

# Introduction to a Christian Seder Recovering Passover for Christians

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## The Festival of Passover

Passover is the oldest and most important religious festival in Judaism, commemorating God's deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and his creation of the Israelite people. Passover is actually composed of two festivals, **The Feast of Unleavened Bread** and **Passover** (which is sometimes used to refer to the single day and sometimes to the entire span of both festivals).

The festival of **Passover**, known as **Pesach**, begins at sunset on the 14th of Nisan (usually in March or April) and marks the beginning of a seven day celebration that includes the Feast of Unleavened Bread. **-1-** The focal point of Passover is a communal meal, called the **Seder** (which means "order," because of the fixed order of service), which is a time of rejoicing and celebration at the deliverance for the Hebrews that God accomplished in the exodus. Sometimes the meals during the entire period of Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread are referred to as Seder meals, called the first Seder, the Second Seder, etc., although usually only the first two nights are considered Seder meals.

Unlike the most Holy days of Christianity that are observed in Church, since the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in AD 70 Passover has been celebrated in the home with family and friends as they eat a meal together. It is customary to invite guests to share the Seder meal, especially

newcomers to the community. The actual Seder meal in most Jewish homes is an elaborate feast, with food, games for the children, and plenty of time to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt. It is not unusual for a Seder to last three to four hours.

The Seder involves everyone present since they all have a **Haggadah** (Heb: "telling," the printed order of service, reading, and songs) and are called to share in reading and singing the story. While the father or grandfather is usually the leader of the service, others have roles as well. The mother of the home lights the festival candles that signal the beginning of Passover, the youngest child asks the four questions, the children help eliminate all **Chametz**, leaven, from the house, search for the hidden **Afikomen** (a symbolic piece of **Matzah**, unleavened bread) and open the door for Elijah, the parents or the grandparents tell the story of the exodus, and various others are designated to read or lead certain portions of the service.

Passover is really more than a festival. It is an elaborate teaching experience, especially for the children, intended to call people to their identity as the People of God. By using all of the senses, the Passover Seder tells the story of God's grace in history and calls the participants to experience and share in the story as their own story. Passover becomes more than simply a service or a time; it becomes a way to confess faith in the One who has acted in history, and for Jews expresses the hope that He will continue to act in bringing deliverance to all people everywhere.

**The Feast of Unleavened Bread** (Heb: *matsoth*; transliterated in various ways as Matzot, Mazzot for the plural form, or Matzoh, Matzah for the singular, or simply Matzo) is a seven day festival that is really a part of and continuation of the Passover celebration. It actually begins on the 15th of Nisan in the Jewish calendar and lasts until the 21st, although as early as Josephus in the 1st century BC the entire festival was counted as eight days (*Antiquities*, 2:15:1). In preparation for Passover, all *chametz* or leavened food (food with yeast) is removed from the house and cannot be eaten during the seven days of the Festival. The unleavened bread symbolizes the haste with which the Israelites had to flee from Egypt. Since they did not

have time for the bread to rise in order to have provisions for the journey, they had to bake it without yeast (Ex 12:11, Deut 16:3).

The second night of Passover (the **Second Seder**) is celebrated as the **First Day of the Omer** (an omer is a sheaf of barley), since on this night an omer was brought to the Temple as an offering. This reflects the likely origin of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as an agricultural celebration that the Israelites adapted from the surrounding Canaanites marking the beginning of Spring barley harvest. Some elements of the Passover itself may have had origins in the pastoral culture of the Middle East in observing the Spring birthing of livestock. Throughout history, Jews and Christians alike have adopted and transformed secular and pagan celebrations and used them to express their own faith confessions.

However, the origins of the festivals are really immaterial to their celebration within the community of Faith. The fact that in Scripture the two festivals are always linked as a memorial to the exodus suggests that whatever the origin, the Israelites combined the festivals very early in their history. The origins are important to students of Scripture and history, but do not really impact the festival as a celebration of God and faith.

The **First Day of the Omer** begins the 49 day countdown (7 weeks of 7 days) to the celebration of **Shavuot**, known in the Old Testament as the **Feast of Weeks** or in Christian Tradition as **Pentecost** (50 days, counting from the first night of Passover). The period between the two festivals is known as the **Days of the Omer**, and serves to tie the two festivals together into a season of sacred time.

While originally an agricultural festival celebrating the beginning of the wheat harvest, in Jewish tradition Shavuot has come to be celebrated as a commemoration of the giving of the Torah at Sinai, a service of thanksgiving for the commandments and instructions by which the Israelites were to live out in practical ways the implications of being the people of God. By using the Days of the Omer to link Passover and Shavuot, they made obvious the theological link between the grace of God in the exodus and the

call to faithful response and obedience represented in God's gift of the Torah.

The last day of Passover is often treated like a Sabbath, with special prayers and no work done.

