



PASSOVER  
*Devotional Guide*



International Fellowship  
of Christians and Jews®  
CANADA

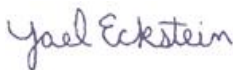
## INTRODUCTION

Passover commemorates the pivotal event in Jewish history — the Exodus of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. It was at this juncture more than three thousand years ago that the national identity of the Jewish people was truly shaped. And it was from this event that some of the most profound affirmations of the Jewish faith were formed: that God is present in human lives; that He hears the cries of the suffering and persecuted; and that He intervenes in history to deliver humanity from affliction and to redeem us from oppression.

It is out of those deeply held convictions that the Jewish people come to the Passover table each year, as they have done throughout the centuries, to remember and to relive that experience of going from slavery to freedom, from oppression to redemption. These shared beliefs, too, draw Christians to learn more about this biblically mandated holy day that Jesus observed and shared with his disciples during his final meal on earth.

It is with this in mind that I am sharing with you these devotions written by my *abba*, father, IFCJ Canada Founder Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, of blessed memory, for your reflection during this most holy season for Christians and Jews alike. These devotions and Scripture readings hopefully will expand your understanding of the Passover celebration and its ties to the Christian faith, as well as deepen your spiritual life as you reflect on how God miraculously works in the lives of His people – in the past, in the present, and in the future to come.

With blessings for *shalom*,



Yael Eckstein

President

International Fellowship of Christians and Jews of Canada

*Passover Eve*  
A HOLIDAY CALLED  
PASSOVER



*“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.”*

— EXODUS 12:13

The *Torah* reading for today is from Exodus 32:11–34:10.

Perhaps you have wondered why the holiday is called Passover. Sure, we know that the name comes from the plague of the firstborn when the angel of death “passed over” the houses of the Israelites marked with the blood of a sacrificed lamb and only took the Egyptians’ firstborns. But that’s just one of the many acts of God in the story of the Exodus. Why not call the holiday after the more glamorous miracle of the sea parting? Or maybe we

could have called it “Exodus” which captures just about the entire story. Why Passover?

The sages explain that holidays on the Jewish calendar are not just about events that happened in the past; they are about events happening right now in the present – in the world around us and in our own personal lives.

There is an energy that permeates every holiday, every year. *Yom Kippur* is a time of forgiveness. *Hanukkah*, a time for miracles. *Purim*, a time of joy and salvation. What’s the energy of Passover?

Passover is a time of change.

The name Passover isn’t just about an act of God that occurred thousands of years ago. Passover also refers to the actions of man that can and should happen every year during the holiday. All year long we talk about the changes we’d like to make in our lives; we’d like to become more patient or less angry, we’d like to make more time for prayer and Bible study. Or maybe we’d like

to make a major lifestyle change. All year long we talk and we think and we deliberate and we plan. On Passover, it's time to pass over all of the thinking and skip right to the doing. It's time to change.

Remember how *matzah* was invented? God said to the Israelites, "Time to go!" The Israelites replied, "Great. We just need to finish baking the bread, prepare a few things, and . . ." And God said, "No. It's time to go now!" So the Israelites took their dough and made it into the flat bread we eat on Passover called *matzah*:  
*"The dough was without yeast*

*because they . . . did not have time to prepare food for themselves"* (Exodus 12:39).

This is the time of year for doing the things we have been putting off because we didn't have the ingredients just right. If we wait for perfect conditions, we may be waiting forever. It's also no accident the Passover takes place in the springtime. It seems that nature all around us is changing, blooming, and blossoming. It's time for us to blossom, too! So, what are you waiting for? Make that call, make that change, and say "yes" to a new opportunity. It's time to go — now!



*Day 1*

## THANKING GOD FOR UNANSWERED PRAYERS



*His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.*  
— EXODUS 2:4

The *Torah* reading for today is from Exodus 12:21–51 and Numbers 28:16–25, and the *Haftorah* is from Joshua 3:5–7; 5:2–6:1, 27.

What if God answered every prayer with a resounding “YES”? Would the world be a better and happier place or a worse one? For example, what if God had answered Miriam’s prayer as she stood among the reeds next to the Nile River where her baby brother Moses floated in a basket designed to protect him as he drifted in the water?

