

# The Feast of Passover (Exodus 12:1-28)

The Passover meal was (and still is) held as an annual event in each Jewish household. The meal commemorates the deliverance and Exodus of the [children of Israel](#) from the dominion of Pharaoh as slaves in Egypt, around 1450 BC.

## The First Passover

The first Passover is described in Exodus chapter 12: one lamb was slain for every household and the blood painted onto the lintels and doorposts. This was done in order that the angel of Death would not slay the first-born son of the Jewish households, but only those of Pharaoh's people, whom God had warned He would judge. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" the Lord told the children of Israel (Exodus 12:13). They were to eat the lamb, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, in haste prior to their departure from Egypt. The eating of unleavened bread was to continue for seven days, as their sustenance to exit Egypt and escape Pharaoh's slavery. God ordained that the children of Israel would commemorate the Passover every year to remember their deliverance, almost 3,450 years ago.

## Early Commemorations of The Passover

Commemoration of the Feast of Passover was the first major event after the [Tabernacle](#) was first built. The building was finished on schedule, two weeks prior to the first anniversary of the Exodus. The Tabernacle was consecrated and anointed with oil (Exodus 40:9, a definite foreshadow of the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ). Aaron and his sons (the [Levites](#)) were also consecrated and anointed to serve in the Tabernacle (Exodus 40:13).

During the first four decades of the Tabernacle, all of the children of Israel were together in one place in the wilderness to commemorate the Passover. Once they had entered into the good land of Canaan, Jerusalem eventually became the focus of worship, at the time of King David, around 1000 BC. From then onwards, the Feast of Passover was to be held every year in Jerusalem, in accordance with God's word to Moses in Deuteronomy 16:1-8.

The ordinances of the Passover, specified in Exodus chapter 12, state that the lamb was to be examined for four days, to ensure it was without blemish. Then at evening (Jewish days begin at sunset) the lamb was to be slain, its blood applied to the lintels and doorposts and then roasted for sustenance for the Exodus journey.

## How is the Passover commemorated today?

Today, the Passover (Seder) meal follows a fairly standard pattern in every Jewish household. There is a 'Haggadah' (which means 'telling', 'portraying', see Galatians 3:1) to guide the proceedings, which is based on four 'Cups'.

At the start, candles are lit and a prayer is offered to bless the First Cup of wine: "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, the Creator who brings forth the vine from the earth with its fruit" (Genesis 1:11). This First Cup is called the Cup of Sanctification, signifying "I the Lord will bring you out from under the yoke of slavery" (Exodus 6:6); this was God setting the children of Israel apart for Himself.

Next all the participants wash their hands: "Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart" (Psalm 24:3-4). This was probably the point where Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:4-12).

Then each person takes some herbs (usually Parsley) and dips them in salt water and eats them (Matthew 26:23; also, it was probably at this point that Jesus gave the sop to Judas, John 13:26). The salt water and herbs remind all present that the Passover was originally eaten with 'bitter herbs' (Exodus 12:8). The herbs are dipped in salt water to remember the tears as "the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help went up to God" (Exodus 2:23). In connection with the herbs, the Lord is remembered and blessed as the Creator of the fruits of the earth.

Next, the head of the family takes the middle one of the three flat cakes of unleavened Matzah bread; he breaks it and puts one half aside, wrapped in a white linen cloth. The hidden bread is called the 'Afikomen' (meaning dessert). There are three pieces of bread to remember that the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is One who keeps His covenant; He it is that delivered the children of Israel from bondage (Exodus 6:2-9). But why is it the middle piece that is broken? This is because the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is an indication of the tri-unity of God. Just as Abraham was willing to offer up His "only son" (Genesis 22:2,12), so God the Father willingly offered up His Son, Jesus (John 3:16). Jesus was broken on the cross for our redemption (I Corinthians 11:24) and wrapped in linen for burial (Luke 23:53).

Part of God's purpose in requiring the children of Israel to remember the Passover was to inspire questions from future young generations, for their instruction (Exodus 12:26-27). Children customarily have to ask four questions:

why tonight?

a night to remember (Exodus 12:42)

why bitter herbs?

to remember the anguish of slavery (Exodus 2:23)

why dip the bitter herbs in the salt water twice?

it was really bad in slavery, but our HOPE was in God (Psalm 42:5)

why do we eat reclining?

because now we are free to come to God (Exodus 3:18-20; Galatians 5:1; Matthew 11:28)

The history of the first Passover is read aloud from Exodus chapter 12 and Psalms 113 and 114.

**The second cup, the Cup of Plagues is filled and passed round. The ten plagues on Pharaoh's Egypt are verbally recounted (Exodus 7:14-12:36):**

**Blood!**

**Frogs!**

**Lice!**

**Flies!**

**Cattle Disease!**

**Boils!**

**Hailstones!**

**Locusts!**

**Darkness!**

**Death of the Firstborn!**

**This Cup of Plagues is the last cup before the Passover Lamb is considered (see Luke 22:17).**

**The climax of the Seder meal should be the festive meal of roast lamb. However, since the Temple no longer stands in Jerusalem (where the Passover lamb was sacrificed), a shankbone is presented as a reminder of the Passover Lamb.**

**It was after this point that Jesus instituted 'the Lord's Supper'. He took the Afikomen bread (laid aside earlier) and gave thanks (Matthew 26:26): "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, the Creator Who brings forth bread from the earth", according to the Jewish Haggadah. Then He broke the Afikomen bread and passed round the third cup of wine, called the Cup of Blessing or the Cup of Redemption. Jesus said "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20).**

**(Incidentally, Jesus' words "this is ..." (Matthew 26:26,28) must mean 'this represents...' since He was Himself there, giving the disciples the bread and wine.)**

**The final cup of wine, the Cup of Praise, is drunk as the Seder meal concludes with the singing of the remaining 'Halel' (or Hallelujah) Psalms (115-118) and the 'Great Halel', Psalm 136 "God's love endures for ever". These psalms are probably the 'hymn' mentioned in Matthew 26:30. Psalm 116 is particularly pertinent to the Lord's prayer in the garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39,42).**

**The final sentence expresses the hope of how next year's Passover will be remembered:**

**"Next year in Jerusalem!"**

**The setting of the Lord's Supper at the heart of the Passover meal explains its meaning. Jesus Christ is Himself the Passover lamb, offered up for the redemption and deliverance of His people (I Corinthians 5:7), the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The bread and wine speak of His death, and of the new covenant it ratifies, reconciling God and man. Jesus says "Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19; I Corinthians 11:24-25), telling His disciples that the Passover is fulfilled in Him. Until He comes again (Luke 22:18; I Corinthians 11:26), we are to remember the significance of what He has done for us.**

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*<http://www.domini.org/tabern/passover.htm>*