

עץ חיים

---

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY  
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



*Produced by* THE JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY

Copyright © 2001 by The Rabbinical Assembly

*Copyright © 2001 by The Rabbinical Assembly*

*Hebrew text, based on Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,  
© 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

*English translation © 1985, 1999 by The Jewish Publication Society*

*First edition. All rights reserved*

*No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, except for brief passages in connection with a critical review, without permission in writing from:*

*The Rabbinical Assembly  
3080 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027*

*Blessings for the Torah and haftarat have been adapted from  
Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals, © 2000 by The Rabbinical Assembly.  
Maps © by Oxford University Press, supplied by Oxford Cartographers. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.  
Illustrations of the tabernacle and its furnishings by Joe Sikora.*

*Composition by VARDA Graphics, Skokie, Illinois  
Design by Adrienne Onderdonk Dudden  
Manufactured in the United States of America*

09 10 10 9 8

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

*Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. Hebrew. 2001.*

*Etz Hayim: Torah and commentary / senior editor, David L. Lieber; literary editor, Jules Harlow; sponsored by the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.*

*p. cm.*

*Text of the Pentateuch in Hebrew and English; commentary in English.*

*Includes the haftarat and commentary on them, p'shat and d'rash commentaries, comments on Conservative halakhic practice, topical essays, and other material.*

*Includes bibliographical references and index.*

*ISBN-10: 0-8276-0712-1 ISBN-13: 978-0-8276-0712-5*

*1. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Commentaries. 2. Haftarat—Commentaries. 3. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch—Theology. 4. Conservative Judaism—Customs and practices. I. Lieber, David L. II. Harlow, Jules. III. United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. IV. Rabbinical Assembly. V. Bible. O.T. Pentateuch. English. Jewish Publication Society, 2001. VI. Title.*

*BS1222 .L54 2001*

*222'.1077—dc21*

2001029757

of Pharaoh so that he would not let the Israelites go from his land.

יְהוָה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא־שָׁלַח אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרְצוֹ: פ

**12** The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: <sup>2</sup>This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months; it shall be the first of the months of the year for you. <sup>3</sup>Speak to the whole community of Israel and say that on the tenth of this month each of them shall take a lamb to a family, a lamb to a household.

**יב** וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל־אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: <sup>2</sup> הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁית חֳדָשִׁים רְאשׁוֹן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה: <sup>3</sup> דַּבְּרוּ אֶל־כָּל־עַדַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם

THE LAST ACT (12:1–51)

This chapter, a composite of several strands of tradition, contains a number of literary units. Each unit centers on an aspect of the Exodus events. Some of these units deal with immediate concerns, such as the last-minute preparations for the departure from Egypt; others relate to the enduring effect of the events in shaping the future course of Israel’s life as a people.

REFORM OF THE CALENDAR (v. 2)

The impending Exodus is visualized as the start of a new order of life that will be dominated by the consciousness of God’s active presence in history. The religious calendar of Israel is henceforth to reflect this reality by numbering the months of the year from the month of the Exodus.

**This month** Elsewhere it is called “the month of Abib,” meaning literally “when the ears of barley ripen,” referring to the spring (March and April). The month of Abib is nowadays known as Nisan.

**first of the months** The Hebrew months, like the days of the week in Hebrew, are called by

numbers. The absence of names may be due to the desire to avoid any connection with the ancient calendars that associated days and months with heavenly bodies or pagan deities and rituals. There is evidence that at least some Israelite months once had Canaanite-Phoenician names, because the Bible refers to the months of Ziv (1 Kings 6:1), Ethanim (1 Kings 8:2), and Bul (1 Kings 6:38). The names of months now used by Jews were borrowed from the Babylonian calendar during the first exile.

THE PASCHAL OFFERING (vv. 3–13)

The laws relating to the sacrificial meal that is to take place immediately before the Exodus are now set forth in detail.

**3. community of Israel** The word translated as “community” (*edah*, from a root meaning “to come together”) was the term used to designate the people Israel acting as a covenant community, in relation to worship.

