

Haggadah: A Christian Celebration of Passover

Leader: Welcome to this special celebration of Passover, a celebration that is very rich with symbolism and full of worship.

Passover is a meal that God designed and a story that God wrote. Passover is the story that we eat. It is a braided story that we eat, for Passover recalls three stories that God has woven together.

On one level, Passover recounts the story of the Hebrew people, who were rescued from slavery in 1446, B.C. But as believers in Christ, we understand that what happened 3,500 years ago in Egypt was a foreshadowing of a greater reality, which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago. Those are two strands of the braided story.

The third strand is our own individual Passover experience, as the blood of the Lamb of God was applied to the doorposts of our own hearts and as God caused spiritual death to PASS OVER each of us personally, setting us free from the slavery and suffering of sin.

Hallel: Songs of Praise

The Jews of Bible times used a group of hymns, called the Egyptian Hallel, in their Passover festivals.¹ These celebratory songs are recorded in our Bibles as Psalms 113-118.

Jesus and His disciples sang Psalm 113 and 114 before the "Last Supper," which was a Passover meal. Let's begin our celebration with these very same words of worship.

ALL: Praise the LORD.

Praise, O servants of the LORD,
praise the name of the LORD.

1. _____: Let the name of the LORD be praised,
both now and forevermore.

From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

2. _____: The LORD is exalted over all the nations,
his glory above the heavens.

Who is like the LORD our God,
the One who sits enthroned on high,
who stoops down to look
on the heavens and the earth?

¹ *Hallelu Yah* is the Hebrew translation of "praise the LORD."

ALL: He raises the poor from the dust
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;
he seats them with princes,
with the princes of their people. . . .

3. _____: When Israel came out of Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue,
Judah became God's sanctuary,
Israel his dominion.

ALL: Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turned the rock into a pool,
the hard rock into springs of water.

Sanctification

Leader: The traditional Jewish Passover incorporates four cups: the cup of sanctification, the cup of deliverance, the cup of redemption, and the cup of praise. These four cups correspond to four promises that God gave in Exodus 6:

I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

God gives these promises of sanctification, deliverance, redemption, and praise to each believer in Christ.

We begin with sanctification, which means being set apart for a special purpose. God set the Hebrew people apart for a special purpose: to belong exclusively to Him. Today God sets apart believers in Christ Jesus for a special purpose: to belong exclusively to Him.

We now want to sanctify this time by setting it apart for the special purpose of celebrating Passover, of celebrating God's works of redemption and deliverance for us. We light these candles now to represent that we are devoting this time to celebrating and worshipping God.

4. _____: "Jesus, You are the Light of the world."

ALL: "Jesus, You are the One who shows us the way to the Father God.
You are the One who dispels the darkness from our souls.
You are the One who brightens our hearts with the knowledge of God,
and You are the One who delights us with the radiant splendor of Your glory."

5. _____: "Jesus, bring the light of who You are to us, we pray,
and shine brightly in this hour, in this room, and in each heart. Amen."

Leader: More than just sanctifying this time, however, we especially come now to sanctify ourselves: we set ourselves apart for a special purpose; we set our lives apart for the special purpose of belonging exclusively to God.

6. _____: "LORD God Almighty, we yield to Your sanctifying Spirit now. We commit to belonging exclusively to You. Thank you for the words of the apostle Peter, who wrote that "we are a chosen people. We are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, we can show others the goodness of God, for He called us out of the darkness into His wonderful light.

'Once we had no identity as a people;
now we are God's people.
Once we received no mercy;
now we have received God's mercy.'"²

Leader: Now with joy, we drink from the first cup, the Cup of Sanctification, rejoicing that God has chosen us to be His.

The story of the Passover, which is both the Jews' story and our story, begins with suffering.

7. _____: "Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. . . . So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves. They appointed brutal slave drivers over them, hoping to wear them down with crushing labor. ... So the Egyptians worked the people of Israel without mercy. They made their lives bitter, forcing them to mix mortar and make bricks and do all the work in the fields. They were ruthless in all their demands.... Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: 'Throw every newborn Hebrew boy into the Nile River.'"³

Leader: The Israelites suffered greatly as slaves in Egypt; and we, too, have suffered greatly as slaves of sin. Let us dip the **parsley** into the **salt water**, which symbolizes the tears and sorrow of slavery.

