

The meaning of the Passover

**GRACE BIBLE CHURCH**

*Robert R. McLaughlin Bible Ministries*

**The meaning of the Passover**

We are going to take a look at some of the functions which take place at the Jewish Passover and the tremendous analogies which point to The Lord Jesus Christ. After we are through you are going to wonder why the Jewish people cannot see that what they are celebrating points to the person of Jesus Christ. We are also going to answer that question as we close.

Passover began on the first month of the Jewish calendar, April 14, 1441 B.C.

This is according to Exo 12:1-14, *Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, "This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, 'On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers households, a lamb for each household. Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste--it is the Lord's Passover. For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments--I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. 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.'"*

Lev 23:5 *"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's Passover."*

God told the Jews that April should be the first month because spring represents the beginning of life. Without a doubt, it is the oldest celebration that we have today, and this feast portrayed the work of Christ on the Cross with emphasis on redemption.

For the Jews, Passover doesn't just happen, it takes a lot of preparation! This is why the disciples said to our Lord; Mat 26:17-20, *"where do you want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" and He said, "go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'the teacher says, My time is at hand; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.' and the disciples did as Jesus*

#### The meaning of the Passover

*had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. Now when evening had come, He was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples.*

In preparation for the Passover, the house must be cleaned and sterilized in honor of this great occasion. Specifically, the house must be free of all leaven. Leaven is simply yeast used to make bread rise and is found in bread, cakes, cookies etc. In the Bible, leaven is symbolic of sin or evil. This is why the Lord said in Mat 16:6 *“watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”* Gal 5:9 says, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.* So, in preparation for the Passover, the Jews had to get rid of all the leaven from their home, there could be no yeast, and the leaven would be burnt in the fire representing the judgment of sin. Paul writes in 1Co 5:7 *“clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”* This is an appeal to us to be pure for the celebration of the Lord's Supper through rebound. The apostle Paul said in 1Co 5:8 *“let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”*

Notice that sincerity and truth is needed to celebrate this feast. Now, after the leaven is cleaned out, the next procedure in the preparation of the Passover is to get out the special white linen cloths that go with the meal.

Remember that white linen is symbolic of perfect righteousness in the Bible (Rev 1:14; Rev 3:5; Rev 19:7-8). In an orthodox Jewish home that follows the precise correct procedure, the table is set with a white tablecloth and white candles, and the father of the house wears a white robe called a kittel and a white crown. He is to symbolize the high priest in the tabernacle who wore a pure white robe. However, it really refers to The Lord Jesus Christ who glowed white after His resurrection (Mat 17:2). There are also white dishes used which were not used throughout the rest of the year. The white linen, white plates, and white candles are used to create an atmosphere of purity. Now, once the table is set and the father is ready, the candles are lit as the preparation continues. Interestingly enough, they are lit by a woman. Women do very little in Judaism, therefore it is very significant when they do. A woman lights the candles because it was a woman who brought us Christ, the light of the world. God chose a woman, Mary, to bring us Christ Who is our Passover, therefore a woman still brings the light to the Passover celebration. After the woman lights the candle she sings a certain song: *“Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has exalted us among all people and bade us to kindle the Passover lights.”* There will be four cups of wine drunk as part of the Passover ceremony. The cups should be filled by one of the servants representing mastery and freedom. The **first cup** is called the cup of sanctification and it simply sanctifies the table and all of the preparations. The drinking of this cup symbolizes approval and gives the blessing for the Passover to begin. After the first cup, the father takes three loaves of the unleavened bread and places them in a special white linen envelope which has three compartments. Then, in a special ceremony of his own, the father removes the middle loaf from its compartment, breaks it, and then wraps it in a separate piece of white linen and hides it away or buries it somewhere. The youngest member of the family who can read will ask four questions; the questions are very general and give the father a chance to tell the story of the Exodus.

The first question is: Why is this night distinguished from all other nights? On this night we eat only unleavened bread. The father begins to chant the Haggadah, and as the story unravels the questions are all answered. So the first question why is this night distinguished from all other nights? On this night we eat only unleavened bread. The answer is that unleavened bread symbolizes purity from sin.

### The meaning of the Passover

The second question: On all other nights we may eat any kind of herbs, but on this night only bitter herbs. Why?

The bitter herbs remind the Jews of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt.

