

**The Reunited Kingdom, part 15
(2 Chronicles 29:1–36:23)**

by Dr. Richard L. Pratt, Jr.

**The Reign of Josiah, part 4: Josiah’s Fidelity in Worship Reforms, part 4:
Josiah’s Later Reforms, part 3: Josiah Observes Passover
(2 Chronicles 35:1-19)**

Josiah Observes Passover (35:1-19)

The final event of Josiah's eighteenth year was his observance of Passover. This event represents the height of Josiah's efforts to reestablish proper worship in Jerusalem. Having recounted how the king readied the temple (34:8-13) and renewed the covenant (34:29-32), the Chronicler turned to the Passover of Josiah's reign.

Comparison of 35:1-19 with 2 Kgs 23:21-27

In this passage, the Chronicler greatly expanded the record of 2 Kgs 23:21-27. The relative sizes of the accounts indicates the importance which the Chronicler placed on Josiah's Passover. The Chronicler's distinctive concerns appear by comparing the two accounts (see figure 62).

2 Chr		2 Kgs 23
35:1a	Introduction to Passover (loosely parallel)	23:21
35:1b-17	Preparations and Ceremonies (added)	-----
35:18-19	Summary of Passover (slightly expanded)	23:22-23
-----	Josiah's Further Reforms (omitted)	23:24-27

Comparison of 2 Chr 35:1-19 and 2 Kgs 23:21-27 (figure 62)

A number of significant points of comparison should be noted. First, the Chronicler began this material by paraphrasing the opening of 2 Kgs 23:21 (// 35:1a) so that Josiah's Passover is idealized. Second, the greatest difference between the two accounts is the Chronicler's additional details on how Josiah celebrated the event (35:1b-17). Third, he also expanded the summary of the event (35:18-19 // 2 Kgs 23:22-23), noting that Josiah's Passover was greater than all others because it was kept by so many of the people. Fourth, the Chronicler omitted Josiah's further reforms after Passover (2 Kgs 23:24-27) in order to keep the celebration itself as the climax of the king's efforts.

Structure of 35:1-19

The Chronicler's expansion of the record of Kings formed his account into four symmetrical parts (see figure 62). The opening (35:1) and closing (35:16-19) of this passage form general statements that describe the Passover in its entirety and frame the middle portion. As a result, the middle portion regresses chronologically and explains some of the details of the preparations (35:2-9) and performance (35:10-15).

Josiah's Passover Introduced (35:1)

The Chronicler paraphrased 2 Kgs 23:21 as he opened his account of Josiah's Passover. His record specified a number of details not appearing in Kings that raise the celebration to the level of a model for his readers (see *Introduction: 27) Disappointment and Celebration*).

First, he noted that the Passover was observed **in Jerusalem**, the city which formed the center of religious life in the post-exilic period (35:1). In Hezekiah's previous celebration of Passover, the Chronicler gave much attention to the fact that the king sent couriers with invitations to encourage all the tribes to come to Jerusalem (see 30:5-6). In Josiah's case, no record of such an invitation appears, but it is evident that the Chronicler was concerned that his readers remember that Jerusalem was the only place Passover was to be observed.

Second, the Chronicler also added that the slaughtering of the Passover lamb took place **on the fourteenth day of the first month** (35:1). The most likely reason for this notice is the contrast it presents with Hezekiah's celebration. Hezekiah observed Passover during the second month because preparations could not be made soon enough (see 30:2-3). Josiah, however, was able to commemorate the event as decreed in the Mosaic Law (Ex 12:18; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16). By this means, the Chronicler not only made it clear that Hezekiah's practice was unusual; he also exalted Josiah's celebration as a model for his post-exilic readers.

Josiah's Preparations for Celebration (35:2-9)

These verses present a chronological regression. As we have seen, the opening verse of this material (35:1) focuses on the day of the Passover slaughter. Now we come to events that preceded

the fourteenth day. As a result, it would be appropriate to translate the verbs in this section as past perfects ("he had appointed ... and had encouraged ... He had said ..." etc.).

