

A Christian Guide to Passover (PESCH)

Below is a compilation of several contemporary Seder services that are used today. Because of the passage of time and that Passover was intended to be a family tradition, it is not possible to reconstruct with certainty the type of Passover meal or celebration that Jesus shared with his disciples. The following program has many components that were part of the Passover Meal and is probably similar to what occurred during his time period. Feel free to reflect upon this Seder program that was used at our church just recently.

Order of Service and the Seder Meal

Usually the evening before the Passover meal was eaten, the paterfamilias led his family through the house by candlelight, looking in nooks and crannies for any leaven in the house. No leaven was supposed to be in the home at that time. (Not infrequently, Jews would sell their leaven to their Gentile neighbors and buy it back after the eight days of unleavened bread!) At the end of the search the father says, “All leaven that is in my possession, that which I have seen and that which I have not seen, be it null, be it accounted as the dust of the earth.

- Seder begins, candles are lit and a prayer is offered to bless the First Cup of Wine.
- Next all the participants wash their hands

... This was probably the point where Jesus washed His disciples' feet (John 13:4-12).

As guests and family members entered the home to celebrate Passover, a servant or slave would often be there to wash their feet. This was the task of the lowest class of people. (That Jesus did this in John 13, even though he was the paterfamilias or head of the family, both symbolizes what he would later do for his disciples [cf. Mark 10:45—“The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many”] and embodies his principle that “If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all” [Mark 9:35; and John 13:15].

- First hand-washing: Once all the guests arrive, we will perform the ritual hand-washing that Jews, from antiquity, have done

before every meal. Table setting: in front of each seat—four glasses for ritual wine, labeled as such (the non-ritual wine glass should not be on the table, but should be given to guests after they arrive and after their feet are washed); one plate,

cutlery, napkin. Several candles on the table. Seating labels in place. Unleavened bread, vegetables, and vinegar (karpas) should all be on the table. As well, representative bottles of wine should be there too, all labeled.

Seating at the Meal

Guests are to recline at table: The ancient near eastern custom of total relaxation was not too far from our modern “couch potato with remote control” motif. They would relax around a low table (about 18” off the ground), sprawled out on pillows, being served by the help. So, take your shoes off, and prepare to have a good time! Seating at Passover is assigned: beginning with the head of the family at one end, the guests are to wrap around the table either from the oldest to youngest, or the most important to the least important.

The Symbolic Nature of the Cups

Four ritual cups of wine are used for the Passover. The Mishnah says that even the poorest man in Israel must drink the four ritual cups, even if it means selling all his possessions! The wine used was red and warm. A prayer is uttered over each cup, and the four verbs of Exodus 6:6-7 are recited, one over each cup. The first prayer (the prayer of sanctification) is uttered by the paterfamilias.... *npg h yrp arwb mluh ilm wnyhla yy hta iwrh* “*Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine. . . . And you, O Lord our God, have given us festival days for joy, this feast of the unleavened bread, the time of our deliverance in remembrance of the departure from Egypt. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to enjoy this season.*”

Then the first cup of ritual wine is then poured and the first verb of Exodus 6:6-7 is recited by the father: *myrxm tlbs tjtm mkta ytaxwhw hwhy yna* “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”

The Seder Meal

- The first drink may now be drunk.

Each person now takes some herbs (usually Parsley or Celery) and dips them in salt water and eats them.

The Karpas (bitter herbs and the first dipping): The head of the house dips bitter herbs (traditionally lettuce or celery) into salt water or vinegar. He dips the bitter herb together with the chief guest of honor (the person on his right), and then the bitter herbs are passed on down the table. After all partake of the karpas, all food is removed from the table.

This heightens the interest of the evening, prompting the questions from the youngest son.

- Next, the head of the family takes the middle one of the three flat cakes of unleavened Matzah bread, breaks one, and lays one part aside for desert ... A description of why three cakes are used and the middle one broken
- The Haroset is dipped into horseradish and eaten.
- The Youngest child present asks four questions:

.... why tonight?

.... why bitter herbs?

.... why dip the bitter herbs in the salt water twice?

.... why do we eat reclining?

~Indeed, this night is very different from all the other nights of the year, for on this night we celebrate one of the most important moments in the history of our people. On this night, we celebrate their going forth in triumph from slavery into freedom.

I am glad you asked the questions you did, for the story of this night

was just what I wanted you to know. Although the Haggadah we are reading tells this whole story, and if you listen carefully, you will surely learn it, I should like to tell you here, in a few words, the answers to your questions.

