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# THE NEW PASSOVER

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## ***Introduction***

‘Passover’ is an obscure feast celebrating obscure events in the history of an obscure nation. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> in 33AD, an obscure Rabbi – known as Jesus of Nazareth – ate the Passover meal with his twelve closest disciples, who were mostly young working class men from an obscure district 80 miles north of Jerusalem. That night, Rabbi Jesus commandeered the 1,500-year-old Passover meal and irreversibly changed its meaning for much of the world’s population to this day.

For 1,500 years, when Jews ate the Passover meal, they were reenacting and participating in the rescue of their ancestors in the Exodus event (Ex. 12). They celebrated how Yahweh, their God, rescued them from the great oppression of Egypt and brought them into a great Promised Land. Today, disciples of Rabbi Jesus see the Passover Meal as a way to reenact and participate in our own great rescue. We have been rescued from a greater oppression than Egypt – Satan, Sin, and Death – and have been brought into a Promised Land greater than Palestine – An eternal home in Yahweh’s Kingdom.

The first time God’s wrath ‘Passed-Over’ his people, they were spared because of the blood of a spotless lamb on their doorposts and were sustained on their journey into the wilderness by unleavened bread. The night before He died, Rabbi Jesus offered himself to his followers; He offered His own blood to spare us God’s wrath, and He offered His body so that we might be sustained by His life as we travel the wilderness on our way to our eternal Home.

Today, Christians call the Passover ‘Communion,’ ‘The Lord’s Supper,’ or ‘The Lord’s Table.’ However, as Jesus commandeered the Passover Meal that night in 33AD, He said something important:

*“And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is **the new covenant** in my blood.’” (Luke 22:20)*

Through Christ's shed blood on the Cross, "The Old Covenant" has given way to "The New Covenant." So, it is appropriate (and helpful!) to call the former Passover Meal "The Old Passover" and the current Passover Meal "The New Passover." When we do, we remind ourselves to transpose and transfer all the rich symbolism and meaning wrapped up in the Old Passover and place it on the shoulders of Christ, who is our better unleavened bread and better sacrificial lamb, providing a hastier rescue from a greater enemy unto a greater promised land.

## **PART I – The Historical Passover Meal**

The first five books of the Bible are critical to understanding the Passover meal – and ultimately, Communion. A failure to understand the historical Passover will result in a colorless and tasteless meal. In fact, the modern evangelical communion elements are tragic examples of this failure to transpose the richness of Passover: a stale cracker, thimbleful of grape-juice, and less than 30-seconds to consider the significance of what you’re doing. Often, it’s a joyless practice led by a clergyman who feels a sense of duty to make sure his congregation “does communion” on the first Sunday of the month...

It all sounds a bit... Grinchy, doesn’t it? Think about it... finally, when the Grinch’s eyes were opened and his heart finally began to grow, he asked himself this memorable question:

*Then the Grinch thought of something he hadn't before.  
“What if Christmas,” he thought, “doesn't come from a  
store? What if Christmas, perhaps, means a little bit  
more?”<sup>1</sup>*

So... What if Passover means more? We know it has something to do with the body and blood of Jesus. It symbolizes what He did to save us. We know we need to take it seriously... But what if the New Passover (Communion) could make these basic truths really... pop? What if the New Passover can take what has become a 2-dimensional practice done in somber duo-tone, and make it a 3-dimensional celebration of the warm heart of God exploding with colors and tastes that remind us of the day our conquering King rescued us?

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<sup>1</sup> Seuss, Dr. *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* New York, NY: Random House Publishers, 1957.

// *Adopting an Ancient Near Eastern Lens*

Modern Western minds have a hill to climb when it comes to developing an accurate understanding of this meal, since Passover is an *Ancient Near Eastern* (ANE) holiday. The Passover is *Ancient* – 3,500years-old and counting! It is also *Near Eastern* – with most of its symbolism and religious nuance trapped within the culture and language of a Egyptian-born-and-Palestine-raised semi-nomadic pastoral/agrarian society.

For example, when God established the Passover meal it was to be celebrated *each year for a whole week starting on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib*<sup>2</sup>... A modern American mind has very little use or care for these words and dates. However, an ancient mind would recall that the month of *Abib* is the month of the barley harvest (*Abib* literally means ‘*an ear of barley*’) which happened as the rainy season began to wane.

