

## The Fourth Cup and the New Passover

### The Four Cups of the Jewish Passover Meal

On the eve of Passover, from about the time of the Evening Offering, a man must eat naught until nightfall. Even the poorest in Israel must not eat unless he sits down to table, and *they must not give them less than four cups of wine to drink...* (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:1)

### The 1<sup>st</sup> Cup: Introductory Rites

“Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.” (see Mishnah, *Berakoth* 6:1)

### The 2<sup>nd</sup> Cup: the Proclamation of Scripture

Then they mix him [the father] *the second cup*. And here the son asks his father... “*Why is this night different from other nights?* For on other nights we eat seasoned food once, but this night twice; on other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread, but this night all is unleavened; on other nights we eat flesh roast, stewed, or cooked, but this night all is roast.” And according to the understanding of the son his father instructs him. He begins with disgrace and ends with the glory; and he expounds from “A wandering Aramean was my father...” [Deut 26:5] until he finishes the whole section. (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:4)

Rabban Gamaliel used to say: Whosoever has not said [the verses concerning] these three things at Passover has not fulfilled his obligation. And these are they: Passover, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs: ‘Passover’—because God passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt; ‘unleavened bread’—because our fathers were ransomed from Egypt; ‘bitter herbs’ because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt. In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written: “And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” (Exod 13:8) Therefore, we are bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our father and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a feast-day, and from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah! (Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:5)

### The 3<sup>rd</sup> Cup: the Eating of the Meal

“Blessed are you, Lord God, who brings forth bread from the earth.” (see Mishnah, *Berakoth* 6:1)

### The 4<sup>th</sup> Cup: Concluding Rites

What shall I render to the LORD for all his bounty to me? *I shall lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD...* Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his holy ones. *O LORD, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your handmaid.* You have loosed my bonds; I will offer you *the sacrifice of thanksgiving*, and call on the name of the LORD. (Psalm 116:12-13, 15-17)

Out of my distress I called to the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me free... *I shall not die, but I shall live*, and recount the deeds of the LORD. The LORD has chastened me sorely, but he has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. *I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.* This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. (Psalm 118:5, 17-22)

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### How Many Cups at the Last Supper?

And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, “*I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you that I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*” *And he took a cup*, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” *And likewise the cup after supper*, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” (Luke 22:14-20)

The *cup of blessing* which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 11:16)

### Jesus’ Vow and the Fourth Cup

And he said to them “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Amen, I say to you, *I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine* until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out* to the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:24-26)

### Jewish Scholar David Daube on the Fourth Cup

There is... in Matthew and Mark a reference also to the fourth and last cup of the Passover liturgy. It is contained in the words: ‘I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until I drink it new in my father’s kingdom’ or ‘in the kingdom of God’. *The meaning is that the fourth cup will not be taken, as would be the normal thing, at a subsequent stage of the service; it will be postponed till the kingdom is fully established...* [In this light,] the notice that ‘when they had sung a hymn they went out into the mount of Olives’ now acquires a fuller sense. The implication is that they go out directly after the ‘hymn’, without drinking the fourth cup and probably also without reciting ‘the blessing of the song’. This portion of the liturgy is postponed till the arrival of the actual, final kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

### Jesus’ Prayer in Gethsemane

Then Jesus went out with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I go over there and pray.” And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.” And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, “*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*” And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter. “So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Again for the second time, he went away and prayed, “*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*” And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, *saying the same words*. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.” (Matthew 26:36-46)

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<sup>1</sup> David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Reprint; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995 [original 1956]), 330-31.

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### The Jewish Tradition of Giving Wine to the Dying

“When one is led out to execution, he is given a goblet of wine containing a grain of frankincense, in order to benumb his senses, for it is written, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul” [Prov 31:6]. And it has also been taught: The noble women in Jerusalem used to donate and bring it.” (Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a).

### Jesus’ Request for Wine on the Cross: “I Thirst”

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “*I thirst.*” A bowl full of sour wine stood there; so they put a sponge full of the wine on hyssop and held it to his mouth. *When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished”*; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:23-30)

### The New Sacrifice of the New Passover

1. By vowing not to drink the final cup of the Last Supper, Jesus *extended* his last Passover meal to include his own suffering and death.
2. By praying three times in Gethsemane for the “cup” to be taken from him, Jesus *revealed* that he understood his own death in terms of the Passover sacrifice.
3. Jesus also *transformed* the Passover sacrifice. In the old Passover, the sacrifice of the lamb would come first, and then the eating of its flesh. But in this case, because Jesus had to institute the new Passover before his death, he pre-enacted it, as both host of the meal and sacrifice.
4. Most important of all, by waiting to drink the fourth cup of the Passover until the very moment of his death, Jesus *united* the Last Supper to his death on the cross. By refusing to drink of the fruit of the vine until he gave up his final breath, he joined the offering of himself under the form of bread and wine to the offering of himself on Calvary. Both actions said the same thing: “This is my body, given for you” (Luke 22:19). In short, *by means of the Last Supper, Jesus transformed the Cross into a Passover, and by means of the Cross, he transformed the Last Supper into a sacrifice.*

### The Catechism on the Cup of Jesus

*By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning. Jesus’ passing over to his father by his death and Resurrection, the new Passover, is anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist... (CCC 1339-1340)*

The “cup of blessing” at the end of the Jewish Passover meal adds to the festive joy of wine an eschatological dimension: the messianic expectation of the rebuilding of Jerusalem. *When Jesus instituted the Eucharist, he gave a new and definitive meaning to the blessing of the bread and the cup. (CCC 1334)*

The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father’s hands in his agony in the garden of Gethsemani, making himself “obedient unto death.” Jesus prays: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me...” (CCC 612)

The desire to embrace his Father’s plan of redeeming love inspired Jesus’ whole life, for his redemptive passion was the very reason for his Incarnation. *And so he asked... “Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me.” From the cross, just before “It is finished,” he said, “I thirst.” (CCC 608)*