*Introduction*

The feast of Passover is probably, out of all the feasts of the Lord, the one we are most familiar with. It is the one we remember when thinking about the Nation of Israel coming out of Egypt and the Last Supper of Jesus where he took the Passover and established it as the Church’s remembrance feast of communion.

As we shall see as we go through, as with all the feasts, it has a practical application, a spiritual application and a prophetic application.

Passover is without doubt the oldest feast that has been kept over a period of 3,500 years.

The meaning of this great feast is one of redemption. God caring for His chosen people that he brings them out of captivity and onto the road to the promised land.

The Jewish nation had lived in Egypt for some 400 years following that great God-brought famine that saw Joseph rise from slave to Prime Minister and second in Egypt to Pharaoh.

So great was the famine that Josephs father sent his brothers, with the exception of Benjamin, to Egypt to buy food. Joseph recognises his brothers straight away, but they do not recognise him. This is understandable as he would have been groomed as an Egyptian, no longer looking anything like them.

400 years later, when Joseph had been forgotten, and the Israelites were in severe bondage, making bricks without straw and being whipped and beaten, God finally hears and answers their pleas.

Moses, one of the Israelites, brought up as a prince of Egypt returns from his running away after killing an Egyptian taskmaster, with God’s message to Pharaoh, “Let my people go”.

Pharaoh was a god in his country, and the country worshipped him along with many other gods.

God’s plagues destroyed and made mockery of the gods of Egypt. The last god to be brought down was Pharaoh himself. Defiant to the last, with a hardened heart, he hung on as long as he could bit in the end it all got to much.

The last plague was to be the killing of the firstborn everywhere. Not just the Egyptians, but everyone in the land.

But for those Israelites who trusted God there was protection.

We read in Ex 11

***EX 11:1-3 And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people.***

And in Ex 12 the instructions for the first Passover are given, but firstly God states:

***EX 12:1-2 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.***

God is doing a new thing with the people of Israel, He is making this a new religious beginning for them, and then He says:

***EX 12:3-11 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.***

***And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover.***

On that 14th day at twilight the Israelites killed their lambs, each family being responsible for the death of their lamb, a lamb that by now they had got attached to. Its blood was then applied to the door posts and lintel of the house. Inside the house each family would then roast and eat the lamb along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

When the angel of death came over and saw the blood, those who had been faithful were saved. The angel of death passed over and they were saved.

As far as Biblical records are concerned, the lamb became the centrepiece for the Passover, no lamb, no deliverance. The Lamb became interchangeable with Passover. One could not exist without the other. Without the Lamb the holiday is meaningless.

On that first Passover night, God required three things to be eaten: - the lamb, the matzah (unleavened bread) and the bitter herbs:

***8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.***

Each of these things represented something specific.

The Lamb depicted innocence

The roasting by fire was to portray the judgment that would come on it instead of the firstborn. The unleavened bread symbolized purity of the sacrifice (leaven usually = sin) and the bitter herbs a reminder of the suffering of the lamb.

**The importance of the Passover.**

There are several important facts that we should understand regarding the Passover, the first is this:

There was only ONE PASSOVER where the Lord passed through the land in judgment. All observances since then are memorials of that occasion.

***EX 13:3 And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten.***

Passover is the oldest religious feast in the world, celebrated for 3500yrs, it is well documented throughout the OT. It was celebrated through the wanderings in the wilderness, with Joshua before going into the promised land, in fact that particular Passover must have been an amazing one for we read in Joshua 5:10-12 that the day after Passover they ate of the fruit of the land of canaan and the manna stopped.

The Passover was the one feast that brought unity and cohesion to the Jewish community, if they were warring with each other, it all stopped at Passover.

The Passover was so important to God and for remembrance by the people, that God instituted that if a person could not keep Passover on the due date, because of being defiled through touching something or away on a long journey, they could celebrate it 30 days later on the 14th of the second month –

***NU 9:6-13 But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were ceremonially unclean on account of a dead body. So they came to Moses and Aaron that same day and said to Moses, "We have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the LORD's offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?"***

***Moses answered them, "Wait until I find out what the LORD commands concerning you."***

***Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites: `When any of you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body or are away on a journey, they may still celebrate the LORD's Passover. They are to celebrate it on the fourteenth day of the second month at twilight. They are to eat the lamb, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. They must not leave any of it till morning or break any of its bones. When they celebrate the Passover, they must follow all the regulations. But if a man who is ceremonially clean and not on a journey fails to celebrate the Passover, that person must be cut off from his people because he did not present the LORD's offering at the appointed time. That man will bear the consequences of his sin.***

The Passover was to be in the form of a service as we can see from

***EX 12:24-28 And ye shall observe this thing for an ordinance to thee and to thy sons for ever. And it shall come to pass, when ye be come to the land which the LORD will give you, according as he hath promised, that ye shall keep this service. And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean ye by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. And the children of Israel went away, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so did they.***

The service was to include the Lamb, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs and to make children question what it was all about so that the Exodus story could be passed from generation to generation.