In fact, Passover was the first event on the first day of a weeklong Festival called “The Festival of Unleavened Bread” (or ‘*Pesach*’).<sup>3</sup> On Sunday during the festival week they would celebrate another special day called *The Feast of Firstfruits*.<sup>4</sup>

This tells us more about Passover than we perhaps expected. The Passover Meal was a meal that kicked off a week of joy for an agrarian society. “The rains came! The barley grew! We have food to eat!” But before they’d get too far, they’d pause to recall the origin story of their people – to call to mind that they wouldn’t be a nation, growing, harvesting, and enjoying good food if God hadn’t first rescued them from slavery in Egypt all those years ago. To sacrifice a spotless lamb and rehearse their identity as a people chosen and redeemed by Yahweh.

An Ancient-Eastern mind saturated in the pages of Scripture is best suited to grasp the layers and sweetness of the Passover. To set it in

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<sup>2</sup> See Exodus 12:18, 23:15, 34:18; Leviticus 23:5; Numbers 28:16; Deuteronomy 16:1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 23:14-15; Leviticus 23:6-8; Numbers 28:17-25; Deuteronomy 16:3-4, 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 23:9-14.

the context of the barley harvest, a weeklong festival, and a rich ancestral origin story. Modern Western Christians should attempt to adopt such a mind. The first step is to recognize our Modern Western lens and be humble enough to admit its deficiencies. Then, we become learners of the Ancient Near East (ANE). We hit the books. We use good Study Bibles, Commentaries, and language-tools. We read literature of ANE authors, and we ask good questions to those who reside in the Near East today.

We could go much further down this path – and we should! We should talk about the purpose for Sabbaths, feasts, and festivals.<sup>5</sup> We should talk about the sacrifices made during the Festival of Unleavened Bread.<sup>6</sup> In fact, we should talk about what a *sacrifice* even is!<sup>7</sup> All this study is critical for truly understanding the significance of the Passover meal and the week of God-centered festivities it initiates.

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<sup>5</sup>Sabbath (Hebrew *šabbāt*). In Genesis 2:2-3, God rests from His work, and enjoys all that He has made. It's a unique time of fellowship between God and the people He has made in His image. In Exodus 20:8-11, 31:15-17, 35:1-3 - God commands his people to observe Sabbath rests every week – six days of work followed by one day of rest - remembering, enjoying, and being with the Creator. Later, in Leviticus 23, God gives commands to observe 3 major festivals – holiday celebrations meant to highlight specific aspects of God's activity and character. These Sabbaths and Holidays make God, His goodness, and our relationship the center of time itself! God has given us a calendar – each week is a call to be present with and grateful to God, and each holiday is another opportunity to see one's life with God at the center.

<sup>6</sup>See Numbers 28:17-25. Food offerings were made to the Lord for all 7 days. Two Bulls (with a 6.6 liter flour/ oil grain offering, 1 Ram (with a 4.4 liter flour/ oil grain offering), and 7 Male Lambs (each with a 2.2 liter flour/ oil grain offering) - all as Burnt Offerings. 1 Male goat as a Sin Offering. Along with regular burnt offerings and regular grain offerings.

<sup>7</sup>“Sacrifice” (Hebrew: *qorbān*) is built off the Hebrew root *qrb*, which means “to draw near.” Offerings/sacrifices were the pivotal element in a system through which humans (Israel) would be allowed to “draw near” to the Holy God. There were 5 major normative types of offerings prescribed in Hebrew Law (outlined in Leviticus 1-5). In the Festival of Unleavened Bread, three different offerings were practiced: Burnt Offerings, Sin Offerings, and Grain Offerings – each are listed here and described in the passage listed:

- *Burnt Offerings* (Hebrew: *‘ōlā*, literally, ‘one that rises’ - so also called ‘*Ascension Offerings*’) were a way to communicate sorrow to God for intentional sins. Described in Lev. 1; 6:8-13.
- *Sin Offerings* (Hebrew: *ḥattā’t*; denoting sin. Also called ‘*Purification Offerings*’) were a way to communicate sorrow to God for unintentional failures – to admit that one's uncleanness is not fit to dwell near His holiness. Described in Leviticus 4:5-13; 6:24-30.
- *Grain Offerings* (Hebrew: *minḥā*. Also called ‘*Tribute Offerings*’) were a way to express gratitude and dedication in light of one's atonement. Described in Leviticus 2; 6:14-23.

