3

The Passover as an Anti-Imperial Activity

3.1 Introduction

"Early Israel was born as an anti-imperial resistance movement."[1] According to the Exodus narrative, the Hebrew slaves prepared for their escape from Pharaoh's totalitarian regime as they sat to eat their first Passover meal. This hastily eaten family supper was an anti-imperial event that effected, celebrated, and anticipated Israel's emancipation from Egyptian imperial rule. It was during the meal itself that God destroyed the firstborn of Egypt, leading to Israel's release from Egyptian bondage.

The thesis of this chapter is that the Passover meal originated as a subversive act of defiance against Egyptian domination and eventually became a symbol of Israel's liberation. Lest future generations of God's people forget the Exodus event, Yahweh instructed the nation to organize and to observe an annual Passover feast as a reminder of the divine deliverance.

By the time of Christ, the Jews found themselves living again under tyranny. Like Egypt, Rome operated as a domination system that used military might and other oppressive means to control the masses. Each spring when Jews from far and wide congregated in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, they not only remembered the original Exodus, but yearned for God to rescue them from the present authoritarian regime. This chapter traces the Jewish Passover meal from Egypt to Rome and

1. Gottwald, "Early Israel," 9.

shows how this feast of freedom evolved into an anti-imperial meal and a symbol of apocalyptic and eschatological deliverance. This emphasis provides a basis for interpreting Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples as being an anti-imperial praxis that points to Rome's defeat and the arrival of God's kingdom.[2] In turn, Jesus' final Passover lays the foundation for the Christian communal meal, i.e., the Lord's Supper, as being anti-imperial in character.[3]

3.2 Exodus from Egypt

The Jewish resistance to imperial Roman domination in the first century, which ultimately led to the great revolt in 66–70 CE and the destruction of Jerusalem, did not occur through happenstance. Jewish oppression and resistance have a long history.

According to the Exodus account, the ancient Hebrews lived in Egypt as resident aliens and then as slaves during the age of Egyptian imperialism.[4] Egypt's powerful military successfully conquered territories, captured multitudes of slaves, and amassed great wealth for its kingdom.

Whether one deems the second book of the Hebrew canon to be historically accurate or not, most agree that it is a piece of subversive literature that recounts in epic style how Yahweh liberated his people from a tyrannical regime, called them to remember what it was like to live as slaves, and challenged them to live differently when they enter the land of promise.

Brueggemann characterizes the Exodus event as a critical analysis of dominant ideology from the perspective of the victims.[5] It is the one event Jews were never to forget, and to which they would hearken back whenever they found themselves enslaved or living again under the heavy hand of oppression. The God who delivered them in the first place could do it again. The Exodus spoke of hope and deliverance.

2. The anti-imperial nature of the Last Supper, Jesus' final meal with his disciples, will be discussed in chapter 6.

3. The anti-imperial nature of the Lord's Supper will be examined in chapter 7.

4. Prior to the Exodus, the Hebrew children lived peacefully in Egypt under a succession of Pharaohs, who supported their presence based on historical precedence and Joseph's faithful years of service to the kingdom (Gen 41:41–57; 47:1–6). Pleins, *Social Visions*, 174, concludes, "The contrast between the pharaohs of Genesis and Exodus tells us that there is room for good monarchic, priestly, and tribal hierarchies in the estimation of the various narrators."

5. Brueggemann, *Hope*, 8, 12.

Egyptian Imperialism

The Egyptians, basing their actions on their imperial ideology, claimed the divine right to enslave the Hebrews. God's people, however, refused to accept the imperial arrangement "as normative or deserving of either respect or obedience."[6] Believing Pharaoh's power to be neither ultimate nor legitimate, they retained their identity as God's people, and in the midst of suffering, cried publicly and collectively for Yahweh to deliver them. This public outcry constituted an "irreversible act of civil disobedience."[7] James C. Scott labels such open forms of resistance as "public transcripts."[8] It was the kind of act that could get the culprit killed.

The Scripture recounts, "God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them" (Exod 2:24–25). Yahweh first paid attention to the cries of the Hebrews because he had made a promise to their forefathers that he would give to their offspring a land and transform them into a great nation through which he would bless the peoples of the earth (Gen 12:2–3; 17:4–8). Second, he responded out of compassion: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on the account of their taskmaster. Indeed, I knew their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians" (Exod 3:7–8).

In a sense, Israel's faith was birthed in the crucible of suffering, and would later be sustained through the same means. Prior to her enslavement, when the Hebrew people had a place of privilege in the empire, they did not depend upon Yahweh for survival. Then "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (Exod 1:8), their fortunes were reversed and they returned to the God of their fathers. The experience of pain begins the formation of a Jewish counter-society within the empire based on their "alternative perception of reality."[9] This evolves into a new social imagination, i.e., envisioning a preferred future that involves the Hebrew people living under the reign of God (Exod 3:8).[10]

6. Ibid., 12.

7. Ibid., 11.

8. Scott, *Domination*, 2. By public transcripts Scott does not mean a conversation that takes place merely before a group of people, but confrontational communication between persons with power and those who lack power.

9. Brueggemann, *Hope*, 17–18.

10. Ibid., 20–21, Brueggemann explains that the social aspect of the "social imagination" refers to the fact that it is embraced by the greater Hebrew community. It is not a "privatization of imagination" which leads to "abdication and resignation in the public arena" and allows for overall conformity with public policy. Social imagination

In responding to the plea of his people, God commissions Moses to speak on his behalf to Pharaoh. When Moses asks for God to identify himself, he receives the answer, "I AM WHO I AM . . . This is my name forever" (Exod 3:13–14). As Yahweh's ambassador, Moses is told that he will be "like God to Pharaoh" (7:1), i.e., he will be God's authoritative spokesperson. He will speak truth boldly into the face of power. When Pharaoh refuses to grant the Hebrews a reprieve to offer sacrifices to their God, the Lord exhibits his power through miracles and plagues so the "Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD [I am that I AM]" (7:5).

A trio of three plagues are unleashed upon Egypt, followed by a devastating tenth plague—the death of the firstborn among both animals and humans. Each set (plagues 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9) begins with God offering Pharaoh an opportunity to repent before the next judgment falls.[11] The first plague in each set also serves to reveal God's power to Pharaoh (Exod 7:17; 8:22; 9:29). "The miracles and plagues are proofs of God's presence and power with Israel—even in the land of Ham."[12] Despite warnings of further judgment, Pharaoh ignores Yahweh's appeal.

The tenth and final plague, death of all firstborn males is accomplished by a direct act of God without any assistance from Moses, and leads to Israel's exodus from Egypt.

Because of his compassionate covenant promises to their forefathers and the manifested faith by the Hebrew slaves, God announces that death will pass over their firstborn. He instructs them that between 10–14 Nisan they are to get ready for deliverance by preparing and eating a sacrificial meal in anticipation and celebration of imminent liberation (Exod 12:3–8). The meal will not be a mere symbolic act, but will actually effectuate their freedom. Each family is to take a lamb, kill it, smear the blood on the lintels of their houses, roast the lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.[13] God calls the meal "the Passover of the Lord" (v. 11). When the plague strikes Egypt, death will pass over all homes marked with the

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is profoundly a community endeavor. In many ways, contemporary Christianity in the West has replaced social imagination with personal imagination that offers hope of heavenly salvation for the individual. The pharaohs of this world encourage privatization of faith because its leaves public affairs intact.

11. Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 378.

12. Ibid., 379.

13. The word "bitter" first appears in Exod 1:13–14, "The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them."

blood of the lamb. Without delay, the Jews must be dressed and ready for their escape (vv. 12–13).

The meal functions in two practical ways. First, it serves as the means by which the firstborn are delivered from physical death with the blood from the dinner lamb smeared on the lintel to protect the children. Second, it provides God's people nourishment for the first leg of their wilderness trek.

Before her exit, God instructs Israel to retell continuously the story of her miraculous exodus from bondage by means of "liturgical recital and enactment."[14] This will be accomplished primarily by observing an annual Passover meal: "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance" (Exod 12:14).[15] Moses adds, "When you come to the land that the Lord will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses'" (vv. 24–27).[16]

3.3 Excursus: The Fourfold Purpose of Memory

According to Miroslav Volf, sacred memory serves four functions.[17] First, it defines the identity of a people. To be a Jew is to remember the Exodus, but it also includes acting in the present. Memory is not a single event. Each succeeding generation must remember in the light of its particular historical and cultural context. God's redemptive action in the Exodus not only formed the ancient Hebrew people into a holy nation, but *informed* their heirs as to how they were to act as Jews. While memory focuses

14. Brueggemann, *Hope*, 10.

15. God also included guidelines for celebrating a seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was to precede the Passover meal (Exod 12:15–20). Whereas the sacrificial Passover meal symbolized escape from *God's judgment* of death upon all firstborn, the Feast of Unleavened Bread signified separation from *Egyptian domination and oppression*: "You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance" (v. 17).

16. Similar instructions are given in Exod 23:4–15; 34:18–25; Lev 23:4–6; Num 9:1–8; 28:16–25; Deut 16:1–8.

17. Volf, *End of Memory*, 97–102.

mainly on the past, it speaks to the contemporary circumstances. Therefore, memory is relevant.

It is the Passover's "commemorative rituals and liturgies" that perpetuate the sacred memory, enabling worshippers to be caught up existentially in the events and their meaning.[18] By eating the future paschal meal "at the precise moment of the exodus, the Israelites embody the memory of their salvation."[19] The food, drink, stories, songs, and symbols that accompany the Seder helps to transport the diners mentally back to Egypt so they participate in the redemption wrought by God through the Exodus. The imagined memory elicited by the meal also allows celebrants who live centuries after the original event to experience the Exodus for themselves as if they were there. The Mishnah declares, "In each and every generation, each person can regard himself as though he has emerged from Egypt."[20] Therefore, every post-Exodus Passover meal reflected in some sense a "realized eschatology."[21]

Second, memory functions to unite a people. Passover was to be a communal rather than a solitary experience. Yahweh entrusted the memory of Exodus to the entire nation (Exod 12:14; 17:24–25; 13:10) to assure it would be kept alive and not fade into oblivion. Memories can be lost if assigned only to a select few individuals. God's plan assured that each person acquired their sacred memories from the larger society—family, community, or nation. Just as each citizen learns about America's history in school and retains these memories through community or national celebrations, so Jews remembered the Exodus by corporate participation in the Passover feast.

Third, sacred memory produces hope. The past is connected to the future. Recollections of former horrors provide a hopeful outlook that God will ultimately set accounts right by vindicating the afflicted and judging the wrongdoers. Even when the evildoers escape justice in this lifetime, they will one day stand at Yahweh's judgment bar and receive recompense for their malicious behavior. Evil will be expunged and God's righteous rule will prevail. Thus, the nation of Israel was instructed to connect the past deliverance with future hope. Redemption was always just over the

18. Ibid., 98.

19. MacDonald, *Not by Bread Alone*, 99. MacDonald's study offers not only a valuable survey of food in the OT, but also acute analysis.

20. *Pesahim* X.5. Pesahim, (פיחסם), which literally means "Passovers" is the third section of the *Seder Moed* of the *Mishnah* and discusses post 70 CE rabbinic debates dealing with Passover.

21. Leonhard, *Jewish Pesach*, 426.

horizon. Passover Seders include a place setting at the table for Elijah, the messianic forerunner, who will pave the way for the coming of the Lord. An open window and a door, and a full glass of wine await his arrival.[22] The modern observance, like its ancient counterpart, looks to the future as well as to the past as the faithful anticipate the redemption to come.

Fourth, Israel's Passover memories were actually "*memories of God*."[23] The Exodus was not merely a fortuitous event or an example of humankind's ability to overcome suffering and evil, but God's loving intervention on behalf of his people—based on his own memory of the covenant he made with Abraham. "In the biblical tradition, remembering is an expression of the experience of liberation given by God."[24] Memory focuses on salvation-history. In history God revealed himself as Israel's mighty champion who fought their wars and secured their freedom (Exod 12:27; 13:8, 14, 16).[25]

3.4 The Eating of the Passover and the March from Egypt

After receiving these instructions about memory, the Israelites consumed the first Passover lamb (v. 28) and "it came to pass at midnight that Yahweh struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock" (v. 29).[26]

22. Barth, *Rediscovering the Lord's Supper*, 11–12.

23. Volf, *Memory*, 101.

24. Bieler and Schottroff, *Eucharist*, 158. Based on remembering her own captivity, Israel was expected to be an anti-imperial alternative society. In emulating Yahweh by compassionately exercising her power for redemptive purposes rather than emulating Egypt and her gods for tyrannical purposes, Israel reflects God's merciful nature and blesses the nations.

25. In like fashion, the memory associated with the Lord's Supper will look to the cross as the new turning point in salvation history through which God secures eschatological deliverance for his people.

26. Because death passes over the eldest among Hebrew children or beasts, God claims them as his own. He instructs Moses, "Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine" (Exod 13:1–2). While all Jewish firstborn belong to God, provisions are made so parents can buy them back from the Lord for five shekels (Exod 13:12–15; 22:29–30). This process is called redemption. The firstborn among clean animals would be sacrificed to God. The firstborn among unclean animals could be redeemed or put to death (Exod 13:13; 34:19–20). Like other practices associated with the Exodus, fathers were required to explain the significance of the redemption system to their children (Exod 13:14–16). The Levites replaced the human firstborn who were redeemed. "Then the

Crushed by the deadly tragedy that befell his land, Pharaoh urged God's people to leave Egypt immediately (vv. 31–33). "By the roundabout way of the wilderness towards the Red Sea" they made their escape (Exod 13:17–18). Gustavo Gutierrez, the Latin American theologian rightly characterizes the "liberation of Israel" as a "political action" that leads ultimately to "the construction of a just and fraternal society."[27] Unfortunately, he erroneously views the Exodus as the result of a successful people's resistance movement that achieves liberation through sacrificial self effort and not God's blessings.[28] In reality, the Scriptures attribute the victory to Yahweh's miraculous intervention alone.

