

## THE COMPASS

# The Truth About Passover

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Every year, the Jewish people throw a very special kind of party called Passover — and we're going to experience a little bit of it together right now.

They didn't dream this up themselves; it's actually God's idea.

3700 years ago the Jews were all slaves in Egypt.

They were slaves for a long time, which was bad enough, but then a new Egyptian king, or Pharaoh, came along, and made things even worse.

**Exodus 1:11-14** says the new Pharaoh "made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields."

It says "the Egyptians used them ruthlessly."

But God in his mercy sent the Jews a leader, named Moses.

You've probably heard this part of the story.

Under orders from God, Moses asked Pharaoh to let the people go.

Initially Moses just wanted them to go on a brief retreat, but Pharaoh said no.

Nine times Moses went to Pharaoh,

Pharaoh kept saying yes and then changing his mind.

Each time, God demonstrated that he was serious by unleashing some kind of plague on the Egyptians:

- the rivers turned to blood,
- the land was overrun by frogs and lice and flies,
- the livestock got sick and died,
- the people suffered boils,
- there was a massive hailstorm that ruined the crops,
- there were swarms of locusts that ate everything that the hail hadn't destroyed,
- the sky went dark —

but in every case, the plagues only touched the Egyptians, the Israelites were left completely intact.

Even when the plague of darkness came, it went pitch black in and around the

Egyptian homes, they couldn't even get a candle to light

they were literally trapped in their homes for 3 solid days, yet it stayed light in and around the Israelite slave dwellings.

Until finally God had had enough.

And he decided not just to get the Israelites out to the desert for a few days of religious ceremonies, but to spring them completely, and to do it in such a way that the people would remember forever what God had done for them, because it would help them to be reminded to rely on God, to maintain their relationship with God, to keep the channels open in their communication with God.

Here's how it happened:

God told Moses, Go warn Pharaoh one more time, and this time explain to him that if he doesn't let you go,

I'm going to manipulate events so that he will actually DRIVE you out of Egypt; he will be so horrified by what has happened to him and his people that he will be *eager* to get rid of you:

I'm going to allow an angel of death into Egypt for one night and give him the freedom to destroy the firstborn son of every family.

But when Moses brought this story to Pharaoh, he blew him off.  
Pharaoh said, This guy is a nut case.

So God set in motion the deliverance of His people  
Here is what God told them to do — we could read these instructions in **Exodus 12**,  
but I'll condense it for you—

On the 10th day of the month, choose a perfect male lamb from your flock, no blemishes, no disabilities, set it aside and watch it for 4 days to make sure it doesn't have a single thing wrong with it.

Then, at sundown on the 14th day, which by the way is a full moon, you slaughter the lamb, slaughter it, but be sure you don't break any of its bones.

Then take a branch of hyssop — this was a thistle kind of plant that was perfect for sprinkling water or other liquids — and God told them to use the hyssop  
sprinkle the blood of that lamb on the sides and tops of the door frames of their homes, their slave quarters.

Then roast the lamb and eat it.

And for a vegetable, He said, choose something that tastes bitter.

And then God told them in **Exodus 12:11**: “Eat with your traveling clothes already on.  
And eat it fast.”

In other words, it's moving day.

Deliverance is coming.

You're gonna go free.

Fill your tank full. You're gonna make tracks.

And also one more thing, he said:

While you wait for deliverance, make some bread for the trip.

The death angel struck at midnight.

He went into every home in Egypt and slaughtered the firstborn son.

But each time the angel of death came to house with blood on the doorframe,

God stopped him — so he would pass over the Jewish homes — so that not a single Jewish family was visited.

At midnight on the night of the full moon, after a big meal of roast lamb,

600,000 Jewish families were making bread...

And the cry went up from house to house among the Jewish slaves:

Time to go!

But the Israelites were in the middle of baking their bread.

