

A Taste of Passover

The following is a chapter excerpted from

Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus
How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith

by Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg
(Zondervan, 2009)

Afterward are instructions and liturgy for a simple family Passover Seder.

© Zondervan, All Rights Reserved.

For more information, see <http://OurRabbiJesus.com>.

A Passover Discovery

Therefore we are duty-bound to thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt, extol, and bless him who did for our forefathers and for us all these miracles. He brought us forth from slavery to freedom, anguish to joy, mourning to festival, darkness to great light, subjugation to redemption, so we should say before him, Hallelujah!

—Passover liturgy from the *Mishnah*

*T*he full moon of Passover stared down at Jesus, its light filtering through the shivering leaves of the olive trees, their branches trembling in the early April breeze. Despite the evening chill, sweat glistened on his forehead. Still praying, he stood and peered into the darkness, listening to a distant murmur of voices. One of his own *talmidim*, Judas, was approaching. Trailing him was a mob of soldiers, snaking up the hill.

Under a nearby tree, Peter, James, and John were lying in a heap. Twice, Jesus had pleaded with them to stay awake, asking them to keep vigil with him on this, the most difficult night of his life. Yet there they were, wrapped in their heavy woolen *tallits*, mouths agape and snoring softly, oblivious of the approaching threat...

“Whenever I used to think back to this scene from Gethsemane,” Lois says, “I couldn’t help but wonder about Jesus’ narcoleptic disciples. How could they have fallen asleep when their beloved rabbi had implored them to stay awake and remain alert? How could they have nodded off when the climax of salvation history was about to take place? I couldn’t imagine a satisfactory answer; this was just one of many questions that filled my head whenever I thought back to that fateful week.

“I remembered previous Palm Sunday services I had attended, where only minutes after the children streamed down the aisles, joyously waving palm branches to celebrate Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the mood would shift, turning solemn as the gospel account of the passion was read. Why were the crowds in Jerusalem so fickle, adoring Jesus

one week and then hating him the next? And why, I wondered, did Jesus choose a Passover Seder to celebrate the last meal of his life?

“Fast forward, now, two thousand years, to the fellowship hall of my church, on the afternoon of the Thursday before Easter, known as Maundy Thursday. We are setting up for a Passover Seder. As Gentile amateurs we are doing our best to recreate the Last Supper, giving ourselves a chance to meditate on its significance. Perfect historical accuracy isn’t the point. Our goal is to relive a little of Jesus’ final evening with his disciples so that we can better appreciate the Maundy Thursday service.

“All afternoon the church kitchen bustles with the sound of clattering pans and chitchat as we hurry about our tasks, cutting parsley, boiling eggs, and spooning horseradish onto plates. When we finally sit down, I am famished. The time ticks by as I endure the long Seder liturgy, with just a bite of parsley dipped in salt water and dry, cardboard-like *matzah* (unleavened bread) smeared with horseradish to tide me over. When we finally dig into our simple meal of lamb stew, I devour my humble feast. Afterward, I hurriedly help with cleanup and then slip into the back of the service, which has already begun. The liturgy is mournful and solemn.

“The events of the day have taken their toll—the nonstop preparations, beginning the Seder feeling famished, and then overeating to compensate. I feel a crushing lethargy sweep over me. Over the next hour, the sanctuary lights gradually dim to complete darkness. I can barely see through shuttering eyelids. As the service rolls on, I rouse with a start. Did someone call my name? I can almost hear the disappointment in Jesus’ voice. ‘Could you not watch with me just one hour?’

“Suddenly, I understand why the disciples found it so hard to stay awake. And they had an even better excuse than I had. Traditional Passover celebrations involved a huge meal plus four cups of wine, and they started at sunset and didn’t end until around midnight. What’s more, they took place after several days of exhausting travel and preparation. Certainly everybody in Jerusalem would have wanted to crawl straight into bed after their late-night feast. Aware of this perennial problem, the rabbis ruled that a person who dozed lightly could remain a part of the dinner, but anyone who fell sound asleep could not.

“Our amateurish attempt at reliving the Last Supper has led to other insights on the final hours of Jesus’ life. I realized, for instance, why the leaders plotted to arrest Jesus after the Passover meal. A man so wildly popular couldn’t have been arrested in broad daylight. To avoid an uprising, the chief priests had to proceed in secret. So they let Judas lead them to Jesus while he was outside the city. Passover evening was the perfect choice because every Jewish family would be celebrating the feast that started at sundown.

Jesus’ arrest and trial proceeded swiftly, occurring during the wee hours, when most of his supporters were in bed. Peter’s denials happened as the rooster crowed, around four or five in the morning. According to Mark’s gospel, Jesus’ final sentence was handed down at sunrise (Mark 15:1). One has to ask, what group of people were around at the crack of dawn on a major Jewish holiday to shout ‘Crucify him’? Mostly corrupt priests and Roman soldiers who wanted to kill Jesus.

But there’s more. Jesus was crucified at nine in the morning—the time of the first temple service of the day! The authorities knew they had to finish their secret trial before the crowds reentered the city to come to worship. And indeed, as Jesus was carrying his cross out of town, his supporters reappear, weeping out loud as they see him being led to his death

(Luke 23:27). His followers had just learned of the events that had transpired the night before.

“Prior to our Passover Seder, I had always thought the crowds unimaginably fickle, cheering Jesus one day and then shouting for his head the next. But Jesus’ supporters never changed their minds. How could they have when they were not even present at his arrest or trial? The entire plot unfolded after the Passover festivities, while most people were sound asleep.”

Jesus’ Last Passover

Learning about Passover, the first and most important of the Jewish feasts, yields rich insights about Jesus’ last week on earth. Passover was a sacred celebration commanded by God himself two thousand years earlier, before the Israelites even left Egypt. It was to become a time of great joy, commemorating the exodus of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. Passover marked the beginning of their nation and defined them as God’s people.

Today Passover is celebrated at home with a formal evening dinner that includes special food, songs, and liturgy. It is called a “Seder,” a word that means “order,” because the liturgy follows a certain order that has remained roughly the same as it was in Jesus’ time. The focus of the evening is to retell the miraculous story of how God brought his people out of Egypt and to contemplate how God will redeem Israel by sending the Messiah.

In Jesus’ time, Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts that brought hundreds of thousands of Jews to Jerusalem. On the afternoon before the meal, each family carried a lamb to the temple to be sacrificed. Afterward it was roasted and shared with a large gathering of extended family and friends. Nowadays, since the temple is not standing, no sacrifice can be made, so in most Jewish traditions lamb is no longer served. Instead, the roasted shank bone of a lamb is placed on a Seder plate along with other ceremonial foods eaten during the evening.

Passover was laden with messianic expectations and filled with prophetic significance, especially in Jesus’ time. Just as God had saved his people when the angel of the Lord had “passed over” the homes of the Israelites and afflicted the homes of the Egyptians, it was believed that God would come again at Passover to save his people. A saying of that day was, “In that night they were redeemed, and in that night they will be redeemed.” Knowing how the events of Jesus’ last week fit into the celebration of Passover shows us the tremendous significance of his death and resurrection.

The book of Exodus said of Passover, “It was a night of vigil for the LORD to bring them out from the land of Egypt; and so on this night all Israel is to keep the vigil to the LORD for generations to come” (Exodus 12:42, NET). The rabbis interpreted this to mean that they should be keeping watch to see what great thing God would do next. Even today, it is traditional for a child to open the door after the Passover supper to see if Elijah might be standing there. Why? Because Malachi said that Elijah would come to herald the Messiah:

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty ...

“See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.” (Malachi 3:1; 4:5)

So for thousands of years, even up to the present, the Jewish people have believed that God would again send redemption on Passover. Redemption did arrive on the very day they were looking for it, but it took a surprising shape. For God had engineered a far greater liberation than they had imagined—freedom not just for one people but for all people. And it was to be a liberation not from the earthly power of a political enemy but from the sinister power of sin and death.

During the Passover in Egypt, the Israelites had been instructed to mark their doorframes with the blood of a lamb so that the Lord would *pass over* them when judgment came. Interestingly, the rabbis marveled at how the blood of a mere sheep could protect people from God’s judgment. They commented that God must have seen the “blood of Isaac” on the doorposts—meaning that God remembered Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son. Remembering it, he spared his people. How close they were! What they did not realize was that when God saw Abraham’s son Isaac, he saw his own Son, Jesus, who would one day sacrifice himself out of loving obedience to his Father.

