



Chosen by God

The Jewish Roots of Christianity

Passover Traditions

Though Passover is only one of seven “Feasts of the Lord” instituted by God in the Old Testament, and celebrated by Jews today, it is the first, and most defining. Passover is not only the central event on the Jewish calendar, but also the central foundation of Jewish life and thought. In the words of Rabbi David Aaron, “every Jew is obligated to see himself or herself as having personally left Egypt and to recount this fact every day.” (Aaron 7) The Jewish people have taken very seriously God’s words in Exodus 12:24 to observe Passover forever.

How does God introduce Himself before He dives into the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2? _____

The Kabbalah, the source book of Jewish mysticism, refers to Passover as the foundation and root of the Torah, and of the faith of Israel. The writer of Hebrews seems to concur in Hebrews 11:28 where the keeping of the Passover is credited to the *faith* of Moses. How is faith defined in Hebrews 11:1? _____

What are the two parts of a God pleasing faith according to Hebrews 11:6? _____

- _____
- _____

Passover was the event where God “passed over” the thresholds of the blood marked doorways to protectively enter the homes of the Israelites. This was the occasion where God introduced Himself to His people in a different way. This was still the Creator God (Elohim) and the Almighty God (Shaddai), but now He was letting His people know that He was also the caring and saving God (YHVH or Yaweh).

It is significant, I think, that Passover is celebrated in the intimacy of the home, with the centuries old telling of this revelation of God’s nature. It is not just the event that is celebrated, but what the event exposed of God and His relationship with His people. It is the foundation of all of the feasts and for all things Jewish because it is an acknowledgement of God’s love. We can only receive God’s love if we see it and recognize it. The Passover Seder is like a rehearsal of God’s love, a reminder of who He is, and what He has done. To fail to observe Passover is considered the beginning of idolatry.

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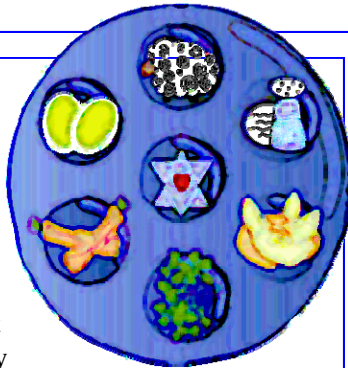
The Haggadah - the telling

The Haggadah is the script for the Passover celebration. It means “the telling” and is exactly that, telling the story of the Exodus, and God’s protection, through elaborate symbolism. The basics of the modern Haggadah are thought to have been basically in place by the 2nd or 3rd century AD. There are many variations, but the same basic elements. Here is a simplified description of events:

- Candles are lit
- Kiddush, the first cup of wine - means freedom from bondage
- Karpus (green vegetable) dipped in salt water to represent the tears of Israel in slavery
- The Unleavened Bread (Matzah)
- Four Questions
- The Passover Story (using pronouns like we, us, our...) Identity with the early Israelites
- Second Cup - filled only half way - deliverance
- The Meal is Eaten, and the Afikomen shared by all.
- The Bareich (a prayer of praise and thanksgiving) is read together
- The third cup of wine
- Elijah’s cup - represents the promise of a Messiah, and cannot be drunk until redemption is complete. Also an empty chair, and an opened door.
- Hymns are sung
- Fourth cup of wine
- Next Year in Jerusalem!

The Seder

The Seder is a celebratory dinner in the home and is the central part of the observance of Passover. Strangers are often invited in remembrance of being strangers in Egypt. At the Seder, every word, every action, and every food is deeply symbolic.



On the Seder plate were:

- **Pesach** - the shank bone of a lamb According to the Haggadah, the lamb was chosen because it was worshipped by the Egyptians, so represents a rejection of idolatry. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD, the lamb could no longer be sacrificed, so the shank bone stands in.
- **Matzah** - The Unleavened Bread
- **Maror** - bitter herbs, represents the bitter experience of the slaves
- Haroset, a mixture of apples, raisins and spices representing the mortar the slaves used
- A roasted egg symbolizing spring, or mourning for the temple. Quite possibly this has some pagan origins
- Karpas - a green vegetable representing spring, and the hyssop that was dipped in blood.

The Four Questions

Questions are an essential ingredient to the Seder. It is thought that the asking of them stimulates God’s love. (Marcus 3) Perhaps it is because to ask questions is to set aside your own wisdom and answers and be childlike. Even if there is no child present, the questions are to be asked, to honor the instructions given by God in Exodus 12:26-27. One person was always to act as the head, or father, and there was to be at least one who played the role of the questioning child.

