



Peninsula City Church

The Easter Season

Passover

Michael Podhaczky

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Passover

Introduction

Q. What is Passover, and is there any relevance to us today as Christ-followers?

If someone were to ask you this question, how would you answer him or her? On the one hand, sadly for many a Christ-follower, they only have a little or no knowledge of the Passover. On the other hand, their knowledge comes from Hollywood, the internet, popular unchristian works or the Television.

The whole topic of the Passover could be a full subject, but here I will review some of the many aspects of the Passover. I will review it from three perspectives; the historical background, the modern Jewish perspective, and the symbolic implications.

1. Its historical background

Q. What is the historical background behind the Passover?

Now then, in Exodus 12:12-28, the Bible records the first Passover (Pesach). Pesach actually means "protection," which was given to Israel as they were protected from the destroyer on the night, Exodus 12:27.¹ Israel had been slaves in the Egyptian nation for about 400 years. This had been prophesied by Abram (soon to become Abraham), see Genesis 15:13; also see Acts 7:6. In fact, God had told Abram that his ancestors would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years.² Due to this enslavement, God was about to free Israel and display to the surrounding nations and especially Egypt that there is no God like Yahweh, (Exodus 6:1-7:7). God would give ten opportunities for Pharaoh (this is a title for the king of Egypt), to humble himself and release Israel. However, we know from the biblical record in Exodus 7:14-12:30 that Pharaoh did not take the first nine God given opportunities.

As part of the plagues that came upon Egypt the tenth plague (the death of the first-born) was the worst of all, (Exodus 11:1-10; 12:12,29-30). What is fascinating though is that God had given Israel a faith step to follow to be protected from the destroyer of the first-born of Egypt. Interestingly the baby boys born to Israelite woman were to be kill under the orders of Pharaoh, (Exodus 1:15-20). Although many would have been killed, it is recorded here that there were those who were not killed and one of them was Moses, (Exodus 2:1-4).

As part of the preparation for this first Passover, (which was part of the feast known as Unleavened Bread, which lasted seven days). One faultless male lamb (or goat) that was one year old was to be chosen for each household, (Exodus 12:3,4). This was to be done on what is call the 10th of Abib, (Deuteronomy 16:1).³ This was done during the time of the Barley harvest (our March-April). This lamb was to be killed on the 14th day of this month and its blood was to be drained into a bowl. Then the person was to get a branch from a common plant called hyssop, dip into the blood, and now rubs the blood soaked branch over the lintel above the door and on the side doorposts.

¹ Berlin, Adele. & Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Jewish Study Bible*. (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 126.

² Interestingly in Exodus 12:41 it says that Israel would in Egypt for 430 years also see Galatians 3:17. So the number given in Genesis 15, maybe a rounding off to the total of years.

³ This was later called Nisan see Nehemiah 2:1; and Esther 3:7.

“The blood of this sacrifice sprinkled on the door-posts of the Israelites was to be a sign to the angel of death, when passing through the land to slay the first-born of the Egyptians that night that he should pass by the houses of the Israelites (Exodus 12:1-23).”⁴

It was on this same night, that the lamb was to be roasted, eaten along with bitter herbs and the unleavened bread. The whole meal was to be eaten quickly since, the household was to be ready to leave their home at short notice. God said,

“On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the LORD!” (Exodus 12:12)

The Passover involved not only the release from slavery, but also the blood as a process to avoid the judgment that fell on the gods of Egypt and thereby the nation. Therefore, it was to remain a day to remember forever,

“This is a day to remember. Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the LORD. This is a law for all time (Exodus 12:14).

It has been remembered from that time, until this day by Jews and even by Christians around the world. The Passover is a powerful life-giving day to remember, as it causes one to reflect on the deliverance by almighty God. It also brings into focus the cost involved to release His people from slavery. This all culminated in the Exodus or Israel exiting Egypt, (Exodus 12:31-42). Therefore, the Passover is called the time of our freedom (z’man cheruteinu)⁵

2. The modern Jewish perspective

Over time, the order of the Passover meal or in some cases a service has evolved into what it is today in Jewish home or service. The directive for the Passover is given using the Haggadah (or story), a book containing the order of service for the Seder. It was to commemorate the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt and the birth of the Hebrew nation.⁶ Therefore, the order of the ceremonial dinner is called the Seder (order), which remembers the release from slavery, the cost involved and the Exodus from Egypt Passover service. It has been said that,

“Its purpose is to symbolise important features and lessons of the Exodus and the redemption.”⁷

