

Preparing for Passover

By PAUL J. SCHARF

When you represent The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, there is sort of an unwritten rule that you will present Passover Seder demonstrations in the spring, leading up to Easter.

Notice that I am careful to point out the fact that these are *educational* presentations. We are not mandating that the church return to the Mosaic Law and reinstate the Passover. However, there is so much that we can learn from the wonderfully rich heritage behind this festival—which I call *the world's oldest holiday*.

I had intended to devote the spring of 2020 to studying the Seder and sharing my initial lessons on it. Of course, those plans were changed by the coronavirus crisis, and the project was postponed until this year.

So, for several weeks I have been researching the origin, traditions, celebration and significance of Passover. My wife and I have been watching numerous videos of Passover Seder presentations, and I have enjoyed listening to lectures on the subject and making dozens of multi-media slides for my messages.

I have been amazed to discover, first of all, just how much there is to learn about Passover—and how much I did not know!

This fall will mark 400 years since people first began celebrating Thanksgiving in America. But the Jewish people have been celebrating Passover for almost nine times that amount! Furthermore, when a Jewish family sits around the table to participate in the Seder, they may take as much as four or five hours to complete the festivities. Keep in mind that they have also been celebrating it in numerous countries, and cultures, all around the world for all of these centuries.

Thus, whenever anyone presents *the Passover Seder*, it is necessary to realize that they are only giving you a glimpse—a snapshot—not the complete history of Passover, or a comprehensive overview of its celebration in Jewish culture, or a thorough understanding of the implications it contains for Christians. Everyone who presents the Seder within a 30-to-60-minute session has to be selective and emphasize only certain aspects of the history, customs and importance of Passover.

In fact, I have no specific background from a cultural perspective that qualifies me to talk about the Passover Seder. As far as Jewish traditions go, I am an observer and learner. But I am a Bible teacher. So, I have decided to build on my strengths—focusing my teaching on those areas where I can speak with authority, namely the Biblical passages regarding Passover that are found in both the Old and New Testaments.

One issue that became settled in my mind almost immediately as I researched this topic is the fact that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, at the Last Supper, within the

Passover Seder. I know that some have proposed alternative views, but I am established in the conviction that this was indeed a Passover meal.

Since it was Passover, we then begin to realize how much tradition—above that which God introduced at the institution of Passover in Exodus, or mandated in the Law regarding Passover in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—had already become part of the celebration by Jesus' day. In fact, unless we understand something about those traditions, we will never fully grasp the significance of all that Jesus said and did “on the same night in which He was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23).

Jesus' implementation of the Lord's Supper becomes three-dimensional in our minds when we realize that the “bread ... He broke” (1 Cor. 11:23-24) for His disciples was divided from the *Afikomen*, and that “the cup” He shared with them “after supper” (1 Cor. 11:25; Luke 22:20) was the third cup, of *redemption*. He elevated it to become “the cup of blessing” (1 Cor. 10:16). Lastly, He abstained from drinking the fourth cup, of *acceptance*—in light of the rejection He was so profoundly experiencing. Yet, His very act of refusal to drink leaves us with the certain hope of the future restoration of Israel in the coming kingdom (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25).

In these ways, Jesus—“our Passover” (1 Cor. 5:7)—forever transformed the meaning of Passover, while making it foundational to this ordinance of the church.

I have always loved holidays—and have always especially enjoyed the Easter season. It is sort of like Christmas in the spring—the last major spiritual holiday until Thanksgiving rolls around once again. My focus on Passover this year has truly enriched my life, and I hope that my presentations will encourage the congregations where I teach on it, making their Easter celebrations more meaningful and memorable.

But I have to admit, finally, that the very last line of the Passover Seder stops me cold every time I ponder it. “Next year in Jerusalem!” is to be shouted in unison, with exuberance, by everyone seated around the Seder table.

How wonderful will be the day when, ultimately, “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26) to gather in unity, with their Messiah, in the midst of His kingdom, in the Holy Land.

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