



PREPARING FOR PASSOVER

*This day shall be to you one of remembrance:
you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord throughout the ages;
you shall celebrate it as an institution for all time.*

EXODUS 12:14

THE DAYS before Passover are ones of great preparation. For thousands of years — during inquisitions, pogroms, and massacres, and in secret caves, attic hideouts, and death camps of the Shoah¹³ — Jews have gathered during the month of Nisan to celebrate God's promise of freedom from Egyptian bondage.

The rules for Passover preparation are ancient, set forth in Exodus (12:1–20); reiterated in Numbers (9:11–12) and Deuteronomy (16:1–8). Although it may not seem feasible to follow these rules exactly, many are easily observed in modern homes. When we adopt

traditional preparations, we join countless others — living, dead, and The One crucified, the Risen — who have celebrated God’s faithfulness throughout the ages.

*On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread,
when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb,
Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and
make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”*

*So he sent two of his disciples, telling them,
“Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water
will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house
he enters, ‘The Rabbi asks: Where is my guest room,
where I may eat the passover with my disciples?’
He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready.
Make preparations for us there.”*

MARK 14:12-15

PREPARING THE HOME

Removing Leaven

In observant Jewish homes, all *hametz* (food made with yeast) is eaten or given away before the holiday begins. Everyday cookware, utensils, dishes, glasses, and flatware are either put away or koshered

13 Shoah, also Sho’ah or Shoa (Hebrew for “destruction”), is slowly replacing “Holocaust” to describe Nazi annihilation of Germany’s Jewish population during the 1930s, a policy the Nazis pursued in Europe until their defeat in World War II. The original word for holocaust, the Greek *holokauston*, refers to “a burnt sacrifice offered to God” and generally appears in Scripture whenever Torah-mandated sacrifices are mentioned. Christian as well as Jewish theologians are increasingly using Shoah to militate against the theologically offensive implication that the Nazi “Final Solution” had anything to do with pleasing God.

specifically for Passover. Orthodox Jews also store all canned and bottled foods (e.g., spices) to ensure that no hametz survives.

Before the first night of Passover, everybody in the household participates in one final, thorough ceremonial search for hametz. With blessings and a candle lighting their way, the family explores cupboards and closets. Bread and cake crumbs are scooped up with a wooden spoon or brushed into a bag with a feather. In the morning, the head of the family burns the last traces of hametz. Matzoh is the only form of bread or baked goods that may be eaten during Passover.

As Catholics, we pay special attention to food during Lent, which always precedes Passover. Before the Second Vatican Council, devout Catholics renounced eggs, butter, milk, cheese, and meat during the forty days of Lent. Although relatively few contemporary Catholics follow these dietary strictures, we are still asked to set aside certain foods during Lent. Like Jews refraining from eating hametz during Passover, the spiritual discipline of refraining from eating meat during Lent helps us connect abstinence to remembrance. Consider the promise, possibility, and power of also observing this ancient dietary regulation during the Triduum.¹⁴

14 Scholars note that the standards of cleanliness established by the laws of *kashrut* are what spared the Jewish people from a variety of diseases and plagues throughout the centuries.

On the other hand, despite the educated and humane structure of ancient Hebrew society, its hierarchy also used these highly ritualized observances to separate, elevate, or exclude. During his lifetime on earth, the Pharisees and teachers of law challenged Jesus on the laxity with which some of his disciples observed ceremonial washing traditions. In response, Jesus said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a man can make him unclean by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him unclean" (Mark 7:1-20).

This debate about which aspects of Torah should or should not be observed to please God continues in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 11:1-18) and is transformed by Paul's successful argument that the Law of Love for all others