On the first Passover, God freed his people by taking the life of the firstborn sons of Egypt. Many centuries later, God made salvation possible for all who would accept it by giving the life of his firstborn Son.

The Bread of Passover

Knowing about how Passover coincides with the other two spring feasts, Unleavened Bread (*Matzot*) and Firstfruits (*Bikkurim*), will enlighten us in several more ways about the death and resurrection of Christ. These first three feasts come in rapid succession over the course of a week in early spring, usually falling in late March or early April.

The feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread begin at almost the same time, and sometimes they are referred to as one (Mark 14:12). The Passover lamb was sacrificed on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of the month Nisan but is eaten after sunset, at the beginning of Nisan 15, when the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread began. Remember that in the Jewish calendar each new day begins at sunset.

Why is this feast important? One reason is that it tells us something about the kind of bread Jesus was holding when he broke it and said, “This is my body.” Leonardo DaVinci’s masterful painting “The Last Supper” has shaped our imagination of Jesus’ last meal. In it, Jesus is depicted with ordinary loaves of bread. But there would not have been a scrap of regular bread on the table or anywhere else in the house because Jews were required to eat the Passover meal using only unleavened bread (Deuteronomy 16:1–3). In fact, leavening of any kind was forbidden for the entire seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, starting with the Passover meal. So Jesus would not have been holding ordinary bread but *matzah*.

Why is this significant, and what’s so terrible about yeast anyway? In ancient times leavening was done by adding a blob of old, raw, fermented dough to the new dough. The fresh batch was deliberately infected with microbes that would cause it to rise, but then later to sour, decay, and eventually rot. The puffiness of the leavening reminded the Jews of human pride and hypocrisy. Throughout the year, all grain offerings given to the Lord by fire had to be free of leaven (Leviticus 2:11; 6:17). The ancients saw leavening as a picture of sin and contamination, something God didn’t want in his burnt offerings.

So when Jesus held up the bread and said, “This is my body,” on the night before his death, he was using a specific kind of bread, made without leaven, unadulterated by decay. Unlike the rest of humanity, Jesus had not been infected with the “rotteness” that was in the rest of humankind. He alone was a fit offering for our sins. When God prohibited his people centuries earlier from eating leaven during Passover, perhaps he was thinking ahead to the night when Jesus would take the bread in his own hands, break it, and then say, “This is my body, given for you.”

Paul and other Jewish believers understood exactly what Jesus was saying. Listen to how Paul uses this image to describe how Jesus’ sacrifice should enable us to live righteously:

Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast so that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Corinthians 5:6–8)

Jewish scholar David Daube has pointed out that another significant meaning was given to the bread Jesus broke. He says that Jesus held up a piece of *matzah* and broke off a special piece called the *afikomen*, which was then hidden away. At the end of the meal the *afikomen* was brought out and then broken and eaten by all the participants. Still today this is done, but the explanations vary as to why—commonly it is said to be a way to keep the children awake, because the child who finds it gets a prize. Or, the tradition is said to derive from the Greek word *epikomoi*, meaning “dessert,” because it was the last thing eaten after the meal.

But Daube asserts that in Jesus’ time, the *afikomen* referred to “the coming one,” meaning the longed-for Messiah. The tradition was that the whole piece of *matzah* represented all of Israel, and that the Messiah was “broken off” from the people and hidden away. The appearance of the piece at the end was symbolic of the coming of the Messiah, fervently expected at the time of Jesus. When Jesus held up that particular piece of bread and said, “This is my body,” he was making a shocking claim to be the Messiah, the Christ. Daube believes that rabbis later downplayed the messianic nature of this ritual because of the poor relationship that developed between Christians and Jews.

As fascinating as all this is, a question remains. From reading Exodus, you might ask, “Isn’t the reason for the unleavened bread on Passover to commemorate the dough the Israelites had to make in haste as they were leaving Egypt?” Yes, that’s true too. The bread has multiple layers of imagery. It was also called “the bread of affliction” in Deuteronomy 16:3. As such the unleavened bread represented Israel’s suffering in Egypt. So, you could say that it also represents the suffering of Christ for his people. Often multiple ideas are contained in the imagery of the feasts.

