

The Great Festivals of Israel  
The Passover (Pesach)

The Passover commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people from bondage and birth of the nation. In a more general sense, particularly among less observant Jews its meaning is found in the many past deliverances. As with all Jewish feasts, the rabbis have added traditions (one of our Israeli friends tells us that the motive seems to be seeking to be pious by doing more until it becomes a burden difficult to carry as Jesus indicated in His day [Matt. 23:4]) over the centuries. The month marks the first month in the Jewish calendar annually (“... it is to be the first month of the year to you” (Exod. 12:1).

*The Historic Context of the Passover*

1. When God made His covenant with Abraham (“On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram” [Gen. 15:13], he revealed several prophetic details about the history of His people.
  - a. **“...that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved for four hundred years”** (15:13).
  - b. **“Then in the fourth generation they will return here...”** (15:16). The word “generation” means “a turning” so it is best to translate the word a “century.”
2. The sojourn of the sons of Abraham is intertwined with the story of Jacob, his sons, and the famine that drove them out of the land to Egypt where Joseph provided haven in the lower Nile River, the Land of Goshen. Over time with the growing numbers of the Jews and economic prosperity, they posed a threat to the Egyptians (Exod. 1:1-7). So, we are told the Egyptian authorities became quite hostile (**“Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph”** [1:8]. Times changed and favored status fades. Two hundred seventy-six years after Joseph’s death, an Egyptian king (Thutmose III [1504-1450] came to the throne; He did not know Joseph’s contribution (Acts 7:18) and feared his people. He instituted the first extermination program against the sons of Jacob in two phases: slave labor and ethnic cleansing. The motive was the political threat they posed to the nation. That an Egyptian ruler arose that did not know the contribution of Joseph was because the Egyptian rule over the land was interrupted by the Hyksos invasion and conquest for over 150 years.

3. God raised up Moses to deliver His people by confronting Pharaoh and announcing plagues that destroyed the Egyptian economy. God announced a tenth and final plague that would release the people to flee Egyptian servitude. **“Not the Lord said to Moses, one more plague I will bring on Pharaoh and on Egypt; after that he will let you go from here...”** (11:1).

#### The Description the First Passover

The instructions for the Passover are found in Exodus 12:1-14, cryptic mention of the event in 23:15 and 34:18, as well as Deut. 16:1 (“Observe the month of Abib and celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, for in the month of Abib the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt by night.”). The designation of the month as Abib is a Canaanite term for Jewish Nisan or the English April.

1. It is Israel’s only night festival and, like the others, is celebrated within family units (at least originally).
2. In the Exodus 12 passage, the sons of Abraham are identified for the first time as “the congregation of Israel” (v. 3).
3. The preparation for the celebration began with the procurement of a lamb on the tenth day of the month (v. 3). The one-year male lamb or goat was to be unblemished (v. 5).
4. Should a family be too poor to possess or obtain a lamb or goat, they were to join a nearby family in the same situation to share the costs (v. 5).
5. On the fourteenth of the month, the lamb or goat was to be slain by the family (the priestly order had yet to be established).
6. Blood from the slain animal was to be placed on the door posts and linen of the home (v. 7).
7. The shared meal consisted of three things: roast of lamb or goat that had been slain, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. The roast was to be completely consumed or the remnants burned (v. 10).
8. The manner of eating the meal is described. **“Now you shall eat it in this manner” with your loins girded, your sandals on feet, and your staff in your hand, and you shall eat it in haste- it is the Lord’s Passover** (v. 11).

**“I will through the land of Egypt on that night will strike down all the first-born of the land of Egypt... against the Gods of Egypt I will execute judgment”** (v. 12).

9. Seeing the blood on the door posts and lintels of the Jewish homes, God promised to spare the first-borns. **“And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live, I will *pass over*...”** (v. 13).

**“Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance” (v. 14).**

### *The Manner of the Celebration of the Passover today*

Within Judaism the Passover is celebrated with great pomp as a special family meal is served called the seder (the word means *order*, indicating the fifteen components of the meal). At the seder, foods of symbolic significance commemorating the Hebrews’ liberation are eaten, prayers, and traditional recitations are performed while the festival as whole prohibitions work at the beginning and end of the celebration.

