



The Feasts of Israel

4. Passover



The Jewish celebration of Passover is one of the oldest celebrations in the history of humanity. Passover commemorates an event that took place over 3500-years ago in the land of Egypt. Passover is a prophetic picture of the death of the Messiah, who would come to redeem humanity.

What is Passover?

The Passover is a milestone in Israel's history, before Israel was a nation, they were the family of Jacob. God had taken Abraham from Babylon, the city of Ur, to Moriah (Jerusalem). In the land of Moriah, He promised to bless the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God renamed Jacob Israel, and

as an old man Jacob's family of seventy settled in Egypt. There in Egypt, his family grew from seventy souls to over 1 million in over 400-years. Israel became slaves to the Egyptians, they were persecuted so they cried out to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for deliverance. Passover is the story of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian captivity.

Through Moses God delivers judgment on the land of Egypt in the form of 10 plagues. The tenth plague is the death of the "First Born" in the land of Egypt, including animals, Egyptians and Hebrews. The only escape from this death was the "blood of a lamb". In Exodus 12, God through Moses instructs Israel what they need to do, and how they are to remember this event for generations to come.



¹ Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, ² "This month shall be your beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year to you. ³ Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying: 'On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. ⁴ And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. ⁵ Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ⁶ Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. ⁷ And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. ⁸ Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. ⁹ Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire—its head with its legs and its entrails. ¹⁰ You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. ¹¹ And thus you shall eat it: with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD's Passover.

¹² 'For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. ¹³ Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. **Exodus 12:1-14**

God outlined the steps Israel was to take; Exodus 12 instructs them to:

- Make the month of Nisan their first month of the year
- Take a male lamb or goat 1-year old without blemish
- The lamb was to be selected on the 10th of the month and be kept until the 14th of Nisan
- On the twilight of the 14th the lambs were to be “publically” killed by the whole assembly
- Each family was to take the blood of “their” lamb and apply it to the door posts and lintel.
- The family was to roast the whole lamb over the fire
- They were to let no flesh remain until morning, burning what remains
- The people wear their belts and sandals with staff in hand, eating in haste

As the families of Israel provided a lamb for their Passover, God Himself would provide a lamb for the family of God. Each of these steps would foreshadow the picture of the Messiah who would God’s Passover Lamb.

When does Passover Occur?

Passover is the first feast of the Jewish year and the foundation of all other feasts. It begins on the twilight of 14th day of Nisan (March/April). Passover is followed by the seven-day feast of unleavened bread. The feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread are celebrated together because they are so closely linked. Before the Babylonian captivity the month of Nisan was known as Abib (Exod. 13:4, 34:18), Israel later adapted the Babylonian names for the months.

How was Passover celebrated?

God instituted the feast of Passover as everlasting celebration for generations to come; the meal was to commemorate the “Passover” of death on the land of Egypt. The foods were to help Israel remember and prepare for an even greater “Passover”, when God would sacrifice His “Lamb” for humanities redemption. Three foods were essential to the Passover celebration, *roasted lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs*.

Each of these foods represented an aspect of the celebration of redemption. The innocent lamb died for those in the house, he was roasted as picture of the judgment, he took the place of those in the house. Unleavened bread pictured the purity of the sacrifice; Israel was to search and burn the leaven in the house, ridding them of sin. The bitter herbs pictured the suffering of the innocent lamb that died in place of those in the house. The lamb, unleavened bread and herbs were to be eaten together (Numbers 9:11, Exodus12:8).

Over the years the celebration of Passover became more specific with a programmed “Seder” celebrated by a family. The Hebrew word *Seder* means “order”, the order of events emerged after the Babylonian captivity. When Jesus practiced Passover with His disciples, Passover was performed with the prescribed order of His day.

The Seder developed over the years as the nation celebrated from the first year to this very day. In the first year in the wilderness Israel celebrated Passover (Numbers 9:1-14). Joshua and Israel celebrated it when they entered the Promised Land (Josh. 5:10-12). Kings Hezekiah (2 Chr. 30) and Josiah (2 Kings 23:21-22) celebrated Passover. The returning Jews celebrated Passover when they came back from Babylon (Ezra 6:19-20). Jesus also celebrated Passover with His disciples, and His life became the living reality of the event as demonstrated in the Gospels.



