

PAEDO-COMMUNION AND THE FEASTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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Often in discussions of Paedo-Communion the proponents of that practice assert that it is justified on the observance of the Hebrew Nation throughout the Old Testament, where it is argued that each member of the household participated in the feasts of the nation. This paper, while not examining all of the relevant materials pertaining to other arguments, will endeavor to show that Covenant participation in the Old Testament did not necessitate participation in her feasts by all members of the Covenant, in many cases forbade participation, and that this exclusion was no detriment to the covenantal status of those members who did not participate. Subsequent to this discussion, a New Testament construction will be offered concerning that which is contiguous with Old Testament practice, and that which is changed by our New Testament establishment. All Scripture quotations in this document are from the Authorized Version (AV).

Section 1: The Egyptian Passover

The Egyptian Passover was the original institution of this ceremony and as such, was different from other, later Passover celebrations. These changes in the observance occurred during the time of the wilderness-wandering as the Children of Israel received further legislation from the Lord. Although it is difficult to determine exactly when these changes obtained, it seems from the text that they began rather soon after the Egyptian Passover as the Lord provided greater light as to how He would command the Children of Israel concerning this feast. We might therefore expect a progressive transition that begins early and culminates on the plains of Moab, in the Book of Deuteronomy, when Moses gives those final instructions before ascending up mount Nebo.

The participants of the Egyptian Passover meal are difficult to determine with any certainty. There are different views ranging from, (1) only male heads-of-households, along with adult males of extended family, (2) male heads-of-households and their adolescent circumcised sons, along with any circumcised adult male or adolescent servants, (3)

all adults, males and females, along with those who were able to ask the catechetical question, “What mean ye by this service?” (Exodus 12.26), and (4) every member of every Israelite household. Note the exposition below:

(Exodus 12.3-4) Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: ⁴ And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.

In this passage we have the first indication of who is to partake. First, we have a “lamb for a house”. In other words, the Children of Israel are to partake by households. Note that this does not indicate who in the household partakes, but only that there is to be one lamb per household. While it might be argued that “per household” includes all the members of that house, such is not conclusively the case. First, we see that household here is identified with the “man” that takes the lamb. In other words, “household” or “house” is defined by having a male head, and having that male head is the qualification to take a lamb. It may be that it is a populous house, or a house of one—the import here is not who is in the house, but that there is a house with a male as its head. Second, we see that if one house cannot consume all the flesh of the lamb, then two houses are combined in order to consume the bulk of the flesh. Again, who in those houses are to partake is not in view. Third, even the statement “according to the number of souls” while possibly referring to every person in the house, is most probably limited to the male heads and other adult males of extended family by the next phrase, “Every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb”. Note here that the eating of the men is what regulates how many households will partake of the lamb. And, while it is possible to understand the Hebrew word “man” here (heb. *ish*) as person (v4), contextual concerns indicate against this view, for the Lord has used the word “man” already in this near context to refer to the heads of households, and the parallel phrasing, “according to the number of souls, every man according to his eating” indicates that it is the eating of each man that informs the amount of flesh needed per house. In other words, the word “souls” is informed by the eating of the men.

It is of note that when Moses would teach the Children of Israel later in this passage what they were to eat on the other Holy Days, those Sabbaths which framed the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that each of those days were “holy convocations” in which no servile work was done, “save that which every man must eat” (v16) speaking of

the daily food of those days. The Hebrew word here is not “man” as the AV translates it, but “soul” (heb. *nepesh*) which is the generic word for “person” in such a case as this. In other words, Moses does use a more generic word in this passage when referring to a wider participation. Simply, Moses had a gender inclusive word he could have used for the portion of flesh needed for every person in each household for the Passover lamb. That he used “man” in verses 3-4, instead of “soul” is a strong argument that men were partaking, and not the entire family.

The next portion that speaks of the participants in the Passover is found in verses 6-8:

And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. ⁷ And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. ⁸ And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

In this passage we have several uses of the third person plural. The first instance is “the whole assembly of the congregation” (v6). The activity performed by this assembly is the killing of the Passover in the evening. It is clear here that not everyone could do the killing of the sacrifice, so that while we have the whole assembly in view, this is a collective term, and the context indicates that it means generally, according to every house—not that every person in the nation shall kill the Passover.

The second instance is “and they shall take the blood” (v7). The activity performed by “them” is to strike it on the doorway of the house. Again, it is not possible, nor would we expect that Moses is commanding every person in the nation to perform this task. The subject of the clause “they” clearly refers to some, not all of the persons; most likely, the male heads of the households.

The third instance is “wherein they shall eat it” (v7). This prepositional phrase speaks of which doors shall have blood sprinkled on them—door behind which “they” will eat the Passover; in other words, every house in which a Passover lamb will be eaten. Note again we have the same principle here. While it is possible that every member of the household is referred to, consistency indicates that this use of the third person pertains to the same ones who have killed the lamb, and who have spread its blood on the doorframe. What is indicated by this consistency is that “they” here are the male heads of the households.