## **Christian Passover**

There has been increasing interest among Christians in this ancient festival. There are various reasons for this renewed interest: an increasing sensitivity to cultural and societal problems and a corresponding desire to learn about others; a renewed awareness of the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures as Christian Scripture; a desire or even a need in our modern world to recover a sense of the sacred through liturgy and sacrament; the willingness to find new and innovative ways to worship; and perhaps even the enjoyment that comes from acknowledging the continuity with a 3,000 year old community of faith.

As a result, there has been an explosion of interest in adapting the Passover festival to Christianity. Various organizations, such as "Jews for Jesus," have long promoted Christian Passover services as a means for Jews to retain their cultural heritage while confessing Christian faith. They have also used the Christian Passover as a means to communicate to Christians the Jewish religious heritage that they value.

Our goal here in presenting a Christian adaptation of Passover is to retain the theological, confessional, and educational dimensions of the service. That is, it is presented as a way for people of Christian Faith to express that faith in the context of a gathered community by participating symbolically in the story of salvation. It is presented very deliberately and purposefully as a Christian service, with no apologies. Yet, there has also been a deliberate attempt to preserve the spirit of the Jewish traditions and experience in the service, and to respect the faith journey of Israelites and Jews across the centuries. For that reason, apart from the fact that it will likely be Christians who are participating in the service, the thoroughly Christian dimension will come at the end of the service. After all, that is really how God chose to work in history: to the Jew first, and then also to the rest of us!

## Explanation of Terms and Symbols

**afikoman:** Greek, "dessert," in ancient times the last morsel of the paschal lamb, eaten at the end of the Passover meal. In modern times, it is represented by half of the middle **Matzah** in the ceremonial Seder dish, which, when broken off, is hidden until the end of the meal. Adapted from some Jewish traditions, it also symbolizes the Messiah who will come to restore all things. In Christian Seders, this becomes the symbol of Jesus the Messiah (Christ), and is used as the bread of the Eucharist.

**beitzah:** "roasted egg," in the Seder meal represents the burnt offerings brought to the Temple during festivals in ancient days; it also symbolizes the cycle of life, the endurance of God's people and the hope for a future. Traditionally, a brown egg is used on the Seder plate, roasted in an oven until it turns dark. Vegetarians often use an avocado seed as a substitute for the egg on the Seder plate. While hard boiled eggs are often served as the first course of the Seder meal, like the **zeroah** the *beitzah* is not eaten since sacrifices are no longer offered.

**chametz:** "leaven" or "yeast," the ingredient in bread that ferments and makes the bread "rise" by producing bubbles of gas in the dough. Its absence in Passover carries a dual symbolism. First, the use of unleavened bread symbolizes the haste with which the Israelites had to flee Egypt; second, it is often a symbol of corruption and sin, and so its removal symbolizes the freedom from sin that God brings.

**charoet:** derived from the Hebrew word for "clay," a mixture of apples, nuts, cinnamon, honey, and wine which serves to sweeten the bitter herbs. Because of its appearance, it symbolizes the mud mixed with straw used by the slaves in Egyptian buildings. However, its sweetness symbolizes that the bitterness of slavery is tempered with the hope for a future. While the **maror** and **matzah** are biblical commands, the *charoet* was an element added by the rabbis.



**chazeret:** a second bitter herb sometimes used to make the "Hillel" sandwich; often romaine lettuce is used for the second herb.

**dodi li:** "my beloved is mine," the first words of the traditional reading from Song of Songs (2:16), used as a title for the entire reading.

**haggadah;** plural, **haggadot:** from a root which means "to tell," the printed booklet that contains the instructions or order of service, readings, and songs for the Passover Seder.

**hallel:** "praise," refers both to the section of the Seder in which songs are sung, as well as to the songs themselves.

**k'arah:** a ceremonial Seder plate, sometimes very ornate, that contains places for the five symbolic elements of the Passover Seder: **karpas** (parsley), **lamb bone**, **bitter herbs**, **egg**, and **charoset**. On more elaborate plates, additional places are provided for other symbols, such as a place for a small bowl of salt water. In this Seder plate, space is provided for the **chazeret**, a second bitter herb used to make the "Hillel" sandwich.

**karpas:** "green vegetable," garden greens, usually parsley, celery, lettuce, or other leafy green vegetable such as watercress used in the Seder meal. The greens are dipped in a small bowl of salt water, recalling the hyssop dipped for sprinkling on the door posts of Hebrew dwellings in preparation for the Exodus (Exodus 12:22).