Structure of 35:2-9

This material divides into two reports of Josiah's preparations for the actual slaughtering of the Passover lambs (see figure 61). He first prepared the priests and Levites (35:2-6) and then the sacrifices (35:7-9).

Josiah Readies Priests and Levites (35:2-6)

The Chronicler focused first on Josiah's appointment of priests and Levites to perform Passover duties. This material presents two concerns: the appointment of priests (35:2), the exhortation to the Levites (35:3-6).

Josiah **appointed the priests to their duties** (35:2). The king had already interacted intensely with the priesthood during the renovations of the temple (see 35:9,14). It is unlikely that his widespread reforms took place without their help. Here the Chronicler had in view the appointment of priests to specific duties related to the Passover. He **encouraged them in the services of the Lord's temple** (35:2). That is, he instructed them to perform their duties in relation to the Levite divisions he ordered for the celebration (see 35:10).

Along with the priests, Josiah also exhorted the Levites (35:3-6). The Chronicler's record of Josiah's exhortation divides into an introduction (35:3a) and the exhortation itself (35:3b-6).

The introduction of Josiah's exhortation describes these Levites in two ways that indicate the Chronicler's concerns (35:3a). First, they were those **who instructed all Israel** (35:3a). The Levites were teachers of the Law (see 17:7-8; Neh 8:7-9). The reference here to **all Israel** may indicate that Josiah brought together Levites who lived outside Jerusalem. If so, this description highlights the fact that Levites from all the tribes (in preparation for people from all the tribes) were present at Josiah's Passover (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). The allusion to Hezekiah's Passover is evident (see 30:1-12); Josiah also brought the nation together at this time.

Second, the Levites are described as those **who had been consecrated to the Lord** (35:3a). This notice demonstrates the Chronicler's concern with presenting this event as a model for his readers. Rituals of consecration appear frequently in Chronicles as examples of proper worship which the post-exilic readers were to imitate in their day (see *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*). Only those who had cleansed and committed themselves to the Lord were permitted to participate in the Passover. This qualification was especially important because these Levites probably included many who were dispersed throughout the North and South.

Josiah then gave instructions to the Levites (35:3b-4). The Chronicler's record of these instructions amounts to seven imperatives. These commands touch on different aspects of the Levitical functions and portray Josiah as devoted to proper worship at the temple.

First, the Levites were to **put the sacred ark in the temple** (35:3b). This command is difficult to understand for there is no evidence that the ark had been removed. Yet, we must assume that for some reason, either Manasseh or Amon had removed the ark from the temple. Perhaps they had begun a practice of carrying it through the city for Josiah said it was **not to be carried** any more (35:3b).

Second, the Levites were to **serve both the Lord and his people** (35:3b). As mediators between God and the people of Israel, the Levites performed duties whose object was service to God and to the worshippers.

Third, they were to **prepare themselves by families and divisions, according to the directions written by David ... and by his son Solomon** (35:4). David's arrangements of the Levites appear in 1 Chr 24:4, 19-20, 30-31; 28:19-21. Solomon's directions may be found in 8:14. Apparently, these Levitical arrangements appeared in some written form which are no longer extant. The Chronicler considered the orders of David and Solomon as normative for Israel (see *Introduction: 14 Standards*).

Fourth, the Levites were to **stand in the holy place with a group of Levites** (35:5). The initial organization was to take place within the temple, but later various Levites would move in and out of the temple as they served **each subdivision of the families of ... the lay people** (35:5). By this organization, Josiah insured that no family group within Israel would be overlooked at the Passover.

The fifth, sixth, and seventh imperatives appear in rapid succession and should be taken together. As in Hezekiah's day, the Levites were to **consecrate** themselves (see 35:3). Special consecration was required before sacred duties and included washings, the shaving of their bodies, various offerings, and the presenting of the Levites before the Lord as a name offering (see *Introduction: 6 Royal Observance of Worship*).