**tenth of this month** The completion of the first 10 days of the lunar month apparently held

CHAPTER 12

**2. This month shall mark for you the beginning of the months** One of the first steps in the process of liberation was for the Israelites to have their own calendar, their own way of keeping track of time and recalling the most important days of their people’s history. A slave does not control his or her own time; it belongs to someone else. Hirsch wrote that “the Jewish calendar is the Jewish catechism,” for it is the most concise summary of what we remember and what we stand for. Why does Israel count by the moon, with each month start-

ing when the new moon emerges? Because the moon, unlike the sun, waxes and wanes, nearly disappears and then grows bright again. So the Jewish people go through cycles of prosperity and suffering, knowing that even in darkness there are brighter days ahead (*S’fat Emet*). “Just as God showed Noah the rainbow as a sign of the covenant, God shows Moses the sliver of the new moon as a symbol of Israel’s capacity for constant renewal” (Hirsch).

**3.** The next step toward liberation was to slaughter a lamb publicly, something no Egyptian would do, and mark the doorpost with its blood. In this way, they would proclaim their

<sup>4</sup>But if the household is too small for a lamb, let him share one with a neighbor who dwells nearby, in proportion to the number of persons: you shall contribute for the lamb according to what each household will eat. <sup>5</sup>Your lamb shall be without blemish, a yearling male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. <sup>6</sup>You shall keep watch over it until the fourteenth day

אִישׁ שֶׁהָ לְבֵית-אָבֹתָ שֶׁהָ לְבֵיתָ: <sup>4</sup> וְאִם-יִמְעַט הַבֵּית מֵהֵיט מִשֶּׁהָ וְלֶקַח הוּא וּשְׁכֵנּוֹ הַקָּרֹב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ בְּמִכְסֵת נַפְשֹׁתַי אִישׁ לְפָנָי אֲכָלוּ תִכְסּוּ עַל-הַשֶּׁהָ: <sup>5</sup> שֶׁהָ תָמִים זָכָר בֶּן-שָׁנָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִן-הַבְּבָשִׁים וּמִן-הָעִזִּים תִּקְחוּ: <sup>6</sup> וְהָיָה לָכֶם לְמִשְׁמָרְתָּ עַד אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ

some sort of special significance now lost to us. Yom Kippur, the most sacred day in the religious calendar, falls on the 10th of the seventh month, and in ancient times this same date ushered in the jubilee year. Joshua chose the 10th of the first month to cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan.

**a lamb** See verse 5 and Deut. 14:4. The Hebrew word *seh* can mean both “a lamb” and “a kid of the goats.” In light of the fear expressed in Exod. 8:22, this act broke the sense of dread felt by the enslaved Israelites and removed the psychological barrier to liberation.

**a family** The Hebrew phrase *beit avot* literally means “a house of fathers” and is a subunit of a clan (the biblical *mishpahah*). It is made up of a husband, his wife or wives, his unmarried daughters and sons, and his married sons with their wives and unmarried children.

**a household** Originally, the paschal celebration was a domestic experience. Later it became a pilgrimage festival.

**4. too small** In Second Temple times, a minimum quorum of 10 participants was required for this ritual. The actual slaughtering of the animal was performed in the presence of no fewer than 30.

**will eat** The eating of the animal is an essential part of the ritual. By means of this sacrificial meal, kinship ties are strengthened, family and neighborly solidarity is promoted, and communion with God is established.

**5. without blemish** A defective gift is an insult to the recipient; hence the harmony between the one who brings the gift and God would be impaired by such a gift.

**6. keep watch** The animal, selected on the 10th of the month, is to be carefully protected

psychological liberation from fear of Egyptian opinion and from an eagerness to imitate Egyptian customs, a necessary prerequisite to physical liberation. The Sages see the lamb as a symbol of idol worship, and its public slaughter as a repudiation of idolatry. It has also been noted that in times of drastic change people need specific, action-oriented advice. This gives them a sense of control over a chaotic situation, as we see with mourning customs in the wake of a death.

The shared meal, with *matzah* and bitter herbs (v. 8), will become the prototype of the *Pesah Seider*, when we not only remember but strive to re-enact our ancestors' deliverance from Egypt. Members of some communities come to the *Seider* table with sandals on their feet and a staff in their hand (v. 11), as if they were setting out on a journey to freedom.

