

# THE FEAST OF PASSOVER

## Objectives:

- To better understand Jesus as the Passover Lamb by looking at the customs and practices surrounding the feast of Passover.
- To gain an awareness of the Jewish customs relative to the feast of Passover.

## Approach:

"Beneath the Blood-Stained Lintel" musical recording by Phil Keaggy

*(transition)*

Today we will look at what it was about the blood-stained lintel that gave birth to a holiday that became the birthday for the Jewish people, to a holiday that is the most often referred to holy day in the Bible, and to a holiday that so beautifully paints the picture of Jesus as Messiah.

## I. PASSOVER: THE FIRST OF THE SPRING HOLIDAYS

**A. Passover 7-feast is the first feast in the cycle that God ordained in Lev.**

**23.** It is the first of the 4 Spring feasts or the feasts of the Former Rain (Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost). The 6 feasts that follow are built upon it.

1. Three of the four Spring feasts are celebrated within an eight-day period of time (Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits)
2. Passover is a one-day celebration, Unleavened Bread is a 7-day celebration and Firstfruits occurs on the Sunday after Passover.
3. In the New Testament, Passover and Unleavened Bread are used interchangeably to denote this 8-day period of celebration.
4. During the time of Jesus, two days were observed as Passover due to controversy between the Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees held that the feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover were two distinct holidays with Passover occurring on Nisan 14 and Unleavened Bread on Nisan 15. The Pharisees and the majority of the Hebrews during the time of Jesus observed Passover on Nissan 15. "Jesus may have been following both dates by having Passover with the disciples on the 14<sup>th</sup> and becoming the Passover Lamb on the 15<sup>th</sup>." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Scarlata, 2997, p. 132.

**B. Since these holidays are feasts and food is necessarily connected with them it is important to note that "in the Bible, breaking bread together was considered a bond of loyalty between two or more people. It was considered unthinkable in Bible times to eat at a man's table and then do or say anything to his hurt."**<sup>2</sup>

1. King David expressed shock and dismay in Ps. 41:9 that his friend, "who ate my bread" was the one who betrayed him.
2. Judas Iscariot ate the Passover meal with Jesus and then betrayed him.



*Passover Seder, 2004*

**C. A complete understanding of the meaning of each of these feasts is not possible in one sitting.** Deut. 6: 20-25 indicates that one purpose for celebrating Passover and each of the 7 feasts is to teach our children God's story.

1. Do not become discouraged as we move through the coming weeks if you cannot grasp all of the information regarding these feasts.
2. According to God's plan, understanding comes layer upon layer; precept upon precept. Each year we can add to our understanding as we observe the feasts.
3. As children develop, their understanding grows and deepens. The beauty of these 7 feasts is that they give opportunities each year for a child to add to his understanding of God through his five senses during each celebration. Judaism is a show, tell, taste, hear, and touch religion!

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<sup>2</sup> Hagee, 1999, p. 5.

## II. PASSOVER: ITS' HISTORY AND OBSERVANCE

A. **The history of Passover is found in the book of Exodus.** It commemorates the Hebrews' deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

1. Exodus 12:1-30 records the first Passover. "There was only one Passover when the Lord passed through the land in judgment." (Howard, p. 51) The story is a familiar one--the plagues, the lamb's blood on the doorframe, and the spectacular deliverance through the Red Sea.
2. Exodus 13:3-16 records God's instructions for future Passovers which would be memorials commemorating that first Passover.
3. Exodus 12:25-27 indicates that Passover was to be observed as a ceremony or service, designed to "raise questions in the minds of the children so that the Exodus story could be rehearsed from generation to generation."<sup>3</sup>
4. "Passover is the oldest continuously observed feast in existence today, celebrated for some 3,500 years."<sup>4</sup> The basic order of the Passover Seder has not changed significantly in the past 2,000 years.
5. Passover is one of the three pilgrimage feasts--Jerusalem was quite crowded during the feast--its' population more than doubled.

B. **Passover during the time of Christ:** According to Exodus 12, three foods were to be eaten during Passover--the Lamb, the matzah and the bitter herbs.

