

# Breaking the Middle Matzah

**Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19;**

**First Corinthians 11:23-24**

**About 8:30 pm on Friday evening the fifteenth of Nisan**

**DIG:** How is the Trinity pictured in this ceremony today? What new meaning did Jesus give to the Passover matzah? The wine? What vow did He make? How much do you think the apostles understood when Yeshua spoke about His **body and blood**? What is the *afikoman* and how does it point to Christ?

**REFLECT:** What does communion mean to you? What impresses you most about this scene? In what way is Jesus the One who came for you?

The reading of *the haggadah* continued as Judas had already left on his mission of betrayal. Jesus looked around the table at the Eleven who were left to Him. They ate with gusto and enthusiasm, and as He listened to bits of their conversation and examined the innermost recesses of their hearts, He found what He already knew - that these were good men. But the Chief Shepherd was troubled because these were His final hours and there was much - so very much - that He still had to teach His talmidim.<sup>1400</sup>

While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of matzah. The entire meal would include only unleavened matzah, as this is one of the strict requirements of the holy day. Matthew's wording here implies that Yeshua took a particular piece of matzah on the table. From ancient times to the present day, Jews have celebrated the Seder by focusing on a special matzah in the middle of *the matzah tash* (see below).

There were, and are, **three requirements** for the bread to qualify for the Passover. The first requirement is that the matzah had to be **unleavened** because leaven is the symbol of sin. Jesus had unleavened matzah in that He was sinless (**First Corinthians 11:27, John 6:51**). If Christ had committed only one sin, it would have disqualified Him from being the Passover sacrifice. But Yeshua was the only Jew (and the only person) who ever lived that kept the Torah perfectly, and thus, He had an unleavened body.

Secondly, the matzah had to be **striped**. The body of Yeshua was striped by means of the flogging (**John 19:1**). Isaiah said that by His stripes we are healed (see my commentary on **Isaiah Jb - Yet We Considered Him Punished, Stricken and Afflicted by God**).

Thirdly, the **matzah** also had to be **pierced**. The body of **Jesus** was **pierced** twice at His crucifixion: first, by the nails in His wrists and feet (**John 19:17-18**), and second by the spear in His side (**Yochanan 18:34** and **37**). **Zechariah 12:10** prophesied about the day when all the Jews still living at the end of the Great Tribulation will say: **They will look upon Me, the one they have pierced, mourn for Him as one mourns for an only child.**<sup>1401</sup>

From ancient times to the present day, Jews have traditionally celebrated the Seder by focusing at one point on a special bag called *the matzah tash*. It is one bag with three separate pockets, with a piece of unleavened **matzah** in each pocket. At the beginning of the Seder, the middle **matzah** is taken out of its pocket and broken in half. The larger half is wrapped in a white linen cloth and goes back into *the matzah tash*; the smaller half becomes very important and is even given a special name, *the afikoman*. It is then wrapped in a napkin or pouch and subsequently hidden from the sight of others by one of the Seder participants.

After the meal is over, during part of *the haggadah* called *Tzafun* (which means *hidden*), those present search for the hidden **matzah**. Today, the search for *the hidden afikoman* is one of the highlights for children and grandchildren at the Seder. When discovered, it is unwrapped, broken into small pieces the size of an olive, and distributed for all to eat. Biblical and linguistic scholars are not exactly sure of the origin of the word *afikoman*, although it is usually translated *dessert* or *it comes last*. It is noteworthy that John the Baptist uses the same form of the word when he called his followers to look for **one coming after him, Yeshua the Meshiach (Mattityahu 3:11)**.