Although we celebrate *Rosh ha-Shanah*, beginning a new year, in the fall, the Hebrew calendar actually begins in the spring with *Nisan*, the month of *Pesah*, as the first month. *Tishrei*, the month of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom Kippur*, is the seventh month (see Lev.

23:23ff.). Some scholars see this as a compromise among ancient cultures, those who celebrated the beginning of the new year in the spring when the harsh winter rains were over and the plants and flowers re-emerged, versus those who celebrated the new year in the fall when the rains returned to replenish the land after summer's harsh drought. We can see it as analogous to our beginning a new calendar year in January but marking our personal age on our birthday. Thus *Rosh ha-Shanah* is seen as the anniversary of the creation of the world, marking our shared humanity with other peoples; *Pesah* is the birthday of the people Israel, symbolizing our special destiny as Jews.

**4.** Like so much of Judaism, *Pesah*, although a family celebration, is not to be observed in isolation. It is an occasion for families to join with other families and create a community. More than the poor need the rich, the rich need the poor. Let those whose households are too small to absorb all the blessings that God has given them seek out their neighbors and share the bounty with them (Hirsch).

of this month; and all the assembled congregation of the Israelites shall slaughter it at twilight. <sup>7</sup>They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they are to eat it. <sup>8</sup>They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat any of it raw, or cooked in any way with water, but roasted—head, legs, and entrails—over the fire. <sup>10</sup>You shall not leave any of it over until morning; if any of it is left until morning, you shall burn it.

<sup>11</sup>This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff

הַזֶּה וְשָׁחֲטוּ אֹתוֹ כָּל קֵהַל עֲדַת-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
בֵּין הָעֶרְבִים: <sup>7</sup> וְלָקְחוּ מִן-הַדָּם וְנָתְנוּ  
עַל-שְׁתֵּי הַמְּזוּזוֹת וְעַל-הַמַּשְׁקוֹף עַל  
הַבְּתִימִים אֲשֶׁר-יֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ בָּהֶם: <sup>8</sup> וְאָכְלוּ  
אֶת-הַבָּשָׂר בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה צְלִי-אֵשׁ וּמִצּוֹת  
עַל-מֵרְרִים יֹאכְלֶהוּ: <sup>9</sup> אַל-תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ  
זָא וּבָשָׂל מִבָּשָׂל בַּמַּיִם כִּי אִם-צְלִי-אֵשׁ  
רֹאשׁוֹ עַל-כַּרְעָיו וְעַל-קִרְבּוֹ: <sup>10</sup> וְלֹא-  
תוֹתִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר וְהִנְתַּר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-  
בֹּקֶר בָּאֵשׁ תִּשְׂרְפוּ:  
<sup>11</sup> וְכַכֵּה תֹאכְלוּ אֹתוֹ מִתְּנִיכֶם חֲגָרִים  
נְעִלְיֶכֶם בְּרַגְלֵיכֶם וּמִקְלָכֶם בְּיַדְכֶם

from blemish for four days until it is slaughtered. No reason for the interval is given.

7. According to verses 13 and 23, the daubing at the entrances served to identify the houses of the Israelites, for the blood is designated “a sign.” Blood was a readily available coloring substance; it also possessed symbolic significance because it was looked on as the life essence. The lintel and doorposts form the demarcation between the sacred Israelite interior and the profane world outside.

8–9. Unlike other offerings, this one (called *pesah* in v.11) is roasted. Roasting may have been required here because it is the quickest means of preparation when time is short, or because it is the most effective way of extracting the blood. Deut. 16:7 instructs that this passover offering is to be boiled like a normal sacrifice.

8. **unleavened bread** The Hebrew for “unleavened bread” (*matzot*, singular *matzah*) is introduced without definition or explanation, implying that it is already well known and, hence, independent of the Exodus events. The contexts suggest a kind of flat cake that can be prepared

quickly for unexpected guests (see Gen. 19:3). This verse witnesses the integration of the originally separate *matzot* festival with the Passover celebration. See Comments to Exod. 12:14–20.

**bitter herbs** The Hebrew word *m'rorim* (singular *maror*) probably referred originally to the kind of pungent condiment with which pastoral nomads habitually season their meals of roasted flesh. In rabbinic tradition, the plant referred to five different species of herbs, including lettuce (*hassah*), a vegetable known to have been cultivated in ancient Egypt.

