

**THE STORY of THE PASSION OF THE CHRIST****Lesson 4****Matthew 26.17-30****KEEPING THE PASSOVER**

Jesus' enemies were making every effort they could to keep their evil assaults against Him from taking place during the Passover feast (*Matthew 26.5; Luke 22.6*)

But, God was keeping the schedule. The Christ's death was purposed, predestinated, and planned in every detail from before the Creation of the world