The fourth instance, “and they shall eat the flesh in that night” (v8) and the fifth instance, “with bitter herbs they shall eat it” (v8) is much the same as we have already discussed. The passage begins with a view of the third person plural which does not necessarily refer to every person in Israel, but to the members of every family, or families eating the Passover together. The final three instances, without any textual indication that we have entered into a new understanding, continue to use the third person plural as before. The natural reading of the text points to a distributive use, rather than an inclusive use, of the third person plural. Simply, “they” refers to the male heads-of-households who would kill the Passover, sprinkle the blood, eat the flesh, and the bitter herbs.

To summarize verses 3-4 then, while there is a use of the term “persons” (Heb. *nepbesb*) this term is limited by the contextual concern that is governed by the singular “man” (Heb. *ish*) throughout. If the passage is read according to the more definite term, it is clear that every man shall take a lamb, the house is defined by having a man in it, if that house is too small (presumably to consume an entire lamb when all the eating males are considered) that man and his male neighbor shall join together, and that lamb shall then be reckoned according to the eating (portion) of each man. Let us remember that the household in this culture often included multiple generations. Clearly with this as the context, the phrase “according to the number of souls” in verse 4 speaks of the men eating. Note that Moses does not say, “according to the eating of his house” or, “according to the eating of the persons in his house”, “but according to the eating of a (each) man”.

The next portion in Exodus 12 that pertains to participants in the meal itself is found in verse 11:

And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover.

Here we have a second person plural, “thus shall ye eat it”. Once again the text indicates not everyone in the house, but as the instances above, this too is spoken of the male heads, and addresses them. The attire that is described here can hardly refer to small children or females, but is descriptive of males readying themselves for travel. We must not assume that there is a command to eat given to the whole household—the second person plural can just as easily refer to all the males to whose households are being indicated here—in other words, everyone’s household, not everyone in

the household. And, given that the address indicates a particular attire for the participants that pertains to the male heads, not particularly to small children and women, this reading is strengthened the more.

There is an additional portion which pertains to eating in verses 15-20 of chapter 12. In this portion however we are not speaking of the Passover meal, but the diet of the family itself after the Passover was eaten. Note:

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. ¹⁶ And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. ¹⁷ And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. ¹⁸ In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. ¹⁹ Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land. ²⁰ Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.

In this passage we see that the Passover coincided with the feast of unleavened bread, that the Passover was held on the 15th of Nisan, and that the feast of unleavened bread commenced on that same day. Further, we see that the feast of unleavened bread continued until the 21st day of the same month, or 7 days. Note the phrase in verse 16: “save that which every man must eat”. Here it might be said from the AV that it was only the men that were eating those seven days, upon a strict reading of the text. However, as we noted above, this seven-day fast from leaven was undertaken by all in the household, for the word translated “man” by the AV is actually the Hebrew word “nephesh” (soul) which is the generic word for “person” regardless of gender. In other words, when Moses would widen the eating beyond the males only during this seven day period, and would include the family, he does so through a change in the terms.

There has already been much ink spilled on the phrase in verse 26, “what mean ye by this service?” It will not do to rehash the arguments again, only to mention that this question, when coupled with what we have seen above pertaining to who the actual participants were in the Egyptian Passover, shows consistency with the foregoing. If the male heads of household are partaking, and the children are not, this second person plural makes good sense as the

children asked this catechetical question pertaining to the activities of their father, or perhaps more than one father or households joined together. Note that the question is not, “Why do we eat this way today?” or, “What do we mean by this service?” The children are to ask the question based on the service their fathers are performing.

The final section in this chapter speaks to the necessity of circumcision. Note:

And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: ⁴⁴ But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof. ⁴⁵ A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof. ⁴⁶ In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. ⁴⁹ One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you. ⁵⁰ Thus did all the children of Israel; as the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.

It is interesting to note here that there is no mention made of women partaking. Further, circumcision was a prerequisite for partaking, and that included the servants of a proselyte. In giving the legislation for the proselyte, note that it is one bought with money, apart from any mention of children or a wife. It can be argued that slaves bought with money were adults—sometimes they came with families, and sometimes not. The presumption here is again that of an adult male, circumcised, and part of a larger household. Note also verse 48. “let him come near and keep it”. The “him” there contextually refers to the householder, irrespective of family or servants. Further, while there are different words for male and female slaves in Hebrew (*eved* for male, and *amab* for female), Moses does not mention female servants, only male. There are portions in this book where Moses is legislating for actions pertaining both to male and female servants. At such times, he does not use the word for a male slave as inclusive of the females, but mentions them separately. See Exodus 20.10 as an example of many. So, whether “let all his males be circumcised” refers to his servants or his sons, note that he alone comes near to eat of the Passover.

This concludes our look at Exodus chapter 12. In it we have seen a particular consistency in the language Moses uses as he identifies those who should eat of the Passover. If family members other than the male heads of household and other circumcised adult males partook of the Passover meal, they did so in the absence of a command in this passage, and without a decisive indication. The count of the males, and the determination of their eating, was to determine

whether house was joined to house. We have also seen that Moses, when speaking of the eating of unleavened bread for seven days, uses the generic term for “person” rather than the gender specific “man” used for Passover participation. It might be argued that the repeated use of “man” in this passage means “the man and all that pertains to him”. However this seems to be at odds with the change of the substantive “man” for “person” when a wider participation is in view.

Section 2: The Passover in the Wilderness Wandering in the Balance of the Pentateuch, and Legislation in the Pentateuch for the National Estate in the Canaan

Chronologically, the remainder of the book of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and the first 9 chapters of Numbers record that first year after the departure from Egypt, and it would be fair to say that it was a busy year. Note the following particulars as they pertain to our topic:

The people have received the Law of God in Tables of Stone, and the Book of the Covenant. (Exodus Chapters 19-24) In these precepts we have an advertisement of what will be commanded in greater detail later regarding the feasts of the Lord, and the requirement for all *males* to travel to appear before the Lord three times in the year (Exodus 23.14-18)

Moses receives all the instruction for building the tabernacle and enacting its services (Exodus Chapters 25-31). After Israel’s idolatry at the base of Sinai the Lord again continues to instruct Moses in what He will require for ceremonial observance (Exodus 32-40). Note in chapter 34.22-25 that the Lord instructs Moses that the Passover will be celebrated “before the Lord” and that the *males* of the nation must “go up to appear” thrice in the year, one of those appearances being to celebrate the Passover, one for First-fruits, and one for Ingathering, or Booths. Note once again the command for the males to appear, apart from any mention of women, and we assume, small children. We will discuss this later. Finally in Exodus we note that the instructions were brought to their fruition when in 40.16-34 the Tabernacle is put into service before the first year had expired, and that the cloud covered the Tabernacle, authenticating and inaugurating its use.

Moving into the book of Leviticus it is instructive to note here that we pause in the chronological telling of the journey of the Children of Israel from Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea in order to hear the legislation and service of the Tabernacle and worship, especially as it pertains to those ministers in and around the Tabernacle, namely the Priests and Levites. Pertinent to our topic is any mention of the Passover and other feasts and their attendees, and how the Lord instructed His people to come near to Him, and to dwell with Him as a Holy God in the midst of His people.

Regarding the feasts of Israel, we have the following instruction:

The 23rd chapter of Leviticus gives particular instruction as to the feasts of the Lord:

Vs. 1-3 speak of the Sabbath Day and the pattern of 6 days of work followed by one day of rest.

Vs. 4-8 speak of the Passover. While particular details are given, those who are to attend and partake is not mentioned here. The accompanying feast of Unleavened Bread is also mentioned along with the Passover, the particular day of the year, the duration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, that no work is to be done the first and last days of that Feast, and that a sacrifice is to be offered each of the seven days. It seems that Moses assumes a working knowledge here of his readers, for no details of the Passover are given, only of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Vs. 9-22 speak of the days of First-fruits or Pentecost, and the requirements for those days also. It will be noted that the details of who attended this Feast “before the Lord” is not given in detail here.

The second cycle of festivals for the Old Testament Church is found beginning in verse 23. The first day of the 7th month was a festival of the trumpets, the 10th day of this same month Yom Kippur was observed as a fast day, and the 15th day of this month began the Feast of Tabernacles. The descriptions of these feasts make up the remainder of the chapter, and as before, there is no specific instruction in this chapter pertaining to the requirement of attendance. We have already heard however, that these feasts will be observed by the males of Israel. (Exodus 23.17, 34.22-25).

There is however, some legislation in the Book of Leviticus that pertains to who attended the feasts of Israel. This portion of the book details how the people of the Lord would dwell with the Holy Lord in their midst. We’re speaking of the laws of ceremonial uncleanness, and purity. The Lord, in teaching His holiness to a “Church under age”

enacted several barriers to guard against unrestricted access to Himself to teach the people His holiness. These barriers were put into the various places and relations of the people.

First, there was the high priest, who alone, and only once every year, would enter into the holiest place with blood not his own, on the Day of Atonement. This is explained in Leviticus chapter 16. Not everyone could enter the Holy Place, and even the only one who was permitted, the High Priest, was allowed into the Holy Place once a year on the Day of Atonement, and only then with those items that pertained to His duty as High Priest. There were regulations regarding which of the sons of Levi would draw near to the holy things, and which sons of Levi who would not.

Second, there were other barriers the Lord set up pertaining to physical uncleanness having to do with leprosy, bodily discharge, contact with the dead, etc. This is pertinent to our topic because these laws of uncleanness prevented certain persons from participating in the feasts of the Lord—they were prevented from “drawing near” unto Him. It is in these standards of ceremonially clean and unclean estates that we have certain clues as to who might draw near to the Lord in His feasts and other times of worship, and those who could not.

The English word “unclean” appears 129 times in the book of Leviticus. Sometimes it is spoken of animals, as in 27.11, 27. Other times it speaks of an estate contracted by certain physical circumstances. Note the following instances: Leprosy rendered a person “unclean”. See Leviticus 13 for this regulation. In this chapter we also see that an article of clothing, leather, (13.47-51) and other items can contract leprosy and be “unclean”. In the following chapter even a house can be declared “unclean”.

In Leviticus 15 we see that there are other circumstances that can render a person “unclean”, for instance, if a man has a running issue (vs. 1-3). Further, uncleanness can be contracted by items he touches, or may have touched (v. 4). If this man who is unclean comes into contact with, for instance, a pillow, and then that pillow is touched by another man, the second man also becomes unclean (15.3-11). If a man loses his seed of copulation in the night, he is unclean, and so is his wife, if they sleep together, and if they have sexual intercourse (15.16-18).

