

The Seder - a Denial of Christ

The Passover Service ended at the death of Christ. But Jews, denying Christ as their Saviour, have continued celebrating it down to the present time. After the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the Jewish people switched to a family Passover, held in the home—which eventually acquired the name, “seder.”

As we will learn below, in the middle of the meal, the father of the home tells everyone that, since there is no sacrifice of a lamb at the Temple anymore (since there is no Temple now in Jerusalem), the family has “no sacrifice to make them righteous.”

Thus, everyone who participates in the seder has rejected the Great Sacrifice—the death of Christ on Calvary. For this reason, no genuine Christian should take part in a seder, with its wine drinking and ceremonial repudiation of Christ as our Sacrifice and Mediator.

In the place of the Passover meal, Christ instituted the Lord’s Supper just before His sacrificial death on our behalf. That is the only commemorative meal we are to attend.

While the Jewish seder looks forward to the first arrival of their messiah, the Lord’s Supper looks back to the first advent of the Christian Messiah.

Surprisingly, some Seventh-day Adventist Churches are beginning to have complete seder services at their churches at Passover time (in April this year)—at about the same time that Orthodox Jews will be holding their seders.

In view of this fact, you may want to know more about this ceremonial meal which was devised by Jewish rabbis over a period of centuries after A.D. 70, to help comfort their flocks and encourage them to keep hoping that the promised Messiah would one day appear. As we will learn below, one of their predictions is that He will arrive in the evening while they are sitting at the table during one of their seders.

The **Passover Seder** (or *say-der*) (the Hebrew word literally means “order” or “arrangement”) is a special Jewish ritual which takes place on the first evening of the Jewish holiday of Passover (the 15th day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar) in the nation of Israel, and on the first and second evenings of Passover (the 15th and 16th days of Nisan) among Orthodox Jews outside of Israel (in the Jewish diaspora).

Reading from the Haggadah—At a special meal, portions of the Haggadah are read and explained to all who are present, about how the Jews were enslaved in Egypt and then left one night.

While the *Haggadah* is read, those at the table drink Four Cups of Wine, eat the matzo, and other symbolic foods placed on the Passover Seder Plate.

The Mitzvah—The seder is an integral aspect of Jewish faith and identity; it is part of their ceremonial laws, as given in the Haggadah, which is a heavily revised and changed Biblical Passover service.

It is considered a mitzvah to embellish one’s retelling of the Exodus on this night, telling many imagined details of what happened during the Exodus. Often the seder lasts into the early hours of the morning of the next day, as participants continue to learn Torah, talk about the events of the night, and sing special Passover songs included in the Haggadah.

Where held—Unlike other public holiday observances that are traditionally held in the synagogue, the seder is specifically designed to be conducted by a family at home, with or without guests. (However, the seder may also be conducted by any group of Orthodox Jewish believers.) This focus is derived from the opening words of the Torah verse which is the source for the mitzvah of retelling the Exodus from Egypt: *Vehegadeta levincha bayom hahu leymor ba’avur zeh asah Adonay li betzaysi miMitzrayim* - “And you shall tell it to your son on that day, saying ‘Because of this God did for me when He took me out of Egypt’ ” (Exodus 13:8).

The words and rituals of the seder are a teaching device for the transmission of the Jewish faith (as revised during the Dark Ages since Christ) from parent to child and from one generation to the next.

What happens during a seder?

Removing the leaven—Before the beginning of the Passover, all leaven must be removed from the Jewish home. First, the house is cleaned from top to bottom; and anything containing leaven is removed. Then, the evening before the Passover, the father of the house takes the traditional cleaning implements: a feather, a wooden spoon, and a bag, and searches the house for any specks of leaven which might have been missed. He may spend an hour or two looking in all the drawers, etc.

Setting the table—The table set for the beginning of the Passover Seder includes the Passover Seder Plate (front center), saltwater, three *shmurah matzo* (rear center), and two or more bottles of kosher wine. (As we will learn below, everyone, including the smallest child, drinks quite a bit of it.) A Hebrew language *Haggadah* sits beside each place setting.