When safely out of harm's way, the throng of liberated slaves sing in unison what traditionally has been labeled the "Song of Moses" (Exod 15:1–18), which concludes with the words, "The Lord will reign forever and ever." In singing this canticle by the sea, Israel acknowledges Yahweh to be the true king whose dominion is everlasting and far superior to the world's most powerful Pharaoh. The women join in "with tambourines and with dancing" as Miriam directed them to, "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (vv. 20–21). What is normally characterized to be a victory song, Brueggemann portrays as "a liturgic enactment of a changed social situation"[29] that bespeaks a new political and economic reality wherein Israel rejects Pharaoh as king as they accept and affirm the kingship of God.

The Passover/Exodus is the pivotal point in Israel's history. According to the narrative, it ends four hundred and thirty years under despotic Egyptian rule, marks Israel's birth as a free people, and paves the way for the Mosaic covenant that forms the Hebrew people into a priestly and holy nation, living uniquely under the rule of God as a new political entity (Exod 19:5–6). Harkness denotes, "The concept of the covenant between God and his chosen people . . . underlies [the] concept of kingdom."[30] Gottwald and Mendenhall likewise affirm that when Israel enters the

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Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 'I hereby accept the Levites from among the Israelites as substitutes for all the firstborn that open the womb among the Israelites. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine; when I killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both human and animal; they shall be mine. I am the Lord'" (Num 3:11–13).

27. Gutierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 155.

28. Ibid., 68, 91.

29. Brueggemann, *Hope*, 21.

30. Harkness, *Understanding the Kingdom of God*, 69.

covenant, she pledges her allegiance to the kingdom of God.[31] The giving of the Law thus provides Israel with ethical guidelines to help her live under God's reign. The first commandment, which prohibits the worship of other gods, recognizes Yahweh's superiority over them all (Exod 20:2–3). The Psalmist will later connect Yahweh's power over the pagan gods to his being king: "For the Lord is a great God, and a great *King* above all gods" (Ps 95:3). The Mosaic covenant moves social imagination out of the realm of the theoretical into the sphere of the practical. Hence, imagination becomes social reality.[32]

3.5 Passovers as Liturgical Enactments during the Time of Judges and Monarchy

In describing Israel's origins as a free people, Horsley remarks, "The exodus was clearly a paradigmatic story (later celebrated each year in the Passover festival) identifying their God as the one 'who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage' (Ex 20:2)."[33] When instructing his people to eat an annual Passover to commemorate the Exodus, God was asking them to participate in a liturgical act. Liturgy involves remembrance and performance. In some sense it is a ritualistic and dramatic reenactment of the past through the use of storytelling and symbols. For the Jews, Passover was a yearly opportunity to praise God for their past liberation and their new political reality. It also served as a reminder that Israel was not to become a domination system that enslaved and marginalized people and as a corrective if she did. As Israel's king, Yahweh expected Israel to live according to his sociopolitical principles as reflected in the Law. As Brueggemann notes, "If the subject of liturgy is kingship [which the Passover liturgy is] . . . then liturgy serves to

31. For Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, the Mosaic covenant should be seen as the establishment of an alternative political kingdom. Gottwald, *Tribes of Yahweh*, likewise, believes the covenant should not be seen as forming Israel into a mere spiritual community, but into a new experimental political system based on ethical principles of freedom and justice.

32. In the sight of other nations (dominated by imperial powers which exploit and enslave) Israel, as an alternative society, will live according to the principles of justice, servitude and mercy. The blessings that result from abiding under the active rule of Yahweh will be a testimony of God's goodness. Israel will additionally serve as a "kingdom of priests" to bring their idolatrous neighbors into a relationship with Yahweh. God's election of Israel, therefore, is to spread knowledge of him to the surrounding Gentile nations.

33. Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets, and Messiahs*, 5.

authorize, recognize, acknowledge, coronate, legitimate the ruler and the order that belongs to the ruler. The liturgy is a festive act of enthronement and the obedient act of submitting more and more areas of life to that newly wrought sovereignty."[34]

Since the Exodus secures freedom from domination and marks the birth of Israel as a nation, it is the essence of her identity and sets her apart from the other nations on earth.[35] Israelites are a free people and constitute a nation that is not to oppress others. Rather she is to be an advocate for justice and a champion of the downtrodden. The Passover was intended to help Israel remember her past and serve as a reminder of her obligations. If she applies the lessons of the past to the present, she will find favor with God and humankind.

Freed from servitude to the foreigners, the Israelites are on the verge of possessing the land of promise. At God's command Joshua circumcises the males, who had remained uncircumcised throughout four decades of wandering (Josh 5:2), and he calls for a Passover: "While the Israelites were encamped in Gilgal they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain (Josh 5:10–11).

Scripture is silent as to whether or not Israel continues keeping a yearly Passover under Joshua's leadership. It does make clear, however, that by the time of Joshua's death Israel is in danger of moving away from God and becoming like the surrounding nations. The "Mosaic covenant functioned like a constitution for early Israel" and called upon the nation to give exclusive allegiance to God as their king.[36] In his farewell speech, Joshua encourages the people to keep the Law and warns them not to follow the ways of the heathen nations or to intermarry with their children, lest they fall into a snare and "perish from this good land that the Lord your God has given you" (Josh 23:12–13).

With Joshua's death (Josh 24:29), the nation regresses into patterns of unbelief and idolatry. Instead of influencing her neighbors for the good, Israel succumbs to their sins. An endless series of military rulers, known as judges, lead her on a rollercoaster ride of moral ups and downs, typified by the words, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all people did

34. Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 10.

35. An eating by all, including the disenfranchised, of an annual Passover, marks Israel as a nation that reflects God's attitude toward all his people regardless of status. See MacDonald, *Not by Bread Alone*, 99.

36. Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 5.

what was right in their own eyes" (Judg 21:25). Only once does she make a brief, but fleeting commitment to follow the covenant (Judg 24:19–27).

Rather than being the alternative society that points the nations to Yahweh, and thus fulfilling her social imagination, she desires "to be like all the nations" and demands that the prophet Samuel anoint a king to reign over her (1 Sam 8:5). When told of their request, God says to Samuel, "They have rejected me from being king over them" and charges Israel with being disobedient "from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods" (v. 7). He then gives Samuel the task of warning the people what will happen if their wish is granted.

God is not concerned that they ask for a king, but that they want a king so "they can be like the other nations" (v. 5), which they repeat a few verses later: "We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles" (vv. 18–19).

God had revealed to the patriarch Jacob his plan to give Israel a king (Gen 49:8, 10), anticipating their desire for a king once they entered the Promised Land (Deut 16:14a). Through Moses he instructed them to select a godly king, one to his liking, who would carry out his mandates, i.e., to uphold justice, show mercy, and enforce the socioeconomic principles outlined in the Law. He warned them against crowning a king "like all the nations" (v. 14b), who would "acquire many horses for himself, or return the people to Egypt in order to acquire more horses" (vv. 15–16). The Lord commanded, "You must never return that way again" (v. 16b). The new king additionally "must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; also silver and gold he must not acquire in great quantity for himself" (vv. 17–18). Rather, he should be a man with a passion for the Law (vv. 18–19), one who is humble and leaves an example which his royal descendants can follow (v. 20).

