*Spangler & Tverberg Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus*

**A Simple Seder Liturgy**

Now that you’ve gotten an understanding of the tremendous importance of Passover to both Jews and Christians, you may like to try celebrating it yourself. While you can set up a Seder at your church like Lois did, the most appropriate setting is the home, around the family dinner table, as it is celebrated by Jews today. The overall theme of the Seder meal is that of a father and mother telling their children the wonderful story of how God himself saved their family long ago. For this reason, we include here instructions for a family celebration of a Passover meal. The preparations for a traditional dinner are quite involved, and the liturgy can be long. Here is a very simplified Seder to give you a taste of Passover. Afterward are resources for learning more.

Remember that during the Passover celebration, each person is supposed to imagine him or herself on that very last night of slavery before being set free. The special foods that are eaten are a multi-sensory, experiential way of teaching about that wonderful event. Being hungry and having only dry bread and bitter herbs to eat is a way to have a tiny taste of the deprivation and affliction of slavery. The great pleasure we get when we take our first bite of a mouth-watering feast is like the joy of being set free. As each food enters your lips, ask yourself what God can teach you through it.

Note: The prayers below are based on traditional Jewish prayers, and don’t expressly mention Jesus as the fulfillment of Passover. But the point of the meal is to discuss and explore the meaning of God’s redemption. You should feel free to meditate as Christians on both pictures— of God’s loving liberation of his people from suffering and hopelessness of slavery, and Christ’s salvation of us from sin and death. Make it your goal that the Passover meal is filled with *kavanah –* a sense of the presence of God. It doesn’t need to be solemn and overly formal, however. It is supposed to be a feast to celebrate God’s victory!

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**Seder Preparation**

Traditionally, each home is thoroughly cleaned to remove all traces of leavened food, and this can take days or weeks. During that time people examine themselves, asking how the physical act of cleansing can parallel the spiritual, moral cleansing of the “leaven” from their hearts. As you prepare, ask the Lord what cleansing he wants you to do in your own heart for this time.

For the meal, set the table with the following:  
A nice tablecloth and place settings for an elegant dinner for your family Two candles, with matches or lighter nearby.

A plate with three pieces of *matzah* (available at many grocery stores), covered with a napkin. More *matzah* can be eaten during the meal, but no leavened bread may be present.

A goblet full of wine or grape juice at each setting, plus one extra for Elijah. Instead of four cups, take four sips from this cup during the meal. We’ll refer to it as “wine” even though it may be juice.

A *haggadah* on each plate. Usually this is a booklet with all the prayers and liturgy of the evening. Instead, make copies of the following Seder Liturgy (the next five pages) for each person.

In the center of the table, place the following items on a nice dinner plate. (If you can buy or borrow a traditional Seder plate, all the better):

Haroset:

A roasted lamb bone (beef or chicken is fine too) An egg  
A small bowl of salt water  
Several springs of parsley (enough for each person) A few spoonfuls of ground horseradish

A mound of *haroset* (recipe below)

2 cups peeled, finely chopped apples 1/2 cup chopped pecans  
2 tablespoons grape juice (approx.) 1 tablespoon honey

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

Mix nuts, honey, apples and cinnamon together until well blended. Add grape juice slowly, until texture is a thick paste, like mortar. Taste and adjust the cinnamon and juice accordingly.

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**Seder Liturgy**

This liturgy assumes that a mother, father and school age children are present. Feel free to reassign parts as needed.

1. The mother lights the candles and prays the following:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who teaches us to be holy through His commandments, and commanded us to light these Seder lights. Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who has preserved us and sustained us, and brought us to this season.

Everyone else says, “Amen.” (In Jewish prayer, the one saying the prayer does not say “amen,” but everyone else does, in order to voice their agreement with the prayer.)

2. The father holds up his wine or juice, and he and everyone leans back slightly, as if reclining at a royal banquet. The father prays the blessing for the first cup:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine. Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who has chosen us from among all people, and with love given us solemn days for joy, festivals and seasons for gladness, this day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the season of our redemption, a holy celebration, a memorial of the departure from Egypt, and your festivals which have you caused us to inherit with joy and gladness.

Blessed are you, O Lord, who sanctifies Israel and the seasons. (The family responds, “Amen.”)

All take their first of four sips.

3. Everyone takes a sprig of parsley and dips it into the salt water. This is to represent the tears that the Israelites shed in slavery in Egypt. The mother prays the following blessing:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the earth. (Amen.)