What has come out of that is a service known as the Seder (pronounced SAY-der).

Seder means ‘order’, and basically prescribed the order of the readings, prayers, foods and songs in the Passover service and it has remained the same today as it was in Jesus day.

We know from the Scriptures that Jesus kept the Passover and that he followed the seder, although on the Passover meal at the last supper he made a dramatic change.

We will come back to that in a moment.

God did not detail any order of service, He only commanded that it be kept as a memorial forever.

**Passover preparation**

Before the Passover could take place it has become tradition for the Jewish home to be cleansed of all leaven. The house would be cleaned from top to bottom to make sure there was not a trace of leaven. This was very important because God had commanded:

***Exodus 12:15 (KJV)
15 Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.***

***Exodus 12:19 (KJV)
19 Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.***

Literally, everything that contained leaven had to go!!

It is very interesting that Jesus, when talking of the Kingdom of Heaven said:

***Matthew 13:33 (KJV)
33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.***

Leaven represents everything that is of the old way of life, the life of sin, in fact it represents sin itself. False teaching is leaven also.

So the necessity to put away, get rid of, all the leaven has at least a threefold meaning.

1. For the Israelites about to leave Egypt, it was not a means of time saving. It was a leaving behind all that was sinful. They had been in Egypt, a place full of idols and demonic worship, where Pharaoh was worshipped as a god. God was saying to them, leave all that behind, cleanse yourselves of it, come out from it, I am going to do a new thing with you. You are my people and I am going to place you in My new land. Those who were obedient, trusted in the blood to save them, now they were a saved people about to start a new life.
2. For us as Christians, leaven also is a representation of our sin. When we avail ourselves of the blood of Christ shed for us on the cross of Calvary, we are redeemed from our old way of life. But we have to turn our back on that past life – the sin, the leaven and walk in newness of life.
3. When Jesus spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Saducees, he was speaking of the sin of wrong teaching. When we listen to wrong preaching that leads us away from Christ – working for our salvation, being religious etc. it soon spreads and consumes. This is why we are told to be ‘good Bereans’ to study the word for ourselves to see that we are not being led astray.

There are things we get involved with that look good on the surface, they get us hooked, and before we know it, we are astray from God. Leaven works its way through and takes over.

They were not to eat or have leaven for 7 days. The number 7 is a special number in the Scriptures, it is found throughout its pages, The Hebrew word for 7 is Sheva, it basically means ‘completeness’.

It comes from the root words that mean Gods Oath, promise or covenant.

**Jesus – our Passover lamb**

Jesus was hailed by John the Baptist as ***Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.(John 1:29)***

We know that Jesus was perfect, sinless, without stain or blemish, Isaiah the prophet tells us in Ch 53 - ***7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.***

He came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, Matthew clearly shows us as we read the account after his entry that he was coming into Jerusalem 4 days before the Passover. He was coming into the family to be part of them for the four days and he was closely scrutinized by all to see who he was.

At his trial, Pilate said ***LUKE 23:4 Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.***

**The last Supper – Passover**

Jesus wanted to keep the Passover as was the Jewish tradition and because it was His Father’s feast. He kept it in the traditional way.

The Messiah was the leader of the Seder and would have said the blessings and took the cups.

There were traditionally 4 cups at the Seder to denote the fourfold joy of the Lords redemption. These four expressions of joy are found in:

***EX 6:6-7 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.***

To begin the Seder service, the father of the house would pour the first cup of wine and everyone would stand. He would then raise the cup and recite the *Kiddush* (prayer of sanctification)-

*Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, Who has chosen us for thy service among the nations….. Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who has kept us in life, Who has preserved us, and has enabled us to reach this season.*

Jesus would have taken this cup and gave thanks

***Luke 22:17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves:***

Following this there would be the ritual washing of hands. One of the family members would normally do this. It is symbolic of purification as they prepare to handle food.

It was probably this ceremony that the Lord Jesus used to teach his disciples a lesson on servanthood.

***JOHN 13:4-5 He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.***

Jesus was demonstrating here that he was about to become the suffering servant of the Lord. He would be the One to cleanse them.

Following this washing the *karpas* (green vegetable) is dipped in salt water and eaten. The Karpas is a reminder that the Passover occurs in the springtime – the time, if you like, of renewal, new things. The salt water a reminder of the tears of pain and suffering shed by the Jewish people in slavery. (some use an egg dipped in salt, the egg a reminder of spring).

Then we come to the *Matzah*, the unleavened bread. Traditionally there are 3 of these placed in a linen bag. Some would say they represent the 3 different peoples in the Israelite nation – The Priests, The Levites and the people.

However this explanation is not biblical, and I would suggest that this is more in line with representing the Holy Trinity.

The middle matzah is taken and broken in half, one half is placed back in the linen bag, the other is carefully wrapped in a linen napkin and hidden in the house for the children to later discover.

