



‘Remember, remember’

A Passover meal by Keith Civval

This is a service with a difference – with a meal in the middle of it! Christians can gain new insights into the origins of the communion service; non-Christians can learn about the central basis of the Christian faith in a fresh and informal context; children can be thoroughly involved.

The Jewish festival of Passover goes back to the earliest days, when Israel was formed as God’s holy nation. It has been central to the Jewish faith ever since. The Passover teaches us about God’s saving purposes in history and this, combined with its informal and interactive character, makes it ideal as a means of presenting the gospel to people of all ages.

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- CONTENT TO FOLLOW

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

The following food items are essential. They should be set out on each table within easy reach of all the participants.

Unleavened bread (*matzah*) can be bought in most large supermarkets; alternatively you could use dry water biscuits, which have a similar texture. You will need a large supply!

Charoset: chop finely 1 cup of walnuts and 1 green apple; sprinkle with 2 tsp cinnamon and 2 tsp sugar, and stir gently together with wine to the texture of mortar. (This is enough for about eight people.)

Horseradish, washed and chopped into small pieces but big enough to pick up.

Sprigs of parsley or other green herb.

Bowls of salt water

The leader should have a dish with all of the above *plus* a hard-boiled egg, which has been gently roasted in the oven (till it looks burnt), and a roasted lamb bone. In addition, individually wrap three pieces of *matzah* in a clean napkin and place them in front of the leader. Two candles should be placed on every table.

The meal lies between two times of interactive worship and teaching. It can be an evening meal, or it could be lunch. It can be a family occasion held round the table – or it can be celebrated by a home group, a youth group or other larger grouping. Try to seat everyone round a single table, though for a large group you will need a top table, where the leader sits with the special items and others are seated around other tables so that everyone can see the top table comfortably.

Make as much or as little of the meal as you like, but don’t leave it out. It contributes to the sense of informality and it is a good way of drawing everyone into the celebration.

Prepare a service outline for everyone to follow. In the following outline, normal type



indicates words that the leader could use or adapt. Involve as many people as possible, by asking them, in advance, to read selected sections.

Singing is another important feature of Passover. Some songs have been suggested, but you can choose something similar – and if time permits add in more!

The blessing of the wine comes four times during the Passover. It is a good idea to practise this before you start, especially if attempting the Hebrew!

We praise You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheynu melech ha'olam, boreh pori hagafen.

SESSION PLAN

INTRODUCTION TO THE PASSOVER CELEBRATION

Words in bold are to be said by all, and words in italics provide general directions or Hebrew transliteration.

Writing about the night before Jesus died, Luke says:

When the time came for Jesus and the apostles to eat, he said to them, 'I have very much wanted to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer' (Luke 22:14,15, CEV).

Jesus was going to celebrate in a very similar way to the manner that Jews had celebrated for centuries. We too can look back with thanksgiving on the way God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, because it was from that nomadic people that God created a nation into which, many generations later, Jesus was to be born.

It is no accident that the climax of Jesus' life on earth came at the Passover season, nor that the final act that Jesus wanted to perform with his disciples was to celebrate the Passover meal. The apostles were looking back to the time when the people were freed or redeemed from Egypt, but Jesus was looking forward to an even greater redemption – the redemption of all mankind from their sin.

The Passover prayer book is called the *Haggadah*, which means storybook, because the Passover is about the telling of the story of the escape of the Children of Israel from Egypt – from slavery to freedom. For us today it speaks of the freedom and new life that Jesus has made possible through his death on the cross.

LIGHTING THE CANDLES

We start, as all Jewish festivals start, with the lighting of candles.

It is customary for the woman of the house (or nearest equivalent) to light the candles and say this prayer:

We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who have blessed us by your commandments and commanded us to kindle the festival lights.



We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the universe. You have chosen us from among all peoples to proclaim your unity throughout the world and to sanctify our lives by obeying your commandments.

In your love, O Lord our God, you have given us holy days for gladness, festivals and sacred seasons for rejoicing, even this Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Season of our Freedom, where we worship you and remember the Exodus from Egypt. For you have chosen us to consecrate us to your service, and given us the festivals for gladness and joy. We praise you, O Lord, who hallows the house of Israel and the festive seasons. Amen.

OPENING BLESSINGS

There are many customs that accompany the Passover. One is the drinking of four glasses of wine. These are explained as a symbol of freedom because it was the practice of Roman freemen to drink at least four cups of wine and to recline on couches at their banquets. Each glass of wine is preceded with a blessing, which we all say together. *The wine glasses are filled, all say the blessing and the first glass of wine is drunk.*

All take a sprig of parsley or cress, dip it in salt water and, before eating it say the following blessing.

We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

Song: 'Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise' *The leader now takes the middle one of the three matzahs, breaks it in half,*

and (later) discreetly hides one piece away somewhere in the room.

Behold 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 want come and celebrate the Passover. This year many are still oppressed; next year may all be free. May this spirit of fellowship fill our hearts, and may the time come soon when no one will be in want, and when a festival of redemption from misery and oppression shall be proclaimed for all mankind. Amen.

The wine glasses are filled, all say the blessing and the second glass of wine is drunk.

FOUR QUESTIONS

The *Haggadah* – the dramatic telling of the exodus from Egyptian bondage – is for the entire family. Being child-centred it encourages the children to ask questions concerning the meaning of the service.

The youngest person present asks the following questions:

1 Why is this night different from all other nights? On all other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread; why tonight only unleavened?

