

# JESUS HAGGADAH

## - Passover liturgy with a Christian focus -

### INTRODUCTION

The Jewish Passover meal is the starting point for discovering the significance of 'breaking bread'. It has its roots deeply embedded in history, and is the occasion for the Hebrew household to remember God's supreme act in releasing their ancestors from slavery in Egypt at the Exodus, into freedom and nationhood, as God's people.

For Christians, the Passover meal is also full of significance. The Exodus, which it celebrates, was a promise of a greater act of salvation which would make it possible for all people to know the perfect freedom of the life of God, if they are willing to make it their own.

The person of Jesus fills the Passover meal with further significance. For Christians he is the Messiah already come, also the Passover lamb. The bread and wine of the Passover table connect with his body and blood (life), the source of our freedom.

As Jesus faced the terrible events that he knew would make possible humanity's exodus from bondage, he chose to spend that final evening seated around the Passover table with his closest friends - his disciples. As the time honoured ceremony unfolded he was to mould it in a fresh direction. He took the heart of the Passover meal and formed it into:

- A 'reminder' of all that he was bringing into being;
- A 'sign' to the world that his people were among them;
- A 'promise' that the freedom he was unleashing would one day embrace all things.

This follows the pattern by which a typical Hebrew family celebrates the Passover. We consider its message that remembers the powerful saving act of God in the Exodus, and see it as the symbol of the greatest of all God's saving acts - in Jesus.

### BEGINNINGS

- **Lighting the candles**

We begin by lighting the candles on the table with the traditional prayer:

*"Blessed be God who has led us to holiness through his commandments and commanded us to kindle the lights of Sabbath and festival."*

- **Jesus' opening words**

At the beginning of the last supper Jesus says how much he wanted to share this meal with those closest to him (Lk 22:15-16)

*"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, for I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."*

**FOCUS: First Cup      The ‘Kiddush’ cup      “To Life!”**

The glasses are filled for the first cup of wine.

- **The Kiddush**

The Hebrew word *kiddush* means ‘to make holy’ or ‘special’. It is the prayer prayed at the beginning of each Sabbath meal in gratitude for the gift of life:

*“Blessed is our Lord, God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine’. Blessed is God who chose us from among all people to seek holiness ... With love, you have given us, O Lord, festivals for joy, the Passover feast, this feast of freedom, a holy gathering to remember the Exodus from Egypt. Thanks be to God who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this moment.”*

We all drink the first cup of wine making the declaration, “To life!”

In the last supper the *Kiddush* cup was probably a single cup shared around the group, as Jesus says, “Take this and divide it among yourselves ...” (Lk 22:17)

- **The ‘Handwashing’ (and ‘Handwashing’)**

The host alone now washes their hands, without a blessing, prior to the eating of *karpas*; either the lady of the house, or the youngest child holds the basin and towel for them.

This is the most logical point in the evening, ‘during supper’, that Jesus washed his disciples feet (Jn 13:2-11):

*‘And during supper Jesus knowing the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.’*

- **The Karpas**

Everyone takes a piece of the green vegetable, dips it in the salt water (or vinegar) and eats it in the spirit of ‘eating starters’, after they have said the blessing:

*“Blessed is our Lord, God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the soil.”*

- **The Matzah and the Invitation**

At a traditional Passover there are three special matzah on the table, covered with a cloth. At every normal meal the bread takes precedence - you bless the bread, break and share it. At all Sabbaths (remember this Passover is a Sabbath) the wine takes precedence and so the bread is covered (the Rabbi says, “This is so the bread won’t become embarrassed!”).

At this point the middle *matzah* is taken and broken in two. Half is left in view on the table, the other half is replaced under the cloth between the other two unbroken *matzah*. Traditionally (at some point) a child steals the hidden *matzah* to be redeemed by a sweetmeat when required after the main meal. This hidden *matzah* is called the *afikoman*; from the Greek *epikomion* (‘festival procession’) and the Aramaic *fiku man* (‘dessert’).

As the *afikomen matzah* is broken this beautiful invitation and declaration is made:

*“This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry, come and eat. Let all who are in need, come and celebrate the Passover. This year we are here, next year in the land of Israel! This year we are slaves, next year, freedom!”*

## PASSOVER STORY

**FOCUS: Second Cup      The ‘Haggadah’ cup      “To Freedom!”**

The glasses are filled for the second cup of wine.

- **The Four Questions**

The youngest child (person) at the table asks four questions to begin the telling the Passover story:

*“What makes this night different from all other nights?”*

*“On other nights we can eat bread or matzah. Why tonight only matzah?”*

*“On other nights we can eat any kind of herbs. Why tonight only bitter herbs?”*

*“On other nights we don't dip the herbs we eat into anything. Why tonight do we dip twice?”*

*“On other nights we can eat either sitting upright or reclining. Why tonight do we all recline?”*

- **The Story**

The answer begins...