1. The **Lamb**: "By all biblical accounts, the lamb was the core requisite for Passover. It was the centerpiece of all that was accomplished. If there was no lamb, there would be no deliverance. So central was the lamb to Passover observance that the term 'the Passover' came to be used interchangeably of the lamb as well as the holiday. . .one could not exist without the other."<sup>5</sup>
- It was to be a young lamb (depicting innocence), without defect or blemish
  - It was selected on Nisan 10 and kept near the home until Nisan 14 for observation. "This would allow time for each family to become personally attached to their lamb so that it would no longer be just a lamb but their lamb. This would deeply impress upon them the costly nature of the sacrifice."<sup>6</sup>
  - The lambs were brought into Jerusalem with a great processional, each with a sign hanging around its' neck with the name of the family who owned it.
  - It was sacrificed on Nisan 14 at around 3:00 p.m. by the priests.
  - The lamb was to be roasted with fire and none of its' bones were to be broken

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<sup>3</sup> Howard, p. 51

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Howard, 1997, p. 50.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 50.

- Any roasted lamb not consumed at the Passover Seder was to be burned.
- "Josephus records the number of lambs slain from 256,500 and later (A.D. 65) no fewer than 3 million."<sup>7</sup>
  2. The **Matzah**: or unleavened bread, symbolized the purity of the sacrifice since leaven was often a symbol of sin



3. **Bitter Herbs**: a reminder of the suffering of the Lamb

C. **Passover observance today**: Passover is the most popular Jewish holiday. If contemporary Jews only celebrate one holiday, it is Passover. I have included a short "Haggadah" or order of worship for you in today's handouts. Rather than go through each element of the observance in order, let's focus on several aspects of Passover as it is observed today:

1. Preparation for Passover includes major spring cleaning as well as removing any products which might contain leaven. We will talk more about this next week when we discuss the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The table is set with the finest dishes (in some Jewish groups separate dishes and utensils are used for Passover) and an elaborate meal is prepared.
2. Seating arrangements: the leader sits at the head of the table with the youngest person present to his right. The guest of honor is seated to the leader's left (often a vacant place reserved for the prophet Elijah). At a certain point in the Seder, the youngest often leans upon the leader. "This was the context of the apostle John reclining upon Jesus at their Passover supper (John 13:23). . . would indicate that John sat at the right of the Savior and was the youngest at the meal. . . John would have had the honor of asking the questions that night."<sup>8</sup>



*Passover Seder, 2004*

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<sup>7</sup> Scarlata, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Howard, 1997, pp. 56-57.

3. Ceremonial washing: there are two times during the course of the Seder that each person at the table washes his/her hands. It is a symbolic act of purification in anticipation of the handling of food. The first washing occurs at the beginning of the Seder. It was probably at this point in the Last Seder that Jesus took a towel and washed His disciples' feet (John 13:4-5). "His object lesson demonstrated that He was about to become the suffering Servant of the Lord, and as such, He would be the One to cleanse them." <sup>9</sup>

4. Four Cups of wine or grape juice are consumed during the Passover Seder. They represent the four expressions of redemption found in Exodus 6:6-7: bring, deliver, redeem and take. The first cup is called the cup of Sanctification' 2<sup>nd</sup> the cup of judgment; 3<sup>rd</sup> cup of redemption and 4<sup>th</sup> cup of acceptance or praise

5. Four Questions are asked by the youngest person present that invite a recitation of the history of the exodus. These questions are in response to the command set forth in Ex. 12:26 "And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'it is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord.'"

6. Afikomen: At the beginning of the Seder, the leader takes the middle matzah out of the matzah tash, breaks it, places half in a linen napkin and hides it, while the other half is replaced in the unity. Towards the end of the Seder, the children are allowed to search for the hidden bread and "redeem" it for a small gift. The hidden bread is then broken and eaten just prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> cup of wine.

- This practice was not part of the observance during the time of Christ but was added later to represent the lamb (according to Rabbinic tradition).
- "afikomen" is a Greek word (the only one in the Seder) which simply means "I came"
- Early Hebrew believers broke away from the sacrificial system, believing that Jesus had made a once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. They chose to incorporate the afikomen into the Seder at the precise moment that Jesus had said, "this do in remembrance of me."
- After the temple was destroyed and with it the sacrificial system in A.D. 70, non-believing Jews copied the Hebrew believers' practice of a lamb-less Passover by substituting the afikomen for the lamb.
- Non-messianic Jews, unknowingly, attest to the Messiah when they participate in the afikomen ceremony. "The 'He came' has been an annual reminder that the Messiah, the true Passover Lamb, has already come.. . The Lamb still cannot be separated from the holiday."<sup>10</sup>

7. Additional ceremonial foods: three additional foods, that symbolize some aspect of the Egyptian experience for the Hebrews, have been added to the Seder Plate by Rabbis. They are:

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<sup>9</sup> Howard, 1997, 55

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

- Charoseth--a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon, honey and grape juice. It symbolizes the mortar the Hebrews used to make bricks
- Karpas or fresh greens--symbolizes the hyssop used to put the blood on the doorframe; also symbolizes the new life for the Jewish people. The greens are dipped twice in salt water--once to remind us of the tears shed during slavery and once to symbolize the parting of the Red Sea.
- Roasted egg--serves as a reminder of the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70



*(conclusion if this lesson is given at two different times)*

The Feast of Passover paints a picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God. In tangible ways, using our sense of smell and definitely our sense of taste it paints a portrait of the pain of slavery to sin and the wonder of deliverance, through no effort of our own. I invite you to come and sample the ceremonial foods, if you have never done so. As you do, remember, Jesus came to destroy the bitterness of sin and to give us new life through His blood and body.