Ignoring these long-standing guidelines, Israel does not seek a king who will rule "under God," but covets one like the foreign nations who will rule "instead of God."[37] This was tantamount to abandoning faith in Yahweh and breaking the everlasting covenant.

Although somewhat overstated, Dale Patrick's analysis is correct that in asking for a king Israel "repudiated" the "theocracy which began with Moses and endured through the period of the judges . . ."[38] While, on the one hand, she wants to identify with Yahweh; on the other hand, she

37. Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 80.

38. Patrick, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament," 74.

desires to abandon her divine social obligation to be a distinctive society. Her worship of God will become perfunctory and meaningless.

"Yahwehism" was not simply dogmatism, but "was an alternative way of life—social, economic, political, religious. It gave a transcendent dimension to the struggle of diverse, marginalized peoples to overcome the dominant mechanism and ideologies of oppression and to create a new social order in which all would have enough."[39] Driver judges the matter thus: "In asking for a king 'like the other nations,' God's people have actually become like the nations around them."[40]

God grants Israel's request and tells Samuel "to anoint [Saul] to be ruler over my people Israel" (1 Sam 9:16). Saul reigns twenty years (1020–1000 BCE), followed by the successive reigns of David (1000–962), and Solomon (962–922). Under David, Israel expands its borders, conquering all of Palestine and the surrounding Canaanite city-states, and establishes an imperial monarchy with a strong central government. "The previously free tribes are now ruled from the capital in Jerusalem, the 'city of David.'"[41]

Through Solomon, Israel becomes increasingly more like other nations as she embraces idolatry and operates in the manner of a domination system. With King Solomon's new temple, the monarchy takes on the appearance divine legitimacy. According to the biblical narrative, in the course of time, Solomon rose to become the most powerful leader in the Mediterranean. He not only matched the wealth and wit of other rulers, but also "excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom" (1 Kgs 10:23). Regrettably, the very kind of king God warned against (Deut 16:14–20) was the kind of king Solomon had become.

During the time of the Judges and monarchs the scriptural narrative contains only a single reference to Israel observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread (2 Chr 8:12–13). It is impossible to know if an annual Passover meal was still being celebrated or fell by the wayside. If the former, one can only imagine how the Jewish populace felt as they ate the meal of freedom. Scriptures hint that the peasants did not submit readily to their own oppressive monarchs. At least two major citizenry revolts occurred during the reign of King David (2 Samuel 13–18 led by Absalom and 2 Samuel 20 led by Sheba). In light of the political atmosphere among the masses, one might suspect that the Jews sitting at Passover were not only remembering their past deliverance from Pharaoh, but were hoping for deliverance from

39. Kinsler and Kinsler, *Biblical Jubilee*, 35.
40. Driver, *Images of the Church in Mission*, 29.
41. Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits*, 7.

their own imperial kings. Further evidence of the discontent occurs after Solomon's death and ten tribes split to form the northern kingdom (1 Kgs 11:31–35). Except in rare instances, both kingdoms choose to serve their own interests rather than God's. Both Israel and Judah find themselves making moral compromises and entering into political alliances with their heathen neighbors in order to survive.

3.6 Passover during the Divided Kingdom

In the northern Kingdom the Israelites mistrusted the kings and resisted the call to submit to autocratic rule.[42] One monarch after another emulated the sovereigns of the Gentile nations. They no longer upheld the social vision to be a "holy nation" that included an egalitarian way of life, debt forgiveness, and complete loyalty to Yahweh. They developed visions that supported their own devious plans. As a result, Yahweh commissioned prophets to call the people, especially her leaders, to repent or else face judgment. They denounced unholy alliances with foreign neighbors and condemned bribery, half-hearted worship, oppression and affliction of the poor and disenfranchised, charging of usury, and even pronounced woe on the institution of the monarchy (Amos 2:6–16; 3:9–10; 4:1–13; 5:10, 22; 6:12; Hos 4:1; 6:8; 8:1–4, 14; 10:4; etc.).[43] Along with the message of condemnation, the prophets offered hope if the nation returned to God and his covenant (Hos 14:2). Instead of heeding the prophetic warnings, the leaders persecute the prophets (Amos 2:6–7), and God allows Israel to fall prey to the Assyrians in 722 BCE.

The southern kingdom of Judah fared little better as a succession of kings destroyed the moral fiber of the nation. Only a small remnant of Jews observed sporadically the Passover. As in the north, God sent prophets to the south who condemned the rulers for their inequitable practices and harsh and repressive treatment of the lowly masses (Isa 1:4–5, 15–23, 28–29; 3:13–15; 5:1–7, 24; 6:1–13; 26:21; 30:1–5; Jer 7:1–4; Mic 3:1–2, 9–12).

Scriptures record only two occasions when Judea as a nation joined together to eat a Passover. Both occurred during times of national revival. The first took place when King Hezekiah (ca. 741–740 BCE) ordered the Temple to be cleansed from defilement (2 Chronicles 29) and invited tribes from the north to "come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem to

42. Ibid.

43. There is no scriptural evidence or extrabiblical record that the northern kingdom of Israel ever observed an annual Passover.

keep the Passover to the Lord the God of Israel. . . . for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed" (2 Chr 30:1–2, 5).

Verse 5b ("for they had not kept it in great numbers as prescribed") indicates that before Hezekiah's national decree, few Jews had faithfully kept the feast. Since Passover was a ritual enactment intended to keep alive the memory of the Exodus and to motivate the nation to live according to God's values, verse 5b implies that Judah had abandoned her high calling.

Hezekiah's invitation to the northern tribes to join in a Passover celebration was an effort to bring the northern kingdom to repentance and reunite the people of God (2 Chr 30:6–9). Their overall response was scorn and mockery, with only a few responding favorably (vv. 10–11). Despite Israel's recalcitrant heart, the southern kingdom of Judah joined enthusiastically in the Passover celebration (vv. 12–19). As a result, "The Lord heard Hezekiah, and healed the people. The people of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the festival of unleavened bread for seven days with great gladness . . ." (vv. 20–21). The excitement and spiritual renewal poured over into a second week and "the whole assembly agreed together to keep the festival for another seven days; so they kept it for another seven days with gladness" (v. 23).

The Chronicler summarizes the events: "There was great joy in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon son of King David of Israel there had been nothing like this in Jerusalem" (v. 26).

When godly Hezekiah's reign ends, his successors abuse their power, forsake the Law and lead Judah back into a spiritual malaise and full-blown idolatry (2 Chr 33; 2 Kgs 21). The people of God, called out of Egypt to create and maintain an alternative sociopolitical reality in contrast to the surrounding nations, once again abandon the annual Passover and thus their identity as a holy nation.