**kashrut:** "fitness," the Jewish dietary laws developed from the Old Testament and the Talmud; **kosher** ("proper") identified those foods acceptable to observant Jews. There are a variety of laws governing which foods can be eaten and how they may be prepared, but the basic restrictions are: (1) no pork or pork products as well as certain other foods such as shellfish, and (2) no dairy products served with meat. Also during Passover there can be no food eaten that is made with yeast, baking powder, or baking soda. Today, many commercial foods are marked in various ways (for example, with a "K") to indicate that they are *kosher*.

kippah: also known as a **yarmulke**, a **close fitting hemispherical head covering or cap worn as a sign of reverence and respect for God. Traditionally worn only by men it is now occasionally worn by women in Conservative and Reformed groups. It is often worn during the Seder, especially by the leader.**

**maggid:** "telling," the section of the Seder in which the story of exodus and Passover are recited in various ways.

**maror:** "bitter herb," traditionally a piece of horseradish root or romaine lettuce. A reminder of the bitterness of life in bondage, not only in Egypt, but everywhere. In the Seder meal, grated horseradish is usually used (at right).



**matzah;** plural, **matzot:**

"unleavened bread," dough made without yeast that bakes into a thin flat bread. Biblical tradition says that the Hebrews had to leave Egypt so quickly that they did not have time to let the bread rise so they made the dough without yeast or leaven. It is possible that they took the dough with them in kneading bowls and sun baked the bread on the hot rocks of the desert. There are

various ways to transliterate this term. Today, Matzah is represented by flat cracker-like wafers. In the Passover Seder three Matzot are used, two representing the two loaves of bread that were placed in the Jerusalem Temple on festival days, plus an additional one for Passover.

**mitsrayim:** "Egypt," although the origin of this Hebrew word is uncertain, some see it derived from the Hebrew word *tzar*(narrows, straits), meaning "from the narrows" or "from between the two sides." With this understanding, some use the name Mitsrayim rather than Egypt in the Seder as a more generic symbol of persecution and oppression.

**nirtzah:** "acceptance," the concluding section of the Seder marked by a prayer that the service will be accepted and the drinking of the last cup.

**pesach:** "passover," used to refer to the entire Passover festival or more specifically to the Passover lamb. In the Seder, it refers to the roasted lamb shank bone that represents the sacrificial Passover lamb (Exodus 12:21-27).

**seder:** "order," refers both to the service of the Passover festival meal that follows a prescribed order, and to the entire festival meal itself.

**tzafun:** "hidden," refers to the "dessert" of the meal, which is a piece of Matzah that has been hidden (the **Afikomen**).

**yom tov:** "good day," used to mean "festival."

**zeroah:** "arm," the roasted shank bone of a lamb that is symbolic of the Passover lamb, both the lambs that were killed in Egypt for the first Passover, but also for the sacrificial lambs offered in the Temple to commemorate Passover. Some Jews understand the bone also to symbolize the arm of God outstretched to help his people in times of trouble. Since there are no longer Temple sacrifices, no lamb or any other roasted meat is eaten at Passover. Some households use a chicken neck in place of the shank bone, and vegetarians often use beets to replace the shank bone on the seder plate, with the red beets and juice symbolizing the blood of the lamb that was used to mark the door posts of the houses.

### **Other Items**

**Elijah's Cup** (*kos eliyahu ha-nabi*): In Jewish observance, this is an extra cup of wine displayed (sometimes at an empty place setting) to welcome the prophet of hope who would announce the Messiah's coming. While left empty or untouched in Jewish observance, in the Christian Seder it represents the Cup of Redemption, the Passover, "shed for you . . . the forgiveness of sins," and is used symbolically as the cup of the Eucharist.

**Wine:** The traditional symbol of rejoicing. "Wine to gladden the heart of humanity" (Psalm 104:15). Since many evangelical churches maintain an ethical position of total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, grape juice may be substituted. For a more authentic experience some of the newer carbonated "sparkling" non-alcoholic grape juices can be used.

**Candles:** The symbol of God's presence at the ceremony. Usually two single white candles in candlesticks are used.

## **Preparation for the Seder**

Preparing for the Seder is important if the service is to run smoothly, especially considering that most Christians have not even participated in a Seder let alone planned one. The preparations are not complicated but do need to be given some consideration ahead of time. It is usually wise to begin planning and gathering materials at least two weeks before the actual date, simply to allow for unexpected difficulties. Careful thought ahead of time will make the experience more enjoyable for those leading the service.

## **Different Ways to Conduct a Seder**

One of the first decisions that must be made is the kind of Seder to be held, which will largely determine the number of people participating, as well as the amount and type of preparations necessary. There are three basic ways of doing the Seder as a Christian service.

### **Full Meal Seder**

The Seder can be conducted as a full course meal, just as it is celebrated in Jewish homes. However, this is usually impractical to do in public with a large group, not only because of the expense, logistics, and work involved, but also because of the length of the service. A full Seder meal normally takes from two to four hours, depending on the number of songs and children's activities. Since the Christian Seder is usually offered as part of Holy Week services, usually on Maundy Thursday, such a long evening service will often put a strain on family schedules, especially if there are younger children involved.

