

Mysteries of Christ in The Passover

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MINISTRIES

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Introduction

The Exodus from Egypt and the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery marked the birth of the nation of Israel and is considered by the Jewish people to be the single most important event in their history.ⁱ The delivery itself was both miraculous and divinely orchestrated entirely at His hand. The Lord had sent Moses to Pharaoh to deliver this message; “*Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to Me in the wilderness*” (Exodus 5:1, NKJV).ⁱⁱ

Their subsequent liberation was for the sole purpose of serving God—including the sacrifice of animals that were considered sacred to the Egyptians. This request came with the possible repercussion of death. Therefore, the first Passover is considered one of divine faith and is different from future Passovers, which are those of remembrance.

In the third month after the Exodus, the Lord established His Mosaic covenant with Israel; instituting their law, priesthood, calendar, and their holy convocations. And He purposed to fulfill His promise with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to deliver their descendants into the land of Canaan, and give it to them as an eternal inheritance.ⁱⁱⁱ As such, the celebration of the Passover—commanded to be observed with the roasting of a Paschal Lamb, and eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs—was consecrated as an eternal ordinance of remembrance with the nation of Israel.^{iv}

And for more than three thousand years, the Jewish people have been celebrating this occurrence each year in what is called a *Seder*, meaning “order” of the Passover. The booklet used to tell the story is called a *Haggadah*, which comes from the Hebrew word “*ve’higadeta*” which means to tell.^v This teaching will cover some of the thematic elements of the *Seder*.^{vi}

The Haggadah

The *Haggadah* is a complex piece of rabbinic literature, written predominantly in Hebrew, with parts also in Aramaic. Its style is like the Talmud and Midrash, which have a homiletic or story-telling quality to them—very similar to how Yeshua taught His disciples. These are bolstered with illustrative elements—such as the *Seder* plate—that activate all five of our sensory conduits. The idea is to get you to think. This meditative approach yields far superior results in terms of both retention of the story, and mental comprehension of its underlying spiritual significance.

The Seder

The *Seder* is considered a family affair, and it is common to invite others that might otherwise not have the means to participate. *Seders* are long, ranging anywhere from two to over four hours. Since the *Seder* cannot begin until after dusk,^{vii} an Orthodox *Seder* can go until midnight.

Seders are joyous and celebratory and involve an elaborate dinner with an assortment of unleavened kosher foods. Chicken *Matzah* ball soup is a personal favorite of mine.

Community *Seders* today are quite common in many Jewish congregations. What has also been growing in popularity are Messianic and Christian observances of the Passover that correlate events of the Exodus to the coming of our Messiah, including His death, burial, and resurrection. We will make those same correlations in this teaching. Some churches are even starting to call their communion services, "Passover communion."

Biblical Ordinances

What is traditionally characterized as Passover (*Pesach*) today, is comprised of three separate but overlapping convocations; the Sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb (*Korban Pesach*), the festival of Unleavened Bread (*Hag Ha'matzot*), and the offering of First Fruits (*Reisheet Katzir*).

On the day of Passover sacrifice which falls on the fourteenth day of the first month in the Hebrew calendar, the priests would inspect and prepare the lambs for slaughter in the morning. Then starting in the afternoon, they would offer them as Passover sacrifices on the bronze altar in the Temple. The sacrifices would continue throughout the night, ceasing before dawn as commanded by the Lord.^{viii} This effectively intertwined the day of the Passover sacrifice and the Festival of Unleavened Bread into one continuous convocation and celebration.

The first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread are ordained as days of rests—Sabbaths.^{ix} On the day after this Sabbath (not to be confused with Saturday) the Jewish people were required to bring a sheaf of the first fruits of their harvest to the priest. Fifty days from this second day began the counting of weeks, which established the date for the Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*, also known as the Day of Pentecost).^x

The seven weeks between the second day of Passover and the Feast of Weeks is known as the period of counting the *Omer*. When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the Jewish people would bring a sheaf of barley (called an *omer*) on the second day of Passover. After the destruction of the Temple, this seven-week period became a time of semi-mourning.

On the thirty-third day of counting the *omer* is the Jewish celebration of Lag B'omer, the only day during the seven weeks when weddings are allowed. According to tradition, a terrible plague struck the students of Rabbi Akiva during the *Omer* period, but on the thirty-third day, the plague miraculously ended. During this *omer* period, it is believed that Yeshua ascended to heaven at the age of thirty-three.

The period of counting the *omer* concludes with the Feast of Weeks, also called an offering of the First Fruits (*Bechorim*), which in ancient times traditionally consisted of a wheat offering. While Passover celebrates the miraculous Exodus from slavery in Egypt, the Feast of Weeks

celebrates the giving of the *Torah* (Law) at Mount Sinai (*Matan Torah*). However, there is a greater Messianic fulfillment of these biblical festivals.