In chapter 15 beginning in verse 19 we have the legislation which pertains to women and their monthly menstrual cycle, regarding uncleanness. At the onset of her menses she was to number 7 days for her uncleanness. During that time everything she touched was unclean, as well as everything that touched her. Whatever she sat upon, lay upon, etc. was unclean, and those who came into contact with any of those articles were also unclean until the evening, until he bathed in water and washed his clothes (15.26-27), and the assumption is that if he did not bathe and wash his clothes he remained unclean. If a man had intercourse with his wife, and “her flowers be upon him” that is, it is during her menstrual cycle, he too is unclean for seven days and must bathe in order to be ritually clean.

After the woman numbered 7 days for her menstrual cycle she was considered unclean another 7 days. The only exception to this was if her cycle extended beyond the seven days—that is, she continues “in her flowers”. In that case she numbered the second 7 days only after her issue had ceased (see 15.25). Further, in chapter 12 we see that childbirth rendered a woman unclean. In the case of a male child, she was unclean for the first week, and then 33 days afterward, or 40 days total. In the case of the female child she was unclean for the first 2 weeks, and then 66 days afterward, or 80 days. Note that all these estates of uncleanness were given so that the children of Israel would not “defile the tabernacle of the Lord”. (15.31)

This is explained in the durations in other statements pertaining to what it meant to be unclean. In every case, uncleanness prevented someone from drawing near to the Lord. The leper was “put out of the camp”. The woman was commanded to observe the “days of her separation”. Other cases are indicative of the same kind of separation. A seven-day separation meant that for that contracting of uncleanness, that person would miss the weekly gathering on the Sabbath. One could not draw near to the holy things of God, neither to the sacrifices or sanctuary, in that estate, nor were they permitted to join the weekly convocation in their localities. See Leviticus 12.4, 13.6 This is even more pertinent to the priests, who must be clean on a more regular basis in order to perform their functions.

However, this especially comes to the fore in our discussion regarding who partook of the feasts of Yahveh—the Passover, First-fruits, and Booths, among the other holy convocations when the children of Israel drew near to the Lord. To continue this discussion, we must move on to the book of Numbers.

As we begin in the book of Numbers, we start the chronology again. Chapters 1-14 record the sad history of the Israelites as they disbelieve the Lord, and refuse to enter the land of Canaan. But there is another historical circumstance that takes place in Numbers 9 that merits our attention in our discussion of who participated in the Passover feast during Israel's history. In the first part of the chapter we have the time of the observance fixed for us. Only one year has transpired since the Exodus from Egypt (vs. 1-4). Verse 6 and following records the question of "certain men" who were unclean by reason of contact with a dead body, and were unable to eat the Passover by reason of that uncleanness. Let us take a moment to note here that putting the Tabernacle in service had just taken place 2 weeks prior. (Exodus 40.16-34). The pious intention of these men is clear: They had prepared to partake of the Passover, and then, through no fault of their own, or through some other necessity, have come into contact with a dead body. It is apparent they understood that they were prohibited from coming before the Lord while unclean. They have heard the requirement to appear before the Lord as males, and they have been prohibited in their coming before Him while unclean. They have no option, they believe, but to sin. If they partake, they have sinned for they are unclean. If they refrain, they have sinned because they are commanded to partake. They do what any faithful worshipper ought to do in this kind of case, they go to their spiritual guide, in this case Moses, to have the matter resolved.

Moses, to his credit, does not make up an answer, but declares, "Stand still, and I will hear what the Lord will command concerning you". The presumption clear in the passage is that Moses has not received legislation from the Lord as to how to handle the circumstance of uncleanness regarding the Passover. He does what any faithful minister ought to do; he goes to the Lord for an answer. Although the narrative does not say, it seems fair to assume that the answer comes quickly, as the Lord declares that the men may wait exactly one month to partake of the Passover. On the 15th day of the next month then, these men who could not partake in the 15th of Abib, would partake on the 15th of Ziv. The rest of this discourse goes on to describe three things: First, that the Passover observed in the second month will be undertaken precisely according to the commands given for the Passover generally—there will be no change even though it takes place in the alternate month. Second, to discourage looseness and sloth, and an "elective attitude" when it comes to the things of the Lord, the exhortation is given that all who are able to partake in the first month ought to partake, upon pain of discipline. Third, there shall continue to be one law for the Israelite and the stranger.

Pertinent to our study in this narrative is that there are no women coming to Moses to ask him about their condition regarding the Passover. The legislation in Leviticus which speaks of uncleanness has, we assume, been given by this time, seeing that these men know that they could not come near to the Lord, having contracted ceremonial uncleanness through contact with a dead body. That no women are recorded as coming with the same question may indicate the following things: First, they were coming, and asking these questions of their husbands, and these men were coming to Moses, and it is not recorded. This would be a difficult position to maintain, seeing that women were unclean for about 50% of their lives, and that barring an extraordinary intervention from the Lord, we can reasonably expect that half of the women in Israel would be unable to partake in the yearly feast. It is unreasonable to assume that there was some allowance made for the women of the nation apart from any mention. Second, it is possible that the participation of women was optional, and not commanded, and that if they were clean they partook, and if unclean they did not. In response to this it should be noted that the Lord has been very clear as to how He is to be worshipped, and that this kind of optional or elective observance is not in keeping with that kind of legislation. The regulative principle of worship requires direct command or good and necessary inference for a practice to obtain, and “optional” worship is not in keeping with how the Lord would have us worship Him. Note George Gillespie:

How absurd a tenet is this, which holdeth that there is some particular worship of God allowed, and not commanded?