The questions involve what makes Passover different from all the other nights of the year.

- The first question asks about the custom of dipping the karpas, usually parsley, in the salt water, and also about the dipping of the bitter herbs in the charoset paste.
- The second question is why matzah, or no leaven.
- The third question is why eat bitter vegetables.
- The fourth question regards reclining at the table, and is thought to have been added later when that was no longer the usual custom.

The bread

Unleavened bread, or matzah, is eaten with the Passover meal. It is the bread of suffering which the people ate as slaves. All who are hungry are invited to join, and a prayer is offered for all how are still slaves. Not only is leaven not to be used in the Passover bread, but there isn't even to be a speck of yeast in the house. A thorough cleaning is done to insure that there is none. One tradition is to hide a piece of leaven which one of the children finds and shows to the father. The father sweeps it onto a wooden spoon with a feather, wraps it in a linen cloth, and carries it outside to be burned.

Three matzah are under a cloth on a plate, or in a special bag. The matzot in the middle is the afikomen, which means "that which comes after," or "dessert." It is broken in two, and half of it is hidden while the other half is saved for the blessings later in the meal.

The four cups

Four cups of wine, called the Kiddush, will be drank during the Passover Seder. The meanings of the four cups are based on Exodus 6:6,7

1. I will bring you out - sanctification
2. I will deliver you - plagues and judgment
3. I will redeem you - redemption
4. I will take you to be my people - praise (hallel)

Though this is thought to be a custom added later by the rabbis, it seems that it was already in place by New Testament



The hymns

The hymns traditionally sung toward the end of the Passover Seder are from Psalm 113-118. We see that Jesus and the disciples sang hymns together in Mark 14:26.

Just a bit of interest: Did you know that Psalm 118:8 is the central verse of Scripture, with the same number of verses before and after?

What does it say? _____

Passover in the Old Testament

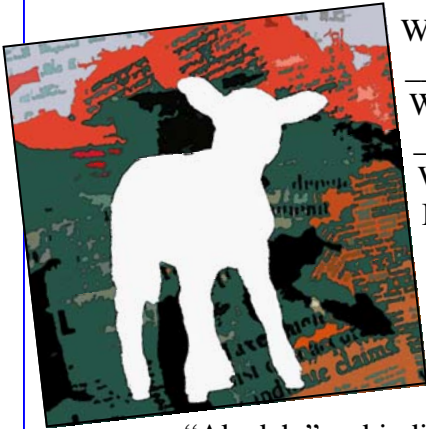
The observance of Passover began to change a bit once the Israelites had settled into their land, and built the temple in Jerusalem. Passover became one of the three Pilgrimage festivals that required a trip to Jerusalem to sacrifice a Passover lamb at the temple. The lamb was to be sacrificed during the afternoon of the 14th day, and then consume the lamb once the sun had set, and the 15th day had begun.

What do we learn about the Passover celebration as it was reinitiated under Hezekiah in 2 Chron. 30:1-12? _____

What elements were practiced by Josiah in 2 Chron. 35:1-19? _____

By the time of Christ, some 2,000 years after the first Passover, a number of customs had accumulated around the meal, eventually evolving into the Passover Seder that is practiced by Jews today.

Where is the lamb?



What question did Isaac ask of his father in Gen. 22:7? _____

Why had they not taken one with them? _____

Where did this sacrifice take place? _____

Interestingly, the first mention of the word that is translated “worship” occurs in Gen. 22:5 at this place. According to 2 Chron. 3:1, what is also located here? _____

The Jewish people recognize the story of Abraham and his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac as a foreshadow of the Passover lamb of Exodus 12:1-42. Most rabbis teach that Isaac was an adult at the time of

“Akedah,” or binding, as this story of obedience to God is called. (Jewish Study Bible 45-46)

They teach that Isaac was a willing participant in his own sacrifice, and is seen as an example and prototype for the Jewish martyr.

What is the only thing that released Isaac from a sure death? _____

What was the central element in the saving of Israelite life in Exodus 12? _____

Where were sacrifices made once the temple had been built in Jerusalem? _____

What happened to the system of sacrifice once the temple was destroyed in 70 AD? _____

What problem did this represent for the Jewish people in the observance of Passover? _____

In the modern Seder, the lamb is represented by the shank bone of a lamb, but is not a part of the meal. The Mishnah is the earliest and most important of the rabbinic texts compiled around 200 AD, after the Second Jewish Revolt failed and it became apparent that the temple would not be reconstructed any time soon. (Bokser 24-33) The Mishnah very subtly set a new precedent for Passover for the Jewish people who no longer had a place to present sacrifices to God. The symbolism of the redemption that had happened came to replace the need for redemption to happen. Basically, the sacrificial lamb has been written out of the modern Jewish Passover Seder so that the absence of the lamb has little consequence.