At this point in the service questions are asked by a child:

The Four Questions begin when the youngest person asks: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" The seder leader replies by asking what differences they notice. The youngest person then replies that there are four ways in which they notice a difference about Passover:

1. On all other nights we eat bread or matza, while on this night we eat only matza.
2. On all other nights we eat all kinds of vegetables and herbs, but on this night we have to eat bitter herbs.
3. On all other nights we don't dip our vegetables in salt water, but on this night we dip them twice.
4. On all other nights we eat while sitting upright, but on this night we eat reclining.

It is a tradition for the youngest at the meal to recline upon the leader, probably their father.

This was certainly a custom used in the upper room.

***JOHN 13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. (John)***

Following the questions the second cup of wine is poured and in response to the questions a lengthy remembering of the calling of Abraham to the giving of the law is gone through, whilst interweaving the items on the Seder plate

This cup is known as the cup of wrath which is also a reminder of the slavery they were under and Gods judgement on Egypt with the plagues.

Before this cup is taken the first half of the ‘praise’ psalms, known as the *Hallel (Psalm 113-118)*.

Next comes the dipping of the matzah (unleavened bread).

The upper matzah and the remaining half of the middle matzah is broken into pieces and given to all at the meal. Each person must eat a piece dipped in horseradish and *haroset* (an apple mixture). This reminds them of the sweetness of Gods redemption in the midst of their bitter slavery.

It is said that it should be taken in the form of a sandwich the filling between two pieces of matzah and that there should be enough bitter herbs to bring tears to the eyes.

It is at this part of the service that we see Jesus speaking of the betrayer.

We read in the account of the Passover Last supper that Jesus dipped the sop (matzah) and gave t to Judas. Yet we see that the disciples still asked the question “who of them would it be”.

We are not told any seating arrangements, but it could be that Judas was sitting in the place of honour to the left of Jesus and he received the sop first, as was tradition. But it was also tradition that the leader of the feast dip the sop and give it to as many as he wanted to, so he could have given it to others as well.

Following on from all this we have the main meal. In Jesus day it would have been roasted lamb with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. But today the meal may well be much more lavish. A meal fit for a King.

After the meal the half broken matzah that had been wrapped and hidden, known as the *afikomen* is searched for by the children. The one who finds it receives a reward.

There is a requirement in rabbinic law that each person present is to have a little piece of this matzah as a reminder of the Passover lamb.

This also shows us that each one of us in order to be saved, must take of Jesus as his personal Saviour.

The third cup

This is known as the cup of redemption. It was at this point in the Passover supper with his disciples that Jesus instituted what we know as the “Lords table” or “Communion”. Jesus told us to take of it as a reminder, not of the physical Passover lamb that was slain, but that he was the Lamb that was slain upon the cross.

This third cup is closely linked with the return of the Messiah and at this point the door of the house is opened in the hope that Elijah will enter, drink the cup and announce the coming of the Messiah.

***MAL 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD:***

After this the fourth cup is taken. This is the cup that Jesus would not drink of.

***MATT 26:29-30 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.***

The hymn that was sung would be the second half of the Hallel (Psalm 115-118)

*Conclusion*

As we look at this Passover feast, the command to take the lamb, kill it, place the blood on the doorposts and lintel, we see how Jesus was indeed the fulfillment of that Passover.

From beginning to end we see the perfection of Jesus as the lamb without blemish, set apart for four days “within the family” being watched. It was declared by Pontius Pilate that there was no fault in this man.

We read that when Jesus was upon the cross a notice was placed on the cross, written by Pilate (John 19:19) that said “Jesus of Nazereth, King of the Jews”.

Under Roman law the name and the crime had to be placed upon the cross.

It read YESHUA HANATSRI VEMELECH HAYEHUDIM.

If you take the first letter of each of these words – YHVH, we see the special name of God. No woner the Chief Priest wanted it changed.

In the traditional Jewish view, YHVH is the Name expressing the mercy and condescension of Almighty God:

"The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to those, You want to know my name? I am called according to my actions. When I judge the creatures I am Elohim, and when I have mercy with My world, I am named YHWH" *(Exodus Rabbah 3:6).*

Elohim is the Name given for God as the Creator of the universe (Gen 1:1-2:4a) and implies strength, power, and justice. YHVH, on the other hand, expresses the idea of God's closeness to humans. For example, YHVH "breathed into his (Adam's) nostrils the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7).

He was not only the Lamb for the individual, but he was the Lamb for the Nation

***John 11:49 And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, 50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. 51 And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; 52 And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.***

His blood was shed upon the cross at Passover, “At just the right time”, the lamb to be slaughtered.

Even the way the afikomen (unleavened bread) is found and taken by all shows us our need to know Jesus personally, to accept him as Saviour and Lord of our lives.

There is no question that Jesus is the Passover lamb. Scripture records it, History echoes it – Is He YOUR Passover Lamb, have you placed your trust in the Messiah Jesus.

There is no deliverance without the Lamb.

Amen