10. A sacrificial animal is devoted in its entirety to a sacred purpose. This is so even when the offering is eaten by the worshipers and not wholly burned on the altar. The intentional act of eating at the designated time is an indispensable part of the ritual. Any leftovers retain their sacred status but may no longer be consumed and must be burned.

11. **loins girded** The standard dress consisted of a flowing shirtlike garment that was tightened by a sash wrapped around the waist when greater maneuverability was called for. The

7. Was the blood on the doorpost a sign that this family had the courage to defy their Egyptian neighbors and demonstrate an inner liberation? Was it perhaps a sign that this family has already suffered and should be spared? Or was it simply that this family had complied with

God's command? Could God not distinguish between Israelite and Egyptian homes? The Talmud says that once a plague has begun, it does not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked (BT BK 60a). Some means was needed to mark the homes that merited being spared.

in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly: it is a passover offering to the LORD. <sup>12</sup>For that night I will go through the land of Egypt and strike down every first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and I will mete out punishments to all the gods of Egypt, I the LORD. <sup>13</sup>And the blood on the houses where you are staying shall be a sign for you: when I see the blood I will pass over you, so that no plague will destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>This day shall be to you one of remembrance: you shall celebrate it as a festival to the

וְאֶכְלֹתֶם אֹתוֹ בְּחֶפְזוֹן פֶּסַח הוּא לַיהוָה :  
 וְעִבְרָתִי בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם בְּלֵילָה הַזֶּה <sup>12</sup>  
 וְהַפִּיתִי כָּל־בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם  
 וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל־אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה  
 שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי יְהוָה : <sup>13</sup> וְהָיָה הַדָּם לָכֶם  
 לְאֵת עַל הַבָּתִּים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם שָׁם וְרָאִיתִי  
 אֶת־הַדָּם וּפָסַחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם וְלֹא־יְהִיֶּה בְכֶם  
 נֹגֵף לְמִשְׁחִית בְּהַכְּתִי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם :  
 וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֹגְתֶם <sup>14</sup>  
 אֹתוֹ חֹג לַיהוָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם

climactic moment of liberation is imminent, and the Israelites must be prepared for immediate departure.

**a passover offering** The Hebrew noun “*pesah*” has given rise to the English adjective “paschal,” used to designate the Passover lamb, the Passover holiday, and Easter. Like the word “*matzah*,” *pesah* is assumed in this narrative to be an immediately understandable term, so it too must have a history that predates the Exodus. The etymology of the word is uncertain, although it may be related to an Akkadian root meaning “to appease.” Three traditions about the meaning of the stem פסח have survived: “to have compassion,” “to protect,” and “to skip over” (see 12:13). Strictly speaking, as noted in the Comments to verses 14–20, only the 14th day of the month can be called *Pesah*; but in the course of time, this term was extended to cover the entire week of the festival.

**12. I will go through** An example of anthropomorphism, attributing a human activity to God. Here it may be used to make His active presence in history more vividly and dramatically perceived. Despite this emphatic statement, however, tradition frequently speaks of the Angel of Death, not God, as “the destroyer.”

**to all the gods of Egypt** God’s power to take Israel out of Egypt manifests His own exclusivity, mocks the professed divinity of Pharaoh, and exposes the deities of Egypt as non-gods.

**13.** The first section of the chapter concludes with an assurance that no harm will befall the

Israelites. This is necessary because fulfillment of the preceding instructions is fraught with peril, and the coming period of inaction will allow anxiety to surface.

#### THE FESTIVAL OF MATZOT (vv. 14–20)

The previous rites deal with a specific time and situation—the Passover of Egypt. The Exodus now becomes an experience stamped for all time on Israel’s memory and imagination, shaping forever its religious consciousness and traditions. Verse 14 establishes an annual festival of remembrance; the subsequent verses explain how it is to be observed.