In this setting Jeremiah pronounces judgment on the temple and ruling classes for disregarding the covenant, shedding innocent blood, practicing idolatry and oppressing "the alien, the orphan, and the widow" (Jer 7:1–7). Judah has reverted back to being a domination system. On God's behalf, he asks, "Has this house, which is called by my name become a den of robbers in your sight?" (vv. 8–10).

Passover does not reappear on the pages of holy writ until a second national revival occurs under the reign of King Josiah (641–609 BCE). After the high priest discovers the long lost "book of the Law" in the Temple, the king arranges to have it read publicly to the people (1 Kgs 23:1–3). As Josiah listens to the Word, he falls under conviction of sin and pledges

openly his faithfulness to Yahweh. The people follow suit and vow allegiance to God and the covenant that he made with their forefathers.

With a renewed vision that Israel was created to serve as God's alternative political reality to the nations, Josiah orders that the heathen priests and their cultic high places be destroyed (vv. 4–20), and commands the entire nation to "keep *the Passover* to the Lord your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant" (v. 21). According to the account in 2 Chr 35:1–5, the priests prepare for a Passover celebration to be held on 14 Nisan and Josiah and his governing officials, "contributed to the people, as Passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king's possessions" (vv. 6–9). The text declares: "The people of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the festival of unleavened bread for seven days. No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah, by the priests and the Levites, by all Judah and Israel who were present, and by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah this Passover was kept" (vv. 17–19). What does verse 18 mean?—"No Passover like it had been kept in Israel since the days of the prophet Samuel; none of the kings of Israel had kept such a Passover as was kept by Josiah." Pleins believes it to mean that the Passover had never been observed during the monarchy, claiming that the fall festival may have taken precedence over the spring festivals.[44] The chronicler, however, records that the nation celebrated the Passover under kings Solomon (2 Chr 8:12–13) and Hezekiah (2 Chr 30:1), and speaks of the events in positive terms (v. 26). Therefore, verse 18 likely implies the Passover celebration under Josiah was more splendorous and meaningful than those held under the aegis of previous kings.

There is no evidence that the remaining southern rulers promoted faithfulness to the covenant or sponsored annual Passover feasts in Jerusalem What is known is that God raised up prophets like Jeremiah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel, and Obadiah to exhort these rulers for their breaking of the covenant with God and for weakening the southern kingdom, which led the nation into Babylonian captivity in 587 BCE (2 Chr 23–24).

44. Pleins, *Social Visions*, 426–27.

3.7 Prophetic Pronouncements of Judgment and Restoration of Passover

As early as 750 BCE, God spoke to the northern kingdom through the prophet Amos of a day when he would "raise up the booth of David that is fallen, and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old in order that they may possess . . . all the nations who are called by my name" (Amos 9:11–12). He goes on to proclaim, "The mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruins and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them upon the land, and they shall never again be plucked up out of the land I have given them, says the Lord your God" (9:13–15).

Jeremiah, whose prophetic ministry spanned from the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign into the Babylonian captivity, likewise announces judgment upon God's wayward people (Jer 9:1–11; 22:13–19; 23:1–4), but also delivers to the nation a message of hope: "The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (Jer 23:5). He then relates this message of hope to the first Passover and Exodus events: "Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them.' Then they shall live in their own land" (vv. 7–8).

Jeremiah switches the focus away from the Egyptian exodus to a future deliverance when North and South will be reunited and God will establish a "new covenant" (Jer 31:31–34). Jesus likely makes a reference to the "new covenant" in his Last Supper symposium discourse, which Luke characterizes as a Passover meal (Luke 22:20). Likewise, Paul references the covenant in his discussion of abuses at the Lord's Table (1 Cor 11:25). These passages will be examined more critically in forthcoming chapters of this thesis.

Ezekiel connects the future judgment and deliverance specifically to Passover. After pronouncing judgment upon God's people (Ezek 1–24), he offers hope for a new Exodus and a restored nation (Ezek 36:22–28). He speaks of God raising up a new king to rule his people (37:21–22), and describes these future events in eschatological terms: "My servant David

shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd. . . . and my servant David shall be their prince for ever" (vv. 24–27). Since King David had been dead for centuries, this reference is to a new king, one who will ultimately fulfill the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants and usher in the kingdom of God.

According to Ezekiel, this golden age will include the reinstitution of the Passover: "In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, you shall celebrate the festival of the *Passover*, and for seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten" (Ezek 45:21).

When Isaiah, son of Amoz, speaks for God he too glimpses the destiny of the nation and declares, "He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa 2:4). In another prophecy he speaks of God receiving glory and praise "from the ends of the earth" (24:14–16) and envisions a future utopian kingdom where "the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear" (Isa 25:6).

Toward the end of the exile, the writer of Third Isaiah foresees and proclaims good news to the poor and oppressed that economic favor and sociopolitical balance will be restored under the reign of God (Isa 61:1–2). These words hearken back to Lev 25:8–17, 23–55, when God instructed his people, liberated from Egyptian bondage, to celebrate a Jubilee year every half-century,[45] when debts are cancelled, confiscated lands returned, and Jewish slaves emancipated, thus, bringing equality back to the nation.

This arrangement was designed to ensure that the newly formed nation would persevere in her social imagination and her counter-domination posture, and that no Israelite would ever have to live in a perpetual state of bondage or indebtedness. In issuing the edict, God twice reminds the nation: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God" (Lev 25:38, 42–43).

Both the original edict (Lev 25:10–12) and prophetic announcement (Isa 61:1–2) are reminders of the Passover/Exodus event. Just as Yahweh showered favor on his people and released them from bondage despite their shortcomings, he now calls upon them to act likewise toward one another. Israel is to operate according to a new paradigm: one that eschews

45. For an in-depth treatment of Jubilees, especially how it relates to the forming of Israel as a society after the Passover/Exodus, see: Kinsler and Kinsler, *Biblical Jubilee*.

domination. The priestly writer of Isaiah 61 now characterizes the restored eschatological kingdom as a time of continuous Jubilee celebration when everyone experiences social and economic equality under the reign of God.[46] Ironically, some variant of this scheme was God's intention for Israel from the time of the Exodus. The Passover was meant to help Israel remember what it was like to be oppressed and to remind her as a free people not to oppress others.

3.8 Returning Exiles Reinstitute the Passover

After Persia defeated Babylon in 539 BCE, King Cyrus issued a decree by the word of the Lord that all Jews who wished to return to their homeland could do so (2 Chr 36:22–23).[47] Three waves of Jewish exiles returned to Jerusalem between 538 BCE and 444 BCE and formed a functioning civil government under the aegis of the Persian Empire.

At first the returnees may have believed their migration back to Jerusalem fulfilled in some way the eschatological visions proclaimed by the prophets because, after rebuilding the Temple, "the returned exiles *kept the Passover*" (Ezra 6:19). The narrative tells how "the priests and the Levites . . . purified themselves;" then they "killed the Passover lamb for all the returned exiles, for their fellow-priests, and for themselves" (v. 21). All ate "and separated themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel" (v. 22).