*// The First Passover in its Narrative Context*

Israel's coming-to-Egypt story is a strange story. 'Israel' is actually the name of one man (also called Jacob) who had twelve sons. It all started when the sons sold one of their brothers, Joseph, into slavery. He winds up in Egypt and ascends the ranks, and becomes Pharaoh's right-hand man. A few years later, a widespread famine causes the eleven brothers to go to Egypt looking for grain. There's a surprisingly happy family reunion between Joseph and his backstabbing brothers, and Joseph invites his whole family to move into Egypt's best neighborhood sometime around the year 1,900BC

They started as a group of 70 people – twelve brothers with their wives and children.<sup>8</sup> They multiplied like rabbits and after 430 years<sup>9</sup> they'd grown into a nation of roughly two million people.<sup>10</sup> However, they weren't the happy family they'd been at first. They were treated like immigrants and refugees typically are – socially and economically marginalized and discriminated against; consigned to the most difficult jobs with no political freedom. The Israelites worked backbreaking jobs as laborers and bricklayers. And ultimately, they became the target of infanticide. Some mothers were so desperate to save their baby boys that they'd risk floating their children downstream in a basket like Moses' mother did. Life was hard.

Additionally, it seems like Israel didn't know the God of their forefathers very well. Israelite oral tradition had probably passed on the

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 1:1-7.

<sup>9</sup> Exodus 12:40 says 430 years - confirmation of what God told Abraham in Genesis 15:13.

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 12:37 and Numbers 1:17-46 records the size of Israel's post-exodus army as over 600,000 men. This figure implies a total population of more than 2 million. However, this is not unheard of. Aboard the Mayflower was a indentured servant named John Halmund. After working off his indenturing he married a woman named Elisabeth Tilling, who bore him 10 children in the new world where he became a cornerstone of the colony at Plymouth Rock. Their 10 children gave them 88 grandchildren, and over the next 4 centuries an estimated 2 million have descended from them - including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, Franklin Roosevelt, Humphrey Bogart, Chevy Chase, and both of the George Bushes.



story that God had a deal with their common ancestor, Abraham, to bless his descendants and give them land<sup>11</sup> – but that wasn’t really showing u, was it? Plus, that was a *long* time ago – 650 years! Maybe they thought it was just a prehistoric wives’ tale. If that god exists, he’s probably not that great. Egypt had *great* gods – Osiris, Imhotep, Set, Ra, and even the Pharaoh himself. They’re an oppressed nation subservient to a great nation. Great nation, great gods... Lame nation, lame gods, right? Whoever the god of Abraham is or was, he’s been oversold.

Later, when they’re questioning God’s goodness and power in the wilderness, they created a cow-idol and worshipped it. When in doubt, worship the “greater” gods of Egypt. The context of Exodus has been laid. Simply put: Israel is an oppressed nation whose knowledge of God is very fuzzy.

But God enters their oppression and pain in a very visceral and personal way. He hears their cries,<sup>12</sup> raises up a deliverer (named Moses),<sup>13</sup> teaches Israel His own personal name – *Yahweh*,<sup>14</sup> promises to deliver them,<sup>15</sup> unleashes a barrage of plagues that prove He is mightier than all Egyptian gods,<sup>16</sup> and then orchestrates their quick escape from Egypt – even making sure they have money,<sup>17</sup> packed bags,<sup>18</sup> and road trip food.<sup>19</sup> He’s like a good parent.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 12:1-4.

<sup>12</sup> Exodus 2:23-25.

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 3:7-12.

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 3:14.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 6:6-8.

<sup>16</sup> Exodus 7:14-12:32. Each plague should be seen as a specific attack on a major Egyptian deity or the Egyptian religious system itself. For example, the plague of darkness is a direct assault by Yahweh on the Egyptian god *Ra*.

<sup>17</sup> Exodus 3:22, 11:2, 12:35-36.

<sup>18</sup> Exodus 12:11.

<sup>19</sup> Exodus 12:8, 34.

<sup>20</sup> In Exodus 34:6, when *Yahweh* declares His personal name to Moses He says, “Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious...” The words translated “merciful” and “gracious” are the Hebrew words *rāḥûm* and *ḥānnûn*. *Rāḥûm* is all about how a parent *feels* about their newborn child. And if *rāḥûm* is how *Yahweh feels* about His children, then *ḥānnûn* is how he *treats* His children. It’s *Yahweh treating* His kids like He cares about them – coming to their

They were poor, oppressed, marginalized, mistreated, suffering, fuzzy brained about who their God is, and unfaithful. Yet God burst into their mess, flexed His muscles, and orchestrated a rescue – an Exodus from their oppressor. He gave them the food they needed to survive in the wilderness, and ultimately brought them into the land He’d promised to their common ancestor.