All eat their parsley and salt water.  
4. The father picks up the plate of three *matzah* pieces and says the following:

Lo! This is the bread of affliction, which our fathers ate in their need. Let us, whom God's mercy has freed, now remember those who are still oppressed and resolve to aid them with all our means. Let those who are hungry come and eat! Let those who are in want come and celebrate the Passover with us! God grant that next year at this time, the whole house of Israel may be free.

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He takes the middle piece, breaks it in half and wraps the larger half in a napkin and hides it to be brought back at the end. This is the *afikomen*.

5. One of the children recites the Four Questions:

Why is this night different from all other nights? On all nights we may eat either leavened or unleavened bread, but on this night, only unleavened bread. On all other nights we may eat any species of herbs, but on this night, only bitter herbs. On all other nights we do not dip even once, but on this night twice. On all other nights we eat and drink sitting, but on this night we are leaning.

6. The father responds by saying: “It is both a duty and a privilege to answer the four questions of Passover and to recite the mighty works of our faithful God. Once we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord, in his goodness and mercy, brought us forth from that land with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Had he not rescued us from the hand of Pharaoh, we and our children would still be enslaved, deprived of liberty and human dignity. We therefore gather year after year to retell this ancient story, for it is not ancient but eternal in its message and its spirit.

Why is this night different from all other nights? On this night we eat unleavened bread to remember that our ancestors, in their haste to leave Egypt, could not wait for bread to rise.

On this night why do we eat only bitter herbs? We partake of the bitter herbs on this night so that we might taste of some bitterness to remind ourselves how bitter is the lot of one caught in the grip of slavery.

On this night why do we dip the herbs twice? We dip twice, parsley in salt water and bitter herbs in *haroset*, once to replace tears with gratefulness, and once to sweeten bitterness and suffering.

On this night, we eat in a reclining position. To recline at mealtimes in ancient days was a sign of freedom. On this night of Passover we demonstrate our sense of freedom by reclining as we drink from each cup of wine, symbolizing our joy.

7. Members of the family take turns reading the story of the first Passover in Exodus 12:21- 39 and 14:5-31.

8. The mother says, “In order to free us from Egypt, God parted the waters and drowned the Egyptians. He sent ten plagues upon Egypt to punish their gods and release us from bondage. But our joy is lessened by knowing about the suffering that the Egyptians endured. As I call out the name of each plague, let us dip our little finger in our wine and drip it out onto our plates. The wine, symbolizing our joy, is lessened by the tears the Egyptians shed.

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These are the ten plagues which the Most Holy, blessed be He, brought upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and these they are:

Blood! Frogs!  
Gnats! Biting Flies!

Cattle Disease! Boils!

Hail! Locusts!  
Darkness!  
Death of the First Born!

9. The father then raises his glass for the second cup of wine for the Cup of Remembrance, saying,

How numerous are the gifts which the Lord has bestowed on us. He brought us forth from Egypt, executed judgment on the Egyptians, slew their gods, slew their firstborn, gave us their wealth, divided the sea for us, caused us to pass through on dry land, supplied us with everything in the wilderness for forty years, gave us the Sabbath, led us to Mt. Sinai, gave us his law, led us to the land of Israel, and built the Temple for us.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine. (Amen.)

Everyone leans back and takes another sip.

10. The family recites the ancient Dayeinu liturgy, which dates back to before 200 AD. Dayeinu means “Enough for us,” and each verse ends with Dayeinu.:

If he had rescued us from Egypt,  
but not punished the Egyptians,  
It would have been enough! (*Dayeinu*)

If he had punished the Egyptians, but not defeated their gods,  
It would have been enough!

If he had given us the Sabbath But not led us to Mount Sinai, It would have been enough!

If he had led us to Mount Sinai, But not given us the Torah,  
It would have been enough!

If he would have given us the Torah,  
but not brought us into the Land of Israel,

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**It would have been enough!** How much more, then, are we to be grateful to God  
for all of these good things which he has indeed done for all of us!

11. The father picks up a piece of unleavened bread, breaks it, and says:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who teaches us to be holy through your commandments, and commands us to eat unleavened bread. (Amen.)

The unleavened bread is passed around and everyone breaks off a piece and eats it.

12. Each person breaks off a small piece of matzah, puts a little bit of horseradish on it. The mother says,

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who teaches us to be holy through his commandments, and commands us to eat bitter herbs. (Amen.)

