

## **Celebrating the Passover**

Scripture: Exodus 12:1–13; Hebrews 10:1–4

Code: B130327

Passover was a very simple memorial. It was an intimate meal—no less than ten and no more than twenty people could celebrate it together. It was a divinely designed memorial that served as an annual reminder of how God protected the Israelites and delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

The Lord used ten plagues to break the Egyptians' grip on the Israelites. The final plague was the mass slaying of the firstborn in every family. It was an incredible slaughter—Exodus 12:30 says “there was no home where there was not someone dead.”

But the Lord made a provision to spare the Israelites. They were able to avoid the angel of death by sacrificing a spotless lamb and spreading the blood of the lamb on the frame of their door (Exodus 12:1-13). And when the angel saw the blood, he would pass over that house.

Every part of the Passover meal was symbolic of some aspect of the deliverance from Egypt. Just as lambs had been slaughtered that night in Egypt and their blood sprinkled on the door posts, so to the Passover lambs were slaughtered and their blood sprinkled on the altar. Likewise, the lamb was cooked and fully eaten the same evening, just as in Egypt (Exodus 12:8-10).

The four cups of wine served during the meal symbolized God's four promises to His ancient people just before their deliverance from Egypt:

I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage. I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God. (Exodus 6:6-7)

The bowl into which the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, and sometimes the bare hands (cf. Matthew 26:23) were dipped contained a paste called *charoseth*, composed of finely ground apples, dates, pomegranates, and nuts. That thick, brownish mixture was perhaps symbolic of the mud and clay used in the making of bricks for the Egyptians. Sticks of cinnamon, representing the straw used for the brick making, were also sometimes added to the charoseth. Into this mixture the bitter herbs would be dipped and eaten, as reminiscent of the bitterness of bondage coupled with the sweetness of deliverance.

The Passover lamb was to be slain at twilight (Exodus 12:6), which translates a Hebrew term literally meaning “between the two evenings.” The ancient historian Josephus explains that time as being between the ninth and eleventh hours of the Jewish day, which would be between three and five o'clock in the afternoon. After being slaughtered by the priest in the Temple court and having had some of its blood sprinkled on the altar, the lamb would then be taken home, roasted whole, and eaten in the special evening meal with the unleavened bread, bitter herbs, charoseth, and wine. Any of it that was not eaten before morning was to be burned.

The lesson of the Passover was that deliverance from the judgment of God requires the death of an innocent substitute. That's what the entire sacrificial system of Israel communicated—deliverance was available, but it came at a price. From the perspective of the law, the lamb was pure.

But it wasn't the sacrifice of a spotless lamb that ultimately satisfied God's wrath. Those sacrifices could not accomplish anything on their own. Instead, they pointed ahead to God's ultimate provision, when He would supply the true Passover Lamb in the sacrifice of His Son.

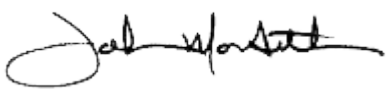
For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (Hebrews 10:1-4)

More than fifteen hundred years after the Lord delivered the Israelites from Egypt, Jesus Christ prepared to celebrate the final Passover with His disciples. In Luke 22:15, Jesus says "I earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." He was eager because it was a pivotal moment in His ministry, and He still had much to teach His disciples before He was handed over to the Sanhedrin.

In an interesting example of God's sovereignty, Christ and His disciples were celebrating the Passover a night before most of the rest of Jerusalem. Galilean Jews observed Passover on Thursday night, since they marked their day from sunrise to sunrise. The Judean Jews marked their day from sunset to sunset, so their Passover would follow on Friday evening. It's important to recognize the two authorized and legitimate celebrations, since they allowed for our Lord to celebrate the Passover one night and be the Passover Lamb the next.

As He sat in that secluded room with His disciples, Christ knew what was going to happen. He was preparing Himself and His closest friends for the moment He would be handed over for execution. Over the centuries millions of Passover lambs had been slaughtered—each of them foreshadowing the sacrifice Jesus was about to make to free God's people from the bondage of their sins. The symbols and shadows of the Passover were about to cease—the true Lamb had arrived. And at exactly the hour of slaughter on Friday afternoon, He would die, the veil in the temple would be ripped from top to bottom, and the system of sacrifice would come to an end.

It was in those final moments with His disciples that Christ transformed the elements of the Passover celebration, creating a new memorial to God's gracious deliverance of His people. And that's where we'll pick it up next time.



(Adapted from [Matthew 24-28: The MacArthur New Testament Commentary](#).)

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