What new light is this which maketh all our divines to have been in the mist, who have acknowledged no worship of

God, but that which he hath commanded? Who ever heard of commanded and allowed worship?!

We would at least expect direction from the Lord pertaining to such an optional participation for women if that was the case. Further, if we consider the instance of the males above, note that the Lord gave them an option based on their uncleanness, if that uncleanness came upon them unexpectedly, or of necessity, as would be the case by the death of a loved one and the necessary handling of the body for burial. In such a case they could come near to the Lord in the next month. It will be understood at this point that a one-month interval gives no relief for a woman who is menstruating—she will (presumably) be in the same estate the next month. In other words, if women did come, or if their husbands were petitioning for their partaking, there is absolute silence, and when a consideration is given, it is exclusive of their estate. Clearly in this one-month leave women are not in view at all. The question that begs to be

¹ G. Gillespie, A Dispute Against English Popish Ceremonies, in A Presbyterian’s Armoury, Vol. 1, p118 (emphasis added)

asked in this passage is, “where are all the women who, if they were also participants in the Passover, would have been asking the same question as these men?” And, if they were asking, where is the record of yet another consideration of say, two or six weeks, rather than one month, to accommodate them? That no such question is recorded, and no such consideration is mentioned is quite telling. The author understands that this is an argument from silence. But its force cannot be ignored. Of course the third option is the most simple, and most obvious from the natural flow and understanding of the text, that even here at the first Passover after the Exodus it is already clear that women do not partake.

There is yet another consideration that arises from the laws of separation. As we have noted above, Leviticus 15.19-33 speaks to the circumstance of contracting uncleanness from a woman who is menstrous. To review, uncleanness could be contracted in the following ways:

By touching her: (v 19)

By touching her bed: (v 21)

By touching anything whereupon she sat: (v 22)

By touching anything that has come into contact with her bed, or with her “sitting”: (v 23)

In these instances, anyone who contracted this uncleanness was to wash his clothes, and remained unclean until the evening. Further, if a man had intercourse with his wife, they both were to wash, and they remained unclean until the evening (v 18). And, if they had intercourse while the woman was menstrous, the man was also unclean for seven days (v 24). These additional considerations do not argue for women coming to Jerusalem with their husbands to participate in the Passover (or the other feasts) but present an added difficulty not often reckoned in our discussions as New Testament believers. It is true that there are narratives in Scripture where we do see the whole family traveling together to the Passover (Luke 2.41-44). However, we must not discount the precautions and difficulties attendant upon such a company. It is possible that a man might contract uncleanness from his wife such that he would be precluded from participation in the feast, even though he had traveled far to observe it. The command for all the *males* to appear before the Lord noted above (Exodus 23.14-18) seems to fit well with these difficulties.

The next portion in the Pentateuch dealing with the Passover is found in Numbers 28, beginning in verse 16. There is no mention of participants, only the details of the offerings offered, especially concerning the feast of unleavened

bread. The wider context also details the rest of the feasts of the Lord and their offerings (Numbers 28-29).

The final mention of the Passover in the Pentateuch is that of Deuteronomy 16. In this chapter we have the details of the feasts of the Lord that were held at the “place where the Lord chose to set His Name”. In this chapter Moses speaks of the Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. In it we observe that there are some statements concerning participation in some of the feasts. Note the following:

Verses 1-8 speak of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread together, and without any distinct mention of who was to participate, save that the second person singular is used (thou, in the AV) in verse 7. It is difficult to ascertain with any certainty what the second person singular refers to here. It could mean the entire nation considered singularly, or it might refer to the head of a household considered generally. Understanding the participants is further complicated by the mingling of the Passover with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. There is nothing inconsistent in this section with the entire family traveling together to Jerusalem, the Father partaking of the Passover, and then the rest of the family observing with him the Feast of Unleavened Bread the ensuing seven days, either staying at Jerusalem, or while traveling home. There is also nothing inconsistent with the family partaking of the Passover in this passage—there simply is no clear direction. It will be noted however that verse 16 requires that all the *males* in Israel appear before the Lord thrice in the year, and that no other participation is commanded by the Lord.

Verses 8-12 describe the Feast of Weeks. Note here that this is a family celebration that includes all the servants. This is in keeping with the idea of a free-will offering, that it has the idea of celebration, feasting, etc. such that anyone might offer such an offering to the Lord—see Exodus 35.29 and Leviticus 22.18-23. That the people all ate of the free-will offerings at this time pertains to the celebratory nature of the people as they remembered the Lord in His blessing them with the first fruits of a harvest to come in that year. They are also to remember that they were slaves in Egypt—that is, that they labored for others, and the first fruits were given to their taskmasters. Here they have those first-fruits in their hands, and in giving the very first part to Yahveh, they profess that He is their liberator and provider.

