Passover cannot be fulfilled until all those people are reached and the ransomed are gathered in and the kingdom is consummated.