The Modern Observation of Passover

The modern Passover celebration begins with the cleaning of the house from leavened bread. From top to bottom the house is inspected, pockets are turned inside and out to rid the dwelling of leaven. Pots, pans dishes are cleaned, and flatware is replaced with the finest Passover, china, silver and crystal.



The Haggadah (Heb. *The Telling*) is a book through which the family will relive the events of the Passover 3500-years ago in the land of Egypt. The story unfolds through prayer, songs, and narrative readings from the book.

The leader sits at the head of the table, with the youngest to the right and to the left a place setting for the prophet Elijah or a guest of honor. The mother then recites a prayer as she lights the candles, she covers her eyes and says;

“Blessed art Thou, O Lord Our God, King of the Universe, Who has set us apart by His Word, and in whose Name we light the festival lights.”

The celebration revolves around four cups of wine that are poured by the father pours. Jesus would have poured the wine at the Seder he held with his disciples in the upper room.

Jesus and Passover

In the first Passover the lamb was chosen from the flock on the 10th of Nisan and was to remain with the household until the 14th when it was killed. Jesus on the 9th of Nisan came to Bethany where he was being prepared for Passover.

¹ Then, **six days before the Passover**, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead,^[a] whom He had raised from the dead. ² There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. ³ Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. **John 12:1-3**

Since Passover is celebrated on the 14th, six days before is the 9th. The next day Jesus enters Jerusalem on the 10th of Nisan.

12 The **next day** a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

“Hosanna!

‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’[d]

The King of Israel!”

14 Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written:

15 “Fear not, daughter of Zion;

Behold, your King is coming,

Sitting on a donkey’s colt.” John 12:12-15

Jesus as the “Lamb” of God was being set aside from the flock to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. For five days he was to remain in Jerusalem, from the 10th to the 14th where he would be killed at twilight fulfilling the picture of the Passover lamb in Exodus. During those five days, Jesus would celebrate Passover with His disciples in the upper room. He was also examined by the religious leaders and tested before he was sacrificed. (Matthew 21:23-27)

The First Cup



To begin the service the father pours out the first cup of wine and asks everyone to rise from the table. Raising his cup he recites the prayer of sanctification, The *Kiddush*, to set apart this day to the Lord.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine. Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, Who has chosen us for Thy service from among the nations... Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who hast kept us in life, Who hast preserved us, and hast enabled us to reach this season.



Jesus would have led the Seder in the upper room as he celebrated Passover with his disciples.

⁷ Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. ⁸ And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat."

⁹ So they said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare?"

¹⁰ And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters. ¹¹ Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' ¹² Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready."

¹³ So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁴ When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve^[a] apostles with Him. ¹⁵ Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide *it* among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I say to you,^[b] I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." **Luke 22:7-17**



The Washing of the Hands

The second ceremony of the modern Seder is the washing of the hands, a family member brings water, bowl and towel to each person at the table to wash their hands before they eat. Jesus in a similar act after supper, showed Himself as a servant and washed the disciple's feet and wiped them with a towel. The Messiah was a servant of humanity.

⁴ rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. ⁵ After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe *them* with the towel with which He was girded. John 13:4-5

The Green Vegetable

After the hands are washed the *karpas*, green vegetable, is dipped in the salt water and eaten. The saltwater reminds people of the tears of suffering suffered by Israel in the land of Egypt.



The Middle Matzah

On the table is a bag with three loaves of Matzah in three compartments. The middle loaves is removed and broken in half. The broken half is then removed and hidden in the house. Later in the ceremony the children have the task of finding the hidden bread.

The Four Questions

After the Matzah is broken and hidden, the youngest child to the right of the head of the table will fulfill the role of Exodus 12:26, "*And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?'*"

Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights, we eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night, only unleavened bread? On all other nights, we all eat herbs, but on this night only bitter herbs? On all other nights, we do not dip even once, but on this night, we dip twice? On all other nights, we eat sitting or reclining, but on this night, we eat reclining?

