

Should Christians Attend a Seder?

I received the following letter yesterday:

“You wrote several years ago about the Seder which the Orthodox Jews celebrate. We are faced here in the ___ church with members who want a rabbi to bring this ‘service’ to our church on April 18. Even our young pastor knew zero about this and pulled a ‘blank,’ when asked about it.

“Some are saying ‘We need to respect others’ beliefs’ and countered with, ‘Yes, we do but we don’t have to worship with them. You don’t want to risk denying Jesus, do you?’ But she continued to make light of the situation; and I then showed her a Waymarks publication, where you had written on the Seder. Anyway, I’d like to request more information on it, so I will have more facts; since our people here do not realize the seriousness of what they’re doing. Jesus truly warned, ‘My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge’ (Hosea 4:6). We should all be aware of what is going on around us. Thank you.”—*Western States*.

In February 2007, I published “The Seder - a Denial of Christ.” In this present paper, additional information is provided.

It is becoming relatively common for many Christian churches—Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, as well as our own—to observe a Seder meal on Maundy Thursday, followed by (or in place of) the Lord’s Supper.

Since the Gospels describe Jesus’ last meal as held during the Passover season, these churches feel that they are honoring Him by returning each spring to the Seder. Jewish rabbis highly formalized this ritual of the Passover service for the Jews; and it was gradually developed over the centuries.

It is said that they are also honoring Jesus’ Jewish roots, by seeking out Jewish texts and rabbis for help in replacing the simple Lord’s Supper with a service which is richly endowed with the centuries-old formalism and ceremonies of a Jewish Passover service. Those who do this do not seem to be satisfied with the simple instruction and pattern which Christ gave about the Lord’s Supper. They want something more exotic.

Here are number of reasons why we should not take part in a Seder service:

- From the New Testament, we have no indication that, after Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, the Christian church continued to observe the Passover. In Christ, everything the Passover pointed toward has been fulfilled.

- The Seder was invented by Orthodox Jews,

not by Christians. It was devised by people who consistently reject Jesus Christ as their Saviour. It is practiced to comfort them while they await the coming of a Messiah.

- The Seder is done in the spring, by Jews, as a substitute for the complete Passover because the Temple at Jerusalem has not yet been rebuilt. Until that is done, while they can eat the roasted lamb in their homes, they cannot offer it on the altar in Jerusalem. But the Passover service ended at Calvary. For Christians to keep it after Christ was crucified is to deny His sacrifice for us.

- The Seder is used, by Orthodox Jews, to encourage them to keep looking for the first coming of the Messiah. We, as Christians (if we are genuine Christians), have the Messiah and worship Him. We are not looking for His first coming, but for His second. The Seder is not held in honor of Christ’s second coming.

- The Seder is an attempt to rejoice at the “deliverance from Egyptian bondage”; it is also trying to cover over the fact that the service is actually a mournful acknowledgement that the Messiah, promised all through the Old Testament, has not yet come to save His people.

- The Passover Seder had not reached its current form at the time of Jesus. It was substantially shaped in later centuries under the direction of rabbinic thought.

Some think that part of it was devised by Rav Nachman (mentioned in *Pesachim 116a*). But there is a dispute as to which Rav Nachman the Talmud was referring to. According to some commentators, this was Rav Nachman bar Yaakov (around A.D. 280); others maintain this was Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak (A.D. 360).

However, there is no manuscript of a *Seder Haggadah* (an elaborate set of commentaries or explanations regarding how to perform a Passover service) which is earlier than the tenth century A.D. (*Siddur Rav Saadya Gaon*). Nearly a thousand years exists between the time of Jesus and the earliest extant text. The *Passover Haggadah* has never been standardized, but has always been shaped and reshaped by circumstances and time. The ritual has been extraordinarily versatile, especially since the tenth century A.D.; therefore, the claim, that any Seder ritual now in existence is the same as the Lord’s Supper meal, as presented by Jesus, is both anachronistic and historically inaccurate.

- The Lord’s Supper was not a Passover meal! It occurred prior to the Passover that year.

- Jesus may have eaten a meal before Passover, but it did not look or sound just like today's Seder. Using modern *haggadahs* (the texts for Passover) in order to help us understand the Lord's Supper is contrary to all that Christ taught us!

- Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to be observed thereafter as a memorial of His death on Calvary. ("Take eat, this is My body; this is My blood"). In stark contrast, the Seder totally ignores the death of Christ and the Lord's Supper; and, in its place, it presents a memorial of the departure from ancient Egypt in the time of Moses.

- Jesus also instituted the foot-washing service as a special ordinance of humility, which He three times commanded us to observe. This service is also entirely omitted by the Jewish service. In its place, they ceremonially wash their hands partway through their Seder.

- Should we follow the instructions of Christ for this memorial service or should we follow the traditions of the Jews?

- Modern day celebrations of the Seder and Passover are a combination of rabbinic traditions keyed to the Exodus story and based on the belief that the Messiah has not come to earth. To this day, more traditional innovations are regularly added to the *Haggadah* (the book used for the Seder).

- The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus with the words, "the blood of the new covenant." He commanded, "Do this in remembrance of Me." What is it that we are to remember? Not a Jewish traditional ritual devised centuries after the death of Christ. We are to remember the shedding of Christ's blood on Calvary, to save our souls, so we can live with Him forever in heaven. The service Christ gave us is not a continuation of the Passover; it is the replacement of the Passover.

- We are told that we should celebrate the Seder once each year, in order to make friends with the Jews. Should we celebrate the mass every so often—or even once—in order to make friends with Roman Catholics? To do so would be a denial of our faith. Why? Because the basic teachings involved in the mass includes bringing Christ down from heaven into the bread, so the priest can eat Him. Why would we participate in the Seder, which is done because the Messiah has not yet come to earth the first time?

- On the night in which Christ was betrayed, our Saviour gave His disciples a new service that found its fulfillment in Him. We are not to return to Judaism. If you participate in a Seder, you will, indeed, be accepting something new: the teaching that Christ was never born, lived, and died for you.

- It makes no more sense for Christians to gather around a Passover Seder than it does to gather around another sacrificial lamb. (A roasted lamb is eaten at some Seders, but not at others.) The Lamb of God, His own Son, has been slain, once and for all. We are not to offer another sacrifice. The final Sacrifice was offered

on Calvary. We now celebrate only that Lamb's own feast as instituted and commanded by Him.

- It has been said that, by keeping a Seder, we understand the Lord's Supper better. That is not true; for the Seder has nothing to do with the Lord's Supper.

- It has been said that, by keeping a Seder, we will understand and love Jesus more. That is not true either; for we are, instead, filling our minds with false ideas about Jesus and His plan and work to save us.

- It has been said that, by keeping a Seder, we reach out and build bridges with the Jewish community. But a "Christian" Seder would be offensive to a faithful Jew. Many Jews find Christian use of the Seder, during Holy Week, offensive. It is just one more example of taking a distinctively Jewish observance and superimposing a Christian meaning on it.

- We do not strengthen our faith by indulging in worldly activities or by practicing rituals of non-Christians. Should we participate in an African witch doctor ritual, in order to draw closer to its adherents? Do we bow to the ground in a Muslim mosque and pray to Allah, in order to become better acquainted with the followers of Muhammad? Communication with any group of people is rarely improved by misappropriating their beloved traditions. Those Christians who take part in a Seder may do so with commendable intentions. But the inherent problems of the practice result in more harm than good.

- The Lord's Supper took the place of the Passover. For example, the Lord's Supper had no bitter herbs and lamb.

- Should a Christian drink wine? Should he eat a portion of a lamb?

- Is he not denying his Biblical faith when he drinks wine (Prov. 20:1; Isa. 28:7; Hab. 2:15; Prov. 23:20-21, 29-30, 31-32)?

- Is he not denying His Lord when he returns to pre-Calvary living and partakes of the sacrificial lamb?

- The entire Seder is concerned with the Passover at the time of the departure from Egypt; the looking forward for Elijah the prophet who will announce the Messiah, when he comes to earth to redeem his people; and the drinking of wine at various times throughout the meal.

Let us now briefly survey key portions of the Seder service. You will find that there is nothing here that should attract you to want to attend one! (A more complete presentation of terms and activities will be found in the companion tract, "The Seder - a Denial of Christ.")

Please know that there are variations of this service. In some Seders, only part of a cup is drunk each time. In others, Christian concepts are partially interwoven.