~ Why do we eat only mazzah tonight?

When Pharaoh let our forefathers go from Egypt, they were forced to flee in great haste. Now, they had prepared dough for bread to take on their journey, but the Egyptians pressed them to hasten out of the land. So they snatched up their dough, and fled, and had no time to bake it. But the hot sun, beating down on the dough as they carried it along with them, baked it into a flat, unleavened bread, which they called mazzah. That is why we eat only mazzah on Pesah.

~ Why do we eat bitter herbs on Pesah night?

Because our forefathers were slaves in Egypt, and their lives were made bitter. That is why we eat bitter herbs on Pesah night.

~ Why do we dip herbs twice tonight?

You have already heard that we dip the parsley in salt water because it reminds us of the green that comes to life again in the springtime. We dip the maror, or bitter herbs, in the sweet haroset as a sign of hope; our forefathers were able to withstand the bitterness of slavery, because it was sweetened by the hope of freedom.

~ Why do we recline at the table?

Because reclining at the table was a sign of a free man in olden times; and since our forefathers were freed on this night, we recline at the table.

- The Father recounts the history of Israel from Abraham till Moses and the giving of the Law with the story of the first

Passover read aloud from Exodus chapter 12 and Psalms 113 and 114 = or the leader will go around the room asking everyone to reconstruct a part of the story. [*What do you remember about your leaving Egypt?*] Each person will tell a part as if he had been a slave and as if he had actually witnessed the plagues and as if he had actually crossed the Red Sea on dry ground and then watched Pharaoh's army drown. Looking at Acts 7:2-38 it is interesting that Stephen's speech so closely parallels the kinds of things that the paterfamilias would say at the Passover that one wonders if this was indeed the message that Stephen, as head of his

own home, would recite at Passover (for at Acts 7:39 Stephen goes beyond what was to be recited and begins to pronounce his indictment against the religious leaders).

Father now explains the significance of the lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. Singing of the first half of the Hallel Psalms: Psalms 113-114. Done in one of two ways: father singing the lines with the family saying “Hallelujah” after each verse, or all singing the psalms together.

- Prayer over the Second Cup

mpgh yrp arwb mlwuh ilm wnyhla yy hta iwrb “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine. . . . Exodus 6:6b: “I will deliver you from their bondage”mtdbum mkta ytlxhw

- The Hands are washed again, another blessing is given to the Matzah, and it is eaten.

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments, and commanded us to eat unleavened bread.”

- The second cup, the Cup of Plagues is filled and passed round and the plagues mentioned individually

Blood!

Frogs!

Lice!

Flies!

Cattle Disease!

Boils!

Hailstones!

Locusts!

Darkness!

Death of the Firstborn!

- The host breaks the guest of honor’s bread and they dip it together in the charoseth and bitter herbs. The guest in turn

breaks his neighbor’s bread and they dip it together, and so on down the line.

- A shank bone is presented as a reminder of the Passover Lamb (Jesus is the Passover Lamb John 1:29). It was probably

at this time that Judas left the meal after he was given the sop (John 13:26).

Herbs, the Matzah, hard-boiled eggs, and grapes are served with the Lamb.

...At this time, Jesus probably took the Matzah that was laid aside and blessed it and passé it around exhorting his disciples to remember his body is broken (Luke 22:19).

After the meal, the third cup is poured. The last of the unleavened bread wafers is blessed, broken, and eaten:

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with your commandments, and commanded us to eat unleavened bread.”

- All participants recite the post-meal grace together, and then the prayer over the wine. “The name of the Lord be blessed

from now until eternity. Let us bless him of whose gifts we have partaken: Blessed be our God of whose gifts we have

partaken, and by whose goodness we exist.” “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who has created the

fruit of the vine. Then the father recites the third verb from Exodus 6:6: “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.” myldg myf n uwrzb mkta ytlagw

Then the wine is drunk.

...At this time Jesus probably passed around the third cup (called the Cup of Blessing or the Cup of Redemption) after the meal, and exhorted his disciples to drink all of it for it represents his bloodshed for sins and represents a new testament. (Luke 22:20)

- The Matzah is eaten for desert.
- The final cup of wine, the Cup of Praise, is drunk as the Seder meal concludes
- A hymn is sung.
- "Next year in Jerusalem!"

Communion

Reading from Luke 22:14-20

The Matzah will be used for the bread

A cup of Juice will be used for the cup