

“The Promise of God”

Jerusalem: The Meal, the Memory, and the Memorial!

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Passover in the First Century

1. Preparation began the evening of Nisan 13 (in general the day was reckoned from sunset to sunset, thus the 14th Nisan began at sunset on the 13th). Included would be the removal of leaven, symbolizing a break from the past and a new beginning ahead.
2. Between 2 — 3 p.m., Nisan 14, paschal lambs were slaughtered. Passover was eaten that night, Nisan 15.
3. Passover began with the Blessing (*Kaddush*) and the First Cup of Four Cups of Wine mixed with water (*Pesachim* 10.2). [Four Cups of Wine (traditionally) correspond to the four promises in Ex 6.6-7. ⁶ “Say, therefore, to the sons of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and 1) I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and 2) I will deliver you from their bondage. 3) I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. ⁷ ‘Then 4) I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.]
4. Ritual Washing — usual practice for washing of hands before touching the food. (Jesus went much further, teaching and exemplifying for disciples humble service to one another using the things around you, John 13.1-16. See Phil 2.6-11.)
5. Dipping of Herbs — Placed in salt water, which “may” symbolize the tears of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, and in later days “may” have represented the tears over the destruction of the Temple and loss of their homeland. This also recalls the dipping of the hiscop in the blood of the lamb and smearing it on the doorposts, Ex 12.22. Here it is lettuce, *Pesachim* 10.3, with “bitter herbs.” John 13.26-30 indicates Jesus dipped a morsel and offered it to Judas Iscariot before he left (Judas did not eat the Passover).
6. Uncovering the Unleavened Bread — Three sheets of unleavened bread were uncovered, symbolizing the unity of the people. (Some connect the three sheets corresponding either to the three divisions of the people, Priests, Levites and the nation as a whole, or to the three

patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.) The host breaks into two pieces the middle sheet of the *matzah*, wrapping half in a cloth and hiding it. This “bread of affliction” (Dt 16.3) links to the hardship. In current times, the host takes the hidden piece out, the *afikoman*, and it’s eaten as a kind of “dessert.” (This has great symbolism for those seeking to see Christian instruction in each part of the Passover, although in Jesus’ day, the lamb is central and would have been that last thing eaten.) It’s worth noting that even in Jesus’ day, there was a connection between the lamb and the bread concerning “redemption.”

7. Retelling the Story of Deliverance — The Passover is an important time of teaching what God has done and will do for His people. Three questions are asked and particular and extended answers were given (Ex 12.26; 13.14; Dt 6.20). Liturgy (the *Haggadah*) wasn’t developed extensively in Jesus’ day. Key would have been the exposition of Dt 26.5-10 (*Pesachim* 10.4).
8. The First Part of the *Hallel* was likely sung — Pss 113 — 114.
9. Blessing and Breaking the Unleavened Bread — the Host breaks the bread and shares it with those at the table. At this point, Jesus, the Host, broke the bread and gave it a whole new significance, Luk 22.19. Jesus is clearly identifying Himself with the Passover Sacrifice and pointing His disciples in a new direction.
10. The Passover Recalls, Reflects, Relives, and Renews what God has done and will yet do. It is an intense time of drawing afresh into fellowship with God and His Promise. “Remembering” is a past act with a very present reality in the lives of God’s people.
11. Passover Meal Is Served — The last thing eaten is the lamb.
12. The Third Cup — Filled, Served, and Grace pronounced. Traditionally called the Cup of Redemption (corresponding to Ex 6.6b, “I will redeem you . . .”). It is also called the Cup of Blessing (as with the First Cup) because of blessing pronounced. It’s widely held that Jesus took this cup, Luk 22.20, and instituted, “This cup is the new covenant . . .”. In the first Passover, the death of the sacrificial lamb and the applied blood opened the way for God’s redemption and deliverance from bondage, establishing a new identity and a new community. In like manner, that cup which foreshadowed, the death of Jesus now opens the way to Eternal Redemption when His death is applied by faith, establishing a New Identity and a New Community under a New Covenant!
13. The Second Part of the *Hallel* was likely sung — Pss 115 — 118 (Matt 26.30).
14. The Fourth Cup — Associated with God’s Promise, Ex 6.7, “I will take you as My own.” Often called the Cup of Praise, looking to the victory, final vindication, and future blessing of God. This time is “no yet” for Jesus for He must drink the Cup of Suffering and one day future will drink the Cup of Praise at the Messianic Banquet in the new age.

Jesus observed the Jewish holidays — Passover (e.g. Luk 2.41; 22.8; John 2.23; Acts 20.6); Tabernacles (John 7.1–11); Dedication (John 10.22–23). The feast of the Jews in John 5.1 has been variously identified as Passover, Purim, Tabernacles or Trumpets. See also Acts 2.1.

Tradition places the location of this room in the home of John Mark. Acts 1:13 finds the disciples in an upper room praying. In Acts 12:12, when Peter is released from jail, he makes his way to where many are gathered to pray. This location is noted as the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark.