

The Passover

In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he personally has gone forth from Egypt, since it is said, *And you shall tell your son in that day saying, It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt* (Exod 13:8). Therefore we are duty-bound to thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt, extol, and bless him who did for our forefathers and for us all these miracles. He brought us forth from slavery to freedom, anguish to joy, mourning to festival, darkness to great light, subjugation to redemption, so we should say before him, Hallelujah.

- Rabbi Gamaliel, teacher of Paul the Apostle (Mishnah Pesah 10:5E)

Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

- Paul the Apostle (1Cor 5:6b-8)

Introduction

By this point, the Lamb has already been sacrificed at the Temple. The meal must be eaten within the walls of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was swollen to four times its usual population at Passover time and finding accommodations was difficult; the Last Supper took place within the city against all convenience but in accord with Passover regulations. Similarly, the meal does not begin until after sunset, and all should recline on couches instead of sitting. [Cf. Matt 26:20 par.: “When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve disciples.” The RSV translation “sat” is incorrect.] Normally the main meal took place in the late afternoon; the Last Supper took place at night against the normal custom but in accord with the special rules of the Passover. The custom was to sit three to a couch, with the host, the most important guest, and the next-most important guest reclining in that order on the head couch. John 13:23-26 seems to indicate that Jesus, John, and Peter reclined on the same couch, in that order. The Passover was celebrated in “associations” (*haburim*) of around ten persons, namely the number of people easily fed by one roasted lamb.

Preliminary Course

A cup of wine, the “*kiddush*” cup, is mixed and placed in front of the *paterfamilias*, along with the bowl of *karpas*. *Kiddush* means “sanctification,” in this case the sanctification of the day.

Blessing and distribution of the first cup: Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

[Compare the blessings of the Passover ritual with the form found in the New Roman Rite: “*Benedictus es, Domine, Deus universi, quia de tua largitate accepimus vinum....*”]

Blessing to sanctify the day: Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast chosen and exalted us above all nations, and hast sanctified us with thy commandments. Thou, Lord our God, hast graciously given us holidays for gladness and festive seasons for joy, this Feast of Unleavened Bread, our Festival of Freedom, a holy convocation in remembrance of the exodus from Egypt. Thou didst choose and sanctify us above all peoples; in thy gracious love, thou didst grant us festivals for gladness and joy. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who hallowest Israel and the festivals.

Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast granted us life and sustenance and permitted us to reach this season.

Blessing over the *karpas*: Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the earth.

Everyone washes their hands. The *karpas* (parsley) is dipped in vinegar or salt water and eaten. [Cf. Matt 26:23-23 par.: “And as they were eating, he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. And they were very sorrowful,

and began to say to him one after another, 'Is it I, Lord?' He answered, 'He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me.'" (Note that the RSV erroneously supplies the word "bread" in Mark 14:20.) Cf. also John 13:26, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." (Note that many translations {Vulgate, NRSV, NJB, etc.} say that Jesus gave Judas bread at this point, but the Greek word *psumion* means a "morsel" of any food.) By this point, Jesus has already washed the disciples' feet. Judas leaves; cf. John 13:27-30—despite Luke's editing of Jesus' saying in Luke 22:21! John 13:29 reports that the disciples supposed Jesus had told Judas to give something to the poor—a strange and sudden errand after dark, except that it was customary to give something to the poor on Passover.] It is permitted to drink wine between the ceremonial four cups, except for between the third and fourth cup (when everyone should be singing).

Passover Haggadah

The main meal is served, but not yet eaten; the second cup of wine, the *haggadah* cup, is mixed and placed in front of the *paterfamilias*.

The youngest boy asks the "four questions", to which the *paterfamilias* responds. If the boy is not old enough to ask the question, the father leads him through it by asking what is different about the night. This is basically an explanation of the foods on the table, as a way of getting at the meaning of the day. The four questions ask why tonight we eat only unleavened bread, why tonight we eat only bitter greens, why tonight we eat only roasted meat, and why tonight we dip not bread but something else in the dish. Modern seder rituals substitute a different question for the question about roasted meat, because it is no longer possible to eat the sacrificial lamb. An ancient tradition bases the answer to the questions around Deut. 26:5ff., but explanations of all kinds were given, including allegorical (Philo) and eschatological (e.g., the unleavened bread seen as foreshadowing the bread given by the Messiah in the kingdom, in connection with Ps 72:16). Further explanation of the other foods and ceremonies beyond just what the questions ask is expected. Jesus no doubt had some commentary to make on the meal, but his decisive *haggadah* was delivered in connection with the blessing over the bread before the meal and the wine after the meal.

It is followed by the singing of the Egyptian Hallel, part I (Ps 113; rabbinic schools of thought differed on whether to include Ps 114 here):

Psalm 113

- 1 Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord, praise the name of the Lord!
- 2 Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and for evermore!
- 3 From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised!
- 4 The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens!
- 5 Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high,
- 6 who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth?
- 7 He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap,

8 to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people.

9 He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord!

Blessing and distribution of the second cup (the *haggadah* cup): Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

The Main Meal

Wash hands for the meal.

Blessing and distribution of the unleavened bread: Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth.