They had their dough in the kneading troughs, they were kneading the dough, but they hadn't added the yeast yet — so the Bible says they took the kneading troughs

with the dough still in them, and wrapped the troughs with clothing and slung them over their shoulders and hit the road.

They were *free*, by God's hand.

When they got to a place where they could finish baking, the bread came out flat.

No leavening to make it puffy. No yeast to make the bread rise.

God said That's a good reminder.

Do this every year.

In fact, let's change the calendar.

This will be the first month of the Jewish year.

Since the death angel passed over, we'll call it Passover.

Passover will start on the night of the full moon in the first month.

Take a perfect lamb, examine it for 4 days, then on the evening of the full moon, slaughter it, roast it, serve a big meal, celebrate your freedom — but eat some bitter herbs along with it, to remind yourself of how bitter your slavery was.

And then for a week, no leaven. Nothing with yeast in it.

Flat bread only — to remind yourself of your flight from Egypt, how far God has brought you.

Down through the centuries, the Jewish people have observed the ritual of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as God prescribed it.

Jews worldwide were celebrating the Feast of Unleavened Bread this past Monday evening.

In fact, you can read the entire detailed description of God's instructions for the Feast in Exodus 12.

He even specifies how to answer the children of the family when they ask

"What does this ceremony mean...?"

And down through the centuries, Jewish families have set aside a special time during the Passover ceremony for a child to ask 4 specific questions, which give the father of the household an opportunity to share the entire story of the first Passover and what it means to the Jewish people.

In fact, God specifically told the Israelites to keep Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as a "lasting ordinance" in every generation without fail, and to make sure that no generation slips through the cracks,

Jewish families will have the youngest child of the family ask the 4 questions each year at Passover.

Everyone was the youngest child at least once, and this way everyone is guaranteed to have heard the story at least once.

**[Sari recites the four questions in Hebrew, then in English.]**

The Passover supper is called the "**Seder**" —

the Hebrew word for "order" — because it happens in a certain orderly sequence.

If we are a Jewish family, the evening begins with the lighting of the candles in the traditional way by the mother of our household, while a Hebrew blessing is spoken.

**[Rebecca lights the candles. Sari speaks the blessing.]**

Then there's a cup of wine.

**[Kristina and Warner move to serve the wine.]**

It's the first of 4 cups that will be consumed during the course of the evening. The first cup is called the Kiddush Cup, or the Cup of Sanctification. With it, the father of the household offers himself and our whole family to God. In other words, we officially proclaim our intention of fulfilling the Passover ordinance as God has called us to do.

**[Sari prays in Hebrew, then David prays in English:]**

*"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."*

(Now don't drink all of your wine. Just take a sip. We're going to come back to the wine a few more times this evening so you'll need some left over.)

**[David leads us in drinking the first cup of wine.]**

Next the father of the family takes 3 loaves of unleavened bread, or matzos — we Gentiles don't normally think of this as a loaf, but when there's no yeast in your bread, this is how a loaf comes out!

It's flat, and it's marked with stripes and poked with holes from the grilling process.

The unleavened bread represents purity.

This isn't something people made up;

God specifically points this out in the book of Exodus, from the very first time He lays out the Passover ceremony.

Leaven is a symbol of sin.

Unleavened bread is a symbol of moral purity.

So the father of our household places the 3 matzos in a special cloth envelope.

**[The leader does so.]**

Then, in a little ceremony within the ceremony, our father removes the middle matzoh. He breaks it, wraps it in a separate piece of cloth, generally white linen,

**[The leader does so.]**

and then the children of our family close their eyes — close your eyes, be good little boys and girls — and Father hides the middle matzoh.

Usually he will bury it somewhere, like under the cushions of a couch.

Why? you ask? You want to know why? You'll see. Be patient. You don't have to know everything all at once.

**[The leader actually hides the matzoh somewhere in the room.]**

Next we go to the Seder plate.

Each item on the plate is called to attention and its meaning is explained.

There's a zeroah, or shank bone of a lamb, obviously a reminder of the lamb that was slaughtered as a means of saving the lives of the Jewish people.