Usually, a full meal Seder is best done in a home setting with a limited number of people. It is especially appropriate for pastoral or church staff, for a smaller Sunday School class, or simply as a celebration with family and friends. It is rare in most Christian circles for families to do specifically religious activities outside of a church setting, and this would be a good

means to address that deficiency. This may actually take as much or more planning than a public service, especially if there are many children involved. There should be plenty of activities included for the children, since the entire service is concerned with telling the story of God to future generations (in addition to the problem of short attention spans!)

### **Demonstration Seder**

This moves to the opposite end of the spectrum, in that a Seder is not actually conducted but only the various elements of the service demonstrated by one or two leaders. This is most often done for a large group who do not themselves participate in any of the activities. A demonstration service has the advantage of flexibility and the least amount of preparation, and is most appropriate for a Sunday School class, children's church, or youth group, or perhaps even a Sunday evening service. The main disadvantage is the lack of the participatory experience in community, the primary value of the Seder. It is usually a demonstration Seder that is offered to local churches by organizations such as "Jews for Jesus," or that is periodically provided to the public by many Jewish synagogues or temples.

### **Symbolic Seder**

This is a compromise between an actual full-meal Seder and a demonstration presented by a small group to an audience. A symbolic Seder usually includes the main elements of the Seder service and the participation of everyone present, but without the full meal, the extended games for the children, and the songs at the conclusion. There are often other aspects of the service that are abbreviated or omitted, such as the hand washings. Usually, a symbolic Seder for Christians will be an adaptation of the Seder service to Christian practice. There are various ways to adapt the Seder, ranging from a total reworking of both the order (*seder*) and the actual service itself (*haggadah*) to give it a Christian perspective from the beginning, to an attempt to recreate an abbreviated version of the Jewish Seder with few if any Christian elements.

The service presented here is a symbolic Seder that tries to respect and retain the Jewish heritage represented in the Seder, yet clearly defining the

service as Christian celebration. For this service, specifically Christian elements are not added into the service until the conclusion, trying to symbolize the way the story of God has actually worked out in history ("to the Jews first, and also to the [Gentile]").

A symbolic Seder has the advantage of presenting the main elements in celebrating Passover, as well as allowing everyone to participate in this unique learning and worship experience. As part of Holy Week services in a local church, it also can be a meaningful way to prepare for the observance of Good Friday and the celebration of Easter. One disadvantage to this service is that it does take considerable planning and preparation, although it is not as complicated as a full meal Seder. On the other hand, almost any meaningful worship experience takes careful planning, and the uniqueness of this service can involve people who might not normally have a role in planning services of worship.

### **Gathering the Materials/Table Setting**

The following guidelines for planning the Seder are intended to be used with The Passover Seder for Christians presented by CRI/Voice, which is a symbolic service designed to be used in a public setting with participation. If another type of Seder is planned, or adaptations of this Haggadah are used, adjustments will have to be made accordingly. (See the Preparation sections in the **Haggadah for The Passover Seder** for Christians for additional information).

### **How Many?**

After the type of Seder is decided, the next step is to estimate how many people will be involved in the service. This is important not only for the physical setup of the service, but also for the material to be purchased or prepared. The following will describe what is needed for the head table and for each place setting as a basis for calculating the amounts needed.

A complication in determining the number of participants involves whether the service will be advertised publicly by newspaper ads, flyers, mailings, or posters, or if it is primarily aimed at a more restricted group. In some

communities, there will be a greater appeal for advertising, and such a service will attract many who would not normally attend services. Of course, it is always best to plan for too many than to come up short, but that also involves a commitment of extra time and resources. Again, this is a decision that should be made early in the planning process.

Another issue that also needs to be decided early in relation to the number of people for whom the service is planned is how the Seder is to be funded. Some churches sell tickets to such events, either at a fixed price or for an unspecified donation. Some charge admission at the door, while some defer expenses by an offering taken at the conclusion of the service or donations accepted as people enter. Others simply offer the service as a ministry of the church with nothing expected from the participants. Which route is taken may also affect the estimated attendance.

### **Seder Elements for Each Table**

These guidelines assume that the layout for the Seder is several small groups or tables of 4-6 people in each group, with one person designated a leader of that group. This can be done without such groups, in which case adaptations could be made in the table setting and the materials required.

**A note about wine:** Wine has always been an integral part of the Passover ritual even in New Testament times, so much so that many of the traditional blessings of the Seder refer to the "fruit of the vine." However, many evangelical churches have taken an ethical position of total abstinence from alcohol, so many will want to use grape juice for this service. Carbonated "sparkling" grape juice is widely available (red grape juice, not clear, should be used).

### **The Head Table**

The head table is usually situated at the front of the room where everyone can see it clearly. If possible, it is best to arrange the room so that everyone will be facing the head table, for example, in a "U" shape. If this is not possible, tables may be angled so that the most number of people have a clear sight line to the head table.