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rescue and taking care of them. *Hännûn* means something like “I help.” Again, Yahweh is like a good parent!

// *The First Passover Event*

To understand the Passover Meal, we now need to zoom in on one of the ten plagues... the tenth and final plague – *Death of the Firstborn*. It is this plague from which the Passover Meal derives its name – since it was during this plague that God “passed over” Israel, sparing them from His wrath.

*“<sup>12</sup> For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will **pass over** you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 12:12-13)*

*“For Yahweh will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, Yahweh will **pass over** the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.” (Exodus 12:23)*

This tenth plague was in a class all its own. The plagues had come in three sets-of-three. Each set of three included two plagues with a warning, and then one with no warning.

<b>First Set of Plagues</b>		<b>Warning</b>
Plague #1	Water to Blood	Exodus 7:16-18
Plague #2	Frogs	Exodus 8:1-4
Plague #3	Gnats	*NONE*

<b>Second Set of Plagues</b>		<b>Warning</b>
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Plague #4	Flies	Exodus 8:20-23
Plague #5	Livestock die	Exodus 9:1-5
Plague #6	Boils	*NONE*

<b>Third Set of Plagues</b>		<b>Warning</b>
Plague #7	Hail	Exodus 9:13-19
Plague #8	Locust	Exodus 10:3-6
Plague #9	Darkness	*NONE*

The separation of the first nine plagues into their own sets tells us that the tenth plague is in some way distinct from the others. First, this plague is distinct in its *severity*. It *does* come with a warning (Ex. 11:4-8), but it's the kind of warning you'd have to be crazy to ignore:

*“Thus says Yahweh: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt,<sup>5</sup> and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the cattle.’ (Exodus 11:4-5)*

Just try to imagine an obscure old man – whose terrible prophecies have devastated your health, home, land, and economy – telling you that at midnight his God will pass by your home and kill your oldest child... then the old man storms out of your house! Do you think you could sleep?

Pharaoh apparently could. But how? The story is clear: it was because his heart was “hardened.” Pharaoh had hardened his own heart ten times<sup>21</sup> - allowing it to spiral deeper into a damnable numbness. And Yahweh had also hardened Pharaoh’s heart ten times<sup>22</sup> - coming alongside Pharaoh’s proud soul and propelling it forward into ignoring

<sup>21</sup> Exodus 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15.

<sup>22</sup> Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17.

the warnings. It's notable that Pharaoh is the first to harden his own heart – first when Moses shows sign of the serpent-staff, and then in in all the first five plagues. It wasn't until the sixth plague “that God actually moved in and hardened Pharaoh's heart.”<sup>23</sup>

Second, this plague is distinct in its *discrimination*. Plagues 1-3 were indiscriminate – everyone, Israelites and Egyptians alike – had suffered from them (Blood, Frogs, and Gnats). But plagues 4-9 discriminated differently: only the Egyptians suffered, while the Israelites were left unharmed. But the tenth was in its own category. *Everyone* was the target of the death-of-the-firstborn plague; however, there was an option for *atonement*. The word ‘atonement’ is the Hebrew word *kippur*. It literally means to *smear* or *cover*.

On the evening before Yahweh came through and allowed the Destroyer to enter houses and kill each firstborn child, Yahweh gave instructions to Israel in this order:

- On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Abib, take a spotless 1-year-old lamb or goat and keep it in your house until the 14<sup>th</sup> day.<sup>24</sup>
- On the 14<sup>th</sup> day, remove all leaven from the house.<sup>25</sup>
- Kill the lamb at twilight. Pour the blood into a basin.<sup>26</sup>
- Don't break any of its bones.<sup>27</sup>
- Dip a cluster of hyssop into the basin, and touch the lintel and doorposts of the house.<sup>28</sup>
- Roast the lamb whole (with head, legs, and guts).<sup>29</sup>
- Eat it along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kaiser Jr., Walter C. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Exodus*. Edited by Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008. 331.

<sup>24</sup> Exodus 12:1-6.

<sup>25</sup> Exodus 12:15-20.

<sup>26</sup> Exodus 12:6, 22.

<sup>27</sup> Exodus 12:46.

<sup>28</sup> Exodus 12:7, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Exodus 12:8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 12:8.