Hmmm, makes me wonder if we have also made convenient adjustments to our Christian equivalent. The blood has been removed because it is too messy. The lamb with a slit throat has been replaced by a cute little lamb that frolics among the flowers. Worst of all, we have adjusted our desperate need for that lamb. The sacrifice has been replaced by... our own worthiness? Complacency? A convenient, but deadly apathy about our own eternal future?

The Samaritans

The Samaritans still sacrifice a Passover lamb every year on Mt. Gerizim in

ancient Shechem

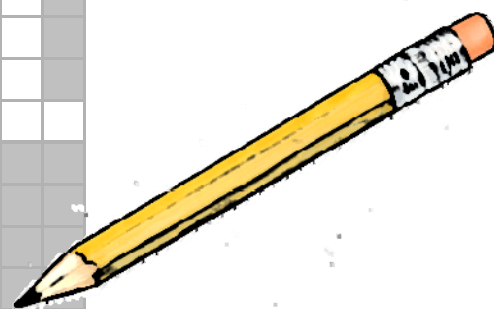
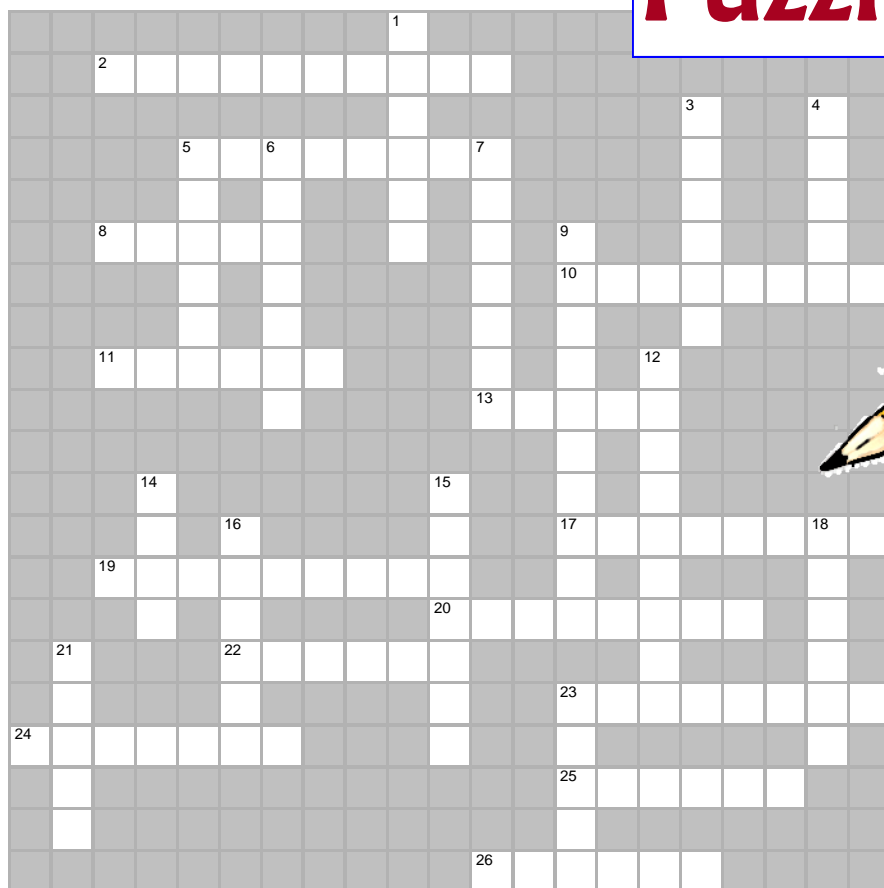
(now Nablus).

