

Remembering Jesus' last meal
with his friends before his death.

Passover Meal

St John's Diamond Creek



Introduction

The Passover Meal is a wonderful way to engage in the truths of Easter.

It is a meal of remembrance and is one of the oldest and most important of Jewish religious festivals. It is still celebrated today within Jewish families and the symbolism and richness is something Christians can enjoy and be enriched by as well. It is a retelling of the story of how God brought the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt – a slavery that had dragged on for hundreds of years – into freedom and new life in the Promised Land of Israel. Jesus would have participated in the Passover Festival each year, and it was during Passover that Jesus washed his disciples' feet and shared his last meal with them before he was arrested and taken to the cross.

We encourage you to use this resource to experience this meal together as a household, by inviting friends into your home, or as a Life Group. Feel free to adapt it as is useful to your own circumstances and take time to discuss your reflections at stages throughout the meal.

The full Passover meal involves 15 steps and can take hours. Our suggestions for your meal include:

- Lamb
- Unleavened bread (bread without yeast, like flat bread)
- Parsley & salt water for dipping (alternatively, tabouli and/or other salad/veg)
- Egg
- Charoset (a Jewish dessert containing apples, walnuts, and honey- alternatively just use fruit & nuts)
- Red Wine or Grape Juice

Non-food items:

- Set your table with candles, to be lit just before the meal
- A bucket of warm water and a few towels, for the washing of feet
- Bible, to read the references given throughout the evening

Explanations of these elements will follow. However, if you do not own candles, are a vegetarian or if your child only eats vegemite sandwiches, remember that what is in your heart is far more important than what is on your table – honour God however you choose to partake.

The First Passover

Read together the First Passover passage, *Exodus 12:1-12, 14*. Those with young children, who have the Jesus Storybook Bible, may choose to read Chapter 10 – *God to the Rescue!*

The Passover meal honours God by highlighting his promises and provision for his people. Jews remember that God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. His judgement literally *passed over* them to those who held them captive. As Christians, we not only honour God by remembering that rescue, but by connecting it with the ultimate rescue, people of all nations freed from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Washing of Feet

The night before Jesus was arrested and taken away, he was celebrating Passover with his disciples. It was during the Passover festival that Jesus washed his disciples' feet.

Read *John 13:1-17* together.

Jesus humbled himself to perform an act usually undertaken by the lowest of servants, demonstrating that his ministry is one of serving, not of being served.

As you wash each other's feet, discuss how can we serve others in our everyday lives.

Lighting the Passover Candles

Traditionally, the eldest female in the family would be the one to light the candles on the table. Pray as they are lit, giving thanks to God for the food about to be received, thanking Jesus for being the light of the world, and asking the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to show us how to be his light to those around us.

Blessed are you God. You have given us life, provided for our needs, and brought us to

this season. Let your light shine on us in blessing and bring us peace.

The Meal

Traditionally, before the meal is eaten, a psalm of praise would be read. Read a selection from *Psalms 113-118*. Alternatively, you might like to share around the table something you are praising God for.

During the meal, questions are asked, and answers given to explain the components being used. If you have young children at your gathering, encourage their involvement by asking the questions, otherwise just take turns in asking and answering.

Q: Why do we have all these special ingredients?

A: The meal is a way to remember the promises of God, recall what God did for His people in the past, and to teach and remember who God wants to be for us today.

Throughout the meal, four cups of wine are used to symbolise the four promises God made to his people in *Exodus 6:6-7*.

First, there is the Cup of Sanctification. *Sanctification* means to be set apart for God. The Israelites were God's chosen people. We remember that Christ has set us apart from the world and we belong to him (*1 Peter 2:9*).

Q: Why is this night different to any other?

A: That is told through the Cup of Deliverance. When the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, God showed them the way to freedom by leading them out of Egypt and through the parted waters of the Red Sea. God said, 'I will free you from being slaves to them.'

Pharaoh rebelled against God and tried to hold God's people captive, so God sent ten

plagues on Egypt to show his strength and to free his people from slavery. (See if you can name all ten. Refer to *Exodus 7-11*).

We give thanks today that God has freed us from every form of captivity, including ourselves!

Then we have the Cup of Redemption. Just as the blood, painted on the doorframes of the Israelites in Egypt, saved them from the final plague, Jesus' death brings salvation to all who believe.

And the Cup of Praise. Our God is a God who saves! We have been chosen to be his people and we eagerly wait for the return of Jesus so that we will be with him forever!

Q: What does the meat stand for?

A: The Lamb reminds us of the Passover lamb, which God commanded the Israelites to sacrifice to protect the lives of their families the night the angel of the Lord passed over the land of Egypt. It also reminds us of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who died on the cross so we could be saved from our sins and be God's children. When Jesus came down to the Jordan River to be baptised, John the Baptist recognised him as the Messiah and said 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (*John 1:29*)

Q: What about the bread?

A: Unleavened Bread is eaten to remind us how quickly the Israelites had to leave Egypt – they had no time to wait for their dough to rise. Remember also that yeast is associated with contamination or sin in the Bible. The unleavened nature of the bread reminds us of the sinless nature of Jesus, the Bread of Life (*John 6:35*)

Q: Do the herbs and eggs represent something too?

A: The herbs remind us that every year God brings new life through nature. We dip

the parsley in salt water to remind us of the tears of a people past who were held in slavery ... it will taste bitter! (*Photo suggestion: capture people's faces as they eat the salty parsley!*)

As you eat remember...

- the sweat and tears shed by the Israelites while they were slaves,
- the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea and the deliverance of the Israelites
- that we are freed from the bitterness of slavery to sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus (*John 8:34-36*)

And the egg is a symbol of life. It reminds us that God is the giver of life. Jesus came to earth as the final sacrifice that took away sin for the last time (*Hebrews 10: 1-18*). He came to bring everyone life and life in abundance.

Q: The dessert might be my favourite! What does Charoset mean?

A: Charoset is a sweet mixture of blended fruit and nuts that looks like the bricks and mortar the Israelites used to build for the Egyptians, reminding us that even the most bitter of work is made sweet by the promise of salvation. As we eat dessert, remember that the sweetness Jesus has brought to our lives, through his forgiveness, was never intended to be kept for ourselves. We are meant to pass the good news on to others. (*Matthew 28:19-20*)

Prayer

On the night before he died, Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. Weather-permitting, you may like to go into your garden after dinner, for a time of pray together.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and have mercy on you. May the Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace, this Easter and always.

Share the evening with others taking part by posting some photos to our private Facebook group – St John's Meeting Place (facebook.com/groups/stjohnsdc)