Washing hands—Once the leaven is removed, the family sits around the table and ceremonially washes their hands with a special laver and towel.

Lighting the candles—Once the house and the participants are ceremonially clean, the Passover Seder can begin. The woman of the house asks God to bless the food. Then she lights the Passover candles.

Haggadah—As the lengthy meal begins and continues, portions from the Jewish *Haggadah* are read.

The first cup of wine—The seder begins with a blessing recited over the first of four cups of wine: “Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast created the fruit of the vine.”

The second cup of wine—The second cup of wine is drunk next. It is to remind the group of the Ten Plagues and the suffering of the Egyptians. Each of the Ten Plagues is recited; and, as each one is mentioned, a drop of wine is spilled on the plate by each person present.

Afikomen—A very curious ceremonial tradition occurs next. At the table is a bag with three compartments and three pieces of *motza*. The middle piece of *motza* is taken out, broken, and half is put back into the bag. The other half is wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden, to be taken out later, after the meal.

(*Matzo*—also *matzoh*, *matzah*, *matza*, *motza*— is a Jewish food item made of plain flour and water, which is not allowed to ferment or rise before it is baked. The result is a flat, crispy, cracker-like bread, with no leaven in it.)

The seder plate—Over the centuries, the rabbis devised a series of object lessons to keep the attention of the little ones during the Passover Seder. These items are tasted by each person, as each is instructed to feel as if they themselves had taken part in the flight from Egypt.

Here they are:

- **Karpas (greens)**—The first item taken is the *karpas*, or greens (usually parsley), which is a symbol of life. The parsley is dipped in saltwater, a symbol of tears, and eaten, to remind us that life for our Jewish ancestors was immersed in tears.

- **Beitzah (egg)**—A roasted egg is on the seder plate, to bring to mind the roasted daily temple sacrifice that no longer can be offered because the Temple no longer stands. In the very midst of the Passover Seder, the Jewish people are reminded, by the one leading out at the seder, that they have no sacrifice to make them righteous before God.

That is a significant admission! It also means that everyone who takes part in the seder agrees that he has no sacrifice or mediator between him and God. We know that, after the death of Christ, the earthly Passover no longer has any significance. Therefore, to take part in the seder is to deny Christ our Lord.

- **Maror (bitter herb)**—*Maror* is usually ground horseradish; and enough is eaten (with *Motza*) to bring a tear to the eyes. It is to remind those at the table of the bitterness of slavery, which their Jewish ancestors experienced in Egypt.

- **Charoset**—*Charoset* is a sweet mixture of chopped

apples, chopped nuts, honey, cinnamon, and a little *Manischewitz* grape wine (kosher for Passover) just for color! This sweet, pasty, brown mixture is symbolic of the mortar that our Jewish ancestors used to build bricks in the land of Egypt. The question is asked, Why do we remember an experience so bitter with something so sweet? The leader at the table then explains that the rabbis say it is to remind all Jews that the promised Jewish Messiah is yet to appear.

Shankbone of the lamb—In every Jewish home, on every seder plate, is a bare shankbone of a lamb, stripped of meat. That is to remind those at the table of the blood of the lamb which was placed on the doorpost and lintel of the home.

The meal—Next comes the meal: steaming hot chicken soup with huge, fluffy *motza* balls; other *motza*, in the form of crackers; slices of pungent, homemade *gefilte* fish with just-ground make-you-cry horseradish; more *motza*; chopped liver (with lots of schmaltz and crunchy fried onions) on a bed of lettuce; more *motza*; enough delectable green salad to feed a colony of hungry rabbits; more *motza*; more crispy fried onions on the side; more *motza*—and that was just the appetizer!

Next comes the meal! Tender, sweet brisket with cabbage; more *motza*; homemade flanken; stewed chicken, roasted chicken, broiled chicken, boiled chicken, sautéed chicken, baked chicken; more *motza*; a whole roasted turkey; more *motza*; fresh-cut green beans with onions; more *motza*; carrot and prune *tzimmes*; more *motza*; sweet potato and raisin *tzimmes*; more *motza*; homemade mashed potatoes swimming in butter; more *motza*—and on it goes! Remember that this meal lasts for hours; and the celebration often continues until early the next morning.