The Samaritans follow the

Torah, though with some adjustments. Mt. Gerizim is referred to as the center of worship instead of Jerusalem, and there is an 11th commandment that requires building an altar there. (Klawans 2)



Puzzle Page



Across

- 2 still sacrifice a lamb for Passover (10)
- 5 book of Jewish mysticism (8)
- 8 bitter herbs (5)
- 10 failure to observe Passover is considered the beginning of this (8)
- 11 the lamb (6)
- 13 number of matzah (5)
- 17 broken half of the middle bread (8)
- 19 there are four of these (9)
- 20 reinitiated Passover observance (8)
- 22 cleaned out thoroughly (6)
- 23 the telling (8)
- 24 cup of wine (7)
- 25 unleavened bread (6)
- 26 Israelite king who observed Passover (6)

Down

- 1 praise (6)
- 3 place of sacrifice (6)
- 4 means order, and is the Passover meal (5)
- 5 green vegetable (6)
- 6 a prayer of praise and thanksgiving (7)
- 7 represents the mortar used (7)
- 9 a trip to Jerusalem (10)
- 12 the fourth question deals with this (9)
- 14 number of cups (4)
- 15 early rabbinic text (7)
- 16 book the Passover songs are from (6)
- 18 an extra spot is left for him (6)
- 21 Moses observed Passover by this (5)
- 23 sung at the end of the meal (5)

John the Baptist

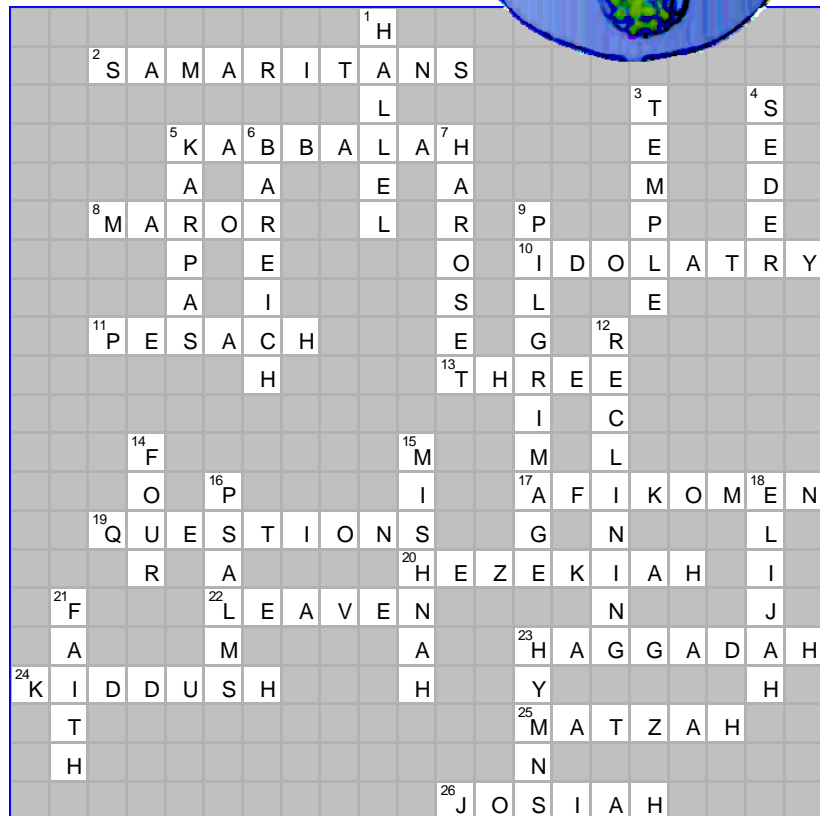
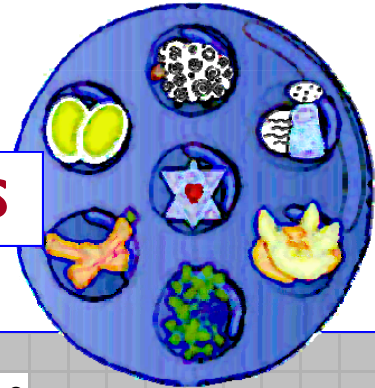
What do we learn about John the Baptist's father from Luke 1:8-13? _____

We know from verse 5 that Zechariah belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. According to 1 Chronicles 24:10, this division was the eighth to serve in the Temple. According to the Mishnah, each division served two times a year, plus times when all the priests served. The first division would serve first, starting on the first week of Nisan. On the third week of Nisan, Passover week, all of the priests served. On the first week of Sivan, the division of Abijah served, and on the second week of Sivan, the week of Pentecost, all of the priests served again.

So, John the Baptist had to have been conceived sometime after Pentecost. That would have put him, nine months later, being born around the time of Passover.

Is it any coincidence that the messenger thought to have been Elijah, even compared to Elijah by Christ (Matt. 11:13-15), arrived in the world at this time that Jewish people have set a tradition of setting him an empty place at their Passover celebrations?

Puzzle Answers



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