

“The Last Passover”

February 11, 2024

Matthew 26:17-30

I. Introduction

Deuteronomy 16:16 says, “Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose.” One of those three times is Passover. Because of this requirement, the number of people gathered in Jerusalem would be enormous. The historian Josephus reported that in 40 A.D. over 250,000 lambs were killed at Passover. Since tradition specified that there must be a minimum of 10 people per lamb, this meant that Jerusalem—a town of normally 500,000 people—would have over 2.5 million people in it. As One under the Law, Jesus was in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover with His disciples. In Luke 22:14, Jesus said, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

But Jesus and the disciples needed to be careful, otherwise their Passover meal would easily become a circus. On the one hand, many of the people that had cheered for Jesus as He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday wanted to crown Him as their Messiah. They were ready to follow Him in a revolt against their leaders and the Roman invaders so that they could be free from foreign oppression. On the other hand, because of His popularity with the people and His teachings regarding their hypocrisy, the “chief priests and elders of the people … plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. But not during the Feast or there may be a riot among the people” (Matt. 26:4-5). So, as Jesus prepared to celebrate what was going to be the Last Passover, He had to be somewhat secretive in His preparations.

II. Preparations for Passover

Some things had to be done before the Passover meal could be celebrated. Turn to Luke 22:7-13.

Since Jerusalem was filled to overflowing, rooms would be scarce, but Jesus seemed to have made previous arrangements. He told Peter and John how to find the room. In addition to setting up the room, if they had not already done so, they would have to buy unleavened bread, wine, bitter herbs, and the dip for the Passover meal. Since the Mosaic Law required that sacrificial lambs for Passover be selected on the 10th day of the first month and that the lamb be kept in the household until it was sacrificed on the 14th, Jesus and His

disciples must have already purchased the lamb. Now Peter and John would have to have the lamb slaughtered by a priest at the Temple. This could only be done between the hours of 3 and 5 in the afternoon. Then upon arriving at the room they would have to roast the lamb whole, set up the room for Passover, and prepare the rest of the meal.

Perhaps the secretive way of having the 2 disciples find the meeting place was necessary to prevent Judas' betrayal before the appropriate time. The location was kept secret so that everything would happen in God's timing. Had Jesus indicated earlier where the room was, Judas would surely have told the chief priests and elders. Then, Jesus would have been arrested there after dark—before the meal and before the final instructions Jesus was going to give. But with the directions that were given to Peter and John, Judas had no way of knowing the location. He and the other nine would not find out where the room was until they arrived in the evening.

This was going to be Jesus' last opportunity to teach the disciples. (*John 13-17, record many of these teachings.*) It was also the last time He would have an intimate meal with these men with whom He had spent 3 years. But most importantly, it would be the time of His transforming the Passover supper of the Old Covenant, marked by the shedding of lamb's blood, into the Lord's Supper of the New Covenant which would be marked by the shedding of His own blood. As Jesus said in *Luke 22:20*, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.*” So, Peter and John “*did as Jesus had directed them and they prepared for the Passover.*”

III. The Last Passover and the Announcement of a Betrayer

Sometime after 6 o'clock on Thursday evening, they all came together for the Passover meal. “*Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve.*” Matthew recorded 2 of the things that happened at the last Passover: Jesus announced that there was a betrayer in their midst, and He instituted the Lord's Supper.

The eating of the Passover meal involved a specific sequence of events. To begin, the first of four cups of red wine mixed with water was served. (Wine was always mixed with water before drinking, but during Passover it was diluted with a double amount of water, lest anyone should become drunk at this holy

occasion.) [Luke 22:17](#) says that “[taking the cup, he gave thanks.](#)” Then, since this meal reminded the Jews of God’s deliverance from physical bondage to Egypt and spiritual bondage to sin, the next thing to happen was a ceremonial washing of the hands, representing the need for moral and spiritual cleansing. The 3rd part of the Passover meal was the eating of bitter herbs, symbolic of the bitter bondage their forefathers had endured in Egypt. These herbs and pieces of unleavened bread were dipped into a paste of finely ground apples, dates, pomegranates, and nuts which were symbolic of the mud and clay used in making bricks for the Egyptians.

The 4th step was taking a second cup of wine. At this time, the head of the household, in this case Jesus, would explain the meaning of Passover. Following that there would be singing from the Hallel, which means praise. The Hallel consisted of [Psalms 113-118](#). Usually at this point the first two Psalms would be sung. After singing, the roasted lamb would be brought out. The head of the household would again wash his hands and then break off pieces of unleavened bread and hand them out to be eaten with the lamb.

The disciples knew that Jesus had been making enemies left and right and they hadn’t been surprised when He had said earlier in His ministry that He was going to be betrayed ([Matthew 17:22; 22:18; 26:2](#)). But as they were eating the meal and Jesus said, “[I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me,](#)” they must have been shocked! Up to the very end, they didn’t realize which one of their number was the traitor. Judas was probably one of the least expected. He was the group’s treasurer, and his integrity was beyond reproach. [Luke 22:23](#) says, “[They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.](#)” No one was the obvious traitor and they each began to say to Jesus, “[Surely not I, Lord?](#)” Each of them had probably dipped his hand into the bowl as they were eating the meal, so, Jesus’ response didn’t help them out at all when He said, “[The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.](#)” But He did assure them that only one of them was the traitor when in [John 13:18](#) He said, “[I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.'](#)”

When Jesus said, “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born,” both the human and the divine sides of the betrayal are seen. From the divine point of view, Judas’ betrayal—Judas’ sin—was predicted in Scripture and was part of the plan of God. [Turn to Acts 2:22-23.](#) But from the human point of view, Judas was completely responsible for what he did and was guilty of this terrible crime. God used Judas’ betrayal for His divine purpose. Joseph’s words to his brothers in [Genesis 50:20](#) could apply here as well: “**You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish which is now being done, the saving of many lives.**” Jesus’ warning of woe and judgment was an appeal for Judas to turn away from his sin before it would forever be too late. But Judas refused.