Within a short time, however, economic disparity develops with the wealthy taking advantage of the peasantry (Neh 5:1–5). This moves Nehemiah, the governor, to announce a Jubilee, calling upon the wealthy to restore to the oppressed "their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them" (Neh 5:11). In response, they agree under oath, "We will restore everything and demand nothing more from them. We will do as you say" (Neh 5:11–12).

The reinstitution of Passover and the attempt to put into practice the Jubilee mandate is temporary and soon it becomes clear that this return to the Promised Land is not the long-awaited restoration of the kingdom of

46. When Jesus announces the arrival of God's kingdom, he uses the language of Jubilees, declaring that the Trito-Isaianic prophecy is now being fulfilled (Luke 4:18–19). Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation*, 88, concludes that for Luke, Jesus links his identity and purpose with Jubilee themes. In Christ the Law and the prophets find their fulfillment.

47. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 316, contains a translation of Cyrus's actual edict.

which the prophets spoke. The people of Israel again abandon their social contract with God and begin serving Yahweh routinely, paying him lip service only, while serving their own selfish desires.[48]

The reconstruction of the Temple opens the way for the establishment of "a ruling priestly aristocracy that owed their position to the imperial regime, and it set up a Temple administration to secure revenues for the imperial court as well as itself."[49] This results in God sending additional prophets, e.g., Micah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, among others, who call one more time for national repentance and tell of God's future plans to gather his people from the four winds and unite them in peace under his kingdom reign (Isa 48:20; 52:7; Hag 2:6–9; Zech 9:9–10; Mal 3:23–24). A small remnant of covenant-keeping Jews hangs onto this hope and passes it down from one generation to the next.

3.9 Hellenization and Passover

The Medo-Persian Empire gave way to the rise of the Greek city-states and the ascendancy of Alexander the Great of Macedon, who conquered Palestine in 333 BCE. Jewish life was altered once again as Hellenization swept the civilized world. Greek troops and teachers crisscrossed the empire conquering and spreading their language and culture. Jerusalem Jews suddenly found themselves living under another regime, no longer as free as they were under Persian self-rule. The priesthood remained unhampered, however, and continued to collect tithes and taxes. They embraced Greek culture and served as surrogates for whichever empire controlled Jerusalem. The result was that an ever-widening gap developed between common Jews and their priestly leaders.

Greek customs such as gathering in festival rooms and eating at a leisurely pace became the preferred way to dine. Formal festivities were elaborate occasions and included the supper proper (the eating course) followed by the symposium (drinking course). Diners reclined on couches throughout the evening as they partook of food and drink. Jews followed suit. According to M. Barth, the Passover meal likewise took on characteristics of a Greek festival meal.[50] In the early second-century BCE, Ben

48. Although their commitment to God was less than enthusiastic, Jews in Jerusalem never returned to the idolatry that brought about their exile in the first place. They strongly embraced monotheism.

49. Horsley, *Jesus in Context*, 25.

50. Barth, *Rediscovering*, 10.

Sirah intimates that Jewish males ate by reclining at the table.[51] Although Bokser points out ways Passover differed from Hellenized meals,[52] he does not adequately deal with the many ways they were the same. The Passover meal would have been viewed by Greeks as a standard sacrificial meal that included an offering, several cups of wine, hymns, instructions, conversation, and encouraged fellowship (*koinonia*), bonding (*philia*), and equality (*isonomia*) among the diners.[53] Leonhard concludes that the Jewish Pesach is "indebted to Greco-Roman sympotic customs."[54]

When eating a Hellenized Passover meal, the Jews reflected on its original meaning. For them the exodus was a metaphor for anti-imperialism.[55] The Passover meal, with its accompanying instructions, kept memory of and desire for freedom alive. Having been dominated by one Gentile kingdom or another since their days in Egypt and ruled by their own tyrannical kings, the Jews began to look for the day when God would liberate them from oppressive regimes and restore his kingdom under a Davidic messiah, who would manifest his rule over the nations.[56]

3.9.1 Resistance to Seleucid Rule

By the third-century BCE, Judea was controlled by Alexander's Ptolemy successors and then came under the heavy hand of the Seleucids. Things reached a critical point for the Jews when Seleucid strong man Antiochus IV (175–164 BCE) recruited willing Jewish collaborators to help with his

51. Sir 9.9 warns, "With a married woman dine not, recline not at the table to drink by her side, lest your heart be drawn to her and you go down in blood to the grave." This quote confirms that it was possible for Jewish men to interact with Jewish women in a banquet setting. Metzger, ed. *Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, 139–40.

52. Bokser, *Origin of the Seder*, 8, 50–66. By arguing that the Greek banquet did not provide the "impetus for the development of the Passover Seder" (55), Bokser erects a straw man and then knocks it down. The issue is not origin or impetus, but whether or not the Passover meal took on the characteristics of a Hellenistic *symposion*. He additionally argues against the Passover being a Greek "philosophical" meal (51–52). Again, this is not the issue. Not all symposia were philosophical in nature; some were sacrificial banquets. Passover was the latter.

53. See chapter 2, section 2.4, where these issues are discussed.

54. Leonhard, *Jewish Pesach*, 435. "Hellenized Jews who celebrated a 'totally' Hellenistic banquet as Pesach" would be at home in a rabbinic or Hebrew-style banquet, since their structures were not that much different (428).

55. Gottwald, "Early Israel," 15.

56. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, 144–45; Collins, *Scepter and the Star*, 20.

rule of the region (1 Macc 1:20–64). He faced mounting resistance after he proclaimed himself to be "Epiphanes," i.e., god manifest, and plundered the Jerusalem Temple of its treasury, collected excessive taxes, built a gymnasium for the training of prospective young leaders, and encouraged Jewish men to participate in athletic games that were played in the nude (1 Macc 1:13). The penultimate cause for all out revolt occurred when many young Hebrew men, embarrassed over the physical sign of their Jewishness, sought to "remove the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant" (1 Macc 1:15). Jews were quickly losing their identity as Jews.

As sociopolitical circumstances worsened, and the extinction of the Jewish religion was a stark possibility, a remnant of Jews mounted a resistance movement in 167 BCE. To resist, however, could end in a martyr's death. Judas Maccabeus, the son of a priestly family, rose to leadership. At the time, a body of apocalyptic literature surfaced from anonymous writers, who claimed to receive revelations about the *eschaton*. The Epistle of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, The Animal Apocalypse, and Book of Daniel told of God's divine imminent intervention, culminating with arrival of God's universal kingdom over earth (Dan 7:13–14). Inspired by these apocalypses, the freedom fighters fought for national liberation. Those losing their lives in the fight for independence were assured they would not miss out on the kingdom, but would be resurrected (Dan 12:1–3).