Verses 13-15 speak of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is akin to a harvest festival, and again, the family members participated in this festival at Jerusalem. They were to remember that it was the Lord who had blessed them in all their

increase, and given them a place to live in the land of promise, because they were once wanderers in a wilderness.

This discourse then closes in verses 16-17 with the reiteration that all the *males* shall appear three times in the year before the Lord: in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, in the Feast of Weeks, and in the Feast of Tabernacles (See also Exodus 23.17; 34.23). Note that in the legislation concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover there is no mention of the family participating, and that this is distinct from the other times the males were required to appear before the Lord. Note Calvin here:

Again, because only half of the seventh month contained three feast-days, i.e., from the first to the fifteenth, for the same reason it is only required of the males that they should leave their houses and celebrate the sacred convocations; for thus the females are spared, to whom travelling is not so convenient. Besides, through the fecundity promised them by God, they were almost always either pregnant or nursing. It is also certain that the boys and young men were excepted under the age of twenty, since God includes under the term males only those who were comprised in the census. If any object that in God's spiritual worship there is no difference between males and females; the reply is easy, that the fathers of families presented themselves there in the names of their wives and children: so that the profession was extended to the other sex, and to those of tender age. ²

Calvin does not mention what we have noted above, viz. that there were considerations of ritual defilement also that would have precluded many women in the nation from participating in the feasts, besides his mention of pregnancy and the care of small children falling to them.

Section 3: The History in the Days of Joshua and After the Conquest

It is an interesting fact in the historical record of the wilderness wandering that we read of no Passover celebration after the beginning of the second year. Now, this may mean that none was observed, or it may mean that it was, and Moses does not record it. However, in Joshua 5.1-9 we read an interesting record about the wilderness generation, that their children were not circumcised. Upon passing over Jordan however, those children whose circumcision was neglected by their unbelieving parents was performed, and following that, the Passover was kept (Joshua 5.1-12). The understanding that no Passover was observed during the wandering is strengthened by the fact that the people ate

² Calvin, J., & Bingham, C. W. (2010). *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (Dt 16:16).

Manna, did not settle in and grow crops, and so it is possible that the other elements of the Passover meal would have been unavailable to them. Calvin disagrees with this interpretation of these events. Commenting on verse 10, he writes:

But it is said that the want of circumcision must have kept back a large proportion, that the mystery might not be profaned; for at its institution it had been declared, No uncircumcised person shall eat of it. To this I have already answered, that it was an extraordinary privilege; as the children of Israel were freed from the law. For it is certain that they continued to use sacrifices, and to observe the other parts of legal worship, although this was unlawful, unless something of the form prescribed by the law had been remitted by divine authority. It is certain that unclean persons were prohibited from entering the court of the tabernacle, and yet the children of Israel, while uncircumcised, offered sacrifices there, thus doing what was equivalent to the slaying of the Passover. They were therefore permitted, by sufferance, to do that which it was not lawful to do according to the rule of the law.³

Regardless of which view is correct, there is no real mention of the Passover participants in any great detail in this passage, or in the rest of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua.

At the end of the period of the Judges we have an interesting record of Hannah, the mother of the Prophet Samuel. In the first chapter of 1 Samuel we have the record of Elkanah, Peninah, and Hannah. Without a detailed exposition, it may briefly be said that it was the practice of the family to travel to Shiloh, the place of the tabernacle of the Lord in those days, for the yearly sacrifice. We are not told if Elkanah himself goes three times in the year, only that once a year he goes along with his whole family. The presumption would be that he was regular in all the required feasts, and that his family only went with him once in the year—it is a presumption, for the passage is silent on his practice other than the once-a-year attendance with his whole family. However, we do note that after the Lord opens Hannah's womb, she refrains from going up until her son is weaned, and that this entailed at least one absence from the family's yearly observance, if not more. What is interesting here is that if participation by the women and children was required, Hannah would have found herself at odds with the Lord's commandment—hardly acceptable for a woman of godliness. But, if as we have seen above, travel for the women was optional, seeing that they did not partake of the feast, we have an understanding that preserves the holy character of Hannah, and which keeps with the purpose of the author as he describes her to us. Other than these inferences, the passage holds no other indication of who

³ Calvin, J., & Beveridge, H. (2010). *Commentary on the Book of Joshua* (83–84).

participated in eating the sacred meals.

One other record in the Old Testament speaks of who was present in the days of the feasts with any kind of certainty. In 1 Kings 8 we have the dedication of the Temple of Solomon, and the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant into that new Temple. The timing of this event is the “Feast of the Seventh month”, or, the Feast of Tabernacles. Note who assembled in Jerusalem at that time to participate in the feast; all the men of Israel (1 Kings 8.2). There is no mention of women or children. 2 Chronicles 5-7 also speaks of this dedication, and also in it we have the same record:

“Thus all the work that Solomon made for the house of the LORD was finished: and Solomon brought in all the things that David his father had dedicated; and the silver, and the gold, and all the instruments, put he among the treasures of the house of God. ² Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the chief of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. ³ Wherefore all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto the king in the feast which was in the seventh month.” ⁴