8. _____: "So the slave drivers and foremen went out and told the people: 'This is what Pharaoh says: I will not provide any more straw for you. Go and get it yourselves. Find it wherever you can. But you must produce just as many bricks as before!' So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt in search of stubble to use as straw. Meanwhile, the Egyptian slave drivers continued to push hard. 'Meet your daily quota of bricks, just as you did when we provided you with straw!' they demanded. Then they whipped the Israelite foremen they had put in charge of the work crews. 'Why haven't you met your quotas either yesterday or today?' they demanded."⁴

Leader: The **haroset** represents the bricks that the Israelites were forced to make and the mortar which they used in their building for the Egyptians. The **haroset** represents suffering and is sometimes made with vinegar. More often, however, the **haroset** is sweet, made with honey. This reminds us of God's sweet kindness to us even in the midst of our suffering.

Let us eat the **haroset** now.

God commanded the Hebrews to eat bitter herbs at their Passover meal to symbolize the cruel suffering of slavery. Now we, too, eat bitter herbs, the **maror**, to remind us of the misery and destructiveness of sin.

² 1 Peter 2:9-10, NLT

³Exodus 1:8-22

⁴Exodus 5:10-14

Deliverance

9. _____: God spoke to Moses: "The LORD said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey....'"⁵

10. _____: "Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.'"⁶

Leader: Our God is the God of the outstretched arm—how wonderful! Motivated by love, He extends His power on our behalf.

ALL: We rejoice that our God rescues us!
We rejoice that our God delivers us!

Leader: With joy, let us drink the second cup, the Cup of Deliverance.

God said, "I will rescue My people!" And so He sent Moses to lead the Hebrew people and to confront Pharaoh. As Pharaoh repeatedly refused to free his slaves, God sent plagues of water-turned-to-blood, frogs, gnats, flies, diseased livestock, boils, hail, locusts, and darkness. But there would be no freedom until blood was shed; there would be no deliverance until someone died.

In the same way, we would never be free until blood was shed and until Someone died. Only the death of Christ could break the stranglehold that our slave-master, sin, had on us.

11. _____: "Then Moses called all the elders of Israel together and said to them, 'Go, pick out a lamb or young goat for each of your families, and slaughter the Passover animal. Drain the blood into a basin. Then take a bundle of hyssop branches and dip it into the blood. Brush the hyssop across the top and sides of the doorframes of your houses. And no one may go out through the door until morning. For the LORD will pass through the land to strike down the Egyptians. But when he sees the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe, the LORD will **pass over** your home. He will not permit his death angel to enter your house and strike you down.'"⁷

Leader: The parsley that we dipped earlier into the salt water reminds us of the hyssop plant, which was used often by Old Testament priests as a part of ritual cleansing. The hyssop in the first Passover in Egypt was used to put the blood of the lambs on the doorframes. The blood dripped down the door at the top and down the sides in the same way that it would later drip down from the head and hands of Jesus as He hung dying on the cross.

Hyssop appears again at the crucifixion when the stalk of a hyssop plant is held up to the Lamb of God. It is as if God is pointing out, "Here is the true Passover Lamb!"

When the Jews eat the Passover lamb, they remember only animals, slaughtered in ancient days. As believers in Jesus, we know that those animals in themselves were meaningless.

⁵ Exodus 3:7-8, NIV

⁶ Exodus 5:5-6, NIV

⁷ Exodus 12:21-23, NIV

They were representations of the True Sacrifice, who was yet come. When we eat the Passover lamb, we remember Jesus, who has come as the true Passover Lamb.

ALL: We think of Jesus,

LEADER: the only one righteous enough to be an acceptable sacrifice before God.

ALL: We think of Jesus,

LEADER: the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.⁸

ALL: We think of Jesus,

LEADER: the one without blemish or defect—perfectly sinless—who willingly gave His life in atonement for us.

