

THE FOUR CUPS OF PASSOVER

OVERVIEW:

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are closely linked. Passover symbolized the deliverance of Israel from captivity in Egypt. However, in the institution of it and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, leaven was searched out in each home to remove it. No leaven could be in the home. This symbolized our need to search out the leaven of sin in our lives that is necessary for us to be obedient servants of the Lamb.

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” (1 Corinthians 11:28 ESV)

After the lighting of the candles, the Brechat Haner, the four cups of wine portion of the feast begins. The leader says, “As we read through the Haggadah, we will drink of ‘cup of the fruit of the vine,’ four times. These four cups stand for the four “I wills” that are recorded in Exodus 6:6-7.

Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’ (Exodus 6:6-7 ESV)

As the Lord spoke these words to Moses, He revealed to him the plan by which He would redeem the children of Israel. In a prophetic sense, God was also revealing how He would redeem His elect to become His children. Based on the four promises in the passage above we have the four cups of the Passover feast.

1. **The Cup of Sanctification** – based on God’s statement, “I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians”
2. **The Cup of Judgment or Deliverance**- based on God’s statement, “I will deliver you from slavery to them”
3. **The Cup of Redemption** – based on God’s statement, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm”
4. **The Cup of Praise or Consummation** – based on God’s statement, “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God”

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THE FIRST CUP: THE CUP OF SANCTIFICATION.

The first cup is part of the Kiddush or Thanksgiving.

God promised that He would bring His people out from under the cruel oppression of the Egyptians. Of course, this parallels God's promise of redemption to His elect through faith in the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SECOND CUP: THE CUP OF JUDGMENT

Later in the Feast after the Urchatz, the Karpas, the Ma Nistanah, the Yachutz, the Maror, the Kharoset, and the Maggid we come to the part of the feast for the second cup. (Each name above means, the Washing of the Hands, Dipping of the Parsley, The Four Questions, Breaking of the Middle Matza, the Bitter Herbs, We dip twice, and the Story of Passover.)

Now we arrive at the Makkot, the second cup: The Cup of Judgment.

The leader of the feast then recites: "Moses left the wilderness to return to Pharaoh's palace where he had been raised. He returned with the message, which the Lord had given him, knowing of the resistance he would encounter."

Then all at the feast recite:

But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So, I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go. (Exodus 3:19-20 ESV)

The leader then recites: "God sent plagues, one by one, yet with each plague, Pharaoh hardened his heart. The Egyptians became afflicted with discomfort and disease, ban and blight. Still Pharaoh would not relent. With the tenth and most awful plague, God pierced through the hardness of Pharaoh's impenetrable heart."

Then all at the feast recite:

For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. (Exodus 12:12 ESV)

The leader recites: "Let us fill our cups a second time. A full cup is a symbol of joy and we are indeed filled with joy at God's almighty deliverance. But let us also remember the great cost at which redemption was purchased. Lives were sacrificed to bring about the release of God's people from the slavery of Egypt."

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What does the second cup, the Cup of Judgment, have in parallel with our Christian faith? A far greater price was paid to purchase our redemption from slavery to sin – the death of God’s only begotten Son – our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The next part of the feast is the Pesach, the Passover Lamb. Of course, this is the part that reminds us that Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. This part of the feast is followed by the Dayehnu or ‘It Would Have Been Sufficient’.

It is at this point that the second cup which was poured during the Makkot is drunk. This cup, even though it is the Cup of Judgment, is a cup of rejoicing because of God’s goodness to us! For each of His acts of mercy and kindness we declare “Dayhenu!” This means that with each act of God by His grace we recognize that it is sufficient. All at the feast gives thanks to God and rejoices in their deliverance. Christians thank God daily for the gift of Jesus. Through Him, we have forgiveness of our sin. Through this, God has provided us life that is abundant and everlasting. The second cup is drunk followed by more praise and worship.

This is followed by the Shulcan Orech or the Passover Supper. This is the sharing of the meal of the Lamb, unleavened bread and the bitter herbs. It is during this part of the feast that Jesus told Judas Iscariot to quickly do what he was going to do. After he left the feast, Jesus instituted the Eucharist by breaking the bread and saying, “this is my body.” He probably waited until the Birka Hamazon or ‘The Blessing After the Meal’ to do this. This part of the feast is a point of thanksgiving for the bread. What greater blessing do Christians have than Jesus, the Bread of Life who has come!

THE THIRD CUP: THE CUP OF REDEMPTION

The next part of the feast is the Ha-Geulah or The Third Cup: The Cup of Redemption. This is called the Cup of Blessing or Ha-Geulah. It is a celebration of God’s promise that He will redeem us. The Jews used this cup to symbolize the blood of the Passover Lamb. It is significant that this is where Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.” Hebrews 9:22 tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:5-6 ESV)

In His passion and death, Jesus atoned completed for our sins. Anyone who places their trust in Jesus and His work of redemption on the cross, passes from death to Eternal life.

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THE FOURTH CUP: THE CUP OF PRAISE OR CONSUMMATION

The Fourth Cup: The Cup of Praise or Consummation takes place during the Hallel. This is a recitation of Psalm 136:1-16

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.
Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.
Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever;
to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever;
to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures
forever;
to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures
forever;
to him who made the great lights, for his steadfast love endures forever;
the sun to rule over the day, for his steadfast love endures forever;
the moon and stars to rule over the night, for his steadfast love endures forever;
to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures
forever;
and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever;
with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, for his steadfast love endures
forever;
to him who divided the Red Sea in two, for his steadfast love endures forever;
and made Israel pass through the midst of it, for his steadfast love endures
forever;
but overthrew Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, for his steadfast love endures
forever;
to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures
forever;*

(Psalms 136:1-16 ESV)

Then the fourth cup is drunk.

This is followed by more praise in which the leader encourages the participants with the promises of God.

For us who are known by the Lord Jesus Christ, let us now confirm our longing to forever be with the Lord in Heaven.