

Celebrate a Christian Seder

CHRIST IN THE PASSOVER

- ♦ History & Symbolism
- ♦ Elements of the Seder
- ♦ Comparison of the Seder
& the Lord's Supper



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“For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the Festival.”

—1 Corinthians 5:7-8

OLD TESTAMENT ORIGIN OF THE PASSOVER

THE PASSOVER is the Old Testament feast that celebrates and remembers God’s liberation of Israel from Egypt. After Joseph saved Egypt from starvation (Genesis 41), the Israelites lived in Egypt as guests. Eventually, the Egyptians forgot about Joseph and enslaved the Israelites for hundreds of years (Exodus 1:6–14). Overburden with work and mistreatment, the Israelites suffered a great deal and called out to the Lord. God responded to their cry and raised a great leader, Moses, who challenged the Pharaoh and Egypt’s power.

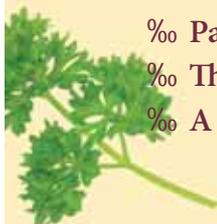
The book of Exodus explains how God freed his people from Egypt. Because of the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart, God punished Egypt with ten plagues (Exodus 7–11). However, instead of recognizing the true God of heaven and earth, Pharaoh grew angrier and oppressed the Israelites even more. One way Pharaoh increased the Israelites’ suffering was by refusing to give them straw, one of the key materials to produce bricks.

However, God would not be denied. As the plagues continued, the suffering shifted from the Israelites to the Egyptians. The nation paid dearly for Pharaoh’s stubbornness. During the last plague, God killed all the first-borns—humans and animals—in the land of Egypt.

God gave his people a way to escape the destruction: the blood of a perfect lamb could take the place of the first-born in the family. God gave Moses specific instructions to follow the night that God’s punishment passed over the Israelite homes (Exodus 12). They were to sacrifice a perfect lamb (and mark their door frames), make unleavened bread, and gather bitter herbs. The Israelites ate this meal standing up, ready to leave Egypt at any moment. This celebration is now called the Passover because God “passed over” the homes marked with the lamb’s blood. The Passover feast was to be repeated throughout the generations as a memorial forever.

The following information looks at:

- ‰ **The Old Testament origin and celebration of the Passover**
- ‰ **Passover symbolism and how it anticipated Jesus’ work**
- ‰ **The Passover feast’s relevance for Christ’s followers today**
- ‰ **A comparison of Jesus with the Passover lamb**



THE PASSOVER IN THE BIBLE

In Exodus 12, God gives Moses the instructions and requirements for the Passover.

EXODUS 12	CHRIST
12:1–2—The feast marked a new year, a new beginning for the Israelites.	In Christ, every believer is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Old things and the old life are past.
12:5—A male lamb in its first year was taken into the home on the tenth of Nisan (the first month of the Jewish calendar). While in the home, it was closely inspected to see if there were any blemishes or disfigurements. If it was without defect, it was then sacrificed on the fourteenth of Nisan.	Christ was closely inspected by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilate (Matthew 27:11–26; Luke 23:1–6; 13–25; John 18:28–19:16) • Herod (Luke 23:8–12) • Annas (John 18:12–13; 19–24) • Caiaphas (Matthew 26:57). They could find no fault in him. Christ is the “lamb without blemish or defect” (1 Peter 1:19).
12:6—The “whole community” of God’s people was required to participate in the sacrifice.	Accepting Christ’s sacrifice is required for all who want to be part of God’s community (Romans 3:21–26).
12:7, 12, 22—The blood of the sacrificed lamb was applied to the doorframe—the lintel and side posts. Because of the covering of blood, the house was spared from God’s plague.	Christ shed his blood to rescue his people. We need to be covered or justified by the blood of the Lamb to be rescued from condemnation (Romans 3:25; 5:9). Christ is the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29).
12:14—The Passover was to be kept as a remembrance forever.	During the Last Supper, Jesus refers to the bread as “my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19).
12:46—God commanded Israel not to break any bones of the sacrificed lamb.	To speed up Jesus’ death, the Roman soldiers were going to break his legs. However, Jesus was already dead, so his bones remained unbroken (John 19:32–33).

THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION AND ITS SYMBOLISM

FIRST CUP AND KIDDUSH (“SANCTIFICATION”)

SEDER Before the *Seder* began, traditionally a woman lit special candles to mark the commencement of this sacred time. Immediately after this, the head of the table raised the first cup of wine—the cup of sanctification—and blessed it.

LORD’S SUPPER According to Luke 22:17–18, “After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

THE FIRST WASHING OF THE HANDS AND THE BITTER HERBS

SEDER As everyone got ready to partake of the Passover meal, the leader of the Passover washed his hands. Then a plate with salted water was passed around into which everyone dipped a piece of lettuce or parsley (*karpas*). The salt was a reminder of the tears the Israelites shed during their bondage in Egypt. The green herb was a reminder of a new beginning.

LORD’S SUPPER Jesus went further than the traditional hand washing and taught his disciples humility by washing their feet (John 13:1–17). During the remembrance of the Israelites’ tears, Judas’ betrayal was likely also a bitter experience for Jesus (Mark 14:20).

THE AFIKOMEN

SEDER The leader took three *matzo* breads and placed them in a special bag with three compartments. The middle *matzah* was broken and one piece placed back in the *matzo* bag. The other piece was hidden under a pillow and was called *Afikomen*.

LORD’S SUPPER Although the practice of the *Afikomen* goes back to antiquity, it is quite possible that it originated after the Romans destroyed the Second Temple in AD 70. In other words, it probably was not practiced in Jesus’ time.

THE AFIKOMEN

- ✧ A practice in the contemporary celebration of the Passover—possibly also an ancient practice—is to take three *matzo* breads and place them in a special bag with three compartments.
- ✧ At one point in the celebration, the middle bread is taken out and broken into two pieces. One of the pieces is returned to the middle bag and the other one is hidden under a pillow. Traditionally, children look for it.
- ✧ When a child finds the piece of *matzah*, the leader of the celebration must “rescue” it by paying some money to the child.
- ✧ At the end of the meal, when the Passover Seder is complete, the *Afikomen* is revealed.