



Pesach (Passover)

By Steve Cohen

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On the fourteenth day of the first month the Lord's Passover is to be held. On the fifteenth day of this month there is to be a festival; for seven days eat bread made without yeast. -- Numbers 28:16 -17

Passover is one of the major Jewish festivals which occurs on the 14th of Nissan in the Jewish calendar. It begins at sundown as the family traditionally gathers from far and wide to sit together in the home after weeks of preparation to clean and remove all leaven from the house.

The Order

The order of the Passover service is found in the Haggadah (the telling) which guides us through the Festival of Redemption. Following the lighting of candles, the head of the household offers a blessing over the first of four ceremonial cups of wine.

Then one of the children reads from the Haggadah the traditional Four Questions marking why this night is different from all other nights:

1. Why do we eat only unleavened bread?
2. Why do we eat bitter herbs?
3. Why do we dip the sop twice?
4. Why do we recline at table?

The Table

Passover is an object lesson and the accoutrements on the table are used to illustrate the lessons we should take from the exodus event, but we also believe it points forward to the work of Messiah.

The Matzoh Tosh - covering for the unleavened bread - holds three pieces of matzo yet separated one from the other. The head of the household removes the second layer, breaks it in half and hides that part, called the Afikomen, to be found later that evening.

On the table each year is a special Seder Plate with six ceremonial items designed to answer the four questions. The items are:

1. Karpas - parsley which is dipped in salt water reminding us that life is immersed in tears.
2. Maror - freshly ground horseradish taken to bring tears to our eyes recalling the harsh labor in Egypt for 430 years.
3. Charoseth - a sweet chopped apple mixture reminding us of the bricks we had to make to build Pharaoh's cities.



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4. Chazeret - an onion or horseradish root.
5. Baytzah - a roasted egg reminding us to the Temple sacrifices no longer offered because the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE.
6. Zaroah - the shank bone of a lamb reminding us of the first Passover lambs and how the blood applied to the door posts of the homes protected us as the angel of death passed over our homes and took the lives the first born not protected by the blood.

The second cup of wine is known as the Cup of Plagues. Here we recite the ten plagues poured out against the idolatry in Egypt before the exodus. We remove a drop of wine from our cups as we name each plague reducing the amount in the cup indicating that we do not have full joy seeing plagues poured out over others.

The Significance

The actual Passover meal is one of the best and largest of the year. After the meal the search for the Afikomen takes place by the children and after it is found we move on to the third cup of wine, the Cup of Redemption.

It was this cup which Jesus took with his disciples in the Upper Room after supper that he identified as the cup of His new covenant in his blood. Following blessings we take the bread and the wine together and they are the cup of redemption at Passover.

Why is this significant for believers today? Because the bread reflects Jesus in that it is unleavened. Leaven is a symbol of sin. The matzo has both stripes and piercing marks, as did Jesus. The bread is wrapped in a white cloth and hidden - as was Jesus following his death. But it does not stop there, the bread is found and brought back - as was Jesus when he was overcame death in his resurrection.

Only red wine is used at Passover, reminding us of the blood of those first Passover lambs which enabled our redemption from slavery. So, too, we see the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, offered for us that we might be redeemed from eternal death to life with God forever.

The final cup is reserved for Elijah the Prophet. Each year a special place setting at the table along with a cup of wine and an empty chair. A youngster goes to the front door of the house to open it wide inviting Elijah to come and join them for Passover. The forerunner of the Messiah was to be Elijah (see Malachi 6) and each year our people hope he will make that announcement. But we know that the announcement was made by John the Baptist - "*Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" John 1:29.

Jesus is indeed our Passover Lamb!



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For More Information

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