

PASSOVER - THE FULFILLMENT

Taken from The Feast Of The Lord

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Since the entire Passover service is woven with rich symbolism, it must be asked: "Why three matzahs?" One rabbinic tradition holds that they represent the three groups of Jewish people: the priests, the Levites, and the Israelites. Another tradition holds that they represent the three patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet rabbinic tradition is at a loss to explain why the middle matzah must be broken. Why must the Levites be broken and not the other groups? Or, why must Isaac be broken and not Abraham nor Jacob? Rabbinic tradition is silent on such an important issue.

Neither explanation fits the symbolism behind this *breaking* ceremony. In reality, the triunity of the Godhead is being symbolized — three persons within the oneness of God, just as three matzahs are in the oneness of the linen bag. The second person of the Godhead, the Son, came to earth as the Messiah. He was broken (died), wrapped, and hidden away (buried), and brought back at the third cup of wine (resurrected the third day).

At first glance, this assertion may appear to be a fanciful attempt to Christianize the Jewish Passover, but the evidence overwhelmingly argues to the contrary. First, the *afikomen* was not present in the day of Jesus. It was a later addition to the Passover. The last solid food taken in that day was the lamb at the dinner. Rabbinic tradition holds that the *afikomen* now represents the lamb, and therefore everyone *must eat* of it.

Second, there is much debate among the rabbis concerning the meaning of the word *afikomen*. The problem is compounded since *afikomen* does not exist in the Hebrew language. It is just not there! Rabbinic consensus usually explains that it means *dessert* since it is eaten after the meal where the dessert would normally be eaten. Amazingly, *afikomen* is the only Greek word (the common language of Jesus' day) in the Passover Seder. Everything else is Hebrew. It is the second aorist form of the Greek verb *ikneomai*. The translation is electrifying. It simply means — *I came*.

Many traditions have developed around the *afikomen*. Moroccan Jews save a piece of the *afikomen* for use when traveling at sea throughout the year. They believe that if a piece of the *afikomen* is tossed into the stormy waves, it will still the waters. It is easy to see the origin of this tradition as Jesus spoke and calmed the stormy Sea of Galilee.

It must be asked, "How could the *afikomen*, if it speaks of Jesus, make its way into the Jewish Passover when the majority of Jewish people today do not accept Jesus as the Messiah?" The situation in the first century must be examined to shed light on this question.

At the Feast of Weeks (also known as *Shavuot* or "Pentecost") in Acts 2, three thousand sons of Israel from many different countries believed on the Lord. The total count was actually much higher since the three thousand did not include the women or children. These Jewish believers would have taken the message of the Savior with them to their Jewish brethren as they returned to their homelands. Many undoubtedly came to the Lord as a result of their testimony. In Acts 21:20, James and all the elders told Paul, "You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed." They were talking only about Jewish believers in Jerusalem and numbered them in the thousands. Some estimate that by the end of the first century there were one million Jewish believers in the Messiah. While this was certainly not a majority within the nation, it was a large enough number to send shock waves throughout synagogues everywhere concerning the messiahship of Jesus.

Another first-century event not only set the stage but mandated a change in the Passover observance. The Roman war machine rolled into Israel and, in A.D. 70, leveled the breathtaking Temple. This was a disaster of the highest magnitude since the majority of the Levitical law was based upon the Temple and its sacrifices. Without the Temple, there could be no more sacrifices. Without the sacrifices, there could be no more Passover lamb, for the Lord had strictly commanded, "Therefore you shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God, from the flock and the herd, in the place where the LORD chooses to put His name" (Dt. 16:2). Without the Passover lamb, the future of Passover observance was threatened. The Jewish people faced the dilemma of ceasing to observe Passover or changing it to be observed without a lamb.

In addition, Jewish believers had already broken away from the sacrificial system, believing that the Messiah had made a once-and-for-all sacrifice upon the cross. They were already celebrating Passover without the lamb, choosing to incorporate the broken matzah (*afikomeri*) into the service at the precise point at which the Lord had said, "This do in remembrance of me." It is not difficult to imagine this tradition being borrowed by others seeking to switch to a "lambless" Passover without their even realizing the full significance behind the ceremony.

Ultimately, Passover foreshadowed the Jewish Messiah as the true Passover Lamb. The Hebrew prophet Isaiah spoke of the Messiah in terms of the Passover lamb and of the greater redemption that He would bring (Isaiah 53). He would be the innocent, pure Lamb upon whom the judgment of God would fall in place of the people. He would be the One who, with great bitterness of suffering and death, would shed His blood to provide the greater deliverance from sin.

How tragic that in millions of Jewish homes today the most obscure ceremony in the Passover (the *afikomeri*) is the one that gives it its greatest and most powerful meaning. The *afikomen* (the "He came") has been an annual reminder that the Messiah, the true Passover Lamb, has already come.

And so, year after year, the small voices of children drift through the night: "Why is this night different?" And the testimony of the *afikomen* echoes back in reply, "I came," for it was on this holiday that the true Passover Lamb was crucified, buried, and on the third day rose again to provide the greater redemption, the deliverance from sin. It is only in Him that the Passover message finds its fullness. The Lamb still cannot be separated from the holiday.

There is no question that Jesus is *the* Passover Lamb. Scripture records it. History echoes it. Yet one final Passover question remains, and it is the most important of all: "Is He *your* Passover Lamb - have you placed your trust in the Messiah and His sacrifice as your only hope of Heaven?" Even as the ancient Israelite was required to individually apply the blood to his door, so, too, today men and women must individually make a decision concerning the Lamb of God. There is still no deliverance without the Lamb.