## **PRAYER**

## **SAMPLE CEREMONIAL FOODS**

### III. MESSIANIC SIGNIFICANCE OF PASSOVER

#### A. Jesus, the Lamb of God

1. "From the beginning of time God had been saying to men, 'There is no way to approach Me except by coming with a lamb'" <sup>11</sup>
  - In the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve sinned and realized they were naked, God killed an animal in order to clothe them. Gen. 3:21
  - God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his covenant son. When Isaac asked his father about the lamb for the sacrifice, Abraham replied, "God will provide for Himself a lamb." Gen. 22:8
  - The Passover lamb was all that stood between the Hebrews and the angel of death. Without the lamb, there would have been no redemption from slavery.
  - Gradually, the prophets of old came to understand that one day God would send a Lamb in place of all the lambs. Isaiah describes the coming Messiah as a lamb "led to the slaughter." (Is. 53)
2. The sacrificial lambs were kept in special grazing fields. Jesus was born in the shadow of the watchtower overlooking those grazing fields.
3. The Passover lamb was to be a one-year old male. Jesus was the firstborn Son of God.
4. The Passover lamb was to be without blemish. Jesus was examined and found without blemish.
5. The Passover lamb was set aside for four days, beginning on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey on the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. When a king came in peace, he rode on a donkey. He was hailed as the "Prince of Peace." He entered Jerusalem with the sacrificial lambs. He was on public display in the temple for four days.
6. The penalty was imposed on the Passover lamb the moment the lamb was chosen. Jesus took on human flesh for one purpose--to carry the penalty of our sin.
7. The Passover lamb was sacrificed at 3:00 p.m. Jesus died in the seventh hour, 3:00 p.m. (Mark 15:33-37)
8. The Passover lamb's bones were not broken. Jesus' bones were not broken.
9. The Passover lamb entered Jerusalem with a sign hanging around its' neck with the name of its' owner inscribed on it. Jesus' died with a sign hung over him. The Hebrew initials for "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" was YHWH--the Hebrew name for God. (During this time messages were customarily written with just the first letter of each word.)
10. The blood of the Passover lamb applied to the door saved the Israelites' firstborn. The blood of Jesus saves us.
11. The body of the Passover lamb must be eaten the same night. Jesus was crucified, suffered, and died in the same night.

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<sup>11</sup> Zimmerman, 1981, p. 51.

12. No work was to be done on Passover--it was a holy convocation unto the Lord. By placing the blood of the lamb on the doorframes, the Hebrews were acknowledging that their effort alone was not sufficient to save their sons. The blood of Jesus saves us from our sins, not our own works.<sup>12</sup>



*Golgotha—the place of the skull  
Jerusalem*

## **B. The Last Seder--The Lord's Supper**

1. The Matzah is a perfect picture of Christ.

- It is pure--it has no leaven. He is pure he was found to be without sin.
- It is pierced. Isaiah says that "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities." (53:5)
- It is striped. It was by His stripes or wounds that we are healed. Is. 53:5

2. The afikomen which is taken from the second compartment of the unity, broken and half of it wrapped in linen and hidden, then later found, redeemed and eaten points to the second member of the Godhead. He was broken through crucifixion and hidden in burial. The afikomen is found and eaten just prior to the third cup, which is the cup of redemption. Jesus gave thanks for the bread during the Last Seder, blessed it, then broke it and gave it to His disciples. He said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19b)

- The blessing that Jesus spoke over the bread foretold His resurrection: "*Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.*"

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<sup>12</sup> Scarlata, 1997, p 110.



3. The third cup--the cup of redemption points to the blood of Jesus which instituted the new covenant. We know that it was the third cup that Jesus took when he told His disciples to take it in remembrance of Him because scripture indicates it was the cup consumed after the meal. Luke 22:20 "In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'"
4. It was during the ritual handwashing at the beginning of the Seder that Jesus washed His disciples' feet. John 13:1-17 He took on the role of a servant and demonstrated to them the humility of the cross.