*“We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, but God brought us out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. If the Holy One, blessed be God, had not taken us out of Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt ...*

*We went down to Egypt and lived there, only a few in number, just seventy people but now O Lord you have made us as numerous as the stars of heaven. The Egyptians treated us badly and made us suffer and they put hard work upon us. They set taskmasters over us to make bricks and build great cities. We cried out to the Lord God and the Lord heard our voice. God saw our suffering and our labour and took us out of Egypt. The Lord said, “I will pass through the land of Egypt and smite every first-born in the land and carry out judgements against all the gods of Egypt. With a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, with great show and with signs and wonders; blood, fire and pillars of smoke.*

*These are the ten plagues which the Holy One, brought upon the Egyptians: Blood - Frogs - Lice - Beasts - Pestilence - Boils - Hail - Locust - Darkness - Slaying of the First-born.”*

Spill three drops of wine on to a cracked plate saying:  
*“Blood, fire, pillars of smoke.”*

*Every Passover, we must declare the three central words:*

*Pesach – because God passed over our houses during the killing of the first-born;  
Matzah – because we ate unleavened bread when escaping from Egypt in haste;  
Maror – because the Egyptians embittered our lives with slavery hard labour.*

*In every generation, every Jew must feel that they themselves came out of Egypt. God did not only save our ancestors but God saved us with them.*

- **Blessing the ‘Haggadah’ cup**

*“Blessed be God, King of the Universe, who has saved us, just as you saved our ancestors from Egypt, and has brought us to this night ... Let us pray to God, the God of our Fathers, that God will come to us in peace - joyful in building God’s city, and happy in God’s service. Let us sing new songs of thanks to God for our salvation and freedom. Blessings to God who has saved Israel, Blessed is our Lord God, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.”*

We all drink the second cup of wine (in a reclining position) making the declaration, “To freedom!”

## **PASSOVER MEAL**

- **The Handwashing**

In preparation for eating the main Passover meal everyone at the table washes their hands, with the blessing:

*“Blessed be God, who made each commandment to bring us to holiness and laid upon us the washing of hands before food!”*

## **FOCUS: Breaking Bread**

- **Sharing the *matzah***

A Palestinian meal always began by the host breaking, blessing and sharing a loaf of bread with those around the table (at Passover this is an unbroken *matzah*). Jesus’ disciples would have been expecting to join in the time-honoured blessing:

*“Blessed be God who brings bread out of the earth. Blessed be God, who made each instruction to bring us to holiness, and laid upon us the eating of *matzah*.”*

Imagine their shock when:

*“The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (1 Cor 11:23-24)*

- **Eating *maror* and *haroset***

At this point everyone takes a scallop of onion, dipping it into both the *maror* and the *haroset* (making a combined sweet and sour mouthful). Eat it reciting the blessing:

*“Blessed be God, who made each commandment to bring us to holiness and laid upon us the eating of ‘*maror*.’”*

- **The ‘*matzor sandwich*’**

We are told, "They shall eat it with *matzor* and *maror*" (Num 4:2). Eat a *matzor* 'sandwich' with *maror* between two pieces of *matzor*, without a blessing.

- **Jesus and Judas**

At this point in the meal (Jn 13: 21-30) Jesus becomes troubled saying, "Very truly, I tell you one of you will betray me." He had previously quoted Psalm 41:9, "The one who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me," – remember Jesus had just shared the broken bread with the group.

The disciples become agitated. Peter 'motions' to John to ask Jesus to identify the betrayer. John is told, "It is the one to whom I give this 'sop' when I have dipped it in the dish."

'He gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot.' Judas asks, "Is it I?" Jesus replies, "Yes". Judas who carried the common purse then leaves the room. Passover is a time to give money to the poor, Judas would be the one expected to do this, no one would be suspicious...

**DINNER IS NOW SERVED!**  
(The Seder Plate is removed)

- **The *Shulchan Orech* declaration:** "Now eat and drink to your hearts delight!"

**AFTER THE MEAL ...**

- **The 'Afikoman'**

Eating the food ends with the sharing of the *afikoman matzah* - the broken half hidden (*tsafun*) at the beginning of the evening. Usually 'stolen' by a young child, it is 'redeemed' with a sweetmeat. Everyone must eat at least a *kezayit* ('the size of an olive'). Today the *afikoman matzah* represents the Passover lamb sacrificed in the Temple.

**FOCUS: Third Cup      The 'Blessing' cup      "To Peace!"**

Fill the third cup of wine.

The meal is concluded with a beautiful prayer-blessing (*berach*) with the central theme of *shalom*, followed by the drinking of the third cup of wine. We know this is the cup that Jesus gave a new focus to, because Paul tells us "In the same way Jesus took the cup also, after supper" (1Cor 11:25-26) and again he speaks of, "The cup of blessing that we bless" (1Cor 10:16); clearly indicating this is the third Passover cup.

