

God's Appointed Times  
*Pesach – Passover*  
*Hag HaMatzah – the Feast of Unleavened Bread*

**Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread – Leviticus 23:5-8, Exodus 12**

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**Purpose**

*Pesach* means “to spring, jump or pass over”, thus the English name Passover. This is an historical reference to God's deliverance of Israel from their captivity in Egypt as recorded in Exodus 12. On the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan, the first month of the year, the angel of death “passed over” all who had consecrated their homes with the blood of the sacrificed lamb (*Exodus 12:12-13*). The blood spared (redeemed) the lives of their firstborn. The Israelites were also commanded to remove all leaven from their homes and eat bread with out leaven for seven days following. The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were to be an *everlasting sign* of God's **redemption and deliverance** (*Exodus 12:14*).

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**Practice** (Old and New Testament)

According to the Scriptures, the Passover is to be celebrated beginning at sundown on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan with a dinner (called the *seder*). A perfect (“without blemish”) lamb (*Exodus 12:5*) was to be killed, roasted over fire and eaten along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The very first Passover meal was to be eaten with their cloaks, belts and sandals on, while holding their walking staffs in preparation for a hasty retreat. In subsequent observations, all leaven (symbolic of sin) was to be removed from the house and unleavened bread was to be eaten for the next seven days (*Exodus 12:14-15*).

Traditional Jewish observation has added a number of elements to the *Seder* meal including green vegetables, a roasted egg, *kharoset* (apple/nut mixture) and four (eventually five) cups of wine. These are arranged on a ceremonial plate in a particular order and position. The entire order of the meal and ceremonial service has been developed into a booklet called *the Haggadah*. The symbolism of the elements of the Seder meal are as follows:

- **Lamb** – blood sacrifice and redemption
- **Unleavened bread** – sinlessness (Jewish tradition also points to the haste in which they fled Egypt)
- Bitter herbs/horseradish – suffering and bitterness of slavery
- Greens/vegetables (parsley) – newness
- Salt water – tears of oppression, tears of joy
- Roasted egg – new birth/new beginning (can also represent burnt offerings)
- Kharoset – the mortar/mixture used to make the bricks while in captivity (loosely taken from *Exodus 6:6-7*)
- Four (five) cups of wine:
  - First cup – Cup of Sanctification (set apart and purify)/Cup of Blessing
  - Second cup – Cup of Praise/Cup of Judgment
  - **Third cup – Cup of Redemption** (see Prophetic fulfillment by Christ)
  - Fourth cup – Cup of Thanksgiving and Hope/Cup of Praise
  - Fifth cup – set at an empty place setting for Elijah (*Malachi 4:5*)

The traditional observance above was well developed by the first century and the time of our Lord. Passover is mentioned in Luke 2:41, John 6:4 and Acts 12:3-4. By far the most well-known and beloved account is the last Passover celebrated by Jesus himself with his disciples, found in *Matthew 26:17-29* and *Luke 22:7-20*. Some of the individual elements are referenced as well - Jesus instructed the disciples to kill/prepare the lamb (*Luke 22:8*); Judas dipped bread or herbs/greens in salt water (*Matthew 26:23*); cups of wine (*Luke 22:17*); and unleavened bread (*Matthew 26:26*).

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**Prophetic Fulfillment by Christ**

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There are a number of ways in which Christ fulfills the elements and symbolism of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. During Christ's own observance of the Passover, the key moment comes when Jesus takes **the bread** and **the cup** and declares the revelation that His body is the bread and his blood is the cup (*Luke 22:19-20*). If this is the Passover Seder meal, then which cup did Jesus drink from? It is probable that the Seder meal had reached the 3<sup>rd</sup> cup – the Cup of Redemption. What better representation of Christ's sacrifice? Therefore, Christ himself declares that He is the fulfillment of the unleavened bread (representing His sinless life/body) and the Cup of Redemption (representing His shed blood).

Leaven (yeast) has been a biblical symbol for sin. In *I Corinthians 5:6-8*, Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to purge all sin and immorality from their fellowship and draws upon the Passover example to make his point. He also makes the wonderful declaration that **Christ is the Passover Lamb**. See also *John 1:29, I Peter 1:18-19, Revelation 5:11-12*.

One other interesting point – Christ declares that He is the unleavened *bread*, the *bread* of life (*John 6:48*) and the living *bread* (*John 6:51*). He was born in Bethlehem, which translates to *house of bread* – *Beth Lehem* בֵּית לֶחֶם. It has also been suggested that the matzah bread's appearance resembles the description of Christ in *Isaiah 53:5* – pierced, bruised and striped.

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**Practical Applications, Observations and Challenges**

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In *I Corinthians 5:6-8*, Paul exhorts this New Testament church “*keep the feast*”. It has been said that “the feast” is actually Christ and that we should celebrate our redemption in Christ by sinless lives. Regardless, the primary message in the Unleavened Bread is the **removal of sin from our lives, our homes and our church**. The purging of sin was so central to the theme of redemption that the sin offerings for the community were burned “outside the camp”. *Leviticus 4:21, 16:27*

As we study the Scriptures, we must do so in the light of the fact that **Christ became our Passover Lamb** and fulfilled God's requirement for a perfect sacrifice. We must continually remind ourselves of all that He has done for us. The Passover was to be an *everlasting sign* of God's redemption through Jesus Christ. How/when did the *Passover meal* become the *Lord's Supper*? Why do you think the Christian church has ceased to “celebrate the feast”?

What does *I Corinthians 11:26* seem to indicate in light of the fact that Christ was celebrating the Passover seder when He made his revelations? If “this cup” was the 3<sup>rd</sup> cup of redemption, then should communion only be celebrated once a year and at Passover time? How do we explain the method, manner and frequency of the Catholic Eucharist and our Lord's Supper?

God set down a pattern that both *pointed to* and *looked back in remembrance* of all that Christ has done for us. What are we doing to continually and deliberately remove sin from our lives and celebrate Christ's sacrifice for us?