

Session 9: The Cups of the Passover

Exodus 6:6-8; Luke 22:14-20; Mark 14:22-26; Matthew 26:36-46

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the Last Supper was a structured Passover liturgy with more than one cup; that after the cup of blessing Jesus vowed not to drink the fruit of the vine again until the kingdom; that the company sang the hymn and left; and that, on the traditional shape of the meal, the liturgy is left unfinished, while on the canonical text itself the host has vowed off the vine and walked into the night.

Catholic Touchstone. By celebrating the Last Supper with his apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Passover its definitive meaning (CCC 1339-1340); and his word over the cup reaches forward: until I drink it new in the kingdom of God (CCC 1403).

What You Need to Know

Read this paragraph twice, because tonight's discipline is unusual: this session must end unresolved. Next week the sealed guesses from Session 1 are opened, and everything tonight sets the table for that opening. Your job is to help the group see a tension in the text with their own eyes, feel its weight, and go home without an answer. If you resolve it tonight, even by a hint, you will spend next week's payoff for a moment's satisfaction. Hold the line.

Here is the ground. The Passover of Jesus's day was not a casual dinner but a structured liturgy of courses and cups. Jewish tradition, codified in the Mishnah around the year 200, describes four cups of wine framing the meal, with the cup after supper called the cup of blessing, and the Hallel psalms sung near the end. Because the Mishnah is later than the New Testament, and because Passover itself changed after the temple fell, we present that structure as tradition and hold its details lightly. But tonight's argument never leans on it, because the New Testament carries its own evidence: Luke records two distinct cups at the Supper; Paul independently calls the Eucharistic cup the cup of blessing, the traditional name of the cup after the meal; and Mark tells us they sang the hymn. A multi-cup liturgy with fixed songs is visible in the inspired text itself.

Then come the two data that create the tension. After the cup, Jesus vows: 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 the company sings the hymn and goes out to the Mount of Olives, with the Passover, by its own customary shape, not yet complete. A vow not to drink, and a liturgy walked out of before its end. Later that night, in Gethsemane, Jesus is praying about a cup. Lay those stones tonight. Do not build the arch.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Exodus 6:6-8. Four promises of redemption in God's own voice: I will bring you out, I will deliver you, I will redeem you, I will take you for my people. Jewish tradition came to associate the cups of the Passover with these four promises; the association is traditional, but the promises themselves are the bedrock of the feast.

The Passover meal's shape. Courses, cups, and psalms: a liturgy of eating and drinking through Israel's redemption. The Gospel accounts move through it: a cup shared with thanksgiving (Luke 22:17), the bread during the meal, the cup after supper (Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25), the hymn at the end (Mark 14:26).

Fulfillment, held back. Tonight, deliberately, we do not state the fulfillment. The texts will place a vow, an unfinished liturgy, and a cup in Gethsemane side by side. Next week, with the sealed guesses open on the table, the group will say the fulfillment themselves.

Voices of the Church

St. Gaudentius of Brescia (d. c. 410)

In summary of his Paschal preaching: Gaudentius, a bishop and friend of St. Ambrose's generation, taught the newly baptized that the Passover of the Jews was the shadow and the Church's Eucharist the truth: the one heir of both testaments keeps the feast, and what Israel ate in figure at its ordered meal, the Church now receives in reality. His Easter sermons walk the old feast and the new side by side.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

In the Summa Theologiae (III, q. 74, a. 5), on the sacrament's matter: Aquinas noted that the Lord himself, at the Supper, called the contents of the cup the fruit of the vine, and the Church follows him: true wine of the grape is the matter of the sacrament of his blood. The Passover cups were real wine at a real table; so is the chalice. That the order of grace takes up rather than floats free of creation is our gloss, but it is his instinct.

St. Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)

In summary of her letters: a Doctor of the Church whose letters return again and again to the Blood, she urged her correspondents to drink from the side of Christ crucified, to find in the Blood both the price of their souls and the proof of God's madness of love. For Catherine, the question of what fills the cup, and what it costs, and who will drink it, lay close to the heart of the Gospel. Tonight the group begins asking her question from inside the upper room.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1339-1340: Jesus chose the time of Passover; by celebrating the Supper in the course of the Passover meal he gave the Passover its definitive meaning, his passing over to the Father anticipated in the Supper and celebrated in the Eucharist.
- CCC 1403: at the Supper the Lord directed his disciples' attention toward the fulfillment of the Passover in the kingdom of God: I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day; the Eucharist ever since has carried that forward-leaning hope.
- CCC 1130: the Church celebrates the mystery of her Lord until he comes; the liturgy strains toward the day when God will be all in all.