The Levites were also to **slaughter the Passover lambs** (35:6), probably for themselves (see 35:8-9). They were then to **prepare the lambs for** (their) **fellow countrymen** (35:6).

The importance of these instructions finds expression in Josiah's closing words. Not only did Josiah make certain that things were done **according to the directions written by David ... and Solomon** (35:4). He also insisted that all things were to be done according to **what the Lord commanded through Moses** (35:6). Josiah was intent upon observing the Passover as God had ordered through these men.

One difficulty rises at this point. According to Ex 12:3 each family was to sacrifice its own lamb. Here the Levites are involved in the Passover sacrifices. This apparent conflict may be resolved by distinguishing between the actual **slaughter of the Passover lambs** (35:6) and the preparation of lambs (i.e. gathering, inspecting, etc.) for their **fellow countrymen** (35:6). The Levites actually sacrificed all Passover lambs in Hezekiah's day (see 30:17) to protect the sanctity of the rite following a period of apostasy. In all events, the Chronicler made it plain that Josiah's preparations for the

Passover were exemplary for his post-exilic readers. They must also arrange for the performance of temple rites in accordance with the standard of Moses' Law (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

Josiah Readies Sacrifices (35:7-9)

Not only did Josiah prepare the priests and Levites; he also provided sacrifices. The Chronicler's report of this effort divides into two parts: provisions from Josiah (35:7), and provisions from Josiah's officials (35:8-9).

Josiah gave **sheep and goats** for sacrifices from **the king's own possessions** (35:7). Hezekiah had done the same in his day (30:24). These contributions were designated **for all the lay people** (35:7).

His officials gave numerous sacrifices as well, but their contributions were **to the people and the priests and Levites** (35:8). Both Josiah and his officials gave more than lambs for Passover. They also contributed **goats** (35:7) and **cattle** (35:7,8,9) for other sacrifices as well (see 35:12).

The Chronicler noted that these gifts were **contributed voluntarily** (35:8). He emphasized the voluntary nature of contributions to the temple services on several occasions (1 Chr 29:6-9,17; 2 Chr 17:16; 31:14; see *Introduction: 9) Temple Contributions*). The Chronicler's hope was that the post-exilic community would not support such services under constraint but voluntarily and enthusiastically. Moreover, the number of animals provided for offerings is very large, 8400 in all (35:8-9). Chronicles often points to large numbers of sacrifices to inspire the post-exilic community to enthusiastic observance of worship in their day (see 1:6; 5:6; 7:4-5; 24:14; 29:32-35; 35:8-9; see also *Introduction: 6) Royal Observance of Worship*).

Josiah's Performance of Celebration (35:10-15)

The Chronicler described several aspects of the actual celebration of Passover. He focused on different aspects of the activities of the **priests and Levites** (35:10). The Chronicler's record divides between the activities directed toward the lay people (35:10-13), and those directed toward the priests and Levites (35:14-15).

The priests and Levites performed a number of tasks related to **all the people** (35:14). They arranged themselves **as the king had ordered** (35:10 see 35:4). The **lambs were slaughtered** (35:11) probably by the lay people (see 35:6; see also Lev 3:2,8,12-13). The priests **sprinkled blood handed to them** (35:11 see 29:22; 30:16). This priestly rite corresponded to the original familial practice of sprinkling the doorposts (see Ex 12:7).

The Levites then **skinned the animals** (35:11 see 29:34) and **set aside the burnt offerings** (35:12). This statement probably does not refer to separate burnt offerings, but to those portions of the Passover lamb that were burned on the altar. This ritual was also done **as is written in the Book of Moses** (35:12). In all likelihood the Chronicler had in mind the regulations concerning peace or

fellowship offerings of which Passover was a type. For a discussion of peace or fellowship offerings, see The same was also done **with the cattle** (35:12), the other sacrifices that were made (see 35:7-9).