Section 4: Conclusion of the Old Testament Survey

What we have seen in our brief study of these relevant passages is that to assert that all Covenant members partook of the Passover is in error. Further, to assert that all Israel, men women, and children, went up to Jerusalem three times in the year to partake of the sacred feasts is certainly a questionable assertion and by no means certain. The texts rather indicate the requirement of male participation by those males who were ceremonially clean. What is optional is whether or not the family traveled together to Jerusalem to enjoy as much as possible together of the ceremony, while only those ritually clean males were required to come and actually did partake. We have also reviewed the requirements of the Regulative Principle of Worship with the help of Mr. George Gillespie. It would be fair to assert at this point in our study that while there is no explicit statement in support of our understanding (that women were not participants in the Passover meal itself, but might have traveled with their husbands and fathers to Jerusalem to partake of the Feast of Unleavened Bread together, as well as the other yearly feasts) certainly it cannot be gainsaid. This conclusion certainly makes a better use of the Scriptural evidence than the assertion that all Israel partook of the

⁴ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 1995 (electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.) (2 Ch 5:1–3).

Passover, or the other yearly feasts. Finally, in this summary of the Old Testament witness, let it also be said that the absence from participation in the feasts, and in the Passover, was no barrier to Covenant membership. In other words, those who did not participate in these ceremonies were not considered outside the Covenant, or deprived in any way. Note:

¹⁰ Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, ¹¹ Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: ¹² That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: ¹³ That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.⁵

Section 5: The New Testament Contribution

The New Testament makes some contribution to the issue of who partook of the Passover. In Matthew 26.17-25 we see that Christ Himself told His disciples to make ready for the Passover, and then in verse 20 Matthew tells us that “he sat down with the twelve”⁶. This is an interesting practice if the argument that all Israelites in each family took part in the Passover meal is true. We know, for instance, that Peter was at this time married.⁷ But what of the other men—had they no attachments? Are we to assume that we have 12 unattached males having no one with whom to celebrate the Passover? I suppose scenarios can be constructed as to why Peter’s wife was not there, but we know as late as the days of the Apostle Paul that Peter continued with his wife,⁸ and as for the others, is it not reasonable to assume that some of them also were married? And yet, we have only the twelve dining with Christ at Passover. The clear inference is that women did not participate in the Passover. If they were required to be there, it is inconceivable that our Lord would have left such unmentioned, or that the Gospel writers, knowing the propriety involved, would not have given some reason why Peter’s wife at least failed to attend.

In opposition to this, Alfred Edersheim writes,

⁵ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 1995 (electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.) (Dt 29:10–13).

⁶ See also Mark 14.17ff and Luke 22.14ff

⁷ See Matthew 8.14 and Mark 1.29-30

⁸ 1 Corinthians 9.5

“It was a common practice, that more than one company partook of the Paschal Supper in the same apartment.⁹ ¹⁰ In the multitude of those who would sit down to the Paschal Supper this was unavoidable, for all partook of it, including women and children,¹¹ only excepting those who were Levitically unclean. And, though each company might not consist of less than ten, it was not to be larger than that each should be able to partake of at least a small portion of the Paschal Lamb¹²—and we know how small lambs are in the East.¹³”

While it is never advisable to disagree with an authority, it is clear here that Mr. Edersheim is dependent on sources that may not apply to our situation here. For instance, in notes 10 and 11 below, he cites a portion from the Mishnah, Pesachim Chapter 8, sections 1 and 3. While a detailed study of the character of the Mishnah is not warranted by our study here, let us remember briefly that it was a collection of the teachings of the Rabbis, written about 220AD, and purported to be some of the oral tradition received by Moses at Sinai as well as other traditions from around the first century AD and later. Needless to say, this is not a reliable source for Biblical celebration of the Passover, and numerous additions to Biblical practice and even errors can be mined out of this body of work. It will also be noted that the same author makes other statements which might be understood as contradictory, or at least adverse to his comments above. Note:

“It was in accordance with this custom that, on the first Pascha after Jesus had passed His twelfth year, His Parents took Him with them in the ‘company’ of the Nazarenes to Jerusalem. The text seems to indicate, that it was their wont to go up to the Temple; and we mark that, although women were not bound to make such personal appearance, Mary gladly availed herself of what seems to have been the direction of Hillel (followed also by other religious women, mentioned in Rabbinic writings), to go up to the solemn services of the Sanctuary.¹⁴”

And note this as well:

“It was the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles, and the scene recorded by St. Luke¹⁵ would take place in the open leafy booth which served as the sitting apartment during the festive week. For, according to law, it was duty during the festive week to eat, sleep, pray, study—in short, to live—in these booths, which were to be constructed of the boughs of living trees.¹⁶ And, although this was not absolutely obligatory on women,¹⁷ yet, the rule which bade all make ‘the

⁹ Pes. 7:8

¹⁰ The Mishnah explains certain regulations for such cases. According to the Targum Pseudo-Jon., each company was not to consist of less than ten persons; according to *Josephus* (War 6. 9. 3), of not more than twenty.

¹¹ Pes. 8:1

¹² Pes. 8:3

¹³ Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 2: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (483).

¹⁴ Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 1: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (235–236).

