

THE MISUNDERSTOOD SACRAMENT

The Jewish Passover is one of the oldest ritual celebrations in history. Irregularly observed for many centuries, depending on who was king at the time, it was reinstated around the time of King Josiah (in the 600's BCE), modified during the Babylonian captivity since there was no temple, and reinstated, with sacrifices, when Israelites returned to Palestine and rebuilt the temple. By the first century Passover was a well established holy week, the Seder liturgy well developed and celebrated regularly every Spring.

Though variations of the Seder meal developed through the centuries depending upon local customs in countries where the Jews eventually settled, many of the 15 segments of its liturgy have remained the same as when Jesus lived.

The most misunderstood segment is from where we get our communion liturgy. Keep in mind that the Jewish writers and readers of the entire New Testament participated in Passover every year and needed no explanation of the Seder dinner or liturgy. It was only when the Gentiles came into leadership and Jewish Christians became a minority, that readers of the Gospels and Paul's letters had nothing with which to reference Jesus' prophetic act on the night he was betrayed.

The Seder liturgy has four specific wine pourings with toasts and prayers. Each cup has a specific name with scriptures, prayers, story, enhanced by visual, tactile and sensory aids. The cup of Sanctification is taken as God's creation and the sanctification of it is remembered. The second cup: Deliverance is taken while recalling the Exodus story of Israel's deliverance from bondage. These cups come before the meal. Then, after supper, is the cup of Redemption, which is the cup of Jesus, and lastly, the cup of Restoration with the scripture, "I will take you to be my people. And I will be your God."

The entire meal is a story of God's work in and for the broken world. Prophetically, three "cups" have been fulfilled. The fourth is yet to come.

Our focus today is on the cup of Redemption and the "Afikomen." The afikomen is a particular piece of matza, specifically unleavened (*NOT a loaf!*) It is pierced, and striped. Before dinner, a matza is taken from the middle of three whole pieces, it is broken, and one piece is wrapped in linen, then hidden somewhere in the house. After supper, it is found (*by children and redeemed by the Father*), broken and shared before drinking from the cup of Redemption. Note the rich symbolism of Christ in the hidden afikomen and the third cup in the following portion of the Seder liturgy. *Of note: since the destruction of the temple, many Jewish theologians refer to the afikomen as a substitute for the sacrificial lamb.*

23b The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;
24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, this is My body
which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 25 In the same manner He
also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My
blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

—Paul 1 Cor.23b-26

(As found in an official Jewish Haggadah:)

The celebration continues after the meal. All guests are seated.

The Cup of Redemption, the third cup of wine, is poured.

FATHER: Baruch Atah Adonai Elohaynu.

ALL: May the name of the Lord be blessed.

FATHER: The time has come in our celebration that is after
supper. We have some special bread that was hidden away
before supper. I will pay a ransom reward to the one who finds
the Afikomen.

XII - TZAFUN תְּצַפּוּן:

Finding, Rewarding, and Eating the Afikomen

*(Narrator: After the meal the young people search for the hidden
Afikomen. It was placed in the special linen wrapper. The person
who finds it resurrects it and brings it to the father. The father
ransoms, or redeems the Afikomen and rewards the finder)*

****Prayers are said****

Father breaks the matzah and shares a piece of the Afikomen with
all present.

All may eat the Afikomen as they receive it.

XIII - BARECH בְּרַךְ: The Cup of Redemption and Blessing

Holding up the wine glasses, the people say:

ALL: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the
universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

All drink from the third cup, the cup of redemption and blessing.