

Maundy Thursday Observance – April 16, 2025

What is Passover and What does it Celebrate?

Recall the Old Testament stories of:

1. God's role in creation and choosing man as a special creature who enjoyed fellowship with God and was given responsibility for caring for His creation.
2. Mankind's fall, falling away, and difficulty maintaining a right relationship with God
3. God's choice of Abraham to father a people whose responsibility would be to spread God's word to all people and restore them to a right relationship with God.
4. The story goes on from Abraham → Isaac → Jacob → Joseph in Egypt, 400 years of residing in Egypt – going from a 3 generation family of descendants of Abraham enjoying favored presence in Pharaoh's land to a large nation of descendants feared by Pharaoh and kept in servitude → Moses and Aaron → Plea with Pharaoh to "Let My people Go" → 9 plagues: blood! Frogs! Gnats! Flies! Cattle disease! Boils! Hail! Locusts! Darkness → the 10th plague (Death of the Firstborn) – preceded by God's *prescription* for avoiding the plague, causing the plague to PASSOVER each household → The escape of the people through the Red Sea → ...
5. God's institution of the PASSOVER as a day of remembrance of their redemption from slavery by God's providence.
(Exodus 12:14) ¹⁴This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

Ancient prescription:

From "Christ in the Passover", the Mishnah (Hebrew book of traditions dating from the first century AD) quotes Rabbi Gamaliel as saying:

Whoever does not make mention of the following three things on Passover has not fulfilled his obligation, namely: (1) the Passover sacrifice, (2) unleavened bread and (3) bitter herbs. The Passover sacrifice because the Holy One ... passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt; unleavened bread ... because our fathers were redeemed from Egypt; the bitter herb ... because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt.

By the first century, the Passover observance had a set form of service called the *seder*, meaning "order of service", including most of the elements of the modern seder.

Scripture Basis for Last Supper as a Passover meal:

1. The Last Supper was an observance of Passover

(Matthew 26:17-19) ¹⁷*On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?”* ¹⁸*He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’”* ¹⁹*So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.*

(see also Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 13:1-4 - note: the account in John seems to begin “before the festival of the Passover”, but the Passover meal was celebrated *before...or on the first day of...the 7-day Festival of Unleavened Bread*)

2. Communion was established as a new covenant and service of remembrance (using the “Cup of Redemption”)

(Matthew 26:26-28) ²⁶*While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.”* ²⁷*Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

(see also Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20) and in Paul’s writings:

(1 Corinthians 11:23-26) ²³*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”* ²⁵*In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”* ²⁶*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

The Gospel of John doesn’t mention the service of cup and bread but does give an extended account in 13:1-18:1 of other remarks of Jesus on that night, including Christ’s establishment of a “new commandment”.

3. Christ established a “new” commandment (*mandatum*)

(John 13:34-35) ³⁴*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.* ³⁵*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

The designation “Maundy Thursday” for our observance comes from the Latin word, *maund* meaning “to command”, commemorating this important aspect of that gathering for the “Last Supper”.

Modern Elements:

1. Preparation – on the day before Passover, finding and discarding *chametz* or leavening; special dishes are used
2. A Family celebration – children, place at the table for strangers, a seat at the table for Elijah
3. Candles – “inspiring a sense of holiness” or “invoking the Holy Spirit to ‘light our hearts’”
4. Basin of water – for washing hands after the first cup of wine (*but recall Christ’s use of a basin of water and towel for His lesson of servanthood*)
5. 4 Glasses of Wine
 - a. Cup of Sanctification or setting apart as holy
 - b. Cup of Plagues – remembering the many who died during the plagues and what it cost to be set free (for us, from sin and death – the lifeblood of Jesus).
 - c. Cup of Redemption – stands for the blood of the Passover lamb – this is the cup that is recorded in the Gospels as being shared at the Last Supper.
 - d. Cup of Praise
6. Salted water – the tears shed during subjugation
7. *Matzo* Plate: with three stacked & covered matzos – the Unity;
8. The *Afikomen*, made by breaking the middle matzo and hiding half of it – later the children will look for the missing portion with the one finding it to receive a reward. The found portion is then divided among those present.
9. **Seder Plate** with ceremonial foods
 - a. *zeroah* – roasted shank bone of a lamb (or chicken neck) – paschal sacrifice (We don't have this as Christ was the final sacrifice...others because the place where sacrifices were offered, the temple, was destroyed in 70ad and not rebuilt.)
 - b. *baytzah* – roasted egg (or *haggigah*: holiday sacrifice at the temple; also a symbol of new life and hope and triumph over death)
 - c. bitter herbs
 - i. *chazereth* – a piece of whole horseradish root
 - ii. *maror* – freshly ground horseradish (or Romaine lettuce)
 - d. *karpas* – a piece of lettuce, parsley or celery representing the hyssop used to spread lambs blood on the doorframe (also a symbol of life – green),
 - e. *charoseth* – a sweet, brownish mixture of chopped apples, nuts, raisins, cinnamon and wine – representing the mortar used in building
10. The Four Questions: Why is this night different from all other nights?
 - a. On all other nights, we eat leavened or unleavened bread, but this night only unleavened bread.
 - b. On all other nights, we eat all kinds of herbs, but this night only bitter herbs.
 - c. On all other nights, we do not dip or vegetables even once. On this night, why do we dip them twice?
 - d. On all other nights, we eat our meals sitting? On this night, why do we eat only reclining? (or the ancient form of the fourth question: On all other nights we eat meat roasted, stewed, or boiled, but on this night why only roasted meat?)
11. Reading or telling the story of Passover
12. *Haggadah* – Hebrew for “telling” or “showing forth” – a book that lays out the full ritual of the seder.

The Seder or Order of the service

(from the booklet: “Passover for Christians”)

1. The Candles – invoking the Holy Spirit to “light our hearts”
2. The Four Cups of Wine – reminds of promises that God made to Moses
 - a. “I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians”
 - b. “I will free you from being slaves.”
 - c. “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.”
 - d. “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”
3. The *Cup of Sanctification* – setting apart as holy
4. The Hand Washing – as God is holy, we must be holy.
5. The Karpas (and salted water) – reminds that new life is a gift from God; also reminds of the hyssop used to place blood of lamb on doorframe; the salted water reminds of tears shed in Egypt
6. The Unity – (may have come from early Christian influence during development of the Seder – representing the Trinity)
7. The Breaking of the Middle Matzah – the hiding of the Afikomen
8. The Four Questions
9. The Story of Passover
10. The *Cup of Plagues* (blood, frogs, gnats, flies, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and Death of the Firstborn)
11. The Dayenu – “It would have been sufficient...”, recounting God's blessings: (kindness) redemption from Egypt, (power) parting of the Red Sea, (care) provision in the wilderness, (goodness) gift of Law, (triumph) promised land.
12. The Passover Lamb (blood marked homes of “saved” for PASSOVER)
13. The Matzah (unleavened “bread of haste”)
14. The Maror (bitter life in Egypt)
15. The Charoseth (mortar used in building) – (the dip used to identify betrayer at Last Supper)
16. The Passover Supper
17. The Eating of the Afikomen – note: this “after dish” was not a part of the ancient celebration as nothing was to be eaten after the meal. It became a formal part of the seder after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. The bread that Jesus broke in establishing the observance of Communion may have been the first use of this “after dish” or afikomen.
18. The *Cup of Redemption* – this is the cup of our communion
19. The Prophet Elijah – empty setting at table, child opens door to look for Elijah
20. The *Cup of Praise*