The focus is on the festival of *matzot*, “unleavened bread.” Without doubt, throughout the biblical period this celebration remained distinct from the one-day paschal rite. Indeed, the next chapter (13:6–8) establishes the laws of *matzot* and makes no mention of the paschal sacrifice. Lev. 23:5–6 similarly differentiates the one from the other: “In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, there shall be a passover offering to the LORD, and on the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Special Passovers were celebrated in the reigns of Kings Hezekiah and Josiah of Judah, both of whom were associated with major reformations (see 2 Chron. 30, 35). We are told in Ezra 6:19–22 that when the exiles returned from Babylon they “celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month,” and then “joyfully celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days.”

**14.** The topic and tone of the Torah narrative now shifts seamlessly but significantly from instructions to Moses’ contemporaries to

listing *mitzvot* to be followed by Jews in later generations—not so as to effect the Exodus but in order to remember it.

LORD throughout the ages; you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time. <sup>15</sup>Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the very first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first day to the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.

<sup>16</sup>You shall celebrate a sacred occasion on the first day, and a sacred occasion on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them; only what every person is to eat, that alone may be

תִּחְגְּלוּ: <sup>15</sup> שִׁבְעַת יָמִים מִצֹּת תֹּאכְלוּ  
אֶף בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן תִּשְׁבִּיתוּ שָׂאֵר  
מִבֵּיתְכֶם כִּי אֶל-אֲכָל חֵמֶץ וְנִכְרַתְהָ  
הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהוּא מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן  
עַד-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי:

<sup>16</sup> וּבַיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ וּבַיּוֹם  
הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם כָּל-  
מְלָאכָה לֹא-יַעֲשֶׂה בָהֶם אֶף אֲשֶׁר  
יֹאכַל לְכָל-נֶפֶשׁ הוּא לְבָדוֹ יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם:

**14. throughout the ages** That is, for future annual celebration.

**15.** The characteristics of the newly ordained festival are now stated: one week's duration, the eating of *matzot*, and the removal of leaven. It is a new season of the year and a new era for the people Israel. One should not enter it with yeast collected from a previous time.

**unleavened bread** Stringent regulations govern the manufacture of *matzot*. The only ingredients are flour and water. The flour may be made only from grains that are susceptible to fermentation: wheat, barley, emmer, rye, and oats.

**on the very first day** Because festivals begin in the evening, this injunction traditionally has been taken to mean that the leaven must have been removed on the previous evening, before the time for the paschal offering on the 14th of the month.

**remove leaven** The positive command to eat *matzah* is supplemented by the strict prohibition against retaining or eating leaven or leavened food throughout the entire festival. This rule is repeated below in verses 19–20 and again in 13:7. Leaven (*s'or*) is the leavening agent known as sourdough; "leavened food" (*hametz*) is food to which sourdough has been added to accelerate the rising of the dough.

**shall be cut off** This punishment, known as *karet*, is largely confined to those who transgress in certain matters of religious worship and sexual behavior. Its nature is uncertain. Various biblical passages lead to the conclusion that *karet* is not a penalty enforced by the courts but a punishment left to divine execution.

**16.** The first and the last days of the festival possess special sanctity, but not to the same degree

**15. shall be cut off** *Pesah* is a fundamental statement of Jewish identity and the meaning and purpose of Jewish existence—so much so

that those who choose not to observe it can be seen as cutting themselves off from the Jewish people.

#### HALAKHAH L'MA'ASEH

**12:15. remove leaven** On the night before the *Seider*, there is a ritual search of the home (*B'dikat Hametz*) by candlelight. A feather and a spoon are used to collect pieces of bread or other leaven that had been hidden to stimulate the search. The next morning, any leavened product not otherwise stored and sold is disposed of, traditionally by burning (*Bi-ur Hametz*) (see Lev. 2:11; Deut. 16:3).

**12:16. the seventh day** This last day is considered to be as holy as the first; all restrictions apply equally to both. Outside Israel, two days are traditionally observed for each day defined as a *mikra kodesh* (sacred occasion) in the Torah, except for *Yom Kippur* (because the Sages judged that fasting for two days would be too burdensome). Before the calendar was established, news of the *Sanhedrin's* announcement of the new moon would not necessarily reach diaspora communities in time before a holiday, and so diaspora Jews observed a second day to be sure not to violate holy day prohibitions. Despite the subsequent creation of the Jewish calendar, adding a second day for each day the Torah designates as a sacred occasion remains the most widespread practice (MT Festivals 1:21). Therefore, the first and last days of *Pesah* are each observed for two days (for a total of eight days); the first day of *Sukkot* and *Sh'mini Atzeret* are each observed for two days (for a total of nine days); and *Shavuot* is observed for two days. The intermediate days of *Pesah* and *Sukkot* have some of the aspects of the festival's first and last days and some aspects of a weekday; hence the name *hol ha-mo'ed*, "the ordinary part of the festival." *Rosh ha-Shanah* is observed for two days even in Israel, because it occurs at the very beginning of the month and even the Jews of Jerusalem could not determine when the new moon would be sighted and the holiday would begin.