When Jesus performed the Passover with the disciples, John was the youngest and would have been to the right of Jesus (John 13:23). He would have been the one asking questions about the Passover.



The Second Cup

In response to the four questions, a second cup of wine is poured. The story of Passover is retold, starting from Abraham being called from the city of Ur (Genesis 12). The story continues with the stories of Patriarch and the promises. How Joseph was sold by his brothers and the nation became slaves in the land of Egypt. How Moses was chosen by God to deliver the nation and how God gave them the Law at Mt. Sinai.

For the story of each plague, some wine is poured. The Seder tray and its various foods are woven into the story of Passover.

The first half of the praise psalms, known as *Hallel* (Ps. 113-118) is recited before the second cup of wine is consumed. According to the Talmud, these songs were recited by the Levites as the lambs were killed.

The Dipping of Matzah

Before the meal, the hands are washed a second time. The top Matzah and the remaining half of the middle Matzah are broken into pieces and handed out to everyone. Everyone at the table must eat some horseradish and *haroset* (apple, cinnamon and nut mixture) with their Matzah. The sweetness of *Haroset* reminds them of their sweet redemption, and the bitter horseradish reminds them of their bitter slavery.

Hillel instructed Jews to eat as much horseradish with their Matzah to bring tears to their eyes, so they could feel what their forefathers felt.

Jesus was in the upper room and told John the one who would betray him was the one who he handed his dipped "Matzah".

²²His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant. ²³One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." ²⁵Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. ²⁷As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. John 13:25-27

The Dinner

The traditional Jewish dinner would have been roasted Lamb or Goat as prescribed in the Passover. In modern times, the Jewish dinner is more varied and includes Gefilte fish, Matzah ball soup, chicken, potato kugel and other delicious foods. Since the fall of the Temple in A.D. 70, lambs can no longer be sacrificed so the menu became more open.



The Afikomen

When the meal is over, the hidden Matzah, from the middle loaf, is sought out by the children. The child who finds this bread will receive a reward. Rabbinic law requires everybody at the table eat a portion of the bread to remind them of the Passover Lamb.



The Third Cup

Now the third cup of the Passover, known as the *Cup of Redemption*, follows in the ceremony. Jesus chose this cup to be reminder of His redemptive work on the Cross. He broke bread to remember his broken body and wine for the blood he would shed.

¹⁷After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. Luke 22:17-20

After the third cup the child is sent to the front door to welcome the prophet, Elijah. The hope is Elijah will be at the door to announce the coming of the Messiah after drinking his cup of wine. God promises to send the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.
⁶ And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." Malachi 4:5-6

Elijah is a precursor to the Second Coming, when Jesus returns in Glory and power. He is seen appearing on the mountain with Moses to Jesus, James and John (Matthew 17:3). John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah. In Revelation 11, one of the two witnesses will be Elijah who will be a witness to the Messiah in Israel before the Second Coming. The Third Cup prepares Israel for his coming.



The Fourth Cup

The fourth is the Cup of Acceptance or Praise. It was this cup Jesus said He would not drink until He drank it with His disciples in the Kingdom of God.

²⁷Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the ^[b]covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." **Matthew 26:27-28**

Closing Hymn

At the conclusion of the Seder a closing hymn was sung from the Hallel, second half from Psalms 115-118. Jesus would have sung these hymns at the close of His Seder with the disciples. Judas had left earlier to betray Jesus; he would lead the armed men to where Jesus would be.



³⁰When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: " I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."^[b] ³²But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." **Matthew 26:30-31**

Earlier Jesus warned Jerusalem, he would not return until they acknowledged Him as Messiah. Jesus quotes from Psalm 118. This is the same verse sung at the close of the Passover Seder.

²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone; ²³ the LORD has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day the LORD has
made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it. ²⁵ O LORD, save us;
O LORD, grant us success. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you. ^[b] **Psalm 118:22-26**

³⁷"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'
Matthew 23:37-39

God's days begin from evening and go to the next evening (sunset to sunset)

