

A BUSY CHRISTIAN WOMAN'S GUIDE TO PASSOVER

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Lifeway women



THE QUESTION

After the podcast interview concluded, I had a question. I asked this Christian pastor who led a Messianic Jewish church if there was any benefit for Gentile Christians to celebrate the Jewish festivals. He didn't answer me directly, but asked me what person every Jewish festival pointed toward. Of course, my answer—Jesus.

Celebrating Passover, or any other Jewish festival, certainly isn't mandated for believers. In the book of Acts, the early followers of Christ wrestled with the question of ceremonial law for Gentile believers. At the Jerusalem council they established that a person did not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian.

However, celebrating the Jewish festivals isn't forbidden and can provide a fresh way for individual families, small groups, and church families to experience God's message of deliverance through Christ in a fresh way.

THE BACKGROUND

The Passover is a Jewish holy day, set aside to remember when the Lord delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. When Moses petitioned Pharaoh to let his people go, God sent ten plagues to convince Pharaoh. The last plague—the death of the firstborn—didn't impact the Israelites who had sacrificed a lamb and painted their doorframes with the blood. The death angel “passed over” their homes and saved them from death.

According to Exodus 12, a day of Passover was to be celebrated each year from generation to generation. It followed the seven-day Festival of Unleavened Bread. Here are some instructions for that first Passover:

- **Sacrifice a young goat or lamb**
- **Consume all the roasted meat along with unleavened bread and bitter salad greens**
- **Eat with urgency while fully dressed, wearing sandals, and holding a walking stick**
- **Smear blood on the tops and sides of the doorframes**

This annual feast hinted at a future sacrifice of a final Lamb whose blood would deliver people from eternal death. Jesus provided salvation through substitution which echoes the Passover lamb which saved the firstborn from death through a substitutionary sacrifice.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) Jesus attended the Passover celebration during all three years of His ministry (John 2:13-23; 6:5; 11:55). He celebrated God's past deliverance but became the future Passover Lamb, providing deliverance for all who believe.



THE PREPARATION

The traditional Passover meal is called the Seder. A guide for the Seder is called *Haggadah* (Ha-GA-dah) which means “the telling.” This Jewish text sets forth the order of the Passover meal and leads families through the Exodus story. Many different versions—both Jewish and Messianic—have guided people through the prayers, readings, and experiences associated with Passover. What follows in this document is a Christ-centered version that will allow busy families to experience the feast in a simplified form. Passover is traditionally celebrated in the spring—usually either March or April.

The leader of the Passover is traditionally the father or grandfather of the family, but you can choose anyone to lead. They will be reading, praying, pouring juice, and instructing. The woman of the household welcomes the celebration and lights the candles and reads the opening blessing. A guest reader will need to be appointed ahead of time to read the Passover story from Exodus 12:1-13. Children will be involved by asking questions which you may want to write on a notecard ahead of time and appoint either one or several children to read.

At the end of this guide, you’ll find a list of items to gather, a recipe, and meal suggestions.

THE SERVICE

SEDER (Say-der) is a Hebrew word that means "order" and refers to the order of service for the Passover meal.

LIGHTS

Woman of household: Light candle(s) and recite:

"Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe who sanctified us through faith in Messiah, Jesus, the Light of the world, and it's in His name that we kindle the Passover lights, amen."

CUP #1

Leader: "Our Passover experience unfolds through four cups containing fruit of the vine. They are named according to the four promises God made to Israel in Exodus 6:6-7:

1. The Cup of Sanctification
2. The Cup of Plagues
3. The Cup of Redemption
4. The Cup of Praise

"The cup of sanctification is where we remember God's kindness and the freedom He has given us in Christ."

Raise up your filled cup while leaning to the left. Leaning to the left signifies freedom and luxury since in ancient times those attending royal feasts would sit with pillows, reclining to the left and eating with their right hand.

Everyone: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Amen!"

HANDWASHING (URCHATZ)

Leader: "The washing of hands is a symbol of our personal sanctification – the cleansing of our daily sins by Christ. Please use the elements in front of you to wash your hands while I read John chapter 13 verses 1 through 5 and 12 to 14."

BITTER HERBS

Leader: "This parsley reminds us of the hyssop used to put lamb's blood on the doorposts during Passover (Exod. 12:22). The saltwater in front of you symbolizes the tears – the pain and suffering of slavery in Egypt for the Israelites and slavery of sin for all of us. Dip your parsley into the saltwater and remember the difficulties in your life and the Messiah who came to deliver us from sin and suffering" (Optional – read Isaiah 53:3-4)

Everyone: Take a piece of parsley, dip it in saltwater, take a small taste and then say together:

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth. Amen."

UNLEAVENED BREAD (MATZAH)

Leader: "Unleavened bread is a key element in our Passover as we remember that the Israelites left Egypt in a hurry, so there wasn't time for the bread to rise. On the table we have three pieces of bread. I am breaking the middle piece and will hide it to be found later in our evening. Now I am inviting our guest _____ to read the Passover story from Exodus 12:1-13."