As you remember the story,

Miriam and her mother had placed Moses in the basket as a last resort. The Egyptians had resolved to kill every single Hebrew baby boy. Miriam and her mother hoped that a non-Egyptian would find the infant and have mercy on him.

Miriam watched to find out her baby brother’s fate, and as the sages teach, while she waited, she prayed. “God, please watch over him. Please make sure no Egyptian officials find him.” Who should come along but the daughter of Pharaoh himself! The daughter of the very man who proclaimed: “*Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile*” (Exodus 1:22).

Miriam continued to pray: “God, please don’t let her see him!” But Pharaoh’s daughter did see him and she reached for the basket.

Miriam begged: “Please God, don’t let her reach him!” Again, God didn’t listen to her. Pharaoh’s daughter did reach the basket, and according to tradition, God even performed a miracle



to lengthen her arm so that she could reach Moses.

Miriam pleaded: “Oh, God, please make her think that he is ugly and no good.” But Pharaoh’s daughter was smitten and she decided to take Moses for her son.

And God said: “Good thing I didn’t answer you, Miriam! Had I done what you asked,

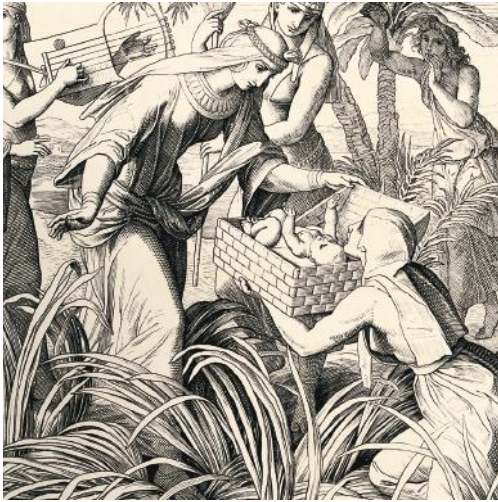
Like Miriam, we don’t always get what we pray for. But we always get what we need, and that makes all the difference.

When we pray for one thing and we don’t get what we asked for, it feels as though one of two things has happened: Either God didn’t hear our prayers, or He has denied us a gift. But neither is

true. God hears every one of our prayers. Sometimes He says “yes” and other times He says “no.” But when God says “no,” it’s not because He doesn’t want us to have good things. When God says “no” to what we asked for, it’s because He has something even greater to give us!

When your prayers seem to go unanswered,

think of Miriam standing desperately by the Egyptian Nile. Thank God for your unanswered prayers because those are often the greatest gifts of all.



*Moses Is Found, by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld  
(German painter, 1794 - 1872)*

Moses would have drifted off and drowned. Instead he will grow up in Pharaoh’s home where he will become a noble, a leader who can redeem Israel.” And indeed he did!

*Day 2*  
THROUGH  
NARROW  
STRAITS



*“And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.” — EXODUS 3:9*

The *Torah* reading for today is from Leviticus 22:26–23:44 and Numbers 28:16–25, and the *Haftorah* is from 2 Kings 23:1–9, 21–25.

**I**t seems that more people than ever are stressed these days. Even though we have more time-saving devices and the technology to have many chores done for us automatically, people seem to be more pressured and overwhelmed.

The bad news is that stress takes a toll on us. Scientific research has proven that stress affects our body, mind, and emotions. We are less able to

cope with illness or everyday challenges and more likely to forget things and make mistakes. But don't despair! There is some good news, too.

Think about how life for each of us began. We were resting comfortably in our mother's womb, when suddenly, there as pressure and pushing. More than likely we became quite uncomfortable and possibly stressed! The contractions continued until we were pushed through a narrow passageway and out into a new world. The miracle of birth had occurred.

The good news about stress: It can lead us to rebirth and renewal!

The Hebrew word for Egypt is *Mitzrayim*. The word comes from a Hebrew word that means “narrow straits” or “constriction.” The sages see Egypt as a narrow place, similar to the birth canal. The children of Israel were stressed, oppressed, compressed, and then literally caught in a narrow place when they found

themselves sandwiched between the Egyptians and the Red Sea.

But just like the birth process, the stress and confinement were all part of the plan. When the Israelites couldn't stand it any longer, they threw up their hands and said, "We are powerless, God, and only You can help!" At that point the sea parted, the Israelites left Egypt behind, and a new nation was birthed.