*Upper Room in Jerusalem*

*(Note: it has been modified over the centuries)*

### **C. Jesus' death and resurrection kept a holy timetable.**

1. Because of the heavy oppression brought on by the Roman occupation of Israel, Passover, at the time of Christ, had reached a pinnacle of importance. *"During this period the Messianic hope flamed up, and in the minds of the Jews the deliverance of the future became bound up with the first redemption in Jewish history: the deliverance from Egypt. . . This belief gained added strength in this period of Roman occupation and oppression. Jews began to believe that the Messiah would be a second Moses and would free the Jews the self-same eve, the eve of Pesach."*<sup>13</sup>
2. The events of that ten-day period were divinely orchestrated to fulfill prophecy regarding the coming of the Messiah. HANDOUT<sup>14</sup>
3. He was tried, convicted, and crucified on the Feast of Passover. Death by crucifixion usually took days. Jesus died in a matter of hours.

<sup>13</sup>Schauss as quoted by Hagee, 1999, pp. 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> Scarlata, 1997, p. 106



*Garden of Gethsemane*

4. He was buried that evening--the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.



*Garden Tomb  
Jerusalem*

5. He arose at the end of the Sabbath (Saturday), which was the beginning of the first day of the week. This was the Sunday after Passover--the Feast of Firstfruits. "The greatest event that separates Jesus from all others is the fact that He overcame death. In three days He rose again and lives today. He arose from the grave on the Feasts of Firstfruits." <sup>15</sup>

- *"On Nisan 17, when Israel emerged from the Red Sea, this emergence was a shadow of the fulfillment of the day of Firstfruits (Lev. 23:9-14) This was the first of God's people to emerge from sin*

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 131-132.

*(Egypt). It was fulfilled 1,478 years later on Nisan 17, 30 A.D. when Jesus was resurrected and ascended to heaven as our high priest, the firstfruits of the resurrected (John 20:17)."* <sup>16</sup>



*Garden Tomb  
Jerusalem*

**D. Passover, as fulfilled by Christ, marks the end of ACT II in God's Redemptive plan.** The exodus marked the end of ACT I. Jesus' second coming will conclude the drama. If you want to know what God will do in the future, look to what He was done in the past.<sup>17</sup>

1. After Joseph had been elevated to the second highest position in Egypt, his brothers came to Egypt seeking food. "His brothers, driven by the gnawing pain of hunger ventured into Egypt and stood before Joseph three times, never recognizing the truth until he revealed his identity. When Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, they fell on one another's necks and wept openly." <sup>18</sup>
2. The Jewish people, sons of Abraham and brothers of Joseph, have now returned to their land three times. The first was when they returned from Egypt, the second was when they returned from captivity with Nehemiah and the third was 50 years ago in 1948.
3. Jewish people are coming to belief in Jesus as the Messiah in record numbers. More have come to accept Him as Messiah in the last ninety years than in the previous 1900 years.
4. The first time Jesus came, He came as the Lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of mankind. The next time He comes, He will come as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! The final act of Redemption is at hand.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Hagee, 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 18.

**E. Passover, though initiated by God and carried out by His Son, still requires a decision on our part.** "The Jewish Midrash teaches that just as the Red Sea did not split until the Israelites stepped into it, so redemption cannot come unless we take the first step."<sup>19</sup>

**F. We will celebrate Passover with our Messiah in heaven.** Jesus said to His disciples at that Last Seder, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." (Luke 22:15-16) This will be the marriage supper of the Lamb. We will participate, as the honored guest, the Bride of Christ!

(conclusion)

We've spent considerable time looking at the observance of the Feast of Passover. I would like to conclude by reading a passage from John Hagee's book "His Glory Revealed"

"I'd like you to look at one particular Passover--the fourteenth day of Abib (Nisan) A.D. 33. The Levites have just opened the doors of the Temple so that the crowds can enter to offer their sacrificial lambs. At the exact moment each head of household takes a knife and prepares to slaughter the lamb that must be sacrificed for his family, Jesus is hanging on a cross outside the city, deserted by all but a few followers and the Roman executioners.

The sky darkens, and the crowds inside the Temple grow silent and pensive. While the stones of the Temple courtyard run red with the blood of lambs and goats, the Lamb of God spills His life's blood outside the city. While the father in each household slaughters a lamb for the sake of his family, God the Father slaughters His holy Lamb for the sake of all who would accept Christ's gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

What wondrous love! What amazing grace!

Never forget it. . . your redemption was purchased by the precious blood of the Lamb of God."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Hagee, 1999, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp. 10-11.



*Model of Temple Mount  
Jerusalem*

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