The Feast of Firstfruits

As significant as Passover is, another important feast sheds light on the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection. We know he was raised to life on the third day (the first day of the week following the Sabbath after Passover). Remarkably, that day happens to be another feast day, the Feast of Firstfruits. This feast could occur on various dates, some

years falling several days after Passover. On the year Jesus died, it exactly coincided with his resurrection. What are the implications?

Firstfruits celebrated the beginning of the barley harvest. On this festival, a sheaf of grain was cut from the field and then offered in thanksgiving to the Lord. Only after that could the rest of the reaping begin. It was a day that represented the people's hope for the future, because the harvest had begun.

But it was more than that. On the Sabbath after Passover, the day immediately preceding the Feast of Firstfruits, a dramatic prophecy was always read in the temple. In it, the Lord instructed Ezekiel to declare to a valley filled with dry bones: "I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life" (Ezekiel 37:5). On Passover God's people had looked for their future redeemer to come. On the following Sabbath they would have read a passage that said God was going to raise the dead when he came. God was promising far more than an earthly harvest. He was saying that he would raise the dead to life!

Now imagine Jesus' followers streaming into the temple on the Sabbath, the day after he died. Still stunned by his brutal execution, they would have listened as a vision was recounted in which God had promised to bring the dead to life. On the very next day, on the Feast of Firstfruits, they would have heard wild rumors sweeping across Jerusalem. Jesus' tomb was empty, and some of his followers claimed to have seen him. Had he really risen from the dead? Could Jesus be the firstfruits of the promised resurrection? Listen to what Paul concluded years later:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (1 Corinthians 15:20–23)

Death hangs over the human race as the darkest of shadows. Even the most promising life seems to end in tragedy. But Paul's words assure us that our fear of death can be replaced by an invincible hope. The resurrection stands as a promise of what God will do for each of us. For those who belong to his Son, eternal life is not merely a possibility but an inevitability.

Remembering Our Redemption

What would you say if someone were to ask you to identify the single most important event in the New Testament? Like most of us you would probably respond that it was the death and resurrection of Christ. But what would you say if someone were to ask the same question about the Old Testament? How could you pick from all the possibilities? The creation? The flood? The covenant with Abraham? Entering the Promised Land? Building the temple? Though we might find the question perplexing, the answer would seem obvious to most Jewish people. Their miraculous delivery from Egypt is the event mentioned over and over in the Old Testament—almost every book refers to it. It is the one event they mention in nearly every worship service.

Whenever God wanted to emphasize why his people should obey him, he reminded them of how he had rescued them and forged them into his own people. "I am the God who brought you up out of Egypt," he kept repeating. Many of the laws of the Torah are rooted in the people's deliverance from Egypt:

The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, *for you were aliens in Egypt.* (Leviticus 19:34, italics added)

If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you ... *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt* to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. (Leviticus 25:35, 38, italics added)

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. (Deuteronomy 5:15, italics added)

Each of the commands above is directly linked to God's actions on Israel's behalf. His people must not mistreat foreigners. Didn't they remember what it was like to suffer abuse in Egypt before God rescued them? His people must help the poor to live in the land. Hadn't they experienced what it was like to live in poverty in someone else's land before God led them into their own? His people must rest and allow all their servants to rest on the Sabbath. Wasn't this rest what they had longed for as slaves in Egypt before God freed them?

Similarly, as followers of Christ, we can continually remind ourselves of how Jesus, the Passover Lamb, has redeemed us from death. We can forgive, because we have been forgiven. We can serve, because Christ humbled himself for us. We can love, because we have experienced the extravagant love of God in our own lives. We have a new life and a new hope, because Jesus fulfilled the ancient feast of Passover.