Since it would have been rather suspicious if Judas hadn’t said the same things as the rest of the disciples, he imitated their disbelief and said the same thing as they were all saying. “**Surely, not I, Rabbi.**” He even called Jesus “**Rabbi**” to emphasize his loyalty. Instead of getting in Judas’ face, Jesus simply said, “**Yes, it is you.**” [Turn to John 13:21-30.](#) Once again Jesus offered Judas His acceptance and love through sharing bread with him, but Judas continued in his deception and treachery. Judas went out to do his deed. Jesus knew who the betrayer was; John knew; and Judas himself knew. But the rest didn’t.

IV. Institution of the Lord’s Supper

After Judas left and Jesus was alone with the 11 faithful disciples, Jesus transformed the Passover meal of the Old Covenant into the Lord’s Supper of the New Covenant. The Passover Jesus was celebrating with the disciples was the last Passover. Jesus ended the Passover and instituted a new memorial. It would not look back to a lamb in Egypt as the symbol of God’s redeeming love and power, but to the very Lamb of God, who by the sacrificial shedding of His own blood, took away the sins of the whole world. [1 Cor. 11:25](#) says, “**This cup is a new covenant in my blood.**”

Jesus took two elements from the Passover feast to picture His own death. The unleavened bread pictured His body given for the sins of the world. The fact that He broke the bread does not symbolize that His bones were broken but rather that He allowed His body to be abused by the soldiers as they beat Him,

nailed Him to the cross, and pierced His side with a spear. Originally, unleavened bread symbolized severance from the old way of life in Egypt and sin. Now the bread represents Christ's own sinless body sacrificed for the salvation of men. In [Luke 22:19](#) Jesus said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Jesus was instituting a memorial of His sacrificial death for His followers to observe.

In saying the bread "is my body," Jesus obviously wasn't speaking literally. He was still standing before them—nothing had changed. Eating His body was no more literal than His saying that He is the Vine and His followers are the branches ([John 15:5](#)) or John the Baptist calling Him the Lamb of God. The bread hadn't turned into His flesh. It was only a symbol of His body. It was still unleavened bread.

The watered wine—"the fruit of the vine"—pictured His blood. It was a symbol of His blood that was shed for the remission of sins. [Hebrews 9:22](#) says, "In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." The cup symbolizes Jesus' blood—His atoning death—the giving of His pure and spotless life for the corrupt, sinful lives of unsaved man. Jesus' shed blood established a New Covenant between God and man. The Old Covenant was meant for the Jews, the New Covenant is meant for all. Jesus' blood made atonement or paid the penalty for the sins of all mankind, Gentile as well as Jew. The "many" in [Matthew 26:28](#) includes all those who trusted in God before Christ died as well as those who have and will trust in Him since His death and resurrection.

Although they didn't know it at the time, Jesus' promise to drink with the disciples in the future kingdom was another assurance to them of His return after His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Lord's Supper isn't only a reminder of our Lord's sacrifice for sins but also a reminder of His promise to return and share His kingdom's blessings. At the end of this present age, we will gather with all His disciples and share this supper in celebration with Him.

The hymn that Jesus and His disciples sang before they left the Upper Room was probably the last psalm of the Hallel, Psalm 118. [Turn to Psalm 118:1-9.](#) Imagine Jesus singing praises to God in the face of His coming rejection, suffering, and death.

V. Conclusion

The Passover Jesus celebrated with the disciples was the last divinely sanctioned Passover ever to be celebrated. The Old Covenant and observance have been replaced by a New Covenant and a new observance. To celebrate the Passover now, that is to remember the deliverance from Egypt, is just a shadow of the permanent deliverance from sin brought about by the death of the Lamb of God. Paraphrasing [2 Corinthians 5:17](#): “**the old has gone, the new has come.**” Now the Lord’s Supper is a memorial to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for the sins of those who accept His gift. It is a time to look backward at what Jesus has done for each one of us. But it doesn’t stop there. The Lord’s Supper is also a time to look forward. Jesus didn’t remain in the tomb. He rose again and we can look forward to “**that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.**” We look forward to being with the One who died for us. But it doesn’t stop there either, [1 Corinthians 11:28](#) says, “**A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.**” The Lord’s table is a time to look inward—a time of self-examination and holding oneself accountable before God for what we do and don’t do—remember the Parable of the Talents or Jesus’ story of the sheep and goats.

The Lord’s Supper is a time to look backward and forward, inward and, also, outward. Outward, since as [1 Corinthians 11:26](#) says, we are “**proclaiming or announcing the Lord’s death until He comes.**” [Rom. 10:14](#) adds, “**How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?**” The Lord’s Supper reminds us of our hope—our salvation—so that we are ready to go tell others that Jesus saves.

Finally, as we remember and celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded that in the past, the present, and the future God loves us and will be with us in all we do and say. No one walks alone. As Jesus said in [Matthew 28:20](#), “**Surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.**” Let me close with the last 2 verses of the Hallel—[Psalm 118:28-29](#). Listen to these words of praise: “**You are my God, and I will give you thanks; you are my God, and I will exalt you. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.**”