

What Does the Jewish Passover Mean to Christians?

Around this time of the year, we begin to see the shelves at the supermarkets stacked with towers of matzos as well as all sorts of kosher foods for Passover. The next aisle over we see rows of stuffed plush Easter bunnies, lambs, baskets, chocolate eggs and cards with lilies and crosses. Soon the Jewish families will be gathered around their tables to commemorate the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Christian families will focus attention on the death of Jesus and celebrate his resurrection.

What does the Passover have to do with “Easter”? Long before there was a Jewish Passover, the Apostle John tells us, the “Lamb [of God] slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). How could that be? If a lamb is for redemption of man and man was not even placed on the earth yet-the slain Lamb would have to have been only in the *mind* of God as part of a plan of salvation. Later when sin actually did enter the world, God would reveal a glimpse of how much the Lamb would cost Him. Father Abraham was told, “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest...and offer him there for a burnt offering” (Genesis 22:2).

The Exodus

But the momentous exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt was a magnificent drama of God's plan of salvation in careful detail. The whole nation was enslaved to the cruel taskmasters of Egypt. They groaned many years under this oppression. Finally, the due time for deliverance arrived. Moses instructed the children of Israel to carefully select a lamb for each household. It was to be slain, roasted with fire while its blood was put on the doorposts and lintels of each house. The firstborn of each family was in jeopardy of death if there was no blood sprinkled on the doorposts. But the angel would “pass over” those houses where it was sprinkled.

By a thorough search, all leaven (*hametz*) was to be removed from the household. While standing up with staff in hand, the Israelites were to eat a lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The next morning the whole nation was delivered out of Egypt. The miraculous opening of the Red Sea allowed the children of Israel to pass through safely. This was the passover of the whole people of God in addition to the firstborn.

Today Jewish families emphasize in their Seder celebration, the passing over of the nation into freedom. Since temple times, though, the Lamb is not slain. But the bitter herbs and the unleavened bread are on the table. The cherished account of the passover is read.

Christ our Passover

Keeping the Jewish tradition, our Lord Jesus sat down with his twelve disciples at the “last supper” actually to partake of the Passover. According to custom, one piece of matzo was not consumed, but hidden. If one of those at the table could find it during the meal, it would be ransomed back by the head of the Jewish passover Seder. Also, based on the prophecy that Elijah would come before Messiah and announce him (Malachi 4:5,6), a cup of wine was set aside for this prophet.

At the end of the meal, Jesus took a piece of matzo and may have used this hidden unleavened bread (“afikomen”). Likewise, he took the cup of wine, possibly the “Elijah cup” leftover after the meal, and attached new meaning to the drinking of it with his apostles. Now that Jesus came to fulfill the Passover,

the hidden and deeper meaning of the unleavened bread was revealed. First the Messiah had to suffer and die and offer his pure, unblemished human life for the world. "My flesh I give for the life of the world." And here was the "Elijah" announcing the coming of the Messiah of glory! How appropriate for Jesus to take this cup and share it with his disciples. "And he took the cup and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves...And he took bread and gave thanks and brake it and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:17-20).

For the disciples, it was difficult to comprehend that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. They heard but did not understand that the unleavened bread represented Jesus' body and the wine his blood. Hours later Jesus was to sacrifice that life on the cross and become that slain Lamb. As often as his disciples had celebrated the yearly Passover, Jesus now asked them to observe a new celebration to take its place.

The Body of Christ

Jesus could have said more, but he knew his disciples could not bear to know much more yet (John 16:12). But in due time, Apostle Paul opened more understanding on the unleavened bread and the cup for the followers of Jesus. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:16,17). Can it be? The followers of Jesus not only partake of Jesus, but are part of the loaf themselves (though they contribute no merit to the sacrifice).

Yes, the followers of Jesus not only take to themselves the righteous merit of Jesus to be justified, but they are invited to be sacrificed with him. "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy*, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). How could human beings have anything "holy" to sacrifice? By faith, the Christian personally accepts Jesus as his Savior and is made righteous and holy. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow him. "Our old [justified] man is crucified with him" (Romans 6:6). "If we suffer *with* him, we shall also reign with him."

Search for Leaven

Why did the Lord ask Israel to get rid of leaven? Leaven represents sin. Do we continue to sin just because we are counted righteous? No, that would be totally inconsistent. We strive to put away sin, leaven, with all our might. We search the crevices and dark corners of our hearts for any impurities. "Purge out therefore the old leaven," the Apostle Paul said, "that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (I Corinthians 5:7,8). This purging of sin is a lifelong effort, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23-24).

Most Christians understand we are to fight against sin even though we are justified in Christ. But most Christians do not understand that we have the privilege of dying *with* Christ as part of his body, his sacrifice. Most Christians understand that we are called the "firstborn," also "the firstfruits." But most Christians do not follow through to understand that the whole world of mankind will be the later born, the afterfruits. Just as in Israel of old, the firstborn were passed over first, later was the passover of the entire nation. Now is the night of the Christian's deliverance. In the morning of God's Kingdom, the billions of earth will be delivered from their bondage to sin and death.

The Jewish people too have missed part of the big picture. They mostly concentrate on the deliverance of the nation; the firstborn passover is not stressed. How appropriate! Though as a people, they missed the calling to be part of the firstborn, they will be the leaders of all people in God's Kingdom on earth for the *second* Passover. So the Jewish Passover is really a complete moving picture of the drama of salvation.

Where will you be in that drama?

For a more thorough discussion of the meaning of the Passover to Christians, [send for your copy](#) of an article, "The Passover of the New Creation," taken from the book THE NEW CREATION. Or if you prefer, you may order the book itself, which also includes a discussion of "Baptism" and the daily life of the Christian.

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