We now understand that Christ Yeshua perfectly fulfilled these four events at His first advent. He was scourged and crucified on the day of the Passover sacrifice. He was buried before the Sabbath on this first day. He lay in the tomb on the second day, this being the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and a *Sabbath* rest. And He rose from the tomb early on the morning of the third day, this being the first day of the week and the Feast of First Fruits (what we call Resurrection Sunday).^{xi} Forty days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, and fifty days after this Sunday came the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell in Jerusalem, and the church was born in the Power of the Spirit to go forth and preach the gospel.^{xii} Everything was perfectly fulfilled exactly according to God's Holy calendar.

Preparation for the Seder

Before starting the Passover *Seder*, two important traditions take place. On the evening preceding the Passover, the Jewish people search all their property for leaven (*Chametz*), by the light of a candle. And then on the eve of the *Seder* before sunset, the mother or woman of the house lights the festival candles (*Le'hadlik Ner*), like those lit for Shabbat.

We see Yeshua as the fulfillment of these traditions; *"Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1Corinthians 5:6-8); and "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:3-5).*

Order of the Seder

The *Seder* itself is comprised of fifteen parts, starting with *Kiddush* (sanctification) of the meal, and ending with the prayers of acceptance. Dinner is served about midway through the *Seder*. This is a welcomed treat as most attendees by then have been sitting for well over an hour, reciting scripture and nibbling on dry *Matzah* and bitter herbs. The order of the *Seder* is attributed to Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki),^{xiii} who correlated the fifteen discrete steps of the *Seder* with the fifteen steps that the Levites took to ascend into the Temple, and the fifteen Songs of Ascent (*Shir Ha'maalot*) that they intoned during their ascent—*Psalms 120-134*.

The Passover *Seder* plate (a relatively late addition), is comprised of several required and several added elements and required where the Paschal Lamb (today represented by a shank bone—*Zaro'ah*), unleavened bread (*Matzah*), and bitter herbs (*Maror*) represented by horseradish,

endive, or romaine lettuce. Added elements include a boiled egg; parsley dipped in saltwater or red wine vinegar, and a sweet fruit and nut dish called *Charosette*. The Lord also required that all sacrifices be offered with salt and a drink offering of wine, so these were incorporated into the *Seder* from the services in the Temple.^{xiv} Before the twelfth century, the practice was to dip the leafy vegetable into red wine symbolizing the blood of the Paschal sacrifice.

Four Cups of Wine

There are several rabbinic opinions as to the meaning of the four cups of wine, however commonly accepted is their correlation to this scripture. *“Therefore say to the children of Israel: I am the Lord; (1) I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, (2) I will rescue you from their bondage, and (3) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. (4) I will take you as My people, and I will be your God” (Exodus 6:6)*. Here we see four prophetic promises for the nation of Israel, these being the cup of sanctification, the cup of deliverance, the cup of redemption, and the cup of restoration. We know that Yeshua has presently fulfilled the first three cups, so there is still one cup yet to be fulfilled at His second coming—this being the cup of restoration.

Another explanation to the four cups is they are a prophetic picture of the four cups of salvation that Israel will drink in the Messianic future, correlating with these scriptures. *“O Lord, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot” (Psalm 16:5)*; *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over” (Psalm 23:5)*; and *“I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord” (Psalm 116:13)*.

The Night of Watching

Passover is called “the night of watching,” a night that has been watched continuously since the six days of creation. As cited in the Talmud, “In the month of Nissan (the first month), Israel was delivered, and in the month of Nissan they will be delivered again in the time to come.” Therefore, Israel’s final redemption will begin on the same night as their first redemption. For this reason, Elijah—the harbinger of the Messiah—is the logical symbol for the Passover *Seder*.

Yeshua said, *“Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things” (Matthew 17:11)*. And he is coming again before the return of the Lord, hence the tradition of setting aside a fifth cup of wine—called the cup of Elijah. There was a tradition at one time to drink a fifth cup of wine without reciting any blessings. Today this is represented by the additional cup that is set aside and not drunk.

The Bread of Affliction

On the Passover table is three unleavened pieces of bread (*Matzot*). The middle *Matzah* is broken in two. The smaller piece is returned to its place between the two unleavened breads, and the larger piece is wrapped in linen cloth and hidden. This larger piece is called the "*Afikoman*," translated from Greek meaning "that which comes after dinner" or "desert." After dinner, the younger children will search for the hidden *Afikoman*, and the winner will receive a prize, often chocolate or candy.

We can see the direct correlation to Yeshua where it says, "*Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury*" (John 19:40). And because of Israel's overall rejection of their Messiah, Yeshua said, "*If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes*" (Luke 19:42). But we know that in her appointed time, Israel will search for her Messiah and she will find Him, "*and so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob*" (Romans 11:26).