The third question: On all other nights we do not dip in the bowl, but tonight we dip twice. Why? This is the dipping, by which the Lord Jesus Christ identified his betrayer, Judas, when He said the “one who dips with Me shall betray Me,” and this has several meanings. Parsley is dipped twice in salt water. The first dip represents Israel going into the Red Sea and coming out unharmed. The second dip is for the Egyptian army who tried to follow them.

The fourth question: On this night we all recline in our chairs at the table. Why?

The reclining in the chairs has to do with freedom. The Jews are no longer slaves and so they can relax.

So as the story is told, and then the ceremonial foods on the center plate are eaten. For example, as the father is telling about the bitterness of slavery, he serves each person horseradish from the center plate, and they take the bread and take a bite of the horseradish, and this brings tears and pain to their eyes! Then he pauses as they dip the parsley in the salt water. As he talks about the lamb, he gestures to the unbroken shank bone of the lamb which is on the plate. Then there is the charose (harosis) which was like a paste made thick to symbolize the clay or representing the mortar that Pharaoh made them make. It's made of figs, dates, nuts and was to symbolize the sweetness or the pleasures of sin in the world. Remember that the Bible teaches that sin will give you pleasure for a season.

Then there is a **second cup** of wine at the Passover. The second cup is spilled into the individual plates in front of each person, a drop at a time. Each drop remembers a plague God put upon Egypt while the implacable Pharaoh hardened his heart. The ten red drops fall into the empty white plate in front of each person and they are clearly representative of those ten great plagues in Egypt. As this happens, the father chants the name of each plague, blood, frogs, gnats, insects, boils, locust, darkness, death etc. It is a very melancholy moment but it is dispelled quickly as the main meal comes out!

The meal is like a thanksgiving meal, and the entire family is assembled. Now, comes the most wonderful and touchingly symbolic part of all, the **third cup**. This is the cup of redemption. After this, it is time to bring forth that buried loaf of unleavened bread, which will serve as the desert to the meal. The afikomin [desert], as it is called which means *the arrival* and represents the Lord Jesus Christ, as the bread of life! The buried unleavened bread, the middle piece, is then eaten with the third cup of wine. That is where we get communion or the Lord's Supper.

The three loaves represent the Trinity, and the middle one represents God the Son. It was the Son who was broken for our sins, it was his body which was broken for you, and the bread was wrapped in white linen and buried, as was the body of Jesus. Now it is brought forth from the ground with the cup of redemption. And the bread, which was the desert, is the last thing eaten because it represents the fact that once someone partakes of the bread of life, they will be sustained forever. Joh 6:35 *Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst.”*

In the actual ceremony, the father breaks off pieces from the loaf (the size of an olive, says the haggadah) and passes the pieces around the table. Each person eats his piece and drinks the third cup with it. Blessings are pronounced over the bread and wine individually which have great meaning for us. So when we celebrate the Lord's supper, we are actually taking a part out of the Jewish Passover and celebrating it today! When the Jews celebrate Passover, they are actually

#### The meaning of the Passover

celebrating a part of the Lord's Supper. This is the part of the Passover that the Lord took the bread and the cup and instituted what we call communion.

Mat 26:26 *"and while they were eating [passover], Jesus took bread, and having blessed it, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, and He said, 'take, eat; this represents My body.'"*

It's interesting because when it says that *"He blessed"* the Jewish people know exactly what the Lord said and the Christian church does not. He said a prayer which was commanded to be said at this time which is *"Blessed art Thou O Lord our God, King of the universe who brings forth bread from the earth."*

So He picked the bread from the floor, representing the earth, and said, *"This is my body,"* this was a prophecy of the fact that bringing forth bread from the earth represented our Lord's resurrection as the bread of life. He was actually saying to His disciples, if they try to bury My body this week, than just like this piece of bread, it will just come up again from the earth. This is why He said, the night before His death in Joh 12:24 *"truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* You cannot bury a kernel of wheat, the Lord said it will only come up again. And so our Lord said that He was the bread of life (Joh 6:35). He was born in Bethlehem which means house of bread. He was buried on the second feast, which was the feast of unleavened bread, which represented His impeccability as the God-man. So they would take the matzoh bread which represents some interesting facets of our Lord's body. It has stripes, and as Isaiah said in Isa 53:5 *"by His stripes we are healed."* The bread is pierced through with holes and as Zec 12:10 says *"they will look on Me whom they have pierced;"* Of course, the matzoh bread is pure, containing no leaven (representing no sin).

