



PASSOVER AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Pesach, or Passover, the Jewish feast celebrating the liberation from Egypt, occurs in the spring during the Biblical month of Aviv, or Nisan as it is known today in the Jewish calendar. Passover begins in late March or during April. (Do a web search for the date each year.) Remember, the Jewish day begins at sundown of the previous day. Pesach initiates the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Pesach is celebrated primarily in the home. In an observant Jewish home, careful and thorough spring cleaning is carried out weeks prior to the holiday. Special dishes and cooking utensils are brought out from storage. Everything used must be absolutely pure and leaven-free. All leaven, which is symbolic of man's evil inclination, must be removed from the house or isolated and temporarily sold to a non-Jewish friend so that, technically, no leaven is possessed. The night before Pesach, the final search for leaven is conducted by the head of the household. A candle, wooden spoon, feather, and an old cloth napkin or bag are used to symbolically seek out and remove some morsels of leavened bread. The proclamation is then made, "Now I have rid my house of leaven." The leaven is taken to a bonfire the next morning and burned.

The Passover Seder is conducted in the evening, which is the beginning of the first day of Passover. (In orthodox homes, a second Seder is held on the second day of the feast.) The Seder meal is a joyful, yet solemn feast occurring in the midst of a family religious service. The meal is eaten while leaning on a pillow or just leaning to the left. Ritual washings precede the meal. *Seder* means order of service. A special book called the Haggadah is read. *Haggadah* means "the telling forth." It contains the biblical story of the Passover and also many traditional explanations and embellishments. *The Four Questions* are asked by a young child. They begin with the familiar introduction, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" Celebrants are to think of themselves as having been at the original Exodus.

During the Seder the meaning of the symbolic Passover foods is explained. The Seder plate occupies the most prominent place on the table and contains a number of important symbolic items. *Maror*, or ground bitter herbs (usually horseradish) represent the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt, as does the *Hazaret* or the whole root of bitter herbs. *Karpas*, usually parsley, symbolic of "new life," is dipped into salt water, representing tears, the sorrow of life. *Charoset*, a mixture of chopped apples, nuts, honey and wine, represents mortar the Israelites used when slaves to

Pharaoh. *Beytzah*, a roasted egg, represents the holiday sacrifices offered in the Temple (known as *hagigah*) which have ceased. The shank bone of a lamb, or *Zeroah*, represents the Passover lamb itself. Four cups of wine are drunk by each person during the Seder, and, of course, *matzah*, or unleavened bread, is eaten. A special place is set in hope that Elijah, the forerunner of the Messiah, will come join the feast. Traditional, but non-symbolic foods, include gefilte fish, matzah ball soup, candied carrots, a main dish such as roast chicken, and macaroons. The last thing eaten is the *Afikomen*, a piece of matzah hidden earlier and then found by one of the children. The Afikomen represents the Passover lamb.

We find a description of the first Passover in the book of Exodus. In the time of Joseph, the sons of Israel had settled in Egypt to avoid a famine. By the time of the Exodus some four hundred years later, the Israelites had become slaves to Pharaoh. God promised to deliver them from this bondage and bring them into the promised land. He brought the judgement of the ten plagues on Egypt, the last being the killing of all the firstborn in Egypt. God told the people to sacrifice the Passover lamb and put the blood of the lamb on the sides and top of their doors. Only through the sacrifice of the lamb would they be spared judgement. The feast was to be kept as a remembrance of God's deliverance.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR NEW COVENANT BELIEVERS:

We know that Jesus has come as the ultimate Passover lamb who causes the judgement of death to "pass over" us. He brings us freedom from the bondage of sin and leads us into *His* kingdom. The setting of the Lord's supper is the Passover Seder. Jesus proclaimed himself to be the ultimate Passover lamb, represented by the unleavened (sinless) bread and the wine. He brought the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34) and redemption through his sacrifice for sin and resurrection.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SHARING YOUR FAITH:

1. Read Exodus 3-12; Deuteronomy 16:1-8; Isaiah 53; John 1:29; Matthew 26:17-30; Luke 22:7-23; and I Corinthians 5:6-8 & 10:14-22.
2. Ask your Jewish friends what Passover means to them, and what their families do for Passover. (Maybe you'll even be invited to a Seder to see for yourself!)
3. Prepare a 1-2 minute testimony of how Jesus is the Passover lamb and how important this holiday is to you.
4. Attend or have your *own* Passover Seder celebrating Jesus as the Passover lamb. Encourage your church to recognize the Passover setting of the Lord's Supper. (CHAIM has a Passover haggadah and instructions online for download.)
5. Send a Passover greeting card to Jewish friends.

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