Passover is a holiday that usually comes along with a fair bit of stress — think of Christmas, times eight, to get an idea of how much food preparation is necessary, how much money is spent, and how much general stress the holiday can create! But the stress is all part of the Passover experience. If handled correctly, it can lead us to our own salvation, our own Exodus from the narrow places in our lives, and our own rebirth.

We get stressed

because we feel like life is overwhelming, that we can't handle it all and we can't do it alone. The psalmist says, "*Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you*" (Psalm 55:22). It's true, we can't handle life alone. Once we realize that only God can help us through, the burden is lifted. Instead of feeling stressed, we can rest, relax, and clear our minds, knowing that everything we accomplish is only possible because of generous help from above. We experience life in a totally new way. We are reborn!



*The Crossing of the Red Sea*



Day 3  
OUR  
CHILDREN,  
OUR FUTURE



*“In days to come, when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’”*  
— EXODUS 13:14

The *Torah* reading for today is from Exodus 13:1–16 and Numbers 28:19–25.

The first night of Passover is filled with excitement as we begin the special meal called the *Seder*. Friends and family gather together as holiday aromas fill the air. In addition to the regular holiday table décor, we add a *seder* plate with six items that will be used or mentioned during the *Seder*. For example, a shank bone represents the Passover sacrifice and bitter

herbs symbolize slavery. There is plenty of *matzah* and an assortment of fine wines or rich fruit juice for the “four cups” that we drink during the *Seder*. But even the most exquisite table is incomplete without the main centerpiece: Our children.

The Passover *Seder* is built around the children at the table. The reading of the *haggadah* (the text that accompanies the *Seder*) begins with the recitation of the “four questions.” The four questions — which begin “Why is this night different than all other nights?” — traditionally are recited by the youngest child. Questions in general are a major theme of the *Seder*. We do all sorts of unusual things just so the children can ask their favorite question: Why? Why isn’t there any bread tonight? Why are we eating bitter herbs? Why are we dipping them in salty water?

Why are we so intent on getting our children to ask questions?

We want them to ask questions so that we can give them

the answers. We want our children to be interested in our story so that they will listen to it and make it their own. All year long our children ask us questions — about school, nature, life, whatever comes into their minds. Sometimes we answer, and sometimes we waive them off with the brush of our hand. But on *seder* night we are commanded to answer them. It's these answers that will shape their thoughts, and it's their thoughts that will shape the future.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of Britain, sums it up this way: “The world we build

tomorrow is born in the stories we tell our children today.” On Passover, we celebrate freedom. We recount our own journey from bitter slavery to sweet freedom, and we cherish this God-given right. God says, “You want a kind and free world? Teach your children first!” Rabbi Sacks continues, “Politics moves the pieces. Education changes the game.”

Recent studies have proven that children are likely to become a reflection of the stories that they hear. So what stories are we telling our children? Make the time to sit with a child and read to him. Read her the stories of the Bible or some

of the many children's storybooks that exhibit values such as kindness and faith. Today's children are tomorrow's leaders. Let's teach them right.



Day 4  
THE  
OVERFLOWING  
CUP



*“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.” — EXODUS 20:2*

The Torah reading for today is from Exodus 22:24–23:19 and Numbers 28:19–25.

Are you a pessimist or an optimist? Believe it or not, one day, according to Jewish tradition, God will want to know.

The sages teach that there are a series of questions each person is asked when his or her time on Earth has come to an end. Among those questions are “were you an honest person?” and “did you make time to study God’s Word?” One of them is also “did you anticipate salvation?” In other words, were you

an optimist? Did you anticipate that things could get better and that God would help you?

You may wonder if that is really fair? How can God expect us to have a rosy outlook on life all the time? We all know people who seem to be born that way – always smiling, always with a cheerful disposition. But then there are some who seemingly have been born on the opposite end of the spectrum.

As one person once said, “I don’t just see the glass as half-empty instead of half-full. I see the glass as half-empty and worry that someone is going to come along and knock it over!” Some of us are just drawn toward thinking negatively. Is that really a crime?

The sages teach, according to the First Commandment, the answer is yes!