- Eat the meal quickly – with belt fastened, sandals on, and a staff in hand.<sup>31</sup>
- Stay inside the house till morning.<sup>32</sup>

It was a simple meal – a lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs. And though the word *atonement* isn't used, the action is. The blood would *cover* the door – from lentil to doorposts. It would be *smear*ed on, with hyssop branches.<sup>33</sup> And that night, when Yahweh saw the blood on the lentil and doorposts of any house, the Destroyer would *Pass Over*.

This plague was different from the others. In the earlier plagues, God simply chose whether Israel would be affected or not. But in the tenth plague, *everyone* needed innocent blood to cover their doors, Israelite or otherwise. This plague was discriminating, not merely on the basis of Israelite or Non-Israelite, but Blood-Covered or Not-Blood-Covered. Why? Simply put, everyone – including Israel – deserved this plague. The lamb was a substitution for all people who deserved to be affected by death.

That night, at midnight, Yahweh passed through Egypt and killed all the firstborn in Egypt. The firstborn of cows, of prison inmates, and of Pharaoh himself. Egypt was passed *through*, but Israel was passed *over*. The grief was more than even Pharaoh could bear and he finally told Israel they needed to leave immediately. So they did. They put their unleavened bread in bindles, and on their way out of town they asked the Egyptians for money, jewelry, and clothes.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Exodus 12:11.

<sup>32</sup> Exodus 12:22.

<sup>33</sup> Hyssop is a shrub with medicinal properties and is in the mint family. In the summer it produces pinkish-blue flowers on its branches (hyssop is not in bloom during the month of Abib, which is March-April). It was used for religious purification in Egypt.

<sup>34</sup> A paraphrase of Exodus 12:29-39.

## **PART II – The Passover as Holiday and Meal**

The Passover event was to be rehearsed year-after-year – God had commanded it very clearly.<sup>35</sup> In fact, the month of Abib became the first month of the year for Israel (see Ex. 12:2) because of their independence. God’s rescue had changed everything – even time itself was now reoriented around God and His wonderful works.

Remember, the Passover was the first event in a weeklong festival. It was a holiday-week... and Evangelical Christians don’t really have anything to compare it to! To God, it was vital that people keep the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread every year because it was the means by which they would rehearse their identity as a people freed by God from slavery.

*“You shall tell your son on that day, ‘It is because of what Yahweh did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” (Exodus 13:8)*

Devastatingly, Israel failed to keep the Passover for most of their history. From the days of the Judges (just a couple generations after Moses) to the days of King Josiah, no Passover was recorded to be observed – about 720 years.<sup>36</sup> And since the second temple was destroyed in 70AD, no Passover sacrifices have been offered.

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<sup>35</sup> Exodus 12:14, 13:3-10; Leviticus 23:4-5; Numbers 28:16.

<sup>36</sup> 2 Kings 23:21-23.

// *The Evolution of the Passover Meal*

As a meal, the first Passover was very basic. It only had 3 culinary elements: Lamb, Unleavened Bread, and Bitter Herbs (prescribed in Exodus 12:8). Over the years, the meal has evolved significantly, picking up more elements and more symbolism as the centuries progress. Today, a Passover Meal may include gefilte fish (poached fish dumplings), matzo ball soup, brisket or roast chicken, potato kugel (somewhat like a casserole) and tzimmes (a stew of carrots, prunes, and sometimes potatoes too).

In the time of Rabbi Jesus (about 1,500 years after the first Passover), the meal had picked up several new elements and begun to develop an *order*. The Hebrew word for order is '*Seder*.' Added elements included the *karpas* (parsley dipped in saltwater), and, certainly the most important addition, *four cups of wine* drunk throughout the evening, marking different movements in the themes of the Exodus being shared. The Passover meal became a meal with *seder* (*order*).

One thing has not changed despite the 3,500 years of events between Moses and us today: the Passover is still a meal that shares a story. When Jews eat the Passover meal, they are reenacting and participating in the Exodus story. After all, God commanded Israel: "You shall *tell* your son..." Today, most families follow the *Haggadah* (lit. *telling*) which provides an order (*seder*) for the meal and the stories shared during the meal.



*// The Symbolism of the Elements*

Let's consider the symbolism that accompanied the original elements of the first Passover meal, and then we'll consider the *Seder* that began developing closer to the time of Rabbi Jesus.