prepared for you. <sup>17</sup>You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your ranks out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout the ages as an institution for all time. <sup>18</sup>In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. <sup>19</sup>No leaven shall be found in your houses for seven days. For whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a citizen of the country. <sup>20</sup>You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

<sup>21</sup>Moses then summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, pick out lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover offering. <sup>22</sup>Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the

17 וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַמִּצּוֹת־זֶה בְּעֶצְמָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־עַבְדֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם: 18 בְּרֵאשִׁון בְּאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב תֹּאכְלוּ מִצַּת עַד יוֹם הָאֶחָד וְעֶשְׂרִים לַחֹדֶשׁ בְּעָרֵב: 19 שִׁבְעַת יָמִים שְׂאֵר לֹא יִמָּצֵא בְּבֵיתְכֶם כִּי | כָּל־אֶכָּל מִחֻמֶּצֶת וְנִכְרַתָּה הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מֵעַד־תֵּת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵר וּבְאִזְרַח הָאָרֶץ: 20 כָּל־מִחֻמֶּצֶת לֹא תֹאכְלוּ בְּכָל־מוֹשְׁבֵיתְכֶם תֹּאכְלוּ מִצּוֹת: פ  
21 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְכָל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם מִשְׁפַּחְתֵיכֶם וְשַׁחֲטוּ הַפֶּסַח: 22 וְלָקַחְתֶּם אֶגְדַּת אִזּוֹב וַיִּטְבַּלְתֶּם בָּדָם אֶשְׂרֵי־בִסָּף

חמישי

as do *Shabbat* and the Day of Atonement. Hence the preparation of food on those festival days is permitted, exempted from the prohibition against labor.

**17.** The rationale for this springtime festival is now given.

**You shall observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread** Understanding the phrase “*u-sh’martem et ha-matzot*” (literally, “guard the *matzot*”) in this way is based on the next phrase—“on this very day”—which takes the word “*matzot*” to mean the festival (*Hag ha-Matzot*). (For a parallel passage, see 23:15.)

**I brought** Better: “I am bringing.”

**18.** As specified in Lev. 23:32, the duration of all festivals is from evening to evening.

**19. a stranger** The Hebrew word *ger* is a foreigner who has taken up permanent residence

among the people Israel. Like his Israelite neighbor, he is required to abstain from possessing leaven for this one week, because its presence within the closely knit community interferes with the ability of others to fulfill their religious obligation. Only the Israelite, however, has the duty to eat *matzah*.

#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE PESAH ARE RELAYED (vv. 21–28)

Moses conveys to the people the divinely given instructions and supplements them with some clarifications.

**21. Go, pick out** Either select a lamb from your flock or purchase one.

**22. a bunch of hyssop** A brushlike plant. This explains how the directive of verse 7 is to be carried out. Three of the hyssop’s thin, woody

**17. observe the [Feast of] Unleavened Bread** Literally, “guard the *matzot*” (pl. of *matzah*). Traditional postbiblical Jewish interpretation

takes this to mean that one should supervise the process of making *matzot* to ensure that no fermentation occurs at any stage.

#### HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

**12:19. No leaven shall be found** Because disposing of foods prohibited on *Pesah* could impose financial hardship, Jewish law permits food to be stored away in the home of the owner provided that for the duration of *Pesah* it is neither seen nor used and its ownership is transferred to a non-Jew. This sale of *hametz* (*M’khirat Hametz*) can be arranged through a rabbi. All foods prohibited during *Pesah* that are not sold in this manner must be disposed of before the holiday; otherwise they may not be used after *Pesah* (*hametz she-avar alav ha-Pesah*).