The third cup of wine has every bit of significance as the bread. Remember that the Lord said in Joh 6:53 *"truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves."* He identified the wine as His blood. In Mat 26:27-28, *and when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."* Now, what did He say when He gave thanks? This is another one of those Jewish blessings. He said, *"blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."* However, this is very meaningful to each one of us as members of the Church, the future bride of Christ. The Lord was actually thanking the Father for bringing Him His future bride.

First of all, I must explain to you the marriage custom of the Jews in time of the Lord Jesus Christ. In those days, the bridegroom would have to approach his chosen bride with a contract, a covenant of marriage, which they would both sign. There was money involved, and the groom would have to pay the father of the bride a certain amount of money to marry his daughter. At the signing of the contract, the groom would drink a toast with the bride, and the cup of wine sealed the covenant. If the woman did not accept the wine it signified her rejection of the offer. If she accepted the groom would leave and he would tell the bride that he was going to prepare a place for her, and he would return to his father's house. This is what our Lord said the night He made a covenant to marry His future bride in Joh 14:2 *"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you."*

At the groom's father's house he would build a bridal chamber where the couple would eventually have their honeymoon. Meanwhile the bride waited at home having been bought for a price (as we are in 1Co 6:20), until her bridegroom would come for her. She would be consecrated, set apart, and she would wear a veil whenever she went out, signifying that she was waiting for her right man to come back. Our veil is our faith! Because her groom had paid a great

#### The meaning of the Passover

price for her, she was loyal and faithful until he came back. At home she would keep an oil lamp and plenty of oil standing by, because her groom might come at midnight, and she had to be ready to travel. In fact, the idea was that the groom would try and surprise the bride by coming at an unexpected hour.

At the groom's house, things would progress as fast as the man could build, but he would have to get his father's approval on the bridal chamber. He would take the father's advice about the price to be paid for the bride, the building of the bridal chamber, and the best time to go to the bride. Therefore, when someone asked him when the big day was, he could answer that the father alone knows! Interesting that our Lord was asked one day, when He would be coming back, and He said in Mat 24:36 *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the son, but the Father alone."*

Finally, the big day would come, and the groom would slip over to the bride's home and steal her away. Now, there were rules that he had to follow, he couldn't just rush in and grab her without warning. There had to be a shout from someone in the groom's party telling the bride that the groom was coming. This was to allow the bride time to get ready for her groom. Of course the application for us is in 1Th 4:16-17, *for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord* As you can see, The Lord Jesus Christ is a Jewish bridegroom who will come for his bride. He approached us with a new contract called the new covenant or New Testament, which in effect says, Heb 8:12 *"for I will be merciful to their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more."*

Now, all of this had to be noted to demonstrate properly the magnificent blessing that Jesus said over the wine. What the Lord was actually doing when He took the third cup with the bread was toasting His bride. Mat 26:27 *and when He had taken a cup and given thanks said, "blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."* Now, The Lord Jesus Christ already said that He was the true vine, now He blesses the fruit of the vine, and that is us! So He was drinking a toast to the Church, the fruit of the vine, the future bride of Christ! Hence, we see communion, the bread and the wine, in all of its glory.

The main difference between communion as it is done in the church, and communion as it is done in the Passover is in the area of joy. Passover is a party, a celebration. Communion is usually a very solemn event. Unfortunately, the Jew somehow displays more joy over the idea of his ancestors being freed from slavery 3,500 years ago than the Christian does over the prospect of eternal life.

Finally, The Lord Jesus Christ didn't drink the **fourth cup**, which is called the cup of praise or sometimes called, Elijah's cup. It is at this point of the Passover that the Jews look for the literal fulfillment of Mal 4:5 which says *"behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord."* An empty chair is left at the table throughout all these proceedings and even a wine goblet. Elijah is expected to enter on some Passover night, take his seat, drink his cup, and say that the Messiah is coming.

However, the principle is that The Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples didn't partake of that cup because the Messiah was already there. The Lord had already announced that John the Baptist had come in the "spirit of Elijah" and had already announced the Messiah. The Lord made it very clear that the third cup was the last cup He would drink. When He put down that cup of the New Testament He said in Mat 26:29 *"but I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."*

#### The meaning of the Passover

Now, you might ask, if the Jews celebrate all of this in detail, why are they so blind concerning The Lord Jesus Christ? Well remember what the Bible says in Joh 1:11 *“He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.”* Therefore in Joh 12:40 *“He has blinded their eyes, and he hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart,”* However, even though they are blinded as a race, there is still the opportunity for any and every individual to convert, 2Co 3:15-16, *“but to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart; but whenever a man turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.”*