Waging full-scale guerilla warfare against Antiochus and his troops involved a prolonged and fearless combat, but the Jewish resistance succeeded in winning their freedom in 164 BCE and ousted their Greek oppressors. They ritually cleansed their sanctuary and began a period of self-rule that lasted until 63 BCE (1 Macc 4:36–59).[57]

3.9.2 Resistance under the Maccabeans

When Simon Maccabeus, Judas' brother, had himself named high priest and leader of the nation, the Jewish masses found themselves living under a new tyrant, only this time, he was one of their own. The priestly Maccabean-Hasmonean family formed a dynasty that "extended the frontiers of the new Jewish state and compelled the neighboring peoples, the Idumaeans in the south and the various foreign clans in and around Galilee,

57. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.2.1, 21–28 mentions that the king of Arabia raided Jerusalem during the Passover observance in 65 BCE.

to recognize them as their rulers and embrace Judaism as their religion. This entailed submission to circumcision as far as the male population was concerned."[58] Like many rulers before them, the Maccabees personally amassed great power and wealth, and exploited their own people on the home front.

What should have been a century of freedom for God's people was turned into an era of subjugation for the demoralized masses. As a result, a majority of Palestinian Jews yearned to be delivered from their own leaders. Passover always brought these feelings out in the open as the browbeaten peasants gathered together and cried out for God to usher in the long-anticipated messianic era.

The *Book of Jubilees* (ca. 160–105 BCE)[59] includes a lengthy description of how Passover was to be observed in Palestine at the time. Not only was it to include memory of the first Passover meal and Exodus, but it was to provide instructions to the contemporary readers as to how they were to eat the supper.[60] The meal was still to be eaten on 14 Nisan as a remembrance of delivery from Egyptian domination in the distant past *and* from Persian and Grecian oppression in the immediate past. But unlike the original Exodus exiles who ate in homes and in haste (Exod 12:11), these Hellenized Jews "shall eat it in the sanctuary of your God,"[61] i.e., in the Temple court, and in a more relaxed fashion and with a joyous attitude.[62] *Jubilees* was the first Jewish writing ever to mention the use of wine at the Passover table.[63] Now that Passover was associated with the Temple, it "required a pilgrimage" to Jerusalem "where the sacrifice was held."[64]

The Essenes, believing the Hasmonean priesthood to be illegitimate and dissatisfied with its leadership in Jerusalem, withdrew to the wilderness where they "formed a new covenantal community in strict adherence

58. Vermes, *Who's Who*, 16.

59. The oldest manuscript among the Dead Sea Scrolls was *Jubilees*, likely written prior to 100 BCE but after 164 BCE. See VanderKam, *Book of Jubilees*, 18.

60. *Book of Jubilees* 49:1–23.

61. Ibid., 49:17.

62. Ibid., 49:22–23.

63. Ibid., 49:6.

64. Smith, *From Symposium*, 147. Originally, the head of the Jewish household killed a lamb and performed the rituals at a Passover meal held in the home. In the first-century BCE, the father was still responsible for the actual slaughter of the lamb, but needed assistance of a priest to pour the blood on the altar. See Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 26–29.

to the Torah."[65] They saw themselves as preparing the way for the arrival of God's kingdom. As such they participated in symbolic acts such as eating a communal meal in anticipation of the messianic banquet to come. By nature and design, the meal was an act of resistance that spoke of the demise of the wicked priesthood and the advent of the long-awaited messianic priest.[66]

3.10 Passover under Roman Imperialism

With the Roman conquest of Judea (63 BCE), which will be discussed in the next chapter, the Jews found themselves living under a Roman domination system. Although a conquered people, the Jews were allowed to participate in their religious festivals, including Passover.

3.10.1 The Structure of the Passover Meal

Philo (20 BCE–50CE), an Alexandrian Jew, makes several scattered references to Passover and describes it as being practiced in a Hellenistic manner, i.e., a meal with two courses (*deipnon* and *symposion*) that incorporates traditional Jewish traditions.[67] According to the *m. Pesahim*, which likely reflects back on the Passover meal tradition in the first century, reclining was the proper posture for eating the Seder.[68] This included women participants reclining at the side of their husbands.[69] Hand washing also became part of the ritual.[70]

Philo also links Passover to a sheaf offering that the worshippers gave to the high priest to be laid on the altar.[71] Josephus (ca. 37–100 CE), the Jewish historian, mentions further that the sheaf offering was presented to

65. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence*, 18.

66. The Messianic Rule (1QSa=1Q28a) 2.15–20, in Vermes, *Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, 159–60.

67. Philo, *Spec.* 2.144–173.

68. *m. Pesah.* 10:1, concludes, "And even the poorest Israelite should not eat until he reclines at his table." Also see *b. Pesah.* 108a.

69. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals*, 72.

70. *m. Hag.* 2:5–7.

71. Philo, *Spec.* 2.162.

the priest on Sunday, 16 Nisan,[72] and treated as a firstfruits offering.[73] In time this act took on eschatological significance.

Passover meals had now been moved from the Temple into homes scattered throughout Jerusalem, although lambs were still being purchased and sacrificed at the Temple.[74] By the Roman era, Jews often used the terms "Passover" and "Unleavened Bread" interchangeably; only context determined whether they spoke of the same event or as distinct observances.[75]

Since there are no extant first-century records that describe what actually occurred during a typical Passover meal, it may be impossible to reconstruct a detailed order of events. Green, Jeremias, and Theissen make attempt to do so, basing their imaginative reconstructions on second-century documents.[76] Theissen, representative of the others, divides the Passover Seder into four parts: 1) Pre-meal activities, which include the first cup, hand washing, and the dipping of bitter herbs,[77] 2) Passover *haggadah*, i.e., questions and answers about the features of the meal, along with a song of praise and a second cup, 3) the main banquet and third cup,

72. Josephus, *Ant*. 3.10.5, writes, "On the second day of unleavened bread, that is to say the sixteenth, our people partake of the crops which they have reaped and which have not been touched till then, and esteeming it right first to do homage to God, to whom they owe the abundance of these gifts, they offer to him the first-fruits of the barley in the following way. After parching and crushing the little sheaf of ears and purifying the barley for grinding, they bring to the altar an *assaron* for God, and, having flung a handful thereof on the altar, they leave the rest for the use of the priests. Thereafter all are permitted, publicly or individually, to begin harvest."

73. Segal, *Hebrew Passover*, 26–29.

74. Since the days of King Josiah, the Passover was eaten in the Temple court in Jerusalem on 14 Nisan (2 Chr 35:16–19), but by the first-century CE the great influx of pilgrims to Jerusalem (possibly because of better roads and policing by the Empire) forced the observance to take place in homes within the city limits. See Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1377 and Josephus, *Ant*. 18.2.2 for a fuller discussion.

75. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread originally were separate observances. See Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 92n4. Passover celebrated Israel's divine liberation from Egypt (Lev 23:5). The Feast of Unleavened Bread immediately followed and was a week-long affair commemorating how the Hebrews ate only unleavened bread on the eve of the Exodus (Lev 23:6–8). By the time of Jesus the two events had merged and the terms Passover and Unleavened Bread were used synonymously (Luke 22:1, 7). See Josephus, *Ant.* 18.19.

76. Green, *Luke*, 757–58; Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 68–71, 84–88, Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 424, all base their reconstruction on *m. Pesah*. 10.