PASSOVER STORY

Guest: – Read Exodus 12:1-13

FOUR QUESTIONS

Youngest child who is able to read (or assign different children for each question):

1. On all other nights we don't dip our food. Why do we dip our food tonight?
2. On other nights we eat softer bread. Why do we eat only unleavened, flat bread tonight?
3. On other nights, we eat other vegetables. Why do we eat green parsley tonight?
4. On other nights, we sit in chairs. Why are we reclining tonight?

Leader: "I'm so glad you asked these questions. Tonight, we remember that God rescued us from slavery and sin. We dip our food to remember that we are free from the tears of slavery. Eating flat bread reminds us that the Israelites left their slavery in Egypt in a hurry. We recline tonight because in ancient times reclining was a symbol of royalty or freedom—we are free because of Christ."

CUP #2

Leader: "All the cups symbolize joy except this second cup. The cup of plagues helps us remember the great cost of deliverance. The Israelites freedom was accomplished through plagues. Christ paid a high price – His death on the cross – to free us from sin. We remember the weight of that sacrifice as we drink the second cup."

Everyone: Lift the second cup while leaning to the left and say:

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Amen."

UNLEAVENED BREAD/BITTER HERBS/EGG/CHAROSET

Leader: "We will now sample together the other symbols of Passover. Feel free to dip some bread into the horseradish and/or the apple mixture on your plate and eat the egg as I briefly explain their meanings:

Bread – We've talked about the bread representing the hurried journey out of slavery in Egypt but it also presents a picture of Christ's body. (Optional: Read Isaiah 53:5.)

Bitter Herbs – This is our second eating of bitter herbs. This time we dip a piece of bread into the horseradish to remind us of the sorrow, persecution, and suffering of God's people throughout history.

Egg – The egg is round and endless – like eternal life. Coming out of bondage is like being brought back from the dead. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. (Optional: Read John 11:25.)

Charoset (apples and spices) – The charoset symbolizes the mortar used to make bricks in Egypt. The sweet food reminds us that regardless of trouble and trials, the Messiah promises us His presence.” (Optional: Read Joshua 1:5.)

MEAL

Enjoy your food and stories of God’s grace and deliverance in your life around the table. (You can make whatever you would like for the meal but suggestions and a recipe are provided at the end of the booklet.)

FINDING THE HIDDEN BREAD (AFIKOMAN)

Leader: “Children, now is the time to look for the bread I broke and hid at the beginning of our time together..... Ahh – congratulations _____, here is a small prize for you! Now we bless this piece and remember how Jesus gave His body for us.” (Read Luke 22:19.)

Everyone: Break off a piece of bread and hold it up, recite and then eat the bread:

“Blessed are you O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the ground.”

CUP #3

Leader: “The cup of Redemption comes from Exodus 6:6, ‘I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgment.’ Jesus redeemed us from sin through His blood.” (Read Luke 22:20.)

Everyone: Make sure your cup is filled and say this while leaning to the left:

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Amen.”

ELIJAH’S CUP

Leader: “It is a tradition during Passover to set an additional place with a cup for Elijah. Jewish children might be sent to the door to look for Elijah according to the prophecy in Malachi 4:5 which says Elijah will come to prepare the way for the Messiah. We don’t need to look for Elijah because Jesus referred to John the Baptist as the fulfillment of this prophecy according to Luke 1:17.”

CUP #4

Leader: "Our response to redemption is joy. The last cup is the cup of praise. We celebrate deliverance for the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and our deliverance from slavery to sin in Christ. Together we lift the last cup and drink."

Everyone: Lift your cup and say one more time:

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine. Amen."

(Option if you would like to say the final blessing in Hebrew: *"Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech HaOlam, Bohre Pri HaGahfen. Amen."*)

PRAISE

Leader: "We celebrate all God has done for us offering praise to Him."
(Option to either read one of the Hallel Psalms (Psa. 113–118) or sing a worship song to close the night.)

MATERIALS TO GATHER

- Print a copy of the Seder so each participant can follow along.
- A candle (or menorah if you have one) for the woman of the house to light
- Either pitchers or bowls of water, cloths, or wet wipes for each person for handwashing
- Cups for everyone
- Grape juice to fill cups four times
- Place three pieces of matzah (unleavened bread) in the middle of the table
- White linen cloth to hide the broken matzah
- Small prize for the child who finds the missing bread
- Either have a community plate to pass around (for smaller groups) or have all of these items in small portions on each person's plate:
 - Unleavened bread (Matzah can be purchased in most stores or online—about 5-7 pieces per person.)
 - Parsley
 - Small container of salt water
 - Horseradish
 - Charoset (apple and spice mixture – see recipe below)
 - Boiled egg (1 for each person)

RECIPE

CHAROSET

1 apple

1 pear

1 cup chopped walnuts (leave out if nut allergies)

½ cup raisins (or other dried fruit such as chopped prunes, chopped dates, or cranberries)

½ cup pomegranate or grape juice

¼ tsp. cinnamon

¼ tsp. nutmeg

Peel and dice the apple and pear. Mix in the nuts, raisins, juice, and spices. Refrigerate until serving. Add a little more juice immediately before serving.

MEAL IDEAS

The meal can be any family favorites but perhaps stay away from pork or yeast in the spirit of the celebration. Some traditional dishes for Passover include matzo ball soup, brisket, roast chicken, fish, vegetable dishes of all sorts, and flourless cakes (no yeast).