

Christ in the Passover

Exodus 12:5-8, 12-14

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God instituted the Passover as a festival of redemption, to be celebrated by Jews forever. Originally, it was meant to celebrate God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt, through His servant Moses. However, after Jesus it gains new meaning as a celebration of God's deliverance of mankind from slavery to sin, through His Son Jesus, the Messiah. Like Moses, Jesus leads His people to salvation, yet He was also sacrificed to redeem us from death, like the Passover lamb. For this reason, Passover is relevant to us today, as a celebration of Jesus' sacrifice, which brings salvation.

The *Haggadah* (the telling) is like a manual for the Passover festival. It specifies that before the Feast of Unleavened Bread the entire house is to be cleansed of leaven (yeast), which symbolizes sin. The man of the house reads a prayer declaring the house officially cleansed of leaven. For us Christians, this cleansing reminds us that Jesus has cleansed us of sin. Then the woman of the house covers her head and performs the candle lighting (*Birkat HaNer*) and recites the blessing over the candles. When the candles are lit, we should praise God for giving us Jesus, the light of the world.

The Passover is subdivided by four cups of wine (a cup refilled 3 times). The first cup is called the cup of sanctification. The *Kiddush* blessing is recited. Then the *matzah* is placed in a three-compartment pouch called a *matzah tosh*, which symbolizes unity. Some say it represents unity of the patriarchs, or unity of worship between the priests, Levites, and the congregation. The head of the house washes his hands ceremonially and removes the *matzah* from the center compartment, breaks it, wraps it in linen, and hides it for a time. For us, the *matzah tosh* represents the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The middle *matzah* is Jesus, whose body was broken for us, wrapped in linen, and buried in the tomb. The *matzah* was pierced before baking and has stripes from the rack on which it was baked, just like Jesus was pierced for our iniquities and bore the stripes by which we are healed.

The *Haggadah* also specifies that the youngest son must ask four questions: Why must we eat only unleavened bread? Why must we eat only bitter herbs? Why must we dip the herbs twice? Why must we recline? The Israelites ate unleavened bread because there was no time for rising the dough, as their deliverance was near. They ate bitter herbs to remind them of the

bitterness of slavery. The herbs are dipped in salt water, representing the tears of the oppressed. They recline because the first Passover before deliverance was eaten while standing, but after deliverance the Israelites could relax.

A *Seder* plater holding 6 components is used for the Passover. The first is the bitter herbs (*Karpas*), to be dipped in salt water to represent the bitterness and tears of bondage. The second is a bitter root (*Chazeret*, usually onion or horseradish), representing the fact that the root of life is bitter. The third is *Maror*, the ground-up bitter root (horseradish, to be dipped with *matzah*) which is to induce tears of remembrance of slavery. The fourth is an apple mixture called *Charoset*, representing the mortar used by Israelites for constructing Egyptian buildings. It is sweet because even work becomes sweet when deliverance is near. The fifth is an egg (*Chagigah*) representing the morning sacrifice in the Temple, since hens lay eggs in the morning. The egg is cracked, sliced, and dipped in salt water, representing the tears at the destruction of the Temple. But for us it represents Jesus' death and resurrection, since He said the Temple (His body) would be rebuilt in three days. Finally there is the *Z'roah*, the lamb shank bone, representing the Passover lamb (which was no longer sacrificed after the destruction of the Temple).

The second cup is the cup of plagues, not quite a full cup since we should not rejoice in suffering. God sent 10 plagues upon Egypt to convince Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh hardened his heart over and over, until God then hardened his heart. This reminds us that if we continually harden our hearts towards God, He will let us remain hardened until we experience the consequences and are brought to our knees. The 10th plague was the death of the firstborn. Israelites were spared all other plagues, but were only exempt from this plague through the sacrifice of the spotless Passover lamb, whose blood on the doorposts seals the household with a bloody cross. So for us Jesus' blood on the cross saves us from death.

Then there is the Passover meal, after which the third cup is drunk, the cup of redemption, of which Jesus said, "This is my blood." Then the middle *matzah* is revealed again, just as Jesus was revealed after the resurrection. This bread (*afikoman*) is broken and shared. It is the bread of which Jesus said, "This is my body." For us this bread and cup represent Jesus' body and blood, broken for us, establishing a new covenant.

Then Psalms 113-118 are recited and the fourth cup, the cup of praise, is drunk. But there is yet one cup left, Elijah's cup, which sits at the empty place setting for Elijah. Jews expected

Elijah to return (Malachi 4:5). Jewish children are often disappointed or disillusioned by the fact that Elijah never comes, but in fact he already came. John the Baptist was the Elijah who prepared the way for the Messiah (John 1:29). Jews wanted a triumphant Messiah who would overthrow Rome, but they forgot the passages that describe a Messiah that would suffer and die for us. Jesus is the Messiah, the Passover Lamb, who through His blood cleansed us, delivered us from slavery to sin, redeemed us for God, and saved us from death. Let us pray that the Jewish people recognize Jesus as their Passover Lamb, their Messiah who died and rose again so that they may have new life in Him.