Part of the Seder service was a central item called the Seder plate. The Seder plate had certain items on it. These were used to help those at the Passover meal to remember what was involved in the Passover and then the Exodus to come. The Seder plate contains the following items:

- i. A roasted lamb shank bone (Zero’a): This symbolises the Passover lamb.
- ii. A hard boiled and slightly roasted egg (Beitzah): This is a voluntary peace or festival offering brought to the Temple during Passover.
- iii. Some greens maybe parsley, or bitter lettuce (Karpas): These are dipped into the salt water, which symbolises the cruel pain and bitter times suffered when slaves in Egypt.
- iv. The sweet paste (Haroses or Charoses): A sweet paste made of apples, nuts, cinnamon and red wine (or red grape juice for nondrinkers): This symbolises the mortar used between the bricks in Egypt, as it reminds how hard Israel was forced to work when slaves in Egypt.

⁴ “Passover Sacrifice.” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11934-passover-sacrifice> (24th March 2016).

⁵ “Pesach (Passover).” <http://bje.org.au/course/judaism/holydays-fasts/pesach/> (24th March 2016).

⁶ Pearl, Chaim. & Brookes, Reuben. *The Guide to Jewish Knowledge*. (Bridgeport, CT: Hartmore, 1985), 20.

⁷ Pearl, & Brookes, *Guide to Jewish Knowledge*, 22.

- v. Horseradish as bitter herbs (Maror): These bitter herbs symbolises the cruel pain and bitter times suffered when slaves in Egypt.
- vi. The salt water (and or onion): This symbolises the sweat of the hard labour and the tears that were cried when slaves in Egypt.

Then there were three Matzoth (the Yachutz): Two are the two loaves of unleavened bread eaten at the Passover. There is a third piece of bread, in which half is hidden during the meal (Afikoman), and is brought out at the end as a desert, to make a special blessing at the end of the Passover.

There are four cups of wine (or red grape juice for nondrinkers) that are drunk during the meal. These four cups of wine: Symbolising four statements of redemption declared in Exodus 6:6-7,

- ⁶ “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
 - The first cup: “and I will bring you out”
 - The second cup: “and I will deliver you”
 - The third cup: “and I will redeem you”
 - The fourth cup: “and I will take you”
- Then there is what is called the Cup of Elijah: This fifth cup symbolises the coming of Elijah, this is based on Malachi 4:5,
- “Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives (Mal 4:5 NLT)”
- The Cup of Elijah was poured out right before the reading the Hallel (that is Psalms 113-118).
- Then finally, there is dessert, this is the last piece of Matzah: this is called the Afikoman (meaning the after dish), it symbolises the last meal the Israelites ate when they left Egypt in a hurry beginning the Exodus.

The order of the service

The Search for yeast (Chametz)

The Passover meal opens with a prayer and a searching for the yeast that makes the bread rise. The search was done in the home on the evening of the 14th day of Nisan (Exodus 12:6, it falls within our March-April). After the search, the pieces of bread with yeast placed around the house are set aside to be burned the following morning. A prayer in the Talmud remembers that,

“Leaven (yeast) represents the evil impulse of the heart” (Berechot 17a),⁸ also see Exodus 12:15.

A prayer is said that declares,

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us by your commandments and commanded us to remove the leaven.”

⁸ Perez, Jamie L. *The Perpetual Flame: Offering Acceptable Worship Unto God*. (Lincoln, NE: Writers Club, 2001), 254

Lighting the Candles (Nerot Haner)

As the Seder service begins, there is what is called, the Blessing of the Festival Candles. One of the women or girls in the home will light these candles while saying the following,

“Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and has commanded us to kindle the light of the Festival Day.”

This symbolises bringing light to a dark and dying world in to birth. It is from the beginning

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).

Later, in Exodus 35:14, then God, the Light-giver, told Israel to make a candlestick be the light within the Holy Place in the Tabernacle,

“For light, the lampstand, its accessories, the lamp cups, and the olive oil for lighting”

The Blessing of the Feast

The person overseeing the Passover prayed,

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has given us Sabbaths for rest and anniversaries for rejoicing; festivals and seasons for gladness; and has commanded us through Moses to keep this feast-day of Passover, the celebration of our freedom through your love. And Moses said to the people.”

Everyone present at the Passover meal says,

“Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery... Each year, from generation to generation, you must celebrate it as a special festival to the LORD. This is a law for all time” (Exodus 13:3; 12:14)

Then comes the four cups of wine (or red grape juice for nondrinkers) this is the (Arba Kosot). These four cups of blessing (perhaps represent the four phases of the Exodus of Israel). This represents the four promises of blessing by God to His people, Exodus 6:6-7 is read out,

⁶ “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. ⁷ I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”

The First Cup the Cup of Sanctification or Freedom (Kiddush)

This first cup represents the promise that, “I will bring you out.” This is the cup of blessing or thanksgiving: It is the cup of sanctification, Exodus 6:6.