A Simple Seder Liturgy

Now that you've gotten an understanding of the tremendous importance of Passover to both Jews and Christians, you may like to try celebrating it yourself. While you can set up a Seder at your church like Lois did, the most appropriate setting is the home, around the family dinner table, as it is celebrated by Jews today. The overall theme of the Seder meal is that of a father and mother telling their children the wonderful story of how God himself saved their family long ago. For this reason, we include here instructions for a family celebration of a Passover meal. The preparations for a traditional dinner are quite involved, and the liturgy can be long. Here is a very simplified Seder to give you a taste of Passover. Afterward are resources for learning more.

Remember that during the Passover celebration, each person is supposed to imagine him or herself on that very last night of slavery before being set free. The special foods that are eaten are a multi-sensory, experiential way of teaching about that wonderful event. Being hungry and having only dry bread and bitter herbs to eat is a way to have a tiny taste of the deprivation and affliction of slavery. The great pleasure we get when we take our first bite of a mouth-watering feast is like the joy of being set free. As each food enters your lips, ask yourself what God can teach you through it.

Note: The prayers below are based on traditional Jewish prayers, and don't expressly mention Jesus as the fulfillment of Passover. But the point of the meal is to discuss and explore the meaning of God's redemption. You should feel free to meditate as Christians on both pictures— of God's loving liberation of his people from suffering and hopelessness of slavery, and Christ's salvation of us from sin and death. Make it your goal that the Passover meal is filled with *kavanah* – a sense of the presence of God. It doesn't need to be solemn and overly formal, however. It is supposed to be a feast to celebrate God's victory!

Seder Preparation

Traditionally, each home is thoroughly cleaned to remove all traces of leavened food, and this can take days or weeks. During that time people examine themselves, asking how the physical act of cleansing can parallel the spiritual, moral cleansing of the “leaven” from their hearts. As you prepare, ask the Lord what cleansing he wants you to do in your own heart for this time.

For the meal, set the table with the following:

A nice tablecloth and place settings for an elegant dinner for your family

Two candles, with matches or lighter nearby.

A plate with three pieces of *matzah* (available at many grocery stores), covered with a napkin. More *matzah* can be eaten during the meal, but no leavened bread may be present.

A goblet full of wine or grape juice at each setting, plus one extra for Elijah. Instead of four cups, take four sips from this cup during the meal. We’ll refer to it as “wine” even though it may be juice.

A *haggadah* on each plate. Usually this is a booklet with all the prayers and liturgy of the evening. Instead, make copies of the following Seder Liturgy (the next five pages) for each person.

In the center of the table, place the following items on a nice dinner plate. (If you can buy or borrow a traditional Seder plate, all the better):

A roasted lamb bone (beef or chicken is fine too)

An egg

A small bowl of salt water

Several springs of parsley (enough for each person)

A few spoonfuls of ground horseradish

A mound of *haroset* (recipe below)

Haroset: 2 cups peeled, finely chopped apples

1/2 cup chopped pecans

2 tablespoons grape juice (approx.)

1 tablespoon honey

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

Mix nuts, honey, apples and cinnamon together until well blended. Add grape juice slowly, until texture is a thick paste, like mortar. Taste and adjust the cinnamon and juice accordingly.

Seder Liturgy

This liturgy assumes that a mother, father and school age children are present. Feel free to reassign parts as needed.

1. The mother lights the candles and prays the following:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who teaches us to be holy through His commandments, and commanded us to light these Seder lights.
Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who has preserved us and sustained us, and brought us to this season.

Everyone else says, “Amen.” (In Jewish prayer, the one saying the prayer does not say “amen,” but everyone else does, in order to voice their agreement with the prayer.)

2. The father holds up his wine or juice, and he and everyone leans back slightly, as if reclining at a royal banquet. The father prays the blessing for the first cup:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.
Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who has chosen us from among all people, and with love given us solemn days for joy, festivals and seasons for gladness, this day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the season of our redemption, a holy celebration, a memorial of the departure from Egypt, and your festivals which have you caused us to inherit with joy and gladness.
Blessed are you, O Lord, who sanctifies Israel and the seasons. (The family responds, “Amen.”)

All take their first of four sips.

3. Everyone takes a sprig of parsley and dips it into the salt water. This is to represent the tears that the Israelites shed in slavery in Egypt. The mother prays the following blessing:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the earth.
(Amen.)

All eat their parsley and salt water.