[Cf. Matt 26:26 par.: Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Note that the ritual has already included an explanation of the meanings of the foods; Jesus is now reinterpreting the food.]

The Passover lamb is eaten with the bread and bitter herbs (Exod 12:8). The bitter herbs (*maror*: lettuce, chicory, pepperwort, endives, or dandelion) are dipped in haroseth. Some ancient Rabbis ate the bread and herbs as a sandwich. If the participants wanted a bigger feast, sometimes they would arrange to have a cow or some other animal sacrificed in addition to their Passover lamb to supplement the meal; the rule in this case is that the Passover lamb must be eaten last, because it is supposed to be the Passover repast that satiates the participant.]

Grace after meals:

Leader: My masters, let us say a blessing.

Company and then leader: Blessed be the name of the Lord henceforth and forever.

Leader: With your consent, let us now bless our God whose food we have eaten.

Company and then leader: Blessed be our God whose food we have eaten and through whose goodness we live.

All: Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who sustainest the whole world with goodness, kindness, and mercy. Thou givest food to all creatures, for thy mercy endures forever. Through thy abundant goodness we have never yet been in want; may we never be in want of sustenance for thy great name's sake. Thou, O God, sustainest all, doest good to all, and providest food for all the creatures thou hast created. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who dost sustain all.

Blessing and distribution of the third cup, the “cup of blessing”; cf. 1Cor 10:16, “The cup of blessing which we bless...”): Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

[Cf. Matt 26:27-28 par.: “And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Luke 22:20, 1Cor 11:24, and the Roman Rite all specify that the Eucharistic cup was “after supper”.]

Conclusion

Part II of the Hallel (Psalms 114-118) is sung. [Cf. Matt 26:30 par.: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”] It was sung **antiphonally: one member of the association sang a half verse, and the others responded to each half verse with “Halleluiah”—note the word *hallel* imbedded in this response. Jewish interpretation of the Hallel was mainly eschatological, as is already implied by the use of Ps 118 in the entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21; Mark 11; Luke 19).**

Psalm 114

- 1 When Israel went forth from Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,
- 2 Judah became his sanctuary, Israel his dominion.
- 3 The sea looked and fled, Jordan turned back.
- 4 The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like lambs.
- 5 What ails you, O sea, that you flee? O Jordan, that you turn back?
- 6 O mountains, that you skip like rams? O hills, like lambs?
- 7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob,
- 8 who turns the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of water.

Psalm 115

- 1 Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory, for the sake of thy steadfast love and thy faithfulness!
- 2 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"
- 3 Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.
- 4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
- 5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.
- 6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.
- 7 They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.
- 8 Those who make them are like them; so are all who trust in them.
- 9 O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.
- 10 O house of Aaron, put your trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.
- 11 You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.
- 12 The Lord has been mindful of us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron;

13 he will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great.
14 May the Lord give you increase, you and your children!
15 May you be blessed by the Lord, who made heaven and earth!
16 The heavens are the Lord's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men.
17 The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence.
18 But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 116

1 I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.
2 Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
3 The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.
4 Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I beseech thee, save my life!"
5 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.
6 The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.
7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
8 For thou hast delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;
9 I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.
10 I kept my faith, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted";
11 I said in my consternation, "Men are all a vain hope."
12 What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?
13 I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,
14 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.
15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.
16 O Lord, I am thy servant; I am thy servant, the son of thy handmaid. Thou hast loosed my bonds.
17 I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.
18 I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,
19 in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 117

1 Praise the Lord, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!
2 For great is his steadfast love toward us; and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever. Praise the Lord!

Psalm 118

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!
2 Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures for ever."
3 Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures for ever."

4 Let those who fear the Lord say, "His steadfast love endures for ever."
5 Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free.
6 With the Lord on my side I do not fear. What can man do to me?
7 The Lord is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.
8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in man.
9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.
10 All nations surrounded me; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
11 They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
12 They surrounded me like bees, they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off!
13 I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me.
14 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.
15 Hark, glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly,
16 the right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord does valiantly!"
17 I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord.
18 The Lord has chastened me sorely, but he has not given me over to death.
19 Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.
20 This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it.
21 I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation.
22 The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.
23 This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
25 Save us, we beseech thee, O Lord! O Lord, we beseech thee, give us success!
26 Blessed be he who enters in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord.
27 The Lord is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar!
28 Thou art my God, and I will give thanks to thee; thou art my God, I will extol thee.
29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures for ever!

[It seems that Jesus ended the Passover meal at this point without drinking the fourth cup. When he distributed the Eucharistic cup, he said, "I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29 par.), and he and his disciples departed after singing the final hymn (see Matt 26:30 cited above). Despite the fact that Jesus has spent each night at Bethany up to this point, he does not return to Bethany now; Passover night had to be spent "in" Jerusalem, which, to accommodate the vast numbers of pilgrims, was defined as including a certain

radius around the city walls—a radius which included the Mount of Olives but excluded Bethany.]

Blessing and distribution of the fourth cup: Blessed art thou, Lord our God, King of the universe, who createst the fruit of the vine.

[Dessert after the Passover meal was forbidden.]

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