**The Lamb:** An unblemished Lamb (or goat) took the wrath of Yahweh in place of the people of Israel. It was kept with the family for five days before being killed without any of its bones being broken. Its blood was poured into a basin and the blood was smeared on the lentil and the doorposts of the threshold. It was burned whole and eaten quickly by the family – who were ready to go: wearing their sandals, belt, and staff.

**The Unleavened Bread:** Because of the way in which such a small quantity can infect such a larger mass, leaven (yeast) came to symbolize sin and uncleanness in Israel. Israel would remove all the leaven in their house leading up to the Passover Meal. Being that the barley harvest had just begun, they would've eaten unleavened barley bread. It was an exciting time as the first fruits of the harvest were just arriving. Israel took their unleavened dough with them, and the unleavened bread they took would've sustained them for a short time in the wilderness during their initial escape.

**The Bitter Herbs (*Maror*):** Typically, the bitter herb used in Passover Meal is horseradish. Whatever was used, it's meant to make the eater cry! As it's eaten, one is supposed to remember the tears of Israel as they cried out under the oppression of Egypt.

*Now we begin to explore elements that were introduced later on.*

**The Karpas:** This is Parsley (or any bland vegetable) dipped in saltwater. The Presider helps everyone remember the beginning of Israel's journey into slavery: when Joseph was thrown into the pit and his coat was dipped

in blood. The parsley represents Joseph's coat, and the saltwater represents the salty taste of blood. We also remember the tears that Israel shed in Egypt and how they cried out to God.

**The 4 Cups of Wine:** The four cups of wine are perhaps the most important symbolic and programmatic addition to the Passover Seder ("Order"). Each cup of wine corresponds to one of Yahweh's "I will" statements in Exodus 6:6-7. When God promised to rescue Israel out of slavery in Egypt, he used four "I will" statements. Imagine, after 430 years of harsh oppression and slavery hearing speaking these!

**Cup #1 – The Cup of Sanctification:** *"I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians..."*

**Cup #2 – The Cup of Deliverance:** *"I will deliver you from slavery to them..."*

**Cup #3 – The Cup of Redemption:** *"I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment."*

**Cup #4 – The Cup of Acceptance:** *"I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God..."*

Each cup would be lifted like a toast, and the words would be spoken: *"Blessed are You, Oh Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."*

**Storytelling:** Just before the second cup, it became customary for the children to begin asking questions, like: "Why are we doing this?" "Why are we all reclining at the table?" "Why are we eating bitter herbs?" "Why is tonight different?" In response, the Presider would open the Torah and read the Exodus story – which could take a long time! Today, most

presiders read an abbreviated version (for example, Deuteronomy 26:5-11).

**The Songs:** Several Praise (hallel) Psalms became customary to sing before and after the meal. Of course, none of the Psalms were written by the time of the first Passover, so they were all introduced much later. It would've been customary in Jesus' day to end the Passover Meal by singing Psalm 118.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> We know that Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn together, though it cannot be known precisely which one. Many think Psalm 118.

// *The Order (Seder)*

Again, the word “Seder” (as in, *Seder Meal*) means “order” or “process.” Since the Passover Meal is a meal that shares the story of the Exodus, it makes sense that it would have an order. I will list it here, and then in the next section we will consider where and how Rabbi Jesus commandeers the meal.

This order is loosely based on the *Haggadah* – the modern Seder used by most Jews.

Order	Event	Note
1	Cup #1	The Cup of Sanctification.
2	Handwashing	
3	Karpas	Parsely dipped twice in saltwater or vinegar.
4	Questions	The children begin asking questions.
5	Storytelling	The Exodus story is read.
6	Cup #2	The Cup of Redemption
7	Handwashing	
8	Bitter Herb	AKA Maror. Horseradish.
9	Main Meal	Lamb, Unleavened Bread, other foods.
10	Dessert	No more food is eaten after this.
11	Cup #3	The Cup of Redemption.
12	Singing	Praise Psalms like 113-118, 136.
13	Prayer	Including an expression of hope for Messiah.
14	Cup #4	The Cup of Acceptance.

The Passover meal retells the story of the Exodus, sprinkling the promises of God’s deliverance throughout. It starts with re-experiencing the betrayal of Joseph (tasting the blood on his robe through the *Karpas*) and then moves into the Exodus story. Israel’s bitter oppression is re-experienced (by tasting the *Bitter Herbs*), and their rescue is re-experienced (by tasting the *Lamb* and by eating the *Unleavened Bread*).

They end with anticipating the coming Messiah and toasting to their relationship of acceptance and peace with Yahweh.

