

## *Meeting Jesus: His Life & Times*

### Worksheet for Week 5

#### Jewish Festivals and Passover<sup>1</sup>

##### *Major Jewish Festivals*

The three major Jewish festivals were intimately connected with agriculture (**Passover**, with the barley harvest; **Pentecost**, with wheat harvest and the bringing of first-fruits to the Temple; **Tabernacles**, with the grape harvest). They symbolically celebrated the blessing of Israel's God upon his Land and his people, and thereby drew together the two major covenantal themes of Temple and Land. In addition, Passover celebrated the exodus from Egypt; Pentecost, the giving of Torah on Sinai; and, Tabernacles, the wilderness wandering on the way to the promised land. All three, therefore, focused attention on key aspects of Israel's story, and in the retelling of that story encouraged the people once again to think of themselves as the Creator's free people, who would be redeemed by him and so vindicated in the eyes of the world. This theme was amplified in the prayers appointed for the different occasions.

Two other festivals made substantially the same point, though without the agricultural connection. **Hanukkah**, commemorating the overthrow of Antiochus Epiphanes by Judas Maccabeus and his followers, underlined the vital importance of true monotheistic worship and the belief that when the tyrants raged against Israel her God would come to the rescue. **Purim**, celebrating the story found in the book of Esther, re-enacted the reversal of Haman's plot to destroy the Jews in the Persian empire; it drove home the same message.

Together, the five feasts ensured that any Jew who made any attempt to join in (and by all accounts participation was widespread) would emerge from the festivals with the basic Jewish worldview strengthened: one God, Israel as his people, the sacredness of the Land, the inviolability of Torah, and the certainty of redemption.

##### *Passover*

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt: 'This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family.... The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect.... Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses.... That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire.... Do not leave any of it till morning.... This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover. On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.... This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance...' [selected verses] (Exodus 12:1-14 NIV; see also Deuteronomy 16:1-8.)

Twenty-five years after Jesus' resurrection, Paul tells the Corinthians: "Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth." (1 Corinthians 5:7-8 NIV). [Note – leavened bread (bread made with yeast) could not be eaten during Passover. Yeast couldn't even be kept in a home during Passover days. Leavening bread takes time and unleavened bread was to remind the Israelites of their swift exodus from Egypt.]

##### *Was the last supper a Passover meal?*

Surely, the meal was some kind of Passover meal. Several, almost incidental, details point this way. It was eaten at night in Jerusalem; Jesus and his followers normally returned to Bethany for the night, but Passover meals had to be eaten within the city limits after dark (days in the Jewish calendar began at sunset). The meal ended with a hymn, presumably the Hallel psalms sung at the end of the Passover meal (Psalms 115-118). The best explanation for Jesus' crucial words is that the head of the household would normally explain certain parts of the Passover meal in relation to the exodus story. Passover would normally be celebrated by families and Jesus regarded his followers as a true family group.

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<sup>1</sup> This material on Jewish festivals was taken and adapted from the study guide to a series by N.T. Wright, *Jesus: The New Way*. The guide was prepared by Denise George and is copyrighted by the Christian History Institute.

## Bible Readings for Week 5

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage. What do you find most surprising in these readings?

<p><b>Day 1 Luke 1:1-2:52 The prologue; the birth and childhood of Jesus</b></p>	<p><b>Day 2 Luke 3:1-4:13 Preparation for the ministry of Jesus</b></p>
<p><b>Day 3 Luke 4:14-6:11 Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee amid controversy</b></p>	<p><b>Day 4 Luke 6:12 – 7:50 Jesus heals and teaches</b></p>
<p><b>Day 5 Luke 8 &amp; 9 Jesus' ministry broadens; Jesus' identity and the nature of discipleship</b></p>	<p><b>Weekly Prayer Concerns</b></p>