Then there's a green vegetable, generally parsley, which is dipped in salt water, a reminder of the Red Sea experience.

**[Kristina and Warner move to serve the salt water and parsley.]**

You've probably heard the story of how, in the days that followed their deliverance, the Israelites came to the Red Sea.

They had no way to get across, and Pharaoh had gotten his head together and decided to recapture them and makes them slaves again, so his armies were closing in on them.

But God parted the Red Sea, the Israelites crossed on dry ground, then when the Egyptian army tried to follow, the walls of water collapsed and consumed them all, Pharaoh included.

So during the Passover Seder, the Jews will dip the vegetable once to symbolize the Israelites crossing of the Red Sea, then a second time to symbolize the Egyptians' crossing.

**[The people do so.]**

There's also "maror," or red horseradish, on the Seder plate;

**[Kristina and Warner move to serve the horseradish and matzos.]**

this fulfills God's mandate for the use of "bitter herbs" — which everybody takes a taste of, as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery.

First, a prayer:

**[Sari prays in Hebrew, then David prays in English:]**

*"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe,  
Who bringest forth bread from the earth."*

The horseradish is first eaten on a matzoh, representing the bitterness of slavery. But don't eat all of your matzo or your horseradish; we need some of both left over. I'll show you why in a few minutes.

**[The people do so.]**

There's also something called charoset on our Seder plate.

**[Kristina and Warner move to serve the charoset.]**

This is a sweet concoction made from apples and cinnamon and yummy things. It was not specified by God in the original Passover instructions, but it has been added to the ceremony down through the centuries as a reminder of the sweetness of redemption.

So now we mix the sweet charoset with the horseradish, and eat the rest of the matzoh.

**[The people do so.]**

Many Seder plates include a roasted egg.

This wasn't part of the original ceremony; it was added somewhere along the line, centuries ago, and different families give it different meanings.

Some say it's roasted, so it's hard, like Pharaoh's heart.

In any case, it's not eaten. It just sits there.

Now it's time for the second cup of wine.

It's called the Cup of Plagues.

Each member of the family raises the cup, and then the 10 plagues are recited.

Now if I had been scripting the Passover ceremony,  
I would have made this a victory salute.

My natural reaction to the Passover story is,

*Haha, those Egyptians got what they deserved!*

But that's not the heart of God, that's not the heart of the Jewish people, and it's not the spirit of Passover.

With the second cup of wine, as each of the 10 plagues is recalled, each member of the family dips their little finger into the wine glass and removes a drop of wine for each plague, and they put each drop onto their plate (we can use our napkins) — as a way of mourning for the losses that the Egyptians suffered.

And the family recites this remembrance:

*“For our sake they met with suffering and death.*

*We mourn their loss and express our sorrow over their destruction.”*

Let's do so:

**[The people raise the cup, and recite the plagues — Sari speaks each line in Hebrew first, then the people respond with Doug in English:]**

- *blood*
- *frogs*
- *lice*
- *flies*
- *cattle disease*
- *boils*
- *hail*
- *locusts*
- *darkness*
- *plague of the firstborn*

**[David says:]**

*“For our sake they met with suffering and death.*

*We mourn their loss and express our sorrow over their destruction.”*

This isn't the stereotype of anger and hatred that we've come to expect. Yet this has been part of the tradition of the Jewish people for centuries. As the father of the household says,

**[David says:]**

*“Because we share with Pharaoh the sin of disobedience, and because we regard all people as God's creations, we do not rejoice over the destruction visited upon the Egyptians.”*

So we drink the rest of the Cup of Plagues.

**[Sari prays in Hebrew, then David prays in English:]**

*“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.”*

And then — with the sadness of the plagues out of the way, it's time to eat. The family enjoys a big, joyful, leisurely dinner, like we might associate with Thanksgiving or Christmas.

This is the spirit of Passover — a celebration of deliverance!