### **Part III – How Jesus Commandeered Passover**

In 33AD, a Rabbi in his early 30's from Nazareth (a working-class-district known for its proximity to gentiles) went to Jerusalem with his twelve disciples to celebrate the Passover. The city would've swollen to several times its normal population. Jews from all over the world were in town to celebrate the holiday that spoke most directly to their religious and national identity. The young Rabbi and his rag-tag disciples procured a large upper room and had it prepared for the Passover meal. At twilight, the meal began.

Candles lit the room and the men reclined at the table as their Rabbi poured the first cup of wine and recalled the corresponding words of Exodus 6:6, "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians." The Rabbi lifted up his voice, "Blessed are you Oh Lord our God, king of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine!" The men lifted their glasses in remembrance of God's goodness – not only to their ancestors, but to them. "Here! Here!"

After washing their hands, they all took leafy vegetables and dipped them in saltwater and attempted awkwardly to guide it into their mouth. Some of them gave a mild grimace. They all remembered the way that Joseph had been betrayed – his coat dipped in blood. They remembered how their forefathers sent their people on a downward journey to Egypt.

Then they all began to inquire of Him, "Rabbi, why are we doing this?" "What makes tonight so special?" "Why are we eating this food?" And their Rabbi began to recite, probably from memory, the story of the Exodus. He talked for a long time, but He was so invested in the story – they all were. He talked like He was there the night that God passed through the land of Egypt and spared the firstborn in every Israelite

house. Like he was there when ran out their homes in the middle of the night, no time to spare.

He poured another cup of wine and said to them, “Friends – I have been so excited to eat this Passover with you. I’m telling you, I won’t eat it again until the Kingdom is here!” Then he told them to divide the cup amongst themselves. When they had, he declared loudly, “I will deliver you from slavery!” They all lifted their glasses and he said the words again, “Blessed are you Oh Lord our God, king of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine!” “Here! Here!” they boomed back.

They all took a hunk of horseradish. Some wrapped it in bread. And as they started to reluctantly chew, their sinuses began to react. The space between their nostrils and eye sockets enflamed. Tears began to well up as their tear-filled Rabbi reminded them of the bitter slavery of their people in Egypt. They felt a little like their forefathers. Their tear-soaked faces and painful scowls said it all.

But next, the main course! The Lamb (perhaps!). Roasted to perfection. But then, they were reminded that its blood was covering the door just outside. This lamb. It was killed... in their place. It should’ve been them – blood poured out, burned whole in an oven. God’s wrath passing “through” them like the Egyptians instead of “over” them like their ancestors. Deep gratitude welled up inside many of them.

During the meal, the Rabbi announced that He’d soon be betrayed by someone at that very table! He said it just as he was dipping bread into the same dish as one of his disciples – the one who always carried the moneybag. The disciples couldn’t believe it! They wanted to know who, and the Rabbi said, “It’s the one who is dipping bread into the dish with me.” The twelve were confused, perhaps they were all hungry and there was a lot of dipping.

But the Rabbi got up, took off his outer robes and tied a towel around his waist. They’d already washed their hands twice, but th Rabbi took a basin of water and started to wash the *feet* of his young disciples. Even the one he said would betray him. He touched their filthy, stinky, filth-covered feet, during the middle of dinner. And He said, “You don’t

understand what I'm doing right now, but soon you will. Though, not all of you are clean." The disciple with the moneybag got up and left. The others assumed he was off to buy bread.

Then the Rabbi took the unleavened bread. It was a flat, semi-crispy piece of bread. He turned it, and they saw the burn marks from the oven all over it. He gave thanks to God for the bread, broke it in half, and then, suddenly... their Rabbi went off-script. He said something... new. He said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." What could He have meant? This bread was undefiled by leaven... burned in an oven... and now broken... given to their ancestors to keep them alive as they escaped from slavery. How could He be anything like that?

"That was... different" one disciple whispered. "Maybe now he'll get back to the normal program," another thought. But he didn't. When it came time for the third cup of wine – the one after the meal, the "Cup of Redemption," the young Rabbi stayed off script, now more shocking than they could've imagined. He poured the cup and then encouraged them to drink it, saying, "this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Drink it, all of you!" He spoke the normal words for the third cup, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment," and then looked at them expectantly.