All eat their matzah and horseradish, and think about the bitterness of slavery.

13. On another piece of matzah, each person puts a little horseradish, and this time puts a spoonful of haroset on top. One more matzah piece on top makes a little “sandwich.” The haroset represents the mortar used in making the bricks when they were enslaved. But is sweet, because God was present even in the midst of their suffering. Everyone eats their sandwich.

14. A festive meal is served. Don’t just have the typical discussions that you have over dinner. Use this time to reflect on what you have learned about Passover and the Last Supper. Children can continue to ask their parents what these celebrations are all about. If the parents don’t know, make it a family project to research the answers. Or, discuss how God has redeemed your own lives through Christ, and reflect on the things he has done that have brought you to the point where you are today.

15. The plates are removed and children search for the *afikomen*, which the father hid earlier. Tradition has it that the child who finds it can ask for a gift. This is likely the bread that Jesus held up after supper and said “This is my body.” Feel free to discuss what it means that this “bread of affliction” represents Jesus, and that his sinless, unleavened body was broken for us. The father takes the *afikomen* and holds it up and says,

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. (Amen.)

He breaks it and gives a piece to everyone to eat. This is the last thing that can be eaten, so that the taste lingers in each person’s mouth.

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15. The father then raises his glass for the third cup of wine, which is called the “Cup of Redemption.” This is the cup that Jesus raised after supper and said, “This is my blood.” Think about what it means that Jesus shed his blood to redeem us from our sins. Everyone leans back, raises their glass, and the father prays,

Therefore, we are bound to thank, praise, laud, glorify, extol, honor, bless, exalt and revere him, who did all these miracles for our ancestors and for us; for he brought us forth from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from  
mourning to festivity from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption, and therefore let us sing unto him a new song. Hallelujah!

Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine. (Amen.)

16. One of the children goes to the front door, opens it and looks out, and looks to see if he sees Elijah outside. According to Malachi 4, Elijah will appear to announce the coming of the Messiah. Have the child return to the table and read Matthew 17:10-13. What does Jesus say about the coming of Elijah?

15. For the fourth and last time, the father leans back, lifts his cup and prays,

The breath of all living shall praise your name, O Lord, our God. You redeem, deliver, maintain, and have compassion on us, in all times of trouble and distress, we have no king but you. You are God the first, and God of the last, and God of  
all creatures. You are adored with all manner of praise; who governs the Universe with tenderness, and his creatures with mercy. Every mouth shall adore you, every knee shall bend, every being shall bow down before you. O Lord, who is like unto you? Great and mighty, tremendous God, most high God, possessor of heaven and earth. Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, creator of the fruit of the vine. (Amen.)

Everyone drinks the last of their wine.

16. It is traditional to sing songs of praise after supper, especially the Psalms of Ascent (Psalm 113-118). Read one or more of these, or sing some songs you find meaningful.

17. Last, everyone exclaims together, “Next Year, In Jerusalem!”

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**Dates for Passover**

**Further Resources**

The dates below are the evenings before the calendar date of Passover, which is the time when the Passover meal is traditionally eaten. Some Jews eat another Passover meal the next evening too. For the seven additional days of the Feast of Unleaved Bread, no leavened food can be eaten.

Friday, April 6, 2012 Monday, March 25, 2013 Monday, April 14, 2014

**Books**

Howard, Kevin and Marvin Rosenthal. *The Feasts of the Lord* Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997. Beautifully illustrated guide to the biblical feasts and their fulfillment by Christ.

Kasdan, Barney. *God’s Appointed Times* Baltimore, MD: Messianic Jewish Publications, 1993. Nice overview of the feasts in Jewish tradition and the New Testament, with ideas for Christian observance today.

Sampson, Robin & Linda Pierce. *A Family Guide to the Biblical Holidays* Woodbridge, VA: Heart of Wisdom, 2001. Comprehensive guide for Christian celebrations of the biblical holidays. A good resource for families.

Smith, Michael, and Rami Shapiro. *Let Us Break Bread Together: A Passover Haggadah for Christians* Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005. Co-authored by a rabbi and a pastor, this pamphlet guides Christian groups and families through a Passover Seder.

**Online resources**

For more articles and links exploring Passover, go to *Our Rabbi Jesus: His Jewish Life and Teaching* at http://OurRabbiJesus.com.

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