The head table should be large enough to seat 3-4 people (the two main leaders, one man and one woman, and one designated to lead the "People" readings). It should also be able to hold all the elements of the Seder without being crowded. Usually, a 6-8 foot folding table is best. It should be covered with a white tablecloth; this can be an inexpensive covering, since the risk of stain is high, but a cloth that covers the top and most of the front will help establish the ceremonial nature of the service. A white linen tablecloth can be covered with a sheet of clear plastic for protection (see photo below). It will facilitate the service to have microphones at this table.

## Place Setting for the Leader



These are the basic elements for the leader: 1) a leader's copy of the Seder Haggadah; 2) a special linen napkin with a pocket to hold the afikomen; 3) a linen bag with three compartments for the matzot, here placed on a special silver matzah plate; 4) a cup of drinking water; 5) a bowl of water for the ceremonial hand washing; 6) a bowl of salt water; 7) a napkin or towel; 8) carafe of wine or grape juice; 9) the Seder plate; 10) a bowl of charoset; 11) four glasses, one for each of the cups (a single glass can be used); here Elijah's cup is slightly larger; 12) two candlesticks with white candles; 13) a bowl of grated horseradish; 14) a table with a place setting for Elijah (optional).

In addition to all the elements for individuals and for the group listed above (place settings for each person at the head table), you will need the following for the head table.

### Elements needed for the Head Table:

**1 6-8 ft. folding table**

**white tablecloth**

**1 Seder plate**

a specially decorated plate with places for the symbolic elements used by the leader. This is important in a traditional Seder meal;

some stores, or even a local synagogue or temple, often sell inexpensive plastic or paper Seder plates

**a leaf of Romaine lettuce**

this is only necessary if the Seder plate has a place for a second bitter herb; it is not used in this service

**1 piece of raw horseradish root**

this is placed symbolically on the Seder plate, but is not actually used in the service since grated horseradish is used; a teaspoon of the prepared horseradish can be used on the plate instead

**a Matzah bag or cover (optional)**

**4 clear wine glasses**

it is effective to have rather ornate crystal glasses for the Leader, a different style for each cup; these should be fairly large

**1 loaf or several slices of regular, raised bread**

pieces of this will be hidden and all of it removed before the Seder begins

**1 hard-boiled egg**

this should be either a brown egg, or roasted in an oven until it turns brown

**1 lamb shank bone**

these can usually be obtained from a local grocery store

**Afikomen prizes**

the type and number of these will be determined by how the search for Afikomen is conducted, and whether a prize is given to each child; often coins of Israel are given as prizes

**A Leader's Haggadah**

this is simply an expanded version of the same **Haggadah** used by the people, except with additional instructions and notes; if this is not available, the leader should review the Haggadah well before the service and make any notes necessary

**3 clear bowls**

the Leader's bowl of Charoset, Salt Water, and Maror should be clear so that the participants can see their contents when they are held up; a small, clear custard bowl is ideal

**a pitcher or basin of water**

**an empty basin**

**a hand towel**

### **Place Setting for Each Person**



In this place setting, the elements for the Seder are on a separate plate to be shared by two people. Eggs were also used, although in a typical symbolic Seder they are not. Rather than having a wine glass and filling it for each cup, four small pre-filled communion cups were used. The cup for the salt water is inexpensive clear plastic.



There are the basic elements needed for a symbolic Seder: from left clockwise, Matzah, a bowl of salt water, wine or red grape juice, hard boiled egg (optional), grated horseradish, parsley, charoset.

### **Elements Required for Each Person:**

#### **1 dinner plate**

paper plates are OK, but they should be the better quality "Chinet" type

#### **1 napkin**

to make this a special occasion, if possible linen or cloth napkins can be used

**1 wine glass**

this should be clear, not a paper cup; very inexpensive clear plastic wine glasses are commonly available in many stores. It is also possible for each person to have four small clear plastic communion cups of wine, already filled before the service; if this is done, then the wine carafe is not needed for each group.

**1 water glass**

this is a precaution for those who might get too much Maror and need a drink. This glass can be filled with water, or left empty and filled from the water pitcher if needed

**1 fork and 1 spoon**

plastic is fine, although regular flatware will help mark this as a special occasion

**1 sprig fresh parsley**

this can be placed ahead of time on each individual plate, or can be placed in a larger bowl and passed around at the appropriate time

**1 full piece of Matzah**

usually a 6" square piece. This assumes that each group leader will have the 3 pieces used in the service; it is also possible for each person to have 3 pieces of Matzoth, although that becomes a little more expensive. Most larger food stores will have Matzah available in the Spring, or can order it. It comes 10-12 pieces to a box.

**1 small bowl of salt water**

there should be enough salt water in which to dip the parsley, and enough salt in the water to make it cloudy (an alternate arrangement would have a small bowl for every four or five people to share).

