

# The Feast of Passover

Name	Scriptures	Time / Date	Purpose	Fulfillment
Passover	Ex. 12:1-28, 43-49; Lev. 23:5; Num. 28:16; Deut. 16:1-8	14 <sup>th</sup> day of Nisan (March/April)	To commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.	<b><u>Redemption:</u></b> Christ's death as our Passover John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19

## Background

Passover is the oldest continuously observed feast in existence today. In fact, there was only one Passover, 3,500 years ago in Egypt, when the angel of death passed over the homes of believing Jews who sacrificed a spotless lamb and sprinkled its blood on their doorposts, sparing the loss of their first-born males.

In the same way, there was only one occasion when the Messiah's body was pierced and His blood poured out for our sins. To memorialize His coming death, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the feast of Passover. Just as faithful Jews have observed the Passover for 35 centuries, Christians have observed the memorial meal of the Lord's Supper for 2,000 years.

Observance of Passover was so important to the Jews that for those who had become defiled, an alternate date was given 30 days later.

## The Biblical Observance

The background of Passover is found in Exodus 12, which highlights three symbolic foods:

- † **The lamb.** This had to be a young male lamb that was perfect in every way. He was brought into the house on the 10th of Nisan and observed for four days so that his perfection could be confirmed, and so the lamb became precious to the family. When the lamb was sacrificed, he had to be roasted completely by fire and all of him was to be consumed. All of this pictures the perfect and sinless Messiah, who was observed, loved and completely consumed by God's judgment for our sins (2 Cor. 5:21). Truly, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); truly, He is Christ our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7).
- † **Matzah** – a flat bread with no yeast. It was punctured and scored. This symbolizes Christ's body, which contained no sin and was pierced and scored for us (Isa. 53:3-6).
- † **Bitter herbs.** These symbolize the hardship of captivity and the suffering of the lamb.

## The Modern Observance

The Seder meal (Seder means "order") features four cups, which symbolize four expressions of joy because of God's promises:

- † "I will bring you out."
- † "I will rescue you from bondage."
- † "I will redeem you."
- † "I will take you as My people."

The Seder meal generally follows the pattern below and takes many hours to complete. Before the meal begins (and in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread), the house is purged of all leaven (yeast) and the table, featuring fine linen and special dinnerware, is set. The father leads the ceremony.

**The first cup – the cup of sanctification.** This is to celebrate the promise of God, “I will bring you out (of Egypt).” The family’s Passover leader (in the Gospels, Jesus in the upper room) prays, “We praise you, O Lord our God, creator of the fruit of the vine ... The cup is a symbol of joy. Let us drink from it and be reminded of the joy that is ours as a result of our salvation.”

**Washing of hands.** This is a symbolic gesture of cleansing and purity before God. It was at this point that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet (John 13:4-5), showing that through His suffering and death He would cleanse them.

**Karpas – the green vegetable.** This bitter herb is dipped in salt water and eaten. The salt water symbolizes the tears of slavery; the green vegetable, the bitterness of captivity.

**The “middle” matzah is broken in half.** A white cloth napkin with three compartments is brought out. There are loaves of matzah – unleavened bread – in each compartment. The middle matzah is taken out and broken in half. Half is returned to the napkin; the other half is hidden in the house.

**Questions.** The youngest child sits to the father’s right and asks rehearsed questions that enable the father to tell the story of Passover. The first question asked is, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” This is in fulfillment of Ex. 12:26. In the upper room, the apostle John was seated at Jesus’ right and probably was the youngest of Jesus’ followers.

**The second cup.** This cup celebrates the promise of God: “I will rescue you from bondage.” One drop of wine is spilled out for each of the 10 plagues upon Egypt. The Hallel (Psalms 113-118) is recited.

**Dipping of the matzah.** The upper matzah and the one-half of the middle matzah still in the napkin are broken and distributed. Each participant dips his or her piece in horseradish and haroset (apple mixture), symbolizing redemption in the midst of slavery. Everyone eats a “Hillel sandwich,” two pieces of matzah with enough horseradish to bring tears to the eyes. At the last supper, Jesus took the “dipped sop” (broken matzah) and gave it to Judas, indicating he would be the betrayer (John 13:21-27).

**The dinner – lamb, matzah and herbs.** Today it is a much more sumptuous meal than in Old Testament times, with gefilte fish, matzah ball soup, glazed chicken, matzah nut stuffing, potato kugel, honeyed carrots, stewed fruit, and sponge cake. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., lamb was no longer the central part of the feast.

**The afikomen.** The broken and hidden half of the matzah is now discovered by children who are sent to find it. Everyone must eat a small piece of the newly discovered unleavened bread. The three loaves of matzah were not part of the early Passover celebration; they came during the early days of the church when the lamb was no longer central to the meal. They picture the Trinity and, specifically, the broken, buried and resurrected body of Christ.

**The third cup – the cup of redemption.** This cup celebrates the promise of God: “I will redeem you.” It is at this point in the upper room that Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper (the “cup after supper” Luke 22:20). A child is sent to the door to look for Elijah who, Scripture says, must come before Messiah. There is much anticipation of the Messiah associated with Passover.

**The fourth cup – the cup of acceptance or praise.** This cup celebrates the promise of God: “I will take you as My people.” Jesus said He would not

drink this cup until He drank it new with His disciples in the Kingdom (Matt. 26:29). His acceptance by Israel would not come until much later.

**Closing hymn** (Matt. 26:30). Passover is a joyous time, and many songs are voiced enthusiastically. Often, the latter half of the Hallel (Ps. 115-118) would be sung.

### **The Fulfillment**

To show His fulfillment as the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Peter 1:18-19), and to memorialize His coming death, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during the feast of Passover (Matt. 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). Just as faithful Jews have observed the Passover for 3,500 years, Christians have observed the memorial meal of the Lord's Supper since that night 2,000 years ago in the upper room.