4. The father picks up the plate of three *matzah* pieces and says the following:

Lo! This is the bread of affliction, which our fathers ate in their need. Let us, whom God's mercy has freed, now remember those who are still oppressed and resolve to aid them with all our means. Let those who are hungry come and eat! Let those who are in want come and celebrate the Passover with us! God grant that next year at this time, the whole house of Israel may be free.

He takes the middle piece, breaks it in half and wraps the larger half in a napkin and hides it to be brought back at the end. This is the *afikomen*.

5. One of the children recites the Four Questions:

Why is this night different from all other nights? On all nights we may eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night, only unleavened bread. On all other nights we may eat any species of herbs, but on this night, only bitter herbs. On all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night twice. On all other nights we eat and drink sitting, but on this night we are leaning.

6. The father responds by saying:

It is both a duty and a privilege to answer the four questions of Passover and to recite the mighty works of our faithful God. Once we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord, in his goodness and mercy, brought us forth from that land with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Had he not rescued us from the hand of Pharaoh, we and our children would still be enslaved, deprived of liberty and human dignity. We therefore gather year after year to retell this ancient story, for it is not ancient but eternal in its message and its spirit.

Why is this night different from all other nights? On this night we eat unleavened bread to remember that our ancestors, in their haste to leave Egypt, could not wait for bread to rise.

On this night why do we eat only bitter herbs? We partake of the bitter herbs on this night so that we might taste of some bitterness to remind ourselves how bitter is the lot of one caught in the grip of slavery.

On this night why do we dip the herbs twice? We dip twice, parsley in salt water and bitter herbs in *haroset*, once to replace tears with gratefulness, and once to sweeten bitterness and suffering.

On this night, we eat in a reclining position. To recline at mealtimes in ancient days was a sign of freedom. On this night of Passover we demonstrate our sense of freedom by reclining as we drink from each cup of wine, symbolizing our joy.

7. Members of the family take turns reading the story of the first Passover in Exodus 12:21-39 and 14:5-31.

8. The mother says,

In order to free us from Egypt, God parted the waters and drowned the Egyptians. He sent ten plagues upon Egypt to punish their gods and release us from bondage. But our joy is lessened by knowing about the suffering that the Egyptians endured. As I call out the name of each plague, let us dip our little finger in our wine and drip it out onto our plates. The wine, symbolizing our joy, is lessened by the tears the Egyptians shed.

These are the ten plagues which the Most Holy, blessed be He, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and these they are:

Blood!	Boils!
Frogs!	Hail!
Gnats!	Locusts!
Biting Flies!	Darkness!
Cattle Disease!	Death of the First Born!

9. The father then raises his glass for the second cup of wine for the Cup of Remembrance, saying,

How numerous are the gifts which the Lord has bestowed on us. He brought us forth from Egypt, executed judgment on the Egyptians, slew their gods, slew their firstborn, gave us their wealth, divided the sea for us, caused us to pass through on dry land, supplied us with everything in the wilderness for forty years, gave us the Sabbath, led us to Mt. Sinai, gave us his law, led us to the land of Israel, and built the Temple for us.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine. (Amen.)

Everyone leans back and takes another sip.

10. The family recites the ancient Dayeinu liturgy, which dates back to before 200 AD. Dayeinu means “Enough for us,” and each verse ends with Dayeinu.:

If he had rescued us from Egypt,
but not punished the Egyptians,
It would have been enough! (*Dayeinu*)

If he had punished the Egyptians,
but not defeated their gods,
It would have been enough!

If he had given us the Sabbath
But not led us to Mount Sinai,
It would have been enough!

If he had led us to Mount Sinai,
But not given us the Torah,
It would have been enough!

If he would have given us the Torah,
but not brought us into the Land of Israel,

It would have been enough!

How much more, then, are we to be grateful to God
for all of these good things which he has indeed done for all of us!

11. The father picks up a piece of unleavened bread, breaks it, and says:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who teaches us to be holy through your commandments, and commands us to eat unleavened bread. (Amen.)

The unleavened bread is passed around and everyone breaks off a piece and eats it.

12. Each person breaks off a small piece of matzah, puts a little bit of horseradish on it. The mother says,

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who teaches us to be holy through his commandments, and commands us to eat bitter herbs. (Amen.)