**1 copy of the Seder Haggadah**

**Songbook or printed handout of songs**

**If the hand washing is to be included as a public activity:**

**1 small towel**

for the amount of water used, a wash cloth may be used as a towel

## **Elements required for each group:**

### **2 white candles in candlesticks**

#### **1 small bowl of Charoset**

there should be more than enough in each bowl for each person in the group to have about 2 tablespoons (this can be placed on individual plates before the beginning of the Seder to save time).

#### **1 small bowl of prepared, grated horseradish**

there should be more than enough in each bowl for each person to have about 1 tablespoon; hot variety is better (this can be placed on individual plates before the beginning of the seder).

### **5 white cloth napkins**

for the Matzah basket

### **1 large plate or shallow basket**

for the Matzah

### **3 full pieces of Matzah**

placed on a napkin covered plate or basket each separated by a single white cloth napkin, with the top one also covered by a napkin.

### **1 carafe or pitcher of wine**

### **1 pitcher of drinking water**

### **Table decoration**

fresh spring flowers contributed by members of the group are effective reminders of the newness that this celebrations represents

## **If the hand washing is to be included as a public activity:**

### **1 pitcher of water (or a bowl of water with a small dipper)**

### **1 empty shallow basin**

## **A Community Event**

In planning for the Seder, consideration should be given to the physical set-up for the service. While the normal setting up of tables, sound system, and clean-up are rather routine for any such public service, some additional help will most likely be needed for the unique aspects of this service. Involving

others in the preparation and setup of the service is in keeping with the communal nature of the event, and can itself be part of the excitement of the celebration.

In terms of preparation, someone will need to be in charge of figuring out how much of which items are needed and to supervise purchasing the necessary food and utensil items for the service. Most churches have someone who is willing to take responsibility for decorations, which in this case would involve purchasing, collecting, or coordinating the donation of fresh flowers to be used for table decorations, as well as any other decorations desired. And of course, someone will have to cook or prepare the Charoset, which in a symbolic Seder is really the only food item that needs to be prepared (in addition to the single hard-boiled egg for the Seder plate).

The Leader of the Seder should be chosen early enough that s/he can participate in the planning and coordination of the service, and supervise the final place settings for the service. The Leader needs to be familiar enough with all the details of the service to be able to facilitate it easily and smooth over any problems that might arise. Other readers and participants should be given copies of the Haggadah early enough to be thoroughly familiar with the readings so that they flow smoothly.

## **The Traditional Steps of the Seder**

The *seder* (order) of the Seder traditionally took fourteen steps beginning with the first cup of wine. Even though the removing of leaven is not considered part of the actual Seder, since it takes place before the Seder begins, a symbolic search for leaven is usually incorporated as preparation for the service.

### **Bedikat Chametz**

Search for leaven

### **Hadlakat Ha-Nerot**

Lighting of the Passover candles

**Kaddesh**

Sanctifying blessing and first cup of wine

**Urchatz**

First hand washing

**Karpas**

Green Vegetable dipped in salt water and blessing

**Yachatz**

Breaking the middle Matzah and hiding the Afikomen

**Maggid**

Telling the story of Passover and the second cup of wine

**Rachtzah**

Second hand washing and blessing

**Motzi/Matsah**

Blessing for the bread and eating of Matzah

**Maror**

Eating of the bitter herbs

**Korech**

Eating of sandwich of Maror and Matzah

**Shulchan Orech**

The festival meal

**Tzafun**

Eating the Afikomen

## **Barech**

After meal blessing, the third cup, welcoming Elijah

## **Hallel**

Songs of praise

## **Nirtzah**

Fourth cup and completion of the Seder

## **A Christian Seder Haggadah**

Due to the length of the Haggadah, it is provided on a separate page: [\*\*A Christian Seder Haggadah\*\*](#)

## **Additional Ways to Tell the Passover Story**

There is a great deal of creativity in how the Passover story is told in the Seder. The goal is not simply to repeat the story in the same way year after year, but to teach the *content* of the story as a means of forming identity with the community. That results in literally thousands of different Haggadot that vary in how the Passover story is told.

Usually, there are four major ways of telling the story during the Seder: 1) The Four Questions, 2) the Four Children, 3) the Passover story, concluding with the reading *Dayeinu*, "It would have been enough," and 4) the explanation of the Passover symbols on the Seder plate. The Christian Seder given here combines The Four Questions with the explanation of the Passover symbols on the Seder plate to answer the questions and tell the Passover story. Following are other ways of telling the story and other features that can be incorporated into a Seder.

## **Four Attitudes Toward Passover**

This begins with the observation that the command to "tell your children" the Exodus story occurs four times in the Torah. The Talmud (Jewish rabbinic commentary on the Old Testament Scriptures) suggests that the reason for this fourfold instruction is that there are four different attitudes that could be exhibited in approaching the Seder, represented by four children or four different kinds of people who would ask various questions about the observance. It is not that there are others who exhibit these traits but that each of us at various times have these same attitudes. It is not intended to condemn others but to call everyone to a deeper appreciation of their heritage and faithfulness to God.