Matzah is called "the bread of affliction." Since the original Passover was intended to set a new course for the nation of Israel—breaking with the things of the past—it is apparent that the "bread of affliction" points to something to come. We know that Christ is that bread. He is not only the true bread of life that came down from heaven, but He is the One who was afflicted for our transgressions, "*Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted*" (Isaiah 53:4).

The rabbis teach that the bread of affliction was to be eaten by someone designated as a *Onen*. A *Onen* is defined as someone who is in a state of bereavement (*Aninut*), the period between the death of a near relative and their burial. The Lord God is that *Onen*. He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sin. And since the commandment of bitter herbs was to be eaten with the Paschal Lamb, we can conclude they also are a prophetic reference to the suffering Messiah, and not exclusively to our bondage in Egypt.

The portion of the *Haggadah* about the bread of affliction reads as follows: "Let all who are hungry eat; let all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover." This is a direct reference to Isaiah and a universal call to salvation where it says, "*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price... Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you—The sure mercies of David*" (Isaiah 55:1 & 3).

It is interesting to note this call is not made on the other two great assemblies, Pentecost (*Shavuot*), and Tabernacles (*Sukkot*). Why? Because salvation for either Jew or Gentile is found in none other than the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world, and His sacrifice was made on the Passover.^{xv} This verse in Isaiah promises the everlasting covenant of salvation to all flesh—Jew and Gentile alike.

On the night of the last supper (the last *Seder*), Yeshua officiated the New Covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah;^{xvi} *"In the same manner He [Yeshua] also took the cup after [the Passover] supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread [of affliction] and drink this cup [of wine], you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1Corinthians 11:25-26).*

Four Questions

A popular section of the *Haggadah* is the reciting of this classic question, "What makes this night different from all other nights?" The question—asked by the youngest child—is revealed in four parts: Why do we dip the vegetable twice? Why do we eat unleavened bread? Why do we eat bitter herbs? And why do we eat reclining to the left? This last question was a later substitute for one that was removed after the destruction of the Temple, "Why do we eat only roasted meat on this night?" I have added this one back into the *Seders* I teach because of its direct correlation to Yeshua.

A Covenant of Salt

It was interesting for me to discover that leafy vegetables were historically dipped in red wine to symbolize the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb. Parsley is commonly substituted today as Hyssop is not available in most western parts of the world. This practice was later switched to dipping in red wine vinegar, and then to saltwater to commemorate our tears of affliction in Egypt. Conceivably, the saltwater could also signify the tears Yeshua shed over Jerusalem because of the destruction He saw coming to her.^{xvii}

However, I believe there is a much deeper meaning that lies in the suffering our Messiah endured on the cross for our transgressions. This selfless act officiated in the earthly realm—and served as a witness to the nations—of the New Covenant Yeshua made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

We know that salt is the sign of God's eternal and everlasting promises, calling them "covenants of salt." One He made with the house of Aaron—the priestly lineage that came through Levi, the third-born son of Israel; and the other He made with the house of David—the kingly lineage that came through the tribe of Judah. For it says, *"it is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord with you [Aaron] and your descendants with you" (Numbers 18:19)*, and *"Should you not know that the Lord God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt?" (2 Chronicles 13:5)*. Yeshua is the fulfillment of both covenants, for He is both the King of Israel and her high priest forever whose name is Melchizedek—translating from Hebrew; "my King of righteousness."

The Final Exodus

There is an interesting story in the *Haggadah* called the discourse of Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah. Rabbi Elazar said that we must remember the day we came out of Egypt, every day and all the days of our lives. The sages then added, "The days of your life" implies our present world and includes the future time of the Messiah. Rabbi Ben Zoma further asserted that "In the future, Israel will cease to mention the exodus from Egypt. As it says, *"Therefore behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, that it shall no more be said, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The Lord lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers"* (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

This does not imply that the exodus would not be mentioned, but rather the deliverance from the great exile of Israel to the nations of the earth shall take precedence, and would be an even greater deliverance than Egypt. The other implication is that Israel's restoration remains incomplete.

The *Haggadah* asserts that God has calculated the end. This phrase is commonly used by the rabbis to refer to the end of the age and the coming of the Messiah. In prophetic literature, this is called "the Day of the Lord." The rabbis understand that Israel will endure incredible persecution before the arrival of the Messiah. The prophet Jeremiah called it "the time of Jacob's trouble."^{xviii} Therefore, the *Seder* is as much prospective as it is retrospective, and is even more about the future deliverance of Israel than just the remembrance of the past. Its prophetic quality requires us to view the trials of Israel from the exodus through our present day, and into the future itself.