- Traditionally, a place at the Seder table is left empty, with an untouched cup of wine; this symbolizes

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W the expectation of the coming of Elijah the prophet as
M the forerunner of the Messiah (Mal. 4:5). A rabbinical
1 requirement is that “there should be a full place setting
6 at the head of the table or a separate small table in a
0 prominent place, with a full place setting for Elijah the
5 Prophet.”

- Participation in the Seder requires drinking four cups of wine. Is this something you should be doing? The kosher way of doing this requires that this be fermented wine. It must not be grape juice.

- The Seder begins with the lighting of the candles, to express our faith that the Messiah (Jews have waited for since the time of the Exodus Passover) will someday come to redeem Israel.

Here is the traditional Hebrew blessing for the lighting of the candles:

Barúch atáh Ádonai Elohéinu, Mélech ha-olám, ashér kidshánu be'mitzvo-táv, ve'tziváanu le'hadlíq ner shél yom tóv.

“Blessed are you O Lord our God, ruler of the universe, who hallows our lives with traditions and bids us kindle the festival light.”

- The “First Cup” of wine (“the Cup of Sanctification and Freedom from the Egyptians”) is drunk.

- This is followed by the ceremonial hand washing, showing that we have forsaken all other beliefs except the worship of the pre-Christian God.

- The *Karpas*, which are green vegetables (usually parsley) is eaten. The leader says: “This vegetable, called *Karpas*, represents life, created and sustained by the Lord our God.” (It is parsley that is our life, not Christ.)

- Next comes the Breaking of Bread: The *Matzah*. “On the leader’s table there should be three *matzot* on a plate covered with a napkin. If available, a special *Matzah* bag (*matzah tosh*) may be used. For a public service, each person participating may also have the three *Matzot* on a plate covered, or the designated leader at each table may have the *Matzot*.” At various times in the Seder, another *Matzot* will be broken. The breaking of the *Matzot* symbolizes our hope that the Messiah will someday come, break from us the yoke of the wicked, and set up His kingdom on earth.

- The Passover story is then told. This includes a recounting of each of the ten plagues, the Passover, and the crossing of the Red Sea.

- This is followed by the “Telling of the Story: *Dayeinu* (It Would Have Been Enough).” “This is a traditional responsive reading that follows the telling of the Exodus story. *Dayeinu* is pronounced Die-YEAH-nu, and means ‘It would have been enough.’” *None of the following represents our Christian faith or beliefs! We want more than merely to get out of Egypt!*

Leader: “God has shown us so many acts of kindness and grace. For each one, we say *Dayeinu!* If only the Lord God had taken us out of Egypt—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “If only the Lord God had taken us out of

Egypt and not passed judgment on the Egyptians—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “If only the Lord God had passed judgment on the Egyptians and not parted the sea for us—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “If only the Lord God had parted the sea for us and not taken care of us and fed us manna in the desert for 40 years—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “If only the Lord God had taken care of us and fed us manna in the desert for 40 years and not given us the Sabbath rest—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “If only the Lord God had given us the Sabbath rest and not brought us to Mount Sinai and given us the Torah—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “If only the Lord God had brought us to Mount Sinai and given us the Torah and not brought us into the land of Israel—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

Leader: “For these, alone and together, we say—.”

People: “*Dayeinu!*”

- Next comes the drinking of the second cup of wine: The “Second Cup”: “the Cup of Deliverance.” Leader: “He has brought us forth from bondage to freedom.”

- Next comes “The Meal.” Here begins the actual meal. It is traditionally preceded first by another ceremonial hand washing, followed by the symbolic eating of herbs.

- The *Maror*, or bitter herb, is traditionally horseradish root. Use the type that is made with grated roots. To be effective as a symbol, however, it needs to have a little “edge” to it, even to the point of bringing tears. Perhaps warn people that this herb is very “hot.” Sometimes a second bitter herb is used in making the *Hillel* sandwich, usually romaine lettuce. In anticipation of someone getting too much *Maror*, it is wise to have a small glass of water, at each place setting, or a few extra glasses and a pitcher of water at the table.

Leader: “As we are reminded of the bitterness of our slavery, so too are we reminded of the hope that we have in our Lord. We will now begin to make the *Hillel* sandwich by placing a small amount of *Maror* on a piece of *Matzah*.”