Then comes the most beautiful part of the Passover Seder: the third cup, the Cup of Redemption.

Remember the hidden matzoh, the one that Father buried?

Now it's time to find it.

The children of the family are sent searching, and until they find the buried matzoh, the Passover ceremony cannot continue.

**[The leader assigns a couple people to look for it, and presumably they find it, or we're still at church on Thursday morning.]**

When a child turns up the hidden matzoh, the father of the family is required to redeem it with silver coins.

A generation ago, the going rate was a nickel.

Today it's usually — what, a dollar?

Inflation!

**[The leader pays up.]**

Ask a Jewish family why they start with 3 loaves of unleavened bread,

why they take the middle one out,

why they break it,

why they bury it,

why they stop the entire ceremony until someone finds it,

why it has to be redeemed,

why it has to be redeemed with silver,

you never know what answer you'll get.

Every Jewish family chooses its own interpretation.

It's just for fun.

It's an old tradition.

It's a deep mystery, we can never really know.

Whatever.

Anyway, now we eat the unleavened bread, the buried matzoh that has been redeemed with silver, as the dessert to our Passover meal.

**[The middle matzo is distributed. Each person breaks off a piece and eats it.]**

And after the father of the family offers another prayer, we drink the Cup of Redemption, the symbol of salvation.

**[Sari prays in Hebrew, then David prays in English:]**

*"Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."*

**[and he and the people drink.]**

Now there's a fourth cup at the table too.

In fact, there's an empty chair that never gets sat in and a place setting that never gets used.

These are for the prophet Elijah.

An Old Testament prophecy, in Malachi 4:5, promises that the great prophet Elijah, who's been dead for centuries, will come back and announce the coming of Messiah.

So, many Jewish families prepare a place and a cup of wine for Elijah, it's called the Cup of Praise, in hopes that tonight will be the night when the prophecy is fulfilled, when Elijah comes in, takes his seat, takes a drink of wine, and announces, "The waiting is over! The Messiah has come!"

Furthermore, according to Passover tradition, a door is left open during the Seder so Elijah can come right in, and at this point in the evening, a child is sent out through the door to look and see if the prophet is here yet.

**[The leader sends someone out to do so.]**

But so far, Elijah has never shown up.

And so as not to waste a perfectly good cup of wine, we recite a short prayer —

**[Sari prays in Hebrew, then David prays in English:]**

*“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe,  
Creator of the fruit of the vine.”*

And we drink it.

**[The leader and the people do so.]**

Then we sing a hymn, and the Seder is over.

**[“God Will Make a Way,” a cappella]**

A lot of us Christians don't realize that this was the ceremony that Jesus and His disciples were conducting as they partook of what we call the Last Supper. It was a party. It was a fun evening. They looked forward to it. Spirits were high! But what the disciples didn't realize was that the entire Passover ceremony had been planned by God, thousands of years before, as a picture of Jesus and His work of redemption.

And as Jesus led His disciples through the Last Supper, He was fulfilling the promises of Passover *personally*.

Look at how He did it.

God told the Israelites to select a perfect lamb 4 days in advance and examine it, to make sure it was worthy to serve as the sacrifice.

Jesus entered Jerusalem 4 days in advance of His death — we call it the Triumphal Entry — allowed Himself to be examined over the course of those 4 days, demonstrating that He was worthy to serve as the sacrifice for sin.

What did John the Baptist say when he first saw Jesus?

**“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)**

Look at the matzoh, the unleavened bread. **[The people are encouraged to pick up actual additional matzos from their places and study them.]**

It's striped — a picture of the stripes that the whip laid across Jesus' body.

It's pierced — a picture of the stab wound that was inflicted on Him on the cross.

And it's unleavened — God Himself said to think of leavening as sin.

The unleavened bread is a picture of the purity and perfection of Jesus as the sacrifice for our sin.

Even the parts of the Passover Seder that the Jews have added themselves down through the centuries have been engineered by God to point to Jesus as the true Messiah.