Beyond this, the Levites **roasted the Passover animals** (35:13). This act was also done **as prescribed** (35:13) by Moses (see Ex 12:2-11). Finally, after cleansing the instruments, the Levites **served them quickly to all the people** (35:13). The speed with which the ceremony was carried out also stemmed from Mosaic instruction (see Ex 12:11). Once again, the Chronicler was careful to point out that this event was true to the regulations of Moses (see *Introduction: 14) Standards*).

The Chronicler not only depicted how the Levites served **all the people** (35:13); he turned next to their services to other priests and Levites (35:14-15). First, the Levites made **preparations for themselves and for the priests** (35:14). The **descendants of Aaron** were too busy to sacrifice the Passover lamb for themselves (35:14). So the Levites provided for them. Second, the Levites also provided for the **descendants of Asaph** (35:15), the musical Levites. The Chronicler noted that these men **were in the places prescribed by David** to exalt them as models (compare 35:4; see also *Introduction: 14) Standards*). Here Jeduthun is called a **seer** identifying the Levitical musicians as prophets once again (For the Chronicler's outlook on Levitical prophets see comments on 1 Chr 25:1; see also *Introduction: 15) Prophets*.) They, as well as the **gatekeepers**, were able to remain in their positions **because their fellow Levites made the preparations for them** (35:15).

All of these details of Levitical activity probably interested the Chronicler because of questions raised in his day. As the temple service of the post-exilic period was restored to full operation, many practical questions must have risen. Who was to perform certain rituals? When? How? For this reason, the Chronicler exalted the Levites as fully devoted to the task at hand and careful to follow the instructions of Moses, David, and Solomon.

Josiah's Passover Summarized (35:16-19)

The Chronicler closed his account of Josiah's Passover by returning to a general description of the event which balances with his introductory summary in 35:1. Having regressed chronologically in 35:2-15, the Chronicler returned to the **fourteenth day** (35:1) by beginning this section with the expression **at that time** (Hebrew = "on that day" [NAS] 35:16). Most of this material is part of the Chronicler's addition to the book of Kings and therefore reflects his unique perspectives.

The Chronicler first noted that **the entire service of the Lord was carried out** (35:16). Nothing was omitted, including **Passover** and **burnt offerings** (35:16). Everything took place just **as King Josiah had ordered** (35:16). The Chronicler's desire to idealize this event is evident. He saw it as a model of proper observance.

To add to this positive portrait, the Chronicler also reported that **the Israelites who were present** joined in the celebration of **Passover** and **Unleavened Bread** (35:17). As in the days of Hezekiah, northern Israelites joined in the celebration (30:11,18,21). Thus Josiah's Passover solidified the reunion of North and South around the Davidic monarch and the temple.

In 35:18 the Chronicler returned to the record of Kings (// 2 Kgs 23:22), but expanded Kings in several significant ways. For instance, he wrote that Josiah's Passover was greater than any Passover celebration **since the days of the prophet Samuel** (35:18). Perhaps because of the unusual actions taken in Hezekiah's celebration (see 30:2-3,17-20), the Chronicler exalted Josiah's Passover over Hezekiah's. Moreover, he reported that this supreme Passover included **priests, the Levites and all Judah and Israel who were there with the people of Jerusalem** (35:18). As we have seen, the Chronicler's account of Josiah's Passover emphasized that all the temple personnel were in proper order (see 35:5-6,10). Moreover, the presence of both northern Israelites and Judahites also contributed to the wonder of the event (see *Introduction: 1) All Israel*). The temple worship of that time was not limited to a small number in Jerusalem; it involved the entire nation. Josiah's Passover served as a perfect model for the Chronicler's post-exilic readers.

To close off this portion of his record of Josiah's reign, the Chronicler drew upon 2 Kgs 23:23 to note once again that all these things took place **in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign** (35:19). This verse forms an inclusio around the events described in 34:8-35:18 and opened the way for the Chronicler to move to a later time in Josiah's reign.