Leader: Let us eat the **lamb** with immense gratitude in our hearts for Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The bread that they ate on that first Passover night was flat.

12. _____: "The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. 'For otherwise,' they said, 'we will all die!' So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing."⁹

Leader: The Israelites fled Egypt in haste. This provides a dramatic lesson that we should run quickly when God provides the way of escape from sin; we dare not linger a moment. We are reminded, too, that we must be prepared to leave quickly, at any moment, at the sudden call of God to leave this earth, our land of bondage and groaning.

For us, the bread represents the body of Jesus, who is the Bread of Life. The flat bread, made without yeast, represents the life of Jesus, who was without sin. The **matzoh** bread has stripes, just as the body of Jesus was striped with the brutal lashes of a Roman flogging. The *matzoh* bread is pierced, just as the body of Jesus was pierced with the nails and the spear.

ALL: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."¹⁰

Leader: Jesus observed a Passover meal with his disciples the night before His death.

13. _____: "As they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'Take this and eat it, for this is my body.'"¹¹

Leader: This bread represents the broken body of Jesus, the sacrifice for our sins. Let us eat the bread, remembering the great price that Jesus paid with His body for our salvation.

Redemption

The third cup is the Cup of Redemption, or Salvation. For the Jews, it represents redemption from Egypt. For us, it represents the redemption which God has given us through the blood of Jesus. His death gave us Life. It is His blood that symbolically covers us so that the death which we deserve passes over us, having come with judgment on Him instead.

⁸ John 1:29

⁹ Exodus 12:33-34, NIV

¹⁰ Isaiah 53:5, NIV

¹¹ Matthew 26:26, NIV

When Jesus took the third cup, He used several words from the Jewish betrothal ceremony. He was proposing a covenant of exclusive commitment, made with solemn and binding vows.

14. _____: "Then [Jesus] took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to [the disciples], saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'" ¹²

Leader: Let us drink with joy as we thank God for redeeming us!

Praise

The fourth cup is the Cup of Praise. Jesus made a new covenant with us—not one based on doing good works or on accomplishment. This new covenant is based not on earning but on receiving: our friendship with God is received as a gift.

Jesus said that He would die for us if we would live for Him. Jesus says to us, "I will give all of Me for all of you."

It is the great exchange of our guilt and death and misery and loneliness and darkness and fear—exchanged for His righteousness and life and joy and intimacy and light and love.

When we celebrate Passover or the Lord's Supper, it is as if we are renewing our vows to God—vows of exclusive devotion to Him. We are not only remembering what He gives to us, but we are also remembering that we have given ourselves to Him.

We die to being spiritual single. We now live a shared life with Christ. We promise to belong to God as His people. And He promises to belong to us as our God.

After Jesus and his disciples observed Passover, they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives.¹³ The hymn which they sang probably came from Psalms 115-118. Before we read from these same songs of praise, we will drink from the fourth cup, the Cup of Praise.

ALL: Not to us, O LORD, not to us
but to your name be the glory,
because of your love and faithfulness.

15. _____: I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;
he heard my cry for mercy.
Because he turned his ear to me,
I will call on him as long as I live.

16. _____: The cords of death entangled me,
the anguish of the grave came upon me;
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.

ALL: Then I called on the name of the LORD :
"O LORD, save me!"

17. _____: The LORD is gracious and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.

ALL: Be at rest once more, O my soul,
for the LORD has been good to you.

¹² Matthew 26:27-28, NIV

¹³ Matthew 26:30

18. _____: How can I repay the LORD
for all his goodness to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD.

ALL: For great is his love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

19. _____: O LORD, truly I am your servant; ...
you have freed me from my chains.

I will sacrifice a thank offering to you
and call on the name of the LORD.

ALL: Praise the LORD, all you nations;
extol him, all you peoples.

20. _____: Open for me the gates of righteousness;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.

ALL: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

21. _____: Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.
From the house of the LORD we bless you.

ALL: I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.

22. _____: The LORD is God,
and he has made his light shine upon us.

ALL: This is the day the LORD has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

23. _____: You are my God, and I will give you thanks;
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

ALL: Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.