The tradition of laying 3 loaves of matzoh together, hidden inside a fabric cover, then removing the middle one:

It's a picture of the Trinity:

**[the leader re-enacts it:]**



God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

All 3 start out hidden — invisible to mankind — but then the middle one, the Son, is revealed.

It comes out of hiding.

Jesus came out of heaven, He was born as a human being. He walked among us.

But then it's broken, just as Jesus was.

Then it's buried, just as Jesus was.

And then, everything comes to a stop.

The Passover Seder can't continue until someone finds the buried matzoh.

Just as the world came to a stop until Christ came out of that tomb.

And from that day on, life was possible.

When we find Jesus alive, we have hope for the future.

There are so many detailed parallels.

The hidden matzoh is redeemed with silver coins, just as Jesus was sold for silver coins.

Jews who come to trust Jesus as their Messiah look back on a lifetime of Passover celebrations and they realize that the bitter herbs of the Seder represent the bitterness of their slavery to sin.

The salt water represents the tears they shed when they realized their need of a Savior.

The sweet charoset represents the joy of being set free from sin by faith in Jesus Christ.

And look at what Jesus actually said as He conducted that last Passover Seder of His earthly life:

In Matthew 26, we read (every time we take communion),

**While they were eating**, (this is the Passover Seder)

**Jesus took bread**, (this is the unleavened bread, the matzoh)

**gave thanks** (what did He say? what prayer did He pray?)

The same prayer that Jewish fathers have been praying at this point in the Passover Seder for centuries — any practicing Jew can recite it for you — we heard it here earlier this evening — it goes like this (translated into English, of course):

*“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe,  
Who bringest forth bread from the earth.”*

and then what does the Scripture say?

**He broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”**

In other words, God is going to bring forth my body from the earth.

I'm going to be broken, I'm going to die, but I'm coming back.

He was prophesying His own resurrection.

Then Jesus comes to the Cup of Redemption, the 3rd cup of the Seder.

**Matthew 26:27** says,

**Then he took the cup, gave thanks —**

What did He say? What prayer did He pray?

Any practicing Jew can tell you.

It's the same prayer that has been prayed over the Cup of Redemption for centuries.

*“Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe,  
Creator of the fruit of the vine.”*

Jewish people had been praying this prayer, and thanking God for His provision, for hundreds of years.

But now Jesus says, I’m your provision.

**Matthew 26** goes on to say, **He offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”**

And then what?

That was the 3rd cup, the Cup of Redemption.

He should go on to the 4th cup, the Cup of Praise,  
the cup that’s waiting for Elijah, right?

But what does Jesus do instead?

He says, That’s enough. No 4th cup. It’s not needed. The job is done.

He says in **Matthew 26:29**, **“I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”**

See, Elijah had already come.

Jesus had already told them, in Matthew 11:14, that John the Baptist was the “Elijah” they had been waiting for.

He was the prophet sent by God to announce the coming of Messiah.

Jesus was saying, Don’t keep sending your children out the door to look down the street for my messenger.

He already showed up, he made his announcement, I came, I’ve done my work, you can be *free*.

Passover for centuries had framed a picture of how people could be set free.

But only Jesus perfectly fit the picture frame.

So now, in the middle of the party — in the midst of the celebration — Jesus turns a corner.

He stops and says, in essence. This has been fun. This has been great.

But there’s just one hitch.

I’m the Lamb.

I’m going to be selected — in fact, by one of you at this table — and I’m going to have to die.

I’m going to sacrifice myself for you.

There’s no one else who can do it.

It’s me.

When we receive communion, it’s more than a solemn reminder that Jesus died for us.

We’re reciting part of the Passover ceremony that God ordained as a *guarantee*, a way for Jews and Gentiles alike to know for sure, that Jesus really is the One.

He’s the Messiah.

He’s the Son of God.

He's the Answer.  
He's the Savior.  
There's no other.  
There's no substitute.  
Nobody else fills the bill so precisely, so perfectly.