Dress for the occasion is to be elegant and modest with subdued prints and subdued colors. Women are instructed to wear knee-length dresses with a cardigan or skirt and blouse, men slacks, a button shirt, and jacket.

For guests, a small gift is appropriate (fruit, wine, arranged flowers)

The seder plate is traditionally white and blue, suggestive of purity and divinity respectively.

The seder plate contains the symbols of the of the remembrance o Israel’s deliverance from slavery.

Bitter herbs or horseradish (the harshness of slavery).

Charoset: a paste-like mixture of chopped nuts, grated apples, cinnamon, and sweet red wine represent mortar and bricks.

Chazeret: romaine lettuce used in a Korech sandwich.

Karpas: parsley or green vegetables.

Zeroah: roasted lamb shank bone representing the sacrificed lamb and blood covering.

Beitzah: a roasted egg dipped in salt water, a symbol of mourning.

Additionally: a bowl of salt water and a plate of three matzahs (the middle one will be broken in half)

The Seder (the order)

1. Kadeish: Kiddush blessing, lighting of candles, and the first cup of wine
2. Urchatz: Ritual handwashing without soap in preparation for the Seder

3. Karpas: Dipping a green vegetable in salt water. Karpas is one of the six Passover foods on the Seder plate. It is a green leafy vegetable, usually parsley, used to symbolize the initial flourishing of the Israelites in Egypt. Some say it represents “the tears of slavery.”  
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4. Yachatz: Breaking of the matzah. The largest piece, called the *afikomen*, is wrapped in white linen and hidden for the children to find later. With three matzahs on the plate stacked, the middle one alone is broken.
5. Miggid: The second cup of wine is poured. The youngest child asks four questions around this basic one: “How is this night different from all other nights?” Then the telling the story of Passover. The reading of the event is from a collection of special biblical texts called the Haggadah.
6. Rachtzah: Ritual handwashing in preparation for the meal accompanied with a blessing.
7. Guest Motzi: Blessing over the meal and matzah (the unleavened bread, “the Bread of Affliction.”
8. Matzo: Guests recite a prayer blessing the matzah.
9. Maror: Eating of bitter herb, often horseradish, representing “the bitterness of slavery.”
10. Korech: Eating of bitter herbs sandwiched between matzah.
11. Shulcan Orech: Eating the meal (often gefilte fish, matzah ball soup though it can include a variety of meats or vegetarian entrees with sides).
12. Tzafun: Finding and eating the Afikomen by the children. It symbolizes “a move from brokenness to healing.”
13. Barech: Saying grace after the meal, the third cup of wine, inviting Elijah the Prophet (an extra cup of wine is poured for the prophet). A child opens the door inviting the guests to leave.
14. Hallel: Singing psalms that praise God and the pouring of the fourth cup of wine. The praise Psalms 113-118 are sung, though Psalm 136, the so-called “Great

Hallel,” is often sung in conclude (the repetitious phrase being, “His loving kindness endures forever”).

15. Nirtzah: Ending the Seder and thinking about the future. The guests say, “Next year in Jerusalem,” meaning the hope that misery will end, the kingdom established, and the king enthroned. Music ends the ceremony.

### *The Symbolism of the Passover in the Christian Community today*

The Passover speaks of deliverance, deliverance from the physical oppressor, yet much more as we reflect on how the New Testament writers interpreted the symbolism of the ancient right. The Passover was fulfilled when the true Lamb of God delivered us from the “angel of death” through His shed blood that covered the “doorposts and lintels” of our hearts.

“Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the son of the world” (John 1:19).

He made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin on our behalf,  
That we might become the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21)

1. In thinking through the Passover, the story is about deliverance, a past shadow and a new reality. Collectively to looks forward to fulfillment through the Lord.
  - a. The beginning of the story is that of servitude and bondage. This was also true of us, not in Egypt, but in the grasp of the oppressive power of sin symbolized in unleavened bread and bitter herbs.
  - b. The solution to bondage and death was through the slaying of a lamb. Deliverance from death, the death of the firstborn, through blood.
  - c. The sacrificed had to be an unblemished lamb. “... [redeemed by] a lamb without blemish and spotless of Christ” (I Pet. 1:19).
  - d. Jesus, the true Passover lamb, was slain on Friday at 3:00, the time of the lamb-sacrifice in the Temple, the time the high priest, Joseph Caiaphas, sacrificed the symbol of the Passover. When Jesus cried out, “It is finished (John 19:30),” the anticipation of redemption was over in the death of Jesus.
  - e. The blood of the lamb became the substitute for the death of the firstborn and for us.