77. Athenaeus, *Deipn*. 2.58b–60b. The typical Roman banquet included a pre-meal appetizer course. This is where the Seder ritual dipping lettuce into vinegar would fit into structure.

and 4) Closing, i.e., song of thanksgiving followed by a fourth cup.[78] The *haggadah* may have existed in oral form as far back as the first-century CE.[79] The order of the meal and its outward form fit nicely within the structure of a Roman banquet. It contains hand washings, hors d'oeuvres, conversation, meal, and singing and wine.

3.10.2 Anti-Imperial and Eschatological Nature of the Passover Meal

For many first-century Jews living under Roman oppression, the Passover meal not only celebrated the liberation of their forbearers from the slavery under Pharaoh, but produced a renewed longing for deliverance and the restoration of the nation under the rule of God. According to Wainwright, eschatological expectation ran high, especially during Passover week.[80] Warren Carter believes that Passover "evoke[d] and reenact[ed] the victory of God over . . . Egypt" and served "as a code reference to Rome's downfall."[81] Bokser likewise comments, "The message of Passover remained viable and relevant . . . Within the biblical period the memory of the exodus gave people hope that their imperfect situation would end and a new liberation would occur, a message that also fit the situation of the Jews under Roman domination."[82] He adds, "As reflected in Philo and other sources, this message of thanksgiving and hope for future protection or redemption was often tied to the offering of the paschal sacrifice."[83] Thus, Passover had taken on an eschatological significance.[84]

Temple priests and local merchants in Jerusalem saw Passover as an opportunity to make money for services rendered. The pilgrim travelers, however, viewed such practices as graphic reminders of the oppressive conditions under which they lived. The meal with its symbolism and stories of liberation caused the masses to long for a new exodus from tyrannical gentile rule and the overthrow of their own native rulers. It was an occasion for pious Jews to reaffirm their vision for "a new social order

78. Theissen and Merz, *Historical Jesus*, 424.

79. Leonhard, *Jewish Pesach*, 76.

80. Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 23.

81. Quoted from a letter written by Warren Carter to the author (December 15, 2007).

82. Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, 9.

83. Ibid.

84. Fitzmyer, *Luke X–XXIV*, 1390.

and natural order" that could and would one day come about.[85] As they eagerly awaited the arrival of God's kingdom, these peasant masses likely remembered the prophetic words of Ezekiel who spoke of a new age and a new Passover under the reign of God's new Davidic king (Ezek 45:21–22).

Jeremias notes that first-century Jews not only interpreted the unleavened bread in the traditional manner, but added "*an eschatological interpretation*," which pointed to a future abundance of bread in the kingdom of God.[86] They additionally found eschatological meaning in the words of the *Hallel*, which they sang each Passover—"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Ps 118:24). These words sank deep into their consciousnesses as they sought divine deliverance from the heavy hand of Roman Imperial rule. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, Passover protocol included a place at the table for Elijah, the messianic forerunner, who would pave the way for the coming of the Lord. An open window or door, an empty chair, and a full glass of wine awaited his arrival.[87] Joshua ben Hananiah, a rabbinic sage (ca. 90 CE), in his comments on Exodus 12 and 42, says that the night of Israel's *future* redemption would be on the same night of her deliverance from Egypt.[88]

According to James C. Scott, people who live under tyranny have very few outlets to voice opposition, lest they face severe reprisals. Therefore, they choose to express their pent-up feelings and hostilities outside the sight or hearing of the power brokers. These "hidden transcripts" enable them to go undetected while engaging in subversive conversation with others of like mind. For first-century Palestinian Jews the Passover meal became a defiant and subversive act that anticipated the day when God would defeat Rome and deliver his people, just as he had done before.

When Jesus, along with the apostles, ate his final Passover meal, commonly referred to as the "Last Supper," it reflected the same anti-imperial sentiment as other Passover meals being eaten around the city that year.[89] First-century Jews viewed Rome to be as much an oppressor as ancient Egypt and Caesar as much a tyrant as Pharaoh. Like his contemporaries, Jesus linked the present Passover with the future Passover that would find its fulfillment in the restored kingdom (Luke 22:16).

85. Bokser, *Origins of the Seder*, 83.

86. Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 59.

87. Barth, *Rediscovering*, 11–12.

88. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrash,* 85.

89. Chapter 6 looks at Luke's version of Jesus' final meal as a Passover, and examines its anti-imperial nature.

At times, the repressed emotions and heightened tensions spilled over into the public square. With up to 200,000 sojourners converging on Jerusalem to attend Passover festivities, the atmosphere was like a powder keg ready to explode.[90] According to Josephus, crowds were often provoked to violence with little or no provocation.[91] To guard against "civil unrest," the Roman prefect personally traveled to Jerusalem with extra troops.[92] Stationed along the portico of the Temple, the soldiers were ready "to quell any uprising that might occur,"[93]

Josephus mentions ten disruptions that took place during Passover week from 4 BCE–70CE. The public protests were often aimed at native retainers who did Rome's bidding by imposing heavy taxes upon the Jewish masses.[94] On other occasions, the dissent was directed toward Roman occupation troops. One such outbreak happened when a Roman soldier on the roof of the Temple made lewd gestures toward the pilgrims. A rock throwing riot ensued. Cumanus, procurator of Judea (48–52 CE), brought in additional troops to stop the rebellion. They were successful, but not before many people lost their lives.[95]

3.11 Conclusion

The thesis of this chapter was that Passover served as an anti-imperial meal that effected, celebrated, and anticipated emancipation from Egyptian totalitarian rule. When the Hebrew children gathered on the night of their deliverance and ate the Passover lamb, they participated in a seditious act.

As the pivotal point in Israel's primary history, the Exodus was chiefly a political act of deliverance from tyranny and oppression. God instituted an annual Passover to remind Israel of his compassion toward them as a people and of their obligation to show compassion toward others.

When Israel failed to fulfill her moral mandate and abandoned a perennial Passover celebration, she fell prey to one empire after another.

90. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.14.3; 6.9.3, estimated the number of pilgrims to be ten times that amount, but Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, 263, voicing the consensus of most scholars, believes the number to be less than 200,000.

91. Josephus, *J.W.* 1:88–89; 2:8–13; 2:223–227.

92. Sanders, *Historical Figure of Jesus*, 249–50.

93. Josephus, *Ant.* 20.106–107.

94. Josephus, *J.W.* 2:10–13; *Ant.* 17.213–218.

95. Josephus, *J.W.* 2.223–246; *Ant.* 103–136. According to Josephus 20,000 to 30,000 people died in a stampede.

By the mouth of prophets God revealed that he would one day draw his people out of the nations and restore the kingdom. Under the leadership of his anointed king, Israel would once again celebrate Passover as a sign of his new covenant with the holy nation.

By the first-century CE, Palestinian Jews were yet again under another domination system. Roman troops occupied the Jewish homeland. Amidst dire circumstances, many pious Jews longed for God to fulfill his prophetic promises. Passover week became an opportunity to raise their voices in protest as they prayed and waited for God to lead them in another Exodus.

The church later adopted the structure of the Roman banquet for its communal meals, but drew its eschatological and anti-imperial nature from the Passover.

Chapter 4 will examine the Roman domination system at the time of Christ. Special attention will be given to the sociopolitical and economic conditions that led to the rise of the Jesus movement.