¹⁵ 10:38–42

¹⁶ Comp. ‘The Temple and its Services,’ p. 237, &c.

booth the principal, and the house only the secondary dwelling, would induce them to make this leafy tent at least the sitting apartment alike for men and women.¹⁸

It is clear from these citations that Rabbinic scholarship was not wholly in agreement as to what was required, acceptable, or otherwise practiced. And, it might as well be noted that even if some of this is true recorded history from the mouth of the Rabbis, that it certainly cannot inform the study we have done from the Scriptures themselves. Rather, the Bible ought to judge these practices.

As we come then to the close of our study, it remains to ask the question as to how women came to participate in the Lord's Supper, given this history. In other words, a critic of our view presented here might ask what rationale is used for bringing women to the Lord's Supper, seeing they were excluded from the Passover in the Old Testament, and it could be conceived that an argument *ad absurdum* could be formed out of our thesis. In response, several lines of argumentation can be marshaled.

First, it will be noted that the general statement of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3.27-29 puts baptism upon all equally regardless of ethnicity, social station, or gender. The Apostle here states that baptism unites a Jew, a Greek, slave, a freeman, a man, or a woman to Christ as the seed of Abraham. Clearly this is a reference to Christian Baptism and its participants, as well as to who was allowed to the Passover of the Old Testament.¹⁹ This is seen as the preaching of the Gospel spread to Samaria under the preaching of Phillip the Evangelist, as those who believe are baptized, both men and women (Acts 8.12)²⁰. So first, we see that women are baptized just as men are. The sign of the Covenant is performed upon the women as well as the men. This can also be seen in the Great Commission. We note that in Matthew 28.18-20 Christ commissions His Apostles and ministers after them to "Disciple the nations". The verb to disciple (Gr. *matheteuō*) is the only imperative in this commission of Christ. The others are three participles instructive of how this command will be performed: Note: Disciples are made as the ministers will be going, baptizing, and teaching. That is, those who are baptized are disciples, irrespective of gender.

¹⁷ Sukk. 2. 8

¹⁸ Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 2: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (145).

¹⁹ Note that the distinctions the Apostle mentions in Galatians 3.27-28 are exactly those distinctions of who drew near to the Lord in partaking of the Passover, now done away in Christ: Neither Jew nor Greek: See Exodus 12.43, that no stranger may partake—meaning not of Abraham's seed; neither bond nor free: See Exodus 12.47 "let him come near and keep it" note the householder partakes, but his servants do not; neither male nor female: See Exodus 12.43-48 and note that no uncircumcised shall eat—presumably this prohibition included women; and also see our exposition above pertaining to Exodus 12 and the flesh provided for each "man". However, note that he does not say, "there is neither infant nor mature".

²⁰ See also Acts 16.15

The second line of argumentation pertains to cleanness and uncleanness as it appears in the New Testament. Uncleanness still bars people from access to the Lord in His Sacraments, but uncleanness is no longer tactile: in this age of the Gospel is given moral considerations apart from “touch”. So, one is unclean by reason of unrepentant moral failure, and not by reason of bodily issue, tactile communication with a dead body, etc. It is interesting to note in 1 Corinthians chapter 5 that the Apostle references the Passover and leaven, the symbol of uncleanness. It is clear that the Apostle means to teach that uncleanness still requires separation, but that uncleanness is no longer “tactile”. This also argues for the inclusion of women in the Lord’s Supper, for they are no longer excluded based on their monthly physiology.

The third argument is found in 1 Corinthians 7.14, where the Apostle argues for the sanctification of the unbelieving spouse with respect to the children of the family being holy themselves—that is, set apart unto the Lord as His own lambs, regardless of the gender of that believing spouse. This speaks to a full covenant membership on the part of even a female, not a head-of-house, but married to an unbeliever. She is considered in precisely the same covenantal estate in the eyes of the Church, such that her children are holy, and therefore to be baptized. This speaks of full membership in the Covenant community apart from her unbelieving husband, which would be shown at the Lord’s Table and by her own baptism.

Finally then, the reason infant children are excluded from the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper when women are included is because of the requirements laid down in the administrative text of 1 Corinthians 11.17-34. And, while it is not in the scope of this paper to offer a detailed exegesis of this passage (remember our discussion was the inclusion of all Covenant members in the feasts of the Old Testament) a few comments are in order:

1. There is such a thing as an unworthy partaking. This can hardly be true of an infant who is fed the elements by his parents. (v. 27)
2. There is a level of self-examination required of which infants are not capable. (v. 28)
3. There is a level of self-judgment or separating of which infants are not capable (v. 31)

Women however are capable of meeting these criteria, being first baptized disciples and then possessing the age and ability to do the judging and discrimination necessary to a worthy participation. (See Larger Catechism, q. 177)

This concludes our discussion. We have not attempted to answer every argument of the advocate of paedocommunion. We have attempted to show that covenant status in the Old Testament did not require participation by all members in the feasts and ceremonies of the Mosaic establishment, and in many cases a large portion of the nation did not participate fully in the Passover, and the other yearly feasts, not by being “cut off”, disciplined, or otherwise deprived, but because they were represented through their heads of household, and counted as Covenant members. Therefore, the unbroken line of the paedocommunion supporter who claims “all covenant members partook of all the feasts in the Old Testament, especially the Passover, so also should all covenant members in the New Testament” is shown to be a false conclusion based upon false premises.