Leader: “The *Charoset* is a sweet mixture of apples, honey, and nuts. It symbolizes the mixture of clay and straw that the Israelites used to make bricks for the cities of Pharaoh.”

- The leader takes the *Matzah* and *Maror* and dips it into the *Charoset*. If this is a public service, the leader at each table or group should also lead this action. If the *Charoset* is very thick, it may have to be spooned onto the *Matzah* after a symbolic dip. The remaining piece of *Matzah* is used to make a “sandwich” of the *Maror* and *Charoset*.

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Leader: "In the days of the Jerusalem temple, Rabbi Hillel ate a sandwich of the *Pesach*, the Passover lamb, with bitter herbs and *Matzah*."

Leader: "We eat the *Hillel* sandwich."

- The "Third Cup": the "Cup of Redemption" is drunk.

- The leader fills his third cup of wine and replaces it on the table.

Leader: "This cup is for Elijah the Prophet. Elijah did not see death but was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire. It has been the hope of God's people that Elijah would come at Passover, to announce the coming of the Messiah, the son of David."

- The leader places an empty chair at a table setting, usually to the right of the Leader, to symbolize the hope of Elijah; he then places the filled third cup of wine at Elijah's place.

Leader: "We will now open the door to welcome Elijah to the Passover."

- A child opens a door. (No one, of course, enters.)

Leader: "It is now time to reveal that which has been hidden. We will find the *Afikomen*, so that we may conclude our meal. The *Afikomen* has traditionally symbolized hope for the future, a symbol of redemption, as God again acts in history to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isa. 61:1-2, quoted).

People: "I am the Lord; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Ex. 6:6).

- If the leader has hidden the *Afikomen*, the children now search and find it and return it to the leader for a prize. If the children have hidden it, the leader gives them a gift for its return. If time is short, or if very small children are participating, the leader or others, even the older children, can give clues to the younger children about where to find the *Afikomen*, especially if more than one piece has been hidden. This serves, in its own way, to symbolize the role of parents and the community in leading children to an understanding of the hope and future that they will find in being God's people. After the children have received their prizes, the leader holds a piece of the *Afikomen* in front of him in his left hand.

Leader: "We will now fill the third cup."

- The people refill their cups with wine. (By now, some may be getting a little addled; all are feeling very cheery.)

Leader: "Let us all take a piece of the unleavened bread."

- Everyone takes a piece of the broken *Matzah*.

- All eat the bread. When finished, the people all hold the third cup in their hand. The leader holds up the third cup for all to see.

- All drink the cup. This is followed by a song of praise because the Messiah will someday come.

- The "Fourth Cup": the "Cup of Thanksgiving and Hope."

Leader: "Our Seder is now complete."

People: "I am the Lord; I will take you as my people and I will be your God" (Ex. 6:7).

- The leader fills the fourth cup and signals the participants to refill their cups. *Do not drink yet*. The leader raises his glass in front of the people, and all the people also raise their glasses.

Leader: "We raise our glasses a fourth time in Thanksgiving that Messiah will come."

- All lower their glasses for the prayer.

Leader: "We drink the fourth cup and give thanks!"

- All raise their glasses again and then drink the fourth cup of fermented wine.

Leader: "The traditional conclusion of the Seder is a hope for the future, expressed by Jews throughout history: " 'Next year in Jerusalem.' "

People: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

- The leader extinguishes the Passover candles. If this is a public service, the leader at each table or group should extinguish the candles on their table.

Conclusion:

There seems to be a tendency, in our time, to crave something new and different; this is indeed bordering on the exotic which can be experimented with or indulged.

Along with this, there is a concern to draw closer to the other religions and show them our friendliness, by adopting more of their traditional customs.

My friend, we should be satisfied with the vast abundance of light which we have in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy! Those who forsake the Bible for other theories, inventions, and traditions, only weaken their faith. In their search for additional novelties, they are more likely to later leave God's Word entirely and be lost.

Checking on this, I discovered a complete *New York Times* article, with color pictures of President Obama and his party drinking wine. They were also eating gefilte fish and kosher meat balls, "substitute schmaltz for vegetable oil," and "rendering chicken fat—better known as schmaltz"—for just the right matzo ball flavor" at the Seder. Starting in 2010, it is now a yearly event at the White House. In order to see the article and pictures, go to nytimes.com, and search for the Seder article, dated March 27, 2010.

— Vance Ferrell