The Washing Ur`chatz)

Next comes the washing of the hands. This is the ritual washing of the hand, which symbolises a desire to live a life of purity and holiness before God.

The Green Herbs (Karpas)

Following the washing comes the dipping of the bitter herbs that is, they are into the salt water were brought to the table. The one overseeing the Passover meal took some of the bitter herbs dipped it into the horseradish and the salt water and ate it, then gave the same to the others present and the following blessing is recited:

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruits of the earth.”

This was to symbolise that for each room both dark and light so that the tears of sin can be wiped away. It also was to remember the tears shed in slavery in Egypt. All those present would now take the bitter herbs dipping it and eating together. Then they would all sing the first part of the Hallel: Psalms 113; 114

The Breaking of the Middle Matzah (Yachutz)

Then the person overseeing the Passover would take the middle matzah i.e. the (unleavened bread, i.e. bread that has not risen), break it in half, and leave it for the moment. This taken from Exodus 12:15. The meaning of the breaking of the middle matzah is explained later on in the Passover meal.

The Second Cup, the Cup of Deliverance and Judgement (Makkot)

Then relates to the deliverance for Israel, but judgement or plagues for Egypt. This cup represented the ten plagues that were sent to Egypt by the God of Israel. The second promise is made to Israel, “and I will deliver you” from Exodus 6:6. It is pointed out that both freedom and judgment came hand in hand. Then the person overseeing the Passover will say a blessing over the second cup,

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.”

The Story of Deliverance (Maggid)

Then there is the retelling of the story of the Exodus by the persons at the Passover. The two remaining and a half matzoth are lifted up for everyone in the room to see and then the story of the Exodus is retold as found in (Exodus 12:1-13).

The Second Washing of the Hands (Netilat Yadayim)

This second washing needs to be done before anyone can eat the unleavened bread. Consequently, it is here that the bowl of water is brought out and the towels are given out to the guests.

The Eating of the Unleavened Bread (Motzi Matzah)

Now those at the Passover meal are ready to eat the unleavened bread.

The Eating of the Bitter Herbs (Maror)

This is the eating of the horseradish, which symbolises the cruel pain and bitter times suffered when slaves in Egypt.

The Hillel Sandwich (Korekh)

This is the eating of a so-called sandwich made from unleavened bread, the sweet paste (Haroses or Charoses) and some horseradish (Maror). This makes a bittersweet part of the Passover meal. The person will begin on the bitter side of the sandwich representing slavery and eat towards the sweet side representing redemption.

The Solemn Blessing of the Food, the Seder Meal (Shulchan Orech)

Then the hard-boiled eggs symbolising the voluntary peace or festival offering are dipped into the salty water and are eaten. After that, the Passover lamb is eaten as recorded in Exodus 12:11.

The Afikoman

It is at this time; while the meal is being served the person, overseeing the Passover now hides the other half of the matzah; this half is called the Afikoman. Then a blessing will be given after the meal. However, the meal is not finished; half of the bread that was hidden needs to be found.

This is the eating of the Afikoman (meaning the after dish) or Tzaphun (hidden). The person, overseeing the Passover now asks the children at the meal to search for the Afikoman (the breaking of bread, after dinner) or the (Tzaphun). The child who finds it is given a coin, to signify that they have found a reward. Then the Afikoman is broken up and divided to those at the meal.

The Third Cup the Cup of Redemption (Ha-Geulah)

Then comes the third cup, this is called the cup of redemption or blessing. A blessing is said over this cup,

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.”

The third cup was drunk while they were sitting as a reminder of their freedom. Those at the table were reminded of the promise of Exodus 6:6, “and I will redeem you.”

Psalm of Praise

It was here that the second part of the Hallel is sung: Psalms 115-118

The fourth Cup, the Cup of Praise and Restoration or Release

The person, overseeing the Passover says a blessing over this forth cup. They ask everyone present to say the following blessing with them, “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.” Then soon after the cup is poured out (the release cup), they sing the great Hallel is sung, Psalms 120-127. This is the cup is the promise from Exodus 6:7, “and I will take you.”

Then they all say, “Next year in Jerusalem.” This was to show that they had a hope in the coming of Messiah. Have hope in Elijah’s coming, since, maybe this will be the year of his return. A victory song of praise is sung to finish the night.