The answers are part of the Maggid, the "telling" of the story that is part of the ritual of the Seder meal. Two different ways of using this aspect of the Seder are given, although they are really only variations on the same themes. These can be done informally or developed and written out as part of the Haggadah.

### **The Four Children**

**The Wise Child** would ask: "What is the meaning of the laws and commandments which the Lord our God commanded us to keep?" [Deut 6:20]. This is the question of curiosity and interest, which is answered eagerly and with enthusiasm, explaining in detail the customs and rituals of Passover, taking time to relate each to the community of faith, the nature of freedom, and the call to be God's people to practice justice and righteousness. This can be used as the setting for explaining the symbols of Passover on the Seder plate, as well as the other aspects of the Seder meal.

**The Wicked or Scornful Child** would ask: "What does this service mean to you?" [Exod 12:26]. This is the question of disinterest and indifference, betrayed by saying "you" and not "we," by which this person excludes him/herself from the community. This is answered sternly and forcefully: "We celebrate Passover because of what God did for us while we were slaves in Egypt [Exod 13:8]. If you had been in Egypt, you would not have been included when the Lord God delivered us from slavery." While this sounds harsh, the idea is that indifference to the things of God excludes one from

participation in God's work in the world. The call is to join the community, to participate, to hear the testimony, and to learn about God.

**The Simple Child** would ask: "What is this all about?" This is the question of confusion and ignorance, which is answered in the most simple way possible: "God saved us from slavery." [Exod 13:14]

**The Child who does not know enough to ask a question:** The only proper response to this is to repeat the testimony with patience and tenderness: "We observe Passover because once we were slaves in Egypt and God brought us out by his strength and power because of his love and compassion for us. [Exod 13:8] We observe Passover to remember what the Lord our God has done for us."

### **The Four Participants**

**The Active Participant:** This represents the best and wisest in us, who appreciates the experience of Passover and what it represents in celebrating the love and grace of God, who is willing to express the wonder that God would enter human history and deliver slaves from captivity, and is willing to commit himself/herself to such a God. This person enters into the Seder willing to allow the experience and the confession and commitment to God expressed in it to shape every aspect of daily life, to live out the implications of being God's people in the world, to live out the principles of love, grace, justice, and freedom from oppression of any kind.

**The Passive Participant:** This represents the worst in us that sees no value in such celebrations or observance for ourselves or others, and who is not willing to acknowledge that God does anything in the world. This person enters the Seder with a skepticism that prevents them from actually experiencing the strength drawn from the community of Faith, and so will hear nothing but words and see nothing but ordinary items. They will leave with no sense of belonging because they have made no commitments, they have no roots, and as a result have no future. This person would have kept us all in Egypt, enslaved by apathy and indifference.

**The Shy Participant:** This represents that part of us that tends to be self-centered and see the world in terms of what it means for us and our world of concerns and wants. It is not that this person does not care, but that personal needs and introspection outweigh the need for a larger picture. This person tends to ask simple questions from within certain perspectives, and needs the support and encouragement of all of us in the larger community. We can be compassionate while answering the questions and sharing the experience with them, while at the same time helping them and modeling for them how to learn about God and how to live out that faith in real life. It is important that they learn, for ignorance and self-entered simplicity threaten the freedom of the larger community.

**The Puzzled Participant:** This represents those too young or too immature of any age to fully understand the experience of Passover, and so does not know enough to ask questions. For them we simply tell the story once again, and in the enthusiasm and joy of telling the story demonstrate our own commitment to this celebration, and to the God whom we serve and worship through this service.

### **Dayeinu (It Would Have Been Enough)**

This is a traditional reading that follows the telling of the exodus story. Some Haggadot use Psalms 105 and 106 to tell the Passover story before the Dayeinu (pronounced Die-YEAH-nu). The word means "it would have been enough."

**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!

If only the Lord God had taken us out of Egypt and not passed judgment on the Egyptians . . .

Dayeinu!

If only the Lord God had passed judgment on the Egyptians and not parted the sea for us . . .

Dayeinu!

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..

Dayeinu!

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 . . .

Dayeinu!

If only the Lord God had given us the Sabbath rest and not brought us to Mount Sinai and given us the Torah . . .

Dayeinu!

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

Dayeinu!

For all these, alone and together, we say . . .

Dayeinu!

## Recipes

If this is only a symbolic meal, the only food that actually needs to be prepared for the Seder is the Charoset. The rest of the food items should be readily available in stores. Most larger supermarkets carry specialty food items such as **Matzah** or can order it by request.