- **The *Blessing***

*"Blessed be God who in his goodness, feeds the whole world with his grace, loving kindness and compassion ... Let us thank God that he caused our fathers to inherit a broad and good land; that he brought us out of slavery in Egypt and gave us his instruction and commandments ... Be merciful, O God, to your people of Israel; to your city Jerusalem; to Zion the seat of your glory; to the kingdom of the house of David your anointed; and to the great and holy Temple that is called by your name ... O God, our Father and King, our Creator and Shepherd. He has been, and is, and ever will be good to us. Blessing, salvation and comfort are from him; life, peace and all good things ... May he who makes peace in his high places make peace for us! ... Give thanks to the Lord for he is good and his kindness endures for ever... The Lord will give strength to his people and the Lord will bless his people with peace.'*

Then, imagine their shock a second time when Jesus says:

*“This is the new covenant in my blood which is being shed on behalf of many. Truly I say to you that I will not drink of the fruit of this vine, until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God.”*

We all drink the third cup of wine (in a reclining position) making the declaration, “To peace / *shalom!*”

## CONCLUSIONS

- **The Hymn**

After sharing the third cup of wine we are told, ‘When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives’ (Matt 26:30). The hymn was Psalm 118. Imagine Jesus singing these words in the light of what was just about to happen to him:

“Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good, and his love is eternal.  
Let the people of Israel say, “His love is eternal.”  
Let the priests of God say, “His love is eternal.”  
Let all who worship him say, “His love is eternal.”

In my distress I called to the Lord; he answered me and set me free.  
The Lord is with me, I will not be afraid; what can anyone do to me?  
It is the Lord who helps me, and I will see my enemies defeated.  
It is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on people.  
It is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on human leaders.

Many enemies were around me; but I destroyed them by the power of the Lord!  
They were around me on every side; but I destroyed them by the power of the Lord!  
They swarmed around me like bees, but they burned out as quickly as a brush fire;  
by the power of the Lord I destroyed them.  
I was fiercely attacked and was being defeated; but the Lord helped me.  
The Lord makes me powerful and strong; he has saved me.

Listen to the glad shouts of victory in the tents of God's people:  
“The Lord's mighty power has done it!  
His power has brought us victory - his mighty power in battle!”

I will not die; instead, I will live and proclaim what the Lord has done.  
He has punished me severely, but he has not let me die.

Open to me the gates of the Temple; I will go in and give thanks to the Lord!  
This is the gate of the Lord; only the righteous can come in.  
I praise you, Lord, because you heard me, because you have given me victory.

The stone that the builders rejected as worthless, turned out to be the most important of all.  
This was done by the Lord; what a wonderful sight it is.  
This is the day of the Lord's victory; let us be happy, let us celebrate!  
Save us, Lord, save us! Give us success, O Lord!

May God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
From the Temple of the Lord we bless you.  
The Lord is God; he has been good to us.  
With branches in your hands, start the festival and march around the altar.

You are my God, and I give you thanks; I will proclaim your greatness.  
Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good, and his love is eternal.”

Jesus and the disciples leave the upper room, cross the Kidron Valley and enter the garden in Gethsemene.

**FOCUS: Fourth Cup The ‘Jerusalem’ cup “To Jerusalem!”**

The glasses are filled for the fourth cup of wine; including Elijah’s cup (see below).

Jerusalem means, ‘The dwelling place of peace-*shalom*’, it is the biblical symbol of the accomplishment of God’s final purposes. This cup is the cup of hope. Jesus did not drink this cup at the table, but it became the Gethsemene-Golgotha cup, “If it be possible take this cup from me” (cf Matt 26:39). Drinking this cup enabled our hope to become reality.

- **Waiting for Elijah**

Malachi (4:5) says before the Messiah comes Elijah, the great hero and champion of the Hebrew people, will return (Jesus said ‘Elijah has already come - John the Baptist - Matt 17:11). Traditionally someone (usually a child) goes to the door to see if Elijah has come. Elijah is not there.

When the child returns to the table Elijah’s cup is empty (drunk quickly by an adult while the child is gone!). Everyone says, “Look, it’s empty, you must have missed him!”

- **The Blessing**

*“Let us adore your name; praise and song, strength and dominion are yours. Blessing and thanks from now until eternity. Blessed are you, great in praise, God of thanksgiving, Lord of wonders, King, God, Eternal. Let us bless God; for the vine and its fruits; for all the produce of the field, and for the delights of the land which is the inheritance of our Fathers to enjoy and love. Have compassion, O God, on your people Israel and build Jerusalem, the Holy City, speedily in our days.”*

We all drink the fourth cup of wine (in a reclining position) making the declaration, “To Jerusalem!”

*This ‘Jesus Haggadah’ was compiled by Noel Moules, but can be freely copied and adapted for use in your personal ‘Passover Peacemeal’.*