2 On all other nights we eat various herbs; why tonight do we eat bitter herbs?

3 On all other nights we do not dip green herbs in salt water and bitter herbs in *Charoset*; why do we do so tonight?

4 On all other nights we do not have a roasted lamb bone and a roasted egg on the table;



why do we have both tonight?

THE STORY OF THE EXODUS

We will answer those questions shortly. First we come to the telling of the exodus. We pick up the story at the point at which Moses, having been called by God at the burning bush, had returned to his native Egypt to save the Israelite people. Pharaoh, the king, was not over-keen about letting them go and went through many changes of heart. After each of nine plagues Pharaoh said that they could go and then changed his mind. And so we come to the final hours in Egypt.

First we have the institution of the Passover celebration: Exodus 12:1–8. The Passover lamb is referred to in the New Testament too. Here is one passage from Peter: 1 Peter 1:18–19.

Then read the account of the first Passover: Exodus 12:21–39. In your own words, talk about the essential points, using appropriate language. The essential points are: the lamb was without blemish; the lamb was slain; the blood was applied and became the perfect protection from judgement; the people were set free from bondage and having passed through the waters of the Red Sea eventually reached the Promised Land. This is a picture of how Christ, the Lamb of God, was without sin. Just as lambs were slain in Egypt to protect the Israelite, so we too can have new life through Christ's death on the cross.

Song: 'Lord I lift your name on high'

EXPLANATION OF THE SYMBOLS

We have now explained the momentous historical events, which the festival of Passover celebrates. Now we can answer those four questions about how this festival is observed, and especially the symbolic dishes that are before us.

The leader holds up the matzah and says:

The first of the Four Questions was about the *matzah*, which is traditionally explained as follows. We eat this *matzah* to remind us of the unleavened bread which our ancestors baked in Egypt because their dough did not have time to ferment before the Almighty revealed himself to them and redeemed them, as it says; 'They left Egypt in such a hurry that they did not have time to prepare any food except the bread dough made without yeast. So they baked it and made thin bread.' (Exodus 12:39, CEV)

The leader holds up the horseradish and says:

The second of the Four Questions, about the horseradish, is answered as follows. This horseradish or bitter herb is eaten by us tonight to remind us that the lives of our ancestors were embittered by the Egyptians, as it says 'The Egyptians were cruel to the people of Israel and forced them to make bricks and to mix mortar and to work in the fields.' (Exodus 1:14, CEV) For Christians it is a reminder too that the great redemption which God wrought on our behalf was a redemption that was brought at great cost.

The leader holds up the charoset and says:

The third of the Four Questions was about the dipping of green herbs in salt water, which we have already done and explained, and the horseradish in *charoset* which we shall do presently. The *charoset* was once a common condiment, but as part of the Passover



meal it was taken to represent the mortar with which the Israelites were forced to work in Egypt.

The leader holds up the roasted lamb bone and the roasted egg

The last of the Four Questions was about the roasted lamb bone and the roasted egg. The roasted lamb bone is a reminder of the lamb, which was offered as a sacrifice in the temple and then consumed in family groups, together with bitter herbs. The roasted egg is probably a reminder of the burnt offering, which was made on this as on other festivals.

For Jesus at his Last Supper, this was perhaps the most powerful symbol of all. We can recall the fact that his one sacrifice on the cross was made once for all – making all other sacrifice redundant from that time on.

Psalm 113 read responsively, leader and people reading alternate verses.

Song: 'O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder'

We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who redeemed us and our ancestors from Egypt, and have enabled us to reach this night, that by eating unleavened bread and bitter herbs we may commemorate our redemption. Cause us, we pray, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, to reach yet other festivals and seasons in peace, heartened in the hope for the coming of your kingdom, and rejoicing in the worship of your name. We praise you, O Lord, Redeemer of Israel and all people.

The wine glasses are filled, all say the blessing and the second glass of wine is drunk.

GRACE BEFORE THE MEAL

The leader breaks and distributes the upper of the three *matzahs* on the dish in front of him and all say:

We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

The matzah is eaten. All take a piece of horseradish, dip it charoset, and say:

We praise you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us by your commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of bitter herbs.

The horseradish is eaten. All take a piece of horseradish between two pieces of matzah. Then the leader says:

The Jewish rabbis used to combine *matzah* and horseradish and eat them together so as to fulfil what it says concerning the sacrificial lamb: 'Eat the Passover lamb with thin bread and bitter herbs.' (Numbers 9:11, CEV)

The matzah and the horseradish are eaten. The meal

Use this as an opportunity to talk informally about all that has taken place in the Passover so far. Does it help to explain why the Passover was so important for Jesus?

CONCLUSION

At the end of the meal ask the children to hunt for the piece of matzah that was hidden



earlier, which the leader then breaks and distributes.

It was the middle piece of *matzah* that was broken, and Jesus said: 'This is my body.' The symbolism is powerful because the breaking earlier represents crucifixion, the hiding signifies burial and now the finding reminds us of Christ's resurrection three days after his death on the cross. We read about it in Matthew 26:26–29. And Paul writes about it in Romans 3:20–26.

The wine glasses are filled, all say the blessing and the third glass of wine is drunk.

Song: 'Come and see'

Psalm 115 – *read responsively, leader and people reading alternate verses.*

Psalm 118 – *read responsively, leader and people reading alternate verses.*

The wine glasses are filled, all say the blessing and the fourth glass of wine is drunk.

Psalm 136 – *The leader reads the first part of each verse and everyone joins in with the refrain 'His love endures for ever'.*

Song: 'Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King'