“Behold I am going to send you Elijah” (Mal.4:5)

2. In the celebration of the Passover, the Jews have a place setting for Elijah and the end the evening declaring, “Next year in Jerusalem.” They understood that

Elijah would precede the coming of Messiah. “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” asked the disciples (Matt. 17:10). Jesus replied, “... Elijah already came...He had spoken to them about John the Baptist” (Matt. 17:12-13).

*Here is the grand difference between Judaism and Christianity. What the Jews anxiously anticipate, we celebrate as already come!*

“You know that in two days the Passover is coming” (Matt. 26:2)

“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show forth the Lord’s death until He comes” (I Cor 11:26).

3. The institution of the Lord Table on the night of our Lord’s betrayal tells us explicitly that the Passover’s symbolic significance is found in its greater meaning; it pointed to Christ. Here is more than a physical deliverance; it was a spiritual deliverance. The anticipation of redemption became, through Jesus, the remembrance of redemption accomplished!!

“... Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed” (I Cor. 5:7b).

4. The Passover not only speaks to the coming of Christ; it speaks to the issue of our daily walk in Christ, at least that is how Paul interpreted its meaning.

In context, the passage quoted above concerns a practicing immoralist that Paul exhorts is to be expelled from the assembly of the believers. He likens the sin there to “leaven bread,” the occasion to that of the Israelites in the Passover celebration. They are to remove that which is sinful (“Clean out the old leaven” [5:7b]) for the “unleavened bread” of “sincerity and truth.” Christ is the one whose blood was shed to free us from death. Here the Passover is used as a symbol of deliverance from the practice of sin.

#### Applications:

1. The Jewish people are looking for the coming of the Messiah, we believe that He has come. Judaism has two great eras, the one that is and the one that will be when Messiah comes. We believe in three great eras, the one that was, the one that is, and the one that will be when Jesus returns. Judaism is looking for a Messiah-figure as one who will bring peace and prosperity that is physical in nature as well as spiritual. We believe that Messiah has brought us peace, that he

is more than a king or political sovereign, He will end humanity's greatest curse, greatest bondage, sin and death.

2. We have a very rich heritage in the Old Testament Scriptures, and we must cherish the book. We are the true children of Abraham through faith in Abraham's true seed, Jesus. See. Rom 4:13. There is a beauty of symmetry and cohesiveness in the great book that is beyond imagining!
3. The Jews say, "Next year in Jerusalem." We have found "spiritual Jerusalem" because Jesus brought it to us in His carnation. Jerusalem for us is not a city; it is the presence of God!
4. Judaism teaches, and is very much rooted in, its rich historical heritage. While we share much of that rich past through which the Messiah was promised to us, have we allowed the brighter light of advanced revelation in Christ to unwittingly to see the Old Testament as less important and meaningful than the New Testament?
5. Redemption is a miracle. It is not the result of a variety of observable facts and causes that coalesce in perfect harmony and symmetry. Why? Because its origins are beyond time. That which is infinite, the life of the eternal God placed in the human soul, cannot be the cause nor sum of the accumulation of non-infinite causes. Simply put, salvation is the unmerited, unnecessitated, and, thus, free gift of God through ancient promises and the purchased gift of the Lamb of God. Can you praise Him enough? Do we have all the right words to say? What we have is a life to live that reflects the wonder of it all!
6. How does reading of the Passover in Exodus 12 and then seeing its fulfillment in Christ help you in reading the Bible? How does Jesus' interpretation that John the Baptist was Elijah help in interpreting the Bible?
7. Below is my favorite artistic rendering of Jesus, the true Lamb of God. It was done by a Jewish believer, Udi, in the Old City of Jerusalem. His shop is worth a visit. In the middle of a divided city, the candle light of the gospel shines in this man's art!



AND WITH HIS WOUNDS  
WE WERE HEALED

REMARKS