Remember the First Commandment in its entirety? *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery”* (Exodus 20:2). More importantly, think about what is

not said in this commandment. God does *not* refer to Himself as the Creator of the world, even though that might have been a more obvious choice. Instead, He commands that we know Him as the God who brought the children of Israel out of Egypt. Why? Because we are commanded to know God not just as the Creator of the world, but as the Savior of our individual lives!

We are commanded to believe in a God who hears our prayers and cares deeply for us. We are instructed to believe in a God who can and will help us

out of our own personal bondage, our own trials and difficulties. So can God command us to be optimistic about life? Yes, because to believe in the God who took the Israelites out of Egypt is to believe that God can perform miracles for us, too! He expects that level of faith and commitment from us.

So next time you come across that proverbial glass, don't see it as half-empty or even as half-full. See it as filling up and believe that it will run over! As it says in Psalm 23: "*my cup overflows*" (v.5).



Day 5

## A STORY OF REDEMPTION



*The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land....”*  
— EXODUS 3:7–8

The *Torah* reading for today is from Exodus 33:12–34:26 and Numbers 28:19–25, and the *Haftorah* is from Ezekiel 37:1–14.

Passover, or *Pesach* in Hebrew, commemorates the most influential event in Jewish history — the Exodus of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt. It was at that particular juncture some three thousand years ago that the national Jewish identity was shaped, and it was from this event that some of the

most profound affirmations of the Jewish faith were drawn.

Primary among them is the notion that God is not some distant power, uninterested in His creation. No, the story of Passover affirms for Jewish people that God is present in human life, that He hears the cries of His people, and that He intervenes in human history to deliver His people from affliction and redeem them from oppression.

Through retelling the story of the Exodus and symbolically reliving the events we are to feel as if *we ourselves* were just delivered from Egyptian bondage. Judaism maintains that God’s act of liberation is not a one-time-only event, but an ongoing and repeated one. In the words of the *haggadah*, the text we use during the *seder* meal to retell the Exodus story, “For God did not redeem our ancestors alone, but us, as well.”

Today, more and more Christians are celebrating the Passover holiday in their own way,



motivated by a desire to reclaim the Jewish roots of their Christian faith and the Jewishness of Jesus. Certainly, the links between suffering and joy, death and resurrection, are familiar to both faith traditions. And Christians, like Jews, affirm that darkness will be followed by light, oppression by redemption, and death by resurrection.

So as Jews around the world begin this week of Passover celebrations, I pray that we all will take time to reflect upon the story of Exodus, of a people brought from slavery into freedom because of a God who cared so deeply about humankind that He intervened in human history to deliver them, and how that redemption story is played out in our own lives.



Day 6

## ATTITUDE OF SERVITUDE



*Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says, “Let my people go, so that they may worship me.””*

— EXODUS 9:1

The *Torah* reading for today is from Numbers 9:1–15 and Numbers 28:19–25.

**L***et my people go*” is probably the most famous line in the entire Exodus story. God, via Moses, commands Pharaoh to let the people of Israel leave Egypt. However “*let my people go*” is only half of the line, and it represents only half of the story.

The rest of the verse reads “*so that they may worship me.*” God wants the Israelites to be freed . . . so that they can become servants to Him! The New King

James Version actually translates this verse as “*Let My people go, that they may serve Me.*” Then why is Passover celebrated as the holiday of freedom when the whole point of leaving Egypt was for the Israelites to become slaves once more?

Let’s take a closer look at this concept of slavery and freedom. What is slavery? Slavery means living a life without choices. You are not the master of your own life. Someone else is. Someone else tells you what to do and when to do it. You have no choice but to obey.

What is freedom? Freedom is the chance to choose your own life. You get to decide how you spend your time, your money, and your energy. It’s all up to you.

Now here’s the key. A person can be physically free and yet still live completely in bondage. Pharaohs come in all shapes and sizes today. Slavery is alive and well.

If your phone bings to let you know that a text has come in, and

you know you should ignore it because you are in the middle of a real conversation, *but you can't* – that's slavery. If you can't resist the piece of chocolate cake even though you know it's bad for you – that's slavery. Need to have the latest fashion? Slavery. Can't help but snap at your spouse? Slavery.

Every time you go on auto-pilot, everywhere you don't make conscious decisions, you experience slavery. The Exodus story is not just about a bunch of Jews in ancient Egypt. Every human being experiences slavery.