(*Schmaltz* or *schmalz* is rendered chicken or goose fat used for frying or as a spread on bread. *Schmaltz*, rendered from a kosher-slaughtered chicken or goose, is popular in Jewish cuisine; it was used by Northwestern and Eastern European Jews who were forbidden, by dietary laws, to fry their meats in butter or lard, the common forms of cooking fat in Europe.)

(*Tzimmes* or *tsimmes* is a traditional Jewish casserole. It is a sweet dish, a combination of fruit, meat, and vegetables cooked slowly over very low heat, flavored with honey and sometimes cinnamon.)

The Search for the afikomen—After the meal is finished, and most are too stuffed to get up from the table, the leader of the seder lets the children loose to hunt for the *afikomen*, which was wrapped in a napkin and hidden somewhere in the house. The home is in a ruckus as everyone rushes around to be the first to find the *afikomen* and claim the prize (usually about \$5.00); and Grandpa redeems the *afikomen* from the lucky locator. Once the leader has retrieved the *afikomen*, he breaks it up into pieces and distributes a small piece to everyone seated around the table. Jewish people don't really understand either the origin or meaning of this

ceremonial tradition, but they happily enjoy it. However, it is widely believed that these pieces of Afikomen bring a good, long life to those who eat them.

Elijah's cup—A place setting at the table remains empty for Elijah the prophet, the honored guest at every Passover table. The Jewish people expect Elijah to come during the Passover Seder and announce the coming of the Messiah (Malachi 4:5). So a place is set, a cup is filled with wine, and hearts are expectant for Elijah to come and announce the good news that the Messiah has come to deliver them, by conquering their enemies.

At the end of the seder meal, a child is sent to the door to open it and see if Elijah is there. Every year, the child returns, disappointed; and the wine is poured out without being touched.

Third Cup—With everyone once again settled at the table, the meal is now officially ended; it is now time to drink the third cup of wine. This is the cup; everyone is reminded by the leader that, although the Messiah did not come this time, He will soon come and redeem them.

Fourth Cup—As if that is not enough wine, it is now time for the fourth cup: the *Cup of Hallel*. The word, *hallel*, in Hebrew means “praise.” After four cups of wine inside every man, woman, and child at the table, they must surely feel in a happy mood!

What is the origin of the Haggadah?—Where did this *Haggadah* come from, which is read to everyone in attendance at the seder? The *Haggadah*, which includes the order of the Passover Seder, is very important in the home of every Orthodox Jew. This is because it contains a promise that the Messiah is soon to come. It is this promise that the faithful rely on. It also helps them

resist suggestions, by Christians, that they should accept Christ as their Saviour. —For has not the *Haggadah* promised them a future Messiah?

According to Jewish tradition, the *Haggadah* was compiled during the Mishnaic and Talmudic periods; but the exact time is not known.

The *Haggadah* could not have been written earlier than the time of Rabbi Yehudah bar Elaay (around 170 B.C.), who is the latest tanna (expert) to be quoted in the *Haggadah*. According to most Talmudic commentaries, Rav and Shmuel argued about the compilation of the *Haggadah*; and hence it was not completed by that time.

However the Malbim, along with a minority of Jewish rabbis, believed that Rav and Shmuel were not arguing about its compilation, but its interpretation; and hence it was completed by then. According to this explanation, the *Haggadah* was written during the lifetime of Rav Yehudah haNasi, the compiler of the Mishna. The Malbim theorizes that the *Haggadah* was written by Rav Yehudah haNasi himself. —We will stay out of that controversy!

Nevertheless all commentators agree that it was completed by the time of 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), while others maintain this was Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak (A.D. 360).

Now you know the story behind the seder; so you will be prepared when the leaders at your local church want to have a seder in the spring of the year. —*vf*