Yeshua warned His disciples when He said, *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake"* (Matthew 24:9). And Peter said, *"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy"* (1 Peter 4:12-13).

God's Judgement

As part of the reading of the Exodus story, it is traditional to call out each of the ten plagues; dipping one's finger into a wine cup, and dabbing it onto a plate. This is not just a function of mere convenience, but a prophetic demonstration of the finger of God smiting the Egyptians. Rabbi Eliezer said that each of the plagues represents the four dimensions of the fierceness of God's divine anger: wrath, indignation, trouble, and messengers of evil.

God Himself executed the final, and climactic judgment, and not by a messenger, seraph, or agent. No other created being could have distinguished the seed of the firstborn. Only God can, for it says, *"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" (Exodus 12:12).

This final judgment was executed at "the division of the night," otherwise known as midnight. And so, it shall be with the coming of our Messiah, for it says, *"And at midnight a cry was heard: Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Matthew 25:6).*

The *Haggadah* also correlates the ten plagues with those of the prophets, as it says, *"And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: Blood and fire and pillars of smoke" (Joel 2:30).* It is customary during the *Seder* to pour out wine from the cup for each of these three judgments, rather than to dab it onto a plate. This is analogous to scripture where it says, *"Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth" (Revelation 16:1).*

This prophetic act demonstrates the severity of God's final wrath against the nations that have come against Israel during the great tribulation. It will not just be the ten plagues, but the full wrath of God Himself. And not just the finger of God, but His hand to bring destruction to the earth. This proof-text delineates bookends to Israel's history—her beginning at the time of the exodus, and her culmination at the coming of her Messiah.

The Festival Meal

The festival meal (*Shulchan Orech*), begins with eating a hard-boiled egg dipped in saltwater. There were two Temple offerings given on the Passover; the Paschal Lamb (*Korban Pesach*), and the festival sacrifice (*Korban Chagig'yah*). With the destruction of the Temple, these offerings were symbolically replaced on the *Seder* plate by a shank bone (*Zeroah*) representing the Paschal Lamb, and an egg (*Beitzah*) representing the festival sacrifice.

The Hebrew word "*Zeroah*" literally means "arm," alluding to, *"And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Exodus 6:6).* The Aramaic word for egg is "*Beya*," which also means "pray" or "please." The Jerusalem Talmud, therefore, tells us that the shank bone and egg together quietly supplicate to the Lord, "May it please the Merciful God to redeem us with an outstretched arm." This, again, is the anticipated promise of restoration for Israel.

Grace

In Jewish tradition, grace is done after the meal, for it says, *"When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you" (Deuteronomy 8:10).* The order of grace is set up in four parts; The first benediction is that of "Who Feeds" (*Ha'zan*). The second is the benediction of the land (*Birkat Ha'aretz*). The third is "Who builds Jerusalem" (*Boneh Yerushalayim*). And the fourth is "Who is kind and deals kindly" (*Birkat Ha'tov Veha'mativ*).

Closing

The *Seder* is concluded with a popular phrase, “Next year in Jerusalem!” This is not just a dream or hope of the Jewish people to return to the land of Israel, as many are now living there, but an ultimate promise of something much greater. At the very core of the Jewish faith and religion is the belief that God will one day destroy death—the death of death. And not just in the abstract, but that God will slay the very personification of death, which is God’s messenger of death.

There are differing opinions about who is the angel of death. What we do know however is that “death” is the greatest enemy of God and man, and will be the last enemy to be destroyed; *“Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:24-26)*. And it will be destroyed. This is God’s final victory and the very end of the age when the Lord makes a *“new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1)*.

I love to conclude the *Seder* with this added scripture because it speaks of our glorious hope we have in Christ, Yeshua, in the eternal world to come; *“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:2-4)*.

Amen!

ⁱ Exodus 6:1.

ⁱⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 6:4.

^{iv} Exodus 12:8, 12:24.

^v Exodus 13:8.

^{vi} Sicker, Martin. *A Passover Seder Companion and Analytic Introduction to the Haggadah*. iUniverse, Inc. 2004. ISBN: 0-595-31369-8.

^{vii} Exodus 12:6.

^{viii} Exodus 12:10.

^{ix} Exodus 12:16.

^x Leviticus 23:11-16.

^{xi} Matthew 28:1.

^{xii} Acts 2:1-4.

^{xiii} Shlomo Yitzchaki (22 February 1040 – 13 July 1105), in Latin: Salomon Isaacides, and today generally known by the acronym Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki), was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the Tanakh. Wikipedia.

^{xiv} Exodus 29:40, Leviticus 2:13.

^{xv} John 1:29.
^{xvi} Jeremiah 31:31.
^{xvii} Matthew 26:37.
^{xviii} Jeremiah 30:7.