Drink His blood?! What? "That's a violation of Moses' Law!" some thought. But they got the deep sense that He meant something they couldn't quite understand, and they trusted Him. They drank. They drank, and they wondered what it could mean that His blood was going to redeem them with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment, launching a new covenant that could forgive sins. "The only blood forgiving sins tonight is the lamb's blood on the doorposts outside," one thought...

After some conversations and teachings, and a long prayer, the Rabbi launched into singing and the rest joined in. They sang just one Psalm to end the meal - Psalm 118. The last line of the Psalm rang out,

“Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” The Rabbi held his eyes closed, his face pointed towards heaven with broad smile. He said, “Let’s get going to Gethsemane. It’s late, but I’m hoping you’ll pray with me.”

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I’ve tried to take only a few artistic liberties in this story. You can find this story in Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13. Reading it, I hope you catch a glimpse of how surprising Rabbi Jesus’ actions were. Washing his disciples’ feet once the meal had already started. Saying he wouldn’t eat the Passover Meal again until his Kingdom came. Saying that the bread was His broken body, and that the wine was His redeeming blood! Jesus took the most important symbols of Passover – the unleavened bread, and the blood of the lamb – and said in effect, “These are about me now.”

This is how a quasi-homeless, miracle-working, carpenter’s son from nowheresville took a 1,500-year-old holiday and made it about Himself.



*// The Christological Significance of the Elements*

**Christ, Our Bitter Herb:** The bitter herb (Maror) was meant to remind us of Israel's bitter and oppressive slavery to Egypt. However, Christ has tasted the bitterness of death (Heb. 2:9) so that our slavery to sin and death might be broken have no lasting sting. The Bitter Herb reminds us of the cross, and the words that Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?!" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

**Christ, Our Unleavened Bread:** Unleavened bread was undefiled by the infecting-agent of leaven. Leaven symbolized sin and uncleanness to the Jewish people. Just a little leaven could infect a massive batch of dough. Jesus was completely untainted by sin. Completely clean and clear of the infecting-agent of sin. And just as this kind of bread was meant to be provision in the midst of a hasty rescue, so too is Christ. Jesus rescued us in one-fell-swoop by His substitutionary death on the cross, in a way and at a time that no one was expecting. It was so fast and unexpected that it took his disciples days to grasp it. Jesus is now our life-source on our journey to our Promised Land. Also, consider what must be done to bread before it can become a source of life. It must be mixed, beaten, kneaded, burned with fire, and then ripped apart and chewed up. His body was "broken" and "given for you" and "by his wounds we are healed." He was burned with God's wrath and has become our source of eternal sustenance.

**Christ, Our Passover Lamb:** Of the 365 that God could've chosen to arrange Jesus' crucifixion, it happened the same evening that Passover Lambs were slaughtered (Friday). Like a Passover Lamb, Jesus was unblemished - sinless. None of his bones were broken, but His blood was poured out on the flogging bench and on the cross. And, worse than any torture He faced from human hands, Jesus was wholly burned the wrath of God. Like John the Baptist said, He is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29).

**Christ, Our Cup of Redemption:** Jesus took the Cup of Redemption and made it about Himself. Jesus offers redemption not by the blood of a perfect lamb, but the blood of a perfect man – Himself. God’s wrath only passes over us when the Blood of Christ is smeared over the doorposts of our hearts. Jesus knew that “the life of every living thing is in the blood” and that “it is the blood that makes atonement” (Lev. 17:11, 14). Jesus provocatively encouraged His disciples to do more than drink a cup of wine, but to “drink” His blood so that we might be redeemed from God’s wrath. He has been burned and bled-dry to satisfy God’s wrath so that we wouldn’t have to be.

## Conclusion

In 33AD God Himself became our Passover Lamb. He settled the debt that we owed Him by paying the penalty we deserved to pay. Instead, He was burned and bled-out to satisfy His own wrath towards sin-infected sinners like us. Before He was murdered, our Rabbi gave us a meal – one that we’re supposed to reenact regularly, one that we’re supposed to teach our children. When our children ask us, “Why do we eat this bread and drink this cup?” we’ll tell them, “It is because of what Yahweh did for me when I came up out of slavery to sin and death.” And we’ll tell our kids of the day that we accepted the gift of His broken body and shed blood – and of how he came and smeared it over the doorposts of our hearts. And we’ll raise a fourth glass of wine and recite the words of our acceptance, “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of sin.” And forever and ever the people of God will say, “Here! Here!”

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*\*All scripture quotations are from the ESV. I sometimes replace "The LORD" with the personal name of God it represents: "Yahweh."*