If a full meal is planned, for this to be an authentic Passover experience three traditional observances should be followed in planning the meal: (1) there should be no food served with yeast (strict observance also forbids baking soda or baking powder), (2) there can be no dairy products served since **kashrut** (Jewish dietary food laws) forbids the eating of dairy products with meat, and (3) no pork or pork derivatives can be served. This may take a little effort to accomplish for those not used to such observances. This would eliminate bread, dinner rolls, some kinds of cake, butter either served or used in cooking, creamed sauces or soups, cheese or cheese sauces, dairy based coffee creamer, whipped cream toppings, bacon bits, ham or

Spam pieces in salads, pork fat or bacon grease used in cooking or sauces, etc.

While many Christians associate lamb as the meat of Passover, since lambs can no longer be killed sacrificially it is not part of the Passover Seder. For the same reason, no roasted meat can be served. Usually, either chicken or beef are the main meat dishes.

## **Charoset**

There are two basic versions of Charoset, one that is chunky, uses apples as the base, and is prepared without cooking (which is favored in the West), and the other that uses dates or figs as a base and is cooked into a thick paste (which is favored in the Middle East). The version we use (below) is an uncooked combination of both and uses a food processor (grinder) to blend the ingredients.

There is a great deal of variety in how Charoset can be made. Dates, dried figs, dried apricots, pears, oranges, raisins, currants, bananas, or other fruits or nuts can be chopped and added to the mixture. Cardamom or Coriander are also used as spices. You may have to do some experimentation to see how much each recipe produces, and then determine how many servings need to be prepared for the number of people participating. For symbolic meals each person needs about two tablespoons of Charoset, plus a little extra for the children (they love this!).

### **Apple Charoset (chunky uncooked version)**

1 cup chopped apples (2-3 apples)  
1 cup chopped walnuts, almonds, or pistachio  
1 tsp. ground cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. ginger or 1/4 tsp. ground cloves  
1 tsp. honey or to taste  
grape juice, wine vinegar, or lemon juice

Core, peel, and chop apples very fine. Add nuts, spices, and honey. Add enough grape juice to moisten mixture to the consistency of mortar. Chill

until used; serve at room temperature. This recipe yields about 8-10 well-rounded tablespoons of Charoset.

### **Date/Fig Charoset (paste cooked version)**

1 cup pitted dates or chopped dried figs (or a mixture of dates, figs, and raisins)

1 cup chopped walnuts, almonds, pine nuts, or any combination

2 cups water

1/4 cup wine vinegar

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

1 tsp. honey or to taste

Pour water over fruit and let soak overnight. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, stirring frequently, until mixture forms a paste-like consistency. Cool. Stir in vinegar, cinnamon, and honey. (Some recipes of this version use a small amount, a pinch for a single recipe, of cayenne or chili pepper for added flavor!). This recipe yields about 12-16 tablespoons of Charoset, depending on how long it is cooked and how thick it is.

### **Combination Charoset (blended uncooked version)**

This is the version we use (largely because I like the flavor best!). Raisins or other dried fruit, such as apricot, can be added.

1 cup chopped apples (2-3 apples)

1 cup black walnuts

1 cup chopped, dried dates (or 1/2 cup dates and

1/2 cup figs)

1 tsp. ground cinnamon

1/4 tsp. ground cloves

2 tsp. honey

2 tsp. red wine vinegar

1 tsp. lime juice



Core, peel, and cut apples into 1" chunks. Run apples and dates and other fruit through food grinder using coarse blades (you will likely have to

alternate the apples with the dried fruit). Add nuts, spices, honey, vinegar and lime juice. More liquid may be added if necessary or to taste. This recipe yields about 12-14 well-rounded tablespoons of Charoset.

### **Charoset Shopping List**

One 8 oz. box of chopped dried dates is about 2 cups

One 8 oz. package of black walnuts is about 2 cups.

The above recipe yields enough for a small serving for about 6-8 people. Assuming two full tablespoons per person, and some left for the children to finish off, in addition to the spices a symbolic meal for 50 would require:

20-24 apples

4 8-oz. boxes of chopped, dried dates (or other fruit)

4 8-oz. packages of black walnuts

### **Notes**

1. These festivals are based on a lunar rather than a solar calendar, which is why the dates from year to year vary widely; they fall in March or April (See **The Hebrew Calendar of the Old Testament**). Nisan is a name borrowed by the Israelites during the Exile from the Babylonian calendar. The Hebrew equivalent of Nisan is Abib (Ex 23:15). In the Babylonian system, Nisan is the first month, beginning the year in the Spring (March-April). In the older agricultural calendar of Israel, the year began in the Fall immediately following the harvests (Ex 23:16, the Babylonian month of Tishri, September-October). Since a lunar calendar begins each month with the new moon, the important Israelite religious festivals of Passover-Unleavened Bread and Succoth or Tabernacles begin in mid-month, the time of the full moon.

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