The Final Blessing, the Cup of Elijah (Kos Shel Eliyahu)

Then it is at this time in the Passover meal that the cup of Elijah or Elijah’s place is drunk. This signifies the waiting for Elijah’s return. There is a place at the table for Elijah, but stays empty during the meal. The Cup of Elijah filled and the door was left opened, in anticipation of his coming, this is from Malachi 4:5.

“Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives” (Mal 4:5 NLT).

His place left empty for those who would be like him to proclaim the coming of Messiah.

Finally is the Close of the Passover Meal (Nirtzah)

It is here that the person, overseeing the Passover now tells all to put down the Haggadah and all Shout to the Lord. They shout out, “Next Year in Jerusalem.” They continue, “We are hopeful that one day soon we will enjoy fellowship together with the Messiah Himself in His coming Kingdom!”⁹

⁹ “Nirtzah.” http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Spring_Holidays/Pesach/Seder/Nirtzah/nirtzah.html (24th March 2016).

3. Its symbolic implications

Q. What is the symbolic background behind the Passover?

In the New Testament, we read about the last Passover meal that Jesus participated in with His disciples: Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:14-23; John 13:1,2; 18:1; and 1 Cor 11:23-26. Actually, Jesus said that, "I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before My suffering begins" (Lk 22:15 NLT).

Peter and John (Lk 22:8), were sent by Jesus to prepare the Passover meal: Matt 26:17-19; Mk 14:12-16; Lk 22:7-13. Mark and Luke both record that Peter and John were to meet a man carrying the pitcher of water, he was doing the work usually done by women that is possibly why he stood out to the disciples: Mk 14:13; Lk 22:10; cf. Gen 24:11,15. However, having said this, from time to time men did at times carry water see, Gen 29:10; Ex 2:16.

The evening had now come and things were ready for the Passover meal to begin. Jesus and the disciples all entered the upper room and sat down. The first cup of wine was filled (the expression of the promise of blessing Exodus 6:6,7) by Jesus the one presiding over the feast, He then gave it to be shared by the disciples. Jesus then pronounced a blessing, and they drank the wine. Jesus gives thanks and they drink from the cup: Lk 22:17. It was here that the first part of the Hallel would have been sung i.e. Ps 113; 114.

Jesus then gives Judas the piece of unleavened bread that had been dipped in the (Jn 13:26,27,30) this was a piece of the unleavened bread dipped in the sauce). As was the custom Jesus gave a piece of bread that had been dipped in the bitter mixture and gave it to Judas the person He chose to honour. After this, the unleavened bread was then passed around for the disciples to take some. Then the Passover Lamb brought out, would have been placed in front of Jesus and they would all have eaten the Lamb. While they were eating, Jesus took the third loaf of bread (Afikoman) and broke it as His body, Matt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19.

This was followed the pouring of the next cup (the cup of redemption). Jesus then took a cup gave thanks and gave them to drink, Matt 26:27; Mk 14:23; Lk 22:17-18,20; 1 Cor 11:25. They then sing the second part of the Hallel, (Ps 115; 116; 117;118). Then as they left the upper room for the garden of Gethsemane they sang Ps 120-127, Matt 26:30; Mk 14:26.

Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

Q. What is Passover, and is there any relevance to us today as Christ-followers?

Yes, it is as Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Passover. He was the ultimate Passover Lamb that was sacrificed to bring us out, deliver, redeem and take us into the Himself. Thereby, protecting us from the destroyer, releasing us from the slavery of sin, and reminding us of the cost involved.

What is interesting as we come to a conclusion of the matter, is that, Paul called Jesus the Passover Lamb when he said,

⁷ "Get rid of the old 'yeast' by removing this wicked person from among you. Then you will be like a fresh batch of dough made without yeast, which is what you really are. Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us. ⁸ So, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old bread of wickedness and evil, but with the new bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:7-8 NLT).

John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God,

²⁹ “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’” ³⁶ As Jesus walked by, John looked at Him and declared, ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God!’” (John 1:29,36 NLT).

While John the apostle in the book of the Revelation recorded,

“And (many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders) they sang in a mighty chorus: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slaughtered, to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing’” (Rev 5:12 NLT).

We do not need to shout out, “Next Year in Jerusalem.” Since, the Messiah has already come to Jerusalem and to the world. We do not need to continue, “We are hopeful that one day soon we will enjoy fellowship together with the Messiah Himself in His coming Kingdom!” Since, that day has already come and we can enjoy fellowship together with the Messiah Himself now in His coming Kingdom!

²⁴ “The Lord bless you and keep you; ²⁵ the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶ the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num 6:24-26 ESV).