Unbeknownst to the modern Jew, *the matzah tash* symbolizes the three persons of **the Trinity**. The middle **matzah** is taken out, broken, and wrapped in a white linen cloth. The breaking of the **matzah** points to the broken body of **Christ**, unleavened, striped and pierced. When **He** was removed from the cross, **He** was also placed in linen cloth for a while (**Luke 23:52-53**). When the middle **matzah** is hidden for a while, it symbolizes the three days **He** spent in the tomb. *The afikoman* is the only Greek word in the Seder, and means *He came*. It is in the first person, singular. If *the afikoman* was already established as a traditional element of the Seder prior to the first century, then **Yeshua** was using a well-known ceremony to illustrate some new truth about His ministry as **Meshiach**. Or **He** might have created the ceremony for the first time at this Seder. But whatever its origin, *the afikoman* ceremony undeniably pictures the ministry of **Messiah - His appearance** (leaving *the matzah tash* as in **Micah 5:2**), **His death** (broken for our sins as in **Isaiah 53:10**) and **His resurrection** (the reappearance at the end of the Seder as in **Isaiah 53:10**).<sup>1402</sup>

So while they were eating Jesus took a piece of matzah, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His apostles. Up to this point, they probably didn't regard this as anything different than what they had celebrated at every Passover. But then He said something that must have shocked them greatly: **Take and eat, this is My body, which is given for you.** They began to eat the matzah but they were confused because this was an abrupt departure from the Passover Seder. **Do this in remembrance of Me** (Mattityahu 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; First Corinthians 11:23-24). Now they were guessing. He wanted them to do this, again and again and again, after He had gone to wherever He was going? But they didn't understand that part yet.

The slaying of the lamb was the procedure until 70 AD, but then it changed. In that year the Jewish Temple was destroyed and it was no longer possible to offer up a sacrifice. No more Temple, no more priesthood. Among most Jews today lamb is forbidden and a substitute meat is used like roasted chicken. There is, however, a continuation of the practice of eating unleavened bread with a total removal of leaven from the home. From then on the Passover meal was eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. **As Jewish practice developed over the centuries, the unleavened bread, more and more, became the most important symbol for the Passover because the lamb was no longer there.** Eventually, a little piece of unleavened bread known as *the afikomen* was eaten at Pesach as a symbolic reminder of the Passover lamb. In some Jewish traditions, as they eat that little piece of unleavened bread they say, "In memory of the Passover lamb that was eaten when the Temple stood."

According to Jewish law, a Jew may not even own leaven during the Passover season. But this law created problems for a storekeeper who might own a lot of leavened goods and would suffer great financial loss if he had to destroy all of his leaven. To protect the storekeeper, the rabbis permitted him to sell his leaven to a Gentile temporarily and buy it back after Pesach. The sale itself must be unconditional and the buyer must be free to use it, to sell it, to donate it, or to destroy it. Normally, they would get a Gentile who was friendly to the Jew and did not do so but kept it until Pesach was over and then sold it back. The selling price would be quite minimal. For instance, in Israel some orthodox Jews sell all their leaven to an Arab for one dollar, and after the Passover pay the Arab one dollar and buy back all of the leaven. For a period of eight days that Arab owns all the leaven in that Jewish man's shop. Although it is obviously only legal fiction, it is still considered, under Jewish law, a legal sale. The only difference between this sale and any other sale is one of knowledge in that the seller of the leaven knows that the Gentile will sell it back to him after the Passover. According to Jewish thinking, this knowledge in no way mars or interferes with the legal validity of that sale.<sup>1403</sup>

Therefore, in modern Judaism, the rabbis have developed practices over the years that point to **the Messiah** without them even realizing it. A prime example of this is the *Afikoman* ceremony. The origin of this ceremony is based upon the Oral Law (see **Ei - The Oral Law**), of **the rabbis that said that there was no dessert to be eaten after dinner because the Passover lamb was to be the last thing that was eaten**. But after 70 AD there was no longer any **Pesach** lamb, so the *afikomen* became its symbolic reminder. Because **the Passover** lamb was to be the last thing eaten, now the *afikoman* is the last thing eaten. The rules that applied to **Pesach** lamb now apply to the *afikoman*.

The word **remembrance** is the key element throughout **the Passover (First Corinthians 11:23-24)**. The **Matzah** is a **remembrance** of the *One who came* for us. Communion as practiced by believers today is not something new, but the fulfillment of the details of **the Pesach** Seder. And while **the matzah** is symbolic, the symbolism is significant. A symbol of the sinless life of **the Messiah**, the perfect payment for our redemption.