All eat their matzah and horseradish, and think about the bitterness of slavery.

13. On another piece of matzah, each person puts a little horseradish, and this time puts a spoonful of haroset on top. One more matzah piece on top makes a little “sandwich.” The haroset represents the mortar used in making the bricks when they were enslaved. But is sweet, because God was present even in the midst of their suffering. Everyone eats their sandwich.

14. A festive meal is served. Don’t just have the typical discussions that you have over dinner. Use this time to reflect on what you have learned about Passover and the Last Supper. Children can continue to ask their parents what these celebrations are all about. If the parents don’t know, make it a family project to research the answers. Or, discuss how God has redeemed your own lives through Christ, and reflect on the things he has done that have brought you to the point where you are today.

15. The plates are removed and children search for the *afikomen*, which the father hid earlier. Tradition has it that the child who finds it can ask for a gift. This is likely the bread that Jesus held up after supper and said “This is my body.” Feel free to discuss what it means that this “bread of affliction” represents Jesus, and that his sinless, unleavened body was broken for us. The father takes the *afikomen* and holds it up and says,

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. (Amen.)

He breaks it and gives a piece to everyone to eat. This is the last thing that can be eaten, so that the taste lingers in each person’s mouth.

15. The father then raises his glass for the third cup of wine, which is called the “Cup of Redemption.” This is the cup that Jesus raised after supper and said, “This is my blood.” Think about what it means that Jesus shed his blood to redeem us from our sins. Everyone leans back, raises their glass, and the father prays,

Therefore, we are bound to thank, praise, laud, glorify, extol, honor, bless, exalt and revere him, who did all these miracles for our ancestors and for us; for he brought us forth from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festivity from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption, and therefore let us sing unto him a new song. Hallelujah!
Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine.
(Amen.)

16. One of the children goes to the front door, opens it and looks out, and looks to see if he sees Elijah outside. According to Malachi 4, Elijah will appear to announce the coming of the Messiah. Have the child return to the table and read Matthew 17:10-13. What does Jesus say about the coming of Elijah?

15. For the fourth and last time, the father leans back, lifts his cup and prays,

The breath of all living shall praise your name, O Lord, our God. You redeem, deliver, maintain, and have compassion on us, in all times of trouble and distress, we have no king but you. You are God the first, and God of the last, and God of all creatures. You are adored with all manner of praise; who governs the Universe with tenderness, and his creatures with mercy. Every mouth shall adore you, every knee shall bend, every being shall bow down before you. O Lord, who is like unto you? Great and mighty, tremendous God, most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine. (Amen.)

Everyone drinks the last of their wine.

16. It is traditional to sing songs of praise after supper, especially the Psalms of Ascent (Psalm 113-118). Read one or more of these, or sing some songs you find meaningful.

17. Last, everyone exclaims together, “Next Year, In Jerusalem!”

Further Resources

Dates for Passover

The dates below are the evenings before the calendar date of Passover, which is the time when the Passover meal is traditionally eaten. Some Jews eat another Passover meal the next evening too. For the seven additional days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, no leavened food can be eaten.

Friday, April 6, 2012
Monday, March 25, 2013
Monday, April 14, 2014

Books

Howard, Kevin and Marvin Rosenthal. *The Feasts of the Lord* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997. Beautifully illustrated guide to the biblical feasts and their fulfillment by Christ.

Kasdan, Barney. *God's Appointed Times* Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publications, 1993. Nice overview of the feasts in Jewish tradition and the New Testament, with ideas for Christian observance today.

Sampson, Robin & Linda Pierce. *A Family Guide to the Biblical Holidays* Woodbridge, VA: Heart of Wisdom, 2001. Comprehensive guide for Christian celebrations of the biblical holidays. A good resource for families.

Smith, Michael, and Rami Shapiro. *Let Us Break Bread Together: A Passover Haggadah for Christians* Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005. Co-authored by a rabbi and a pastor, this pamphlet guides Christian groups and families through a Passover Seder.

Online resources

For more articles and links exploring Passover, go to *Our Rabbi Jesus: His Jewish Life and Teaching* at <http://OurRabbiJesus.com>.