THREAD WATCH

The command to eat. Tonight the thread reaches the upper room itself: take, eat; drink of it, all of you. Every prior link, lamb, covenant meal, manna, priestly bread, is present at this table. Say nothing; the group's list says it for them.

HOLD THE ENDING. The session must end with the tension unresolved: the vow, the unfinished shape, the cup in the garden. If a group member connects it to the Cross, honor it warmly in one sentence: hold that thought until next week; bring it sealed if you must. Do not confirm, deny, or elaborate. This is the study's strictest hands-off.

Sealed guesses: FINAL PREP. Next session opens with the ritual. Bring every sealed sheet. Plan the first thirty minutes of Session 10 for the opening: John 19:28-30 read aloud, sheets returned unopened, then opened and read around the circle before any teaching. Review the Session 10 guide this week, not next.

Session Goals

1. Establish the Passover's liturgical shape honestly: New Testament evidence first, Mishnah tradition hedged.
2. Discover Luke's two cups and Paul's cup of blessing as first century evidence of a structured, multi-cup meal.

3. Fix the vow of Mark 14:25 and the departure after the hymn in the group's memory.
4. Follow the cup language into Gethsemane and stop there.
5. End unresolved, with the tension named and held for next week.

A note on time. If you must cut, cut the second Win question and the Dig Deeper. Never cut Matthew 26:36-46; the session's cliffhanger lives there. Protect ten minutes at the end for silence and the closing prayer.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Leader: Father, on the night your Son was betrayed he kept the feast your servants had kept for a thousand years, and he filled its cups with meaning older than Egypt and newer than tomorrow. Seat us at that table tonight. Let us watch, and listen, and not look away. Amen.

Win: Opening the Conversation

1. Have you ever deliberately left something unfinished, a conversation, a project, a goodbye, because finishing it would cost too much or mean too much? Tell us what holding it open felt like.
2. What family meal or celebration in your life has a fixed order, where everyone would notice if a step were skipped?

Build: Into the Text

Leader: First, lay the background honestly. Read this aloud: Jewish tradition, written down in the Mishnah around the year 200, describes the Passover meal as a liturgy of four cups of wine, with the cup after the meal called the cup of blessing and portions of the Hallel psalms sung at prescribed points, the last of them after the meal. Tradition came to link the four cups to God's four promises in Exodus 6, which someone should now read aloud: Exodus 6:6-8. Because these sources were written after the New Testament, we will hold their details lightly and ask a sharper question: how much of this structure can we see in the New Testament itself?

3. Read Luke 22:14-20 slowly, watching the tableware. How many cups does Luke record, and where do they fall in the meal? What does that alone establish?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

Two distinct cups: one near the start, which Jesus receives with thanksgiving and shares (verse 17), and the cup after supper, over which he speaks the words of the new covenant (verse 20). Whatever else is true, Luke shows the Supper as a meal with distinct cups at distinct moments: an ordered meal, not a free-form dinner, with the words of institution spoken at a particular point within it.

4. Now read 1 Corinthians 10:16a, just the first phrase: the cup of blessing which we bless. Paul is writing in the fifties of the first century, probably before any written Gospel and long before the Mishnah. What is quietly significant about the name he uses for the Eucharistic cup?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The cup of blessing is, in later Jewish usage, the fixed name of the cup of thanksgiving after the meal; identifying Paul's phrase with that cup is a traditional reconstruction, not something the verse states. What the New Testament itself anchors is firmer: Paul's own institution account places the covenant cup after supper (1 Corinthians 11:25), exactly where Luke places it, and his name for the Church's cup, the cup of blessing which we bless, already sounds fixed in the fifties. The reconstruction is plausible; the canonical data are certain.

5. Read Mark 14:22-26. Fix two details in your memory as exactly as the text gives them. First: immediately after the cup, what does Jesus vow in verse 25? Second: what is the last thing the company does in the room, and where do they go?

ANSWER *(share after the discussion)*

The vow: truly, 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. The departure: and when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Add the hedged note: by the tradition's shape, the hymn would be the concluding portion of the Hallel,

with a final cup still to come. On the tradition's terms, they leave before the liturgy's last station. On the Gospel's own terms, something stronger and stranger is true either way: the host of the feast has just vowed not to drink wine again, and has walked out into the night.