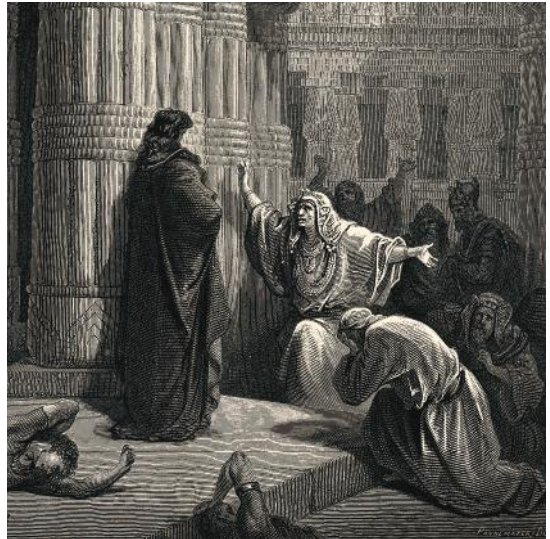
Yet we can all experience redemption.

Here's how.

No one can tell me what to do when I only listen to The One. Nothing can force me to do anything when I only do what He

tells me to do. And what does God tell us to do? He tells us to rise above money. He teaches us to transcend popular opinion. He asks us to become masters of our desires. Everything that we do in service of God puts choice back in our hands. That, my friends, is why only a servant of God is truly free.

Celebrate freedom by exercising it! Before every decision you make today, ask yourself who is calling the shots. Is it the servant of God or the servant of Pharaoh? Choose accordingly.



The Egyptians Urge Moses to Depart, by Gustave Doré

Day 7

LET MY  
PEOPLE  
GROW!



*When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."*  
— EXODUS 13:17

The *Torah* reading for today is Exodus 13:17–15:26 and Numbers 28:19-25, and the *Haftorah* is from 2 Samuel 22:1–15.

The sages teach that if the Bible had not been given over to man, we would have learned many virtues from His creations. For example, we would have learned faithfulness from a dog. Perseverance from an ant. Creativity from a spider. While God did give us the Bible, we can still benefit from observing His wondrous

creatures. Here's what we can learn from a simple crab.

Unlike most animals that grow as an entity during their lifespan, crabs, with their hard outer shells, cannot. As babies grow into older children, their organs, limbs, and facial features grow right along with them. But a crab's shell stops growing when it gets to a certain size. Crabs have to shed their outer shell in order to grow a new one.

They have to leave the old behind in order to step into something new and better. Crabs teach us a powerful lesson about growing: Sometimes, in order to grow, we have to leave behind something – or many things – that no longer suit us.

Crabs instinctively know this truth about growing. They know that without letting go of their old shell, they'll never grow a new and improved one. But as human beings, we tend to resist change – especially when it involves leaving behind a part of us. We need to learn from the crabs and let go of the old.

Exodus 13:17 reads: "*When*

*Pharaoh let the people go...*

However, if we translate this verse literally from the original Hebrew, we get this: “*When Pharaoh sent the people away...*” The sages explain that when it finally came time for the Israelites to leave Egypt, they were hesitant to go. Pharaoh had to literally push them out the door!

While we may have assumed that the children of Israel would jump at the chance to escape their lives of slavery and bitterness, they didn’t. In fact, four-fifths of them – about 2 million Israelites – stayed behind in Egypt! Were they crazy?

No. Just afraid.

Afraid of change and afraid to grow.

The reaction of the Israelites to the opportunity for freedom is actually quite natural. As human beings, most

of us fear the unknown. So we stay in jobs that we don’t like, relationships that hurt us, or in places that no longer suit us. But there is something even scarier than the unknown: It’s staying with something that we *know* is bad for us!

Passover is a time for stepping out in faith. It’s a time of letting go of the old in order to make way for the new. As we shed our old selves, we can become newer, improved versions of ourselves. Pharaoh let the people go. We need to let ourselves grow!





Day 8

## DANCING WITH FAITH



*Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.*  
— EXODUS 15:20

The *Torah* reading for today is Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17 and Numbers 28:19–25, and the *Haftorah* is from Isaiah 10:32–12:6.

One of the most joyous moments in the story of the Exodus – and perhaps in the entire Bible – is the singing and rejoicing that occurred just after the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. This was the climactic moment of what had begun as a wayward prince demanding the freedom of an oppressed people and ended with the most spectacular miracles that the world had ever seen on behalf of the

downtrodden Israelites. God's hand was never so apparent, and the people rejoiced for the good that He had done for them.

Let's picture the scene: The Israelites have finished crossing the sea and they watch their Egyptian enemies getting closer. Suddenly, the sea crashes down on the entire Egyptian army! Not only are the Israelites now safe, they are also free! The Egyptians will never be able to pursue them again. Moses leads the people in a beautiful song of praise to God. Just as he finishes, his sister Miriam leads the women in song. And what's this? They are dancing and making music, too!

The question is where in the world did the women get those timbrels from in the middle of the desert? Did these instruments fall from the sky?

The sages share a beautiful explanation. They say that the Israelite women, in their great faith, prepared these instruments while in Egypt and while they were still enslaved. Led by Miriam, the women refused to

give up hope that the day of salvation would come. Their faith led them to make these instruments, so that when the day came, they were ready!

Miriam's name has two meanings. It comes from the Hebrew word that means *mara*, "bitter." Miriam was born into bitter times of slavery. But the name Miriam is also related to the Hebrew word *meri*, "rebellion." Miriam rebelled against the bitterness in her life. She would not accept it — she refused to submit to hopelessness or depression. She lived her life with complete faith that the bitterness would be sweetened. And indeed it was!

Friends, it's not enough to talk about faith; we need to be willing to act on our faith. That means making life decisions based on faith in God and taking action that fits with His purposes. Our faith must be turned into actions that reflect God's Word and promises.

Perhaps it wasn't the parting of the sea that caused Miriam to dance, but rather the sea parted because Miriam began dancing way back in Egypt when she prepared for that day. Remember, while miracles have the ability to inspire faith, it also works the other way around. Our faith has the ability to inspire miracles.



## THIS HOLY SEASON



*The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.*

— PSALM 18:2

Read Psalm 18.

During this holy season for both faiths, I wish my Jewish friends a blessed Passover, and to my Christian friends, a blessed Easter. In the previous devotions, I have shared with you some reflections on the Passover celebration and the lessons that can be gleaned from it for Jews and Christians alike. In fact, many of the sacred aspects of Christian worship trace their spiritual roots directly to the Jewish faith and the early history of the nation of Israel.

Such is the case with the term “Paschal Lamb,” or “Lamb of

God,” which in the Christian tradition refers to Jesus. From the Jewish perspective, the term is *Korban Pesach*, or “sacrifice of Passover,” which dates back to the first Exodus. The blood of a sacrificed lamb, which was smeared on the doorframes of each Jewish household, served as sign of deliverance from death striking their firstborn sons. The lamb’s blood would be the only path to salvation — without it, their firstborn would die, along with those of the Egyptians.

Additionally, the lamb represented the idols, or false gods, that the Egyptians worshiped. By killing a lamb, the Israelites were, in essence, defying their Egyptian masters as well as demonstrating once again the power of the God of Israel over the Egyptian gods.

In the times of the Jewish temple worship, Jews obeyed God’s command to remember the first Passover by sacrificing a lamb on that day. This lamb had to be male, one year old, and most importantly,

without blemish. Only then would it suffice to be the perfect Passover sacrifice. (See Exodus 12:5.)

This Passover observance is what Christians reference when speaking of “*a lamb without blemish or defect*” (1 Peter 1:19).

It is also true that Jesus, as an observant Jew, and his disciples were celebrating the Passover on the very night that he foretold his coming death. Jesus followed the same divine instructions that were given to Moses as he broke bread with his disciples. And later, the apostle Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians to “*keep the Festival*” (Passover/Lord’s Supper) with unleavened bread (5:8).

Indeed, the Christian observance of Easter resonates back to the story of the Jews’ escape and deliverance from

Egyptian bondage three thousand years ago. Understanding the story of Passover and rich symbolism of the *seder* meal gives a new richness to many of the worship traditions at churches around the world.

It is good for people of faith to remember the Jews’ miraculous deliverance on that first Passover and of God’s divine leading from bondage to freedom. Let us celebrate and praise along with David, in the words of Psalm 18, our rock, our fortress, and the horn of our salvation.



*The Last Supper*

## Passover: Devotional Guide

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