6. Read Matthew 26:36-46, Gethsemane, later that same night. What image does Jesus pray with, three times? Keeping tonight's whole session in your ears, what do you notice, and what do you not yet know?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; and again, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, thy will be done. The man who vowed off the fruit of the vine is on his face in a garden praying about a cup he must drink.

Leader: this answer box deliberately stops here. Name the stones on the table: a Passover with ordered cups; the covenant spoken over the cup after supper; a vow not to drink again; the hymn, and a departure; and now a cup, three times, in the garden. Then say, in these words or your own: we are not going to resolve this tonight. Next week we open what you sealed nine weeks ago, and you will resolve it yourselves.

The Other Side of the Table

Leader: Tonight's objection is aimed at our method itself. Read it at full strength; it deserves it.

The anachronism reading. The four-cup seder comes from the Mishnah, compiled around the year 200, and Passover itself was transformed after the temple's destruction in the year 70, when the lamb could no longer be sacrificed. Reading a third century Jewish liturgy back into a first century Gospel is anachronism, and any argument built on which cup Jesus was holding is built on sand. Serious study should refuse the reconstruction outright.

7. Strengthen it: why is this objection not a technicality but a genuinely important principle?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Because retrojection is how bad history is made: later sources systematically idealize and reorganize earlier practice; a rite without lamb or temple had to change; and a study that cuts corners on dating forfeits its right to be believed on anything else. The group should own this principle, not merely tolerate it.

8. Now audit tonight's argument against that principle. Which of our claims rest on the Mishnah, and which rest on the New Testament alone? Does the tension we ended with survive if the Mishnah is set aside entirely?

ANSWER (*share after the discussion*)

Set the Mishnah aside completely and count what remains from the inspired text alone: the Supper is a Passover meal (Luke 22:15); it has at least two ordered cups at fixed stations (Luke 22:17, 20); the Church's cup carries the fixed name cup of blessing in the fifties of the first century (1 Corinthians 10:16); the company sings a hymn before going out (Mark 14:26); Jesus vows off the fruit of the vine after the covenant cup (Mark 14:25); and within the hour he prays about a cup he must drink (Matthew 26:39, 42). Every stone in tonight's tension is canonical.

What the Mishnah adds is background color and a traditional map of the meal, and we labeled it as exactly that each time we used it. That is the method of this whole study: tradition may illustrate; only Scripture bears weight. The tension you are carrying home tonight was built entirely from the second kind of stone.

DIG DEEPER: The Hymn They Sang

Tradition assigns the Hallel, Psalms 113 through 118, to Passover, its final portion after the meal; the Gospel says only that they sang a hymn. With that hedge stated, open Psalm 116:12-13 and read it aloud: What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.

Then Psalm 118:22-24: the stone which the builders rejected. If these were the songs, this is what Jesus sang, on his feet, walking into the night of his arrest. Read them again in silence. Say nothing else.

Send: Taking It With You

9. Jesus prayed, let this cup pass, and then, thy will be done. What cup are you currently asking God to take away, and what would his second sentence cost you to pray with him?

10. The company sang on the way to Gethsemane. What do you sing, or say, or cling to, on the way into the things you dread? Is it strong enough?

Live It This Week

- Read Psalms 113 through 118 across the week, one or two a day, as the songs of Passover night, and mark every verse that sounds different in the mouth of Jesus.
- Do not try to solve the unfinished meal this week. When your mind reaches for the answer, turn it into a prayer instead: Lord, finish what you began.
- Come next week no matter what. Session 10 opens what you sealed at the beginning, and the circle should be whole.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

Truly, 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. Mark 14:25

Closing Prayer

Leader, after a full minute of silence: Lord Jesus, you kept the feast and left it open; you vowed off the vine and prayed about a cup. We do not yet say what we suspect. Keep us in the tension you chose, and bring us back together to see it finished. Together: Amen.

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

Passage	Used For
Exodus 6:6-8	The four promises of redemption; traditional root of the cups
Luke 22:14-20	Two cups at fixed stations; covenant words at the cup after supper
1 Corinthians 10:16a	The cup of blessing as a fixed first century name; live discovery
Mark 14:22-26	The vow of 14:25; the hymn and departure; live discovery
Matthew 26:36-46	The cup in Gethsemane; session cliffhanger; strict hands-off
Luke 22:15	Steelman answer: the Supper as Passover in the canonical text
Psalms 116:12-13; 118:22-24	Dig Deeper: the Hallel, hedged; the cup of salvation
Mishnah (tradition)	Four cups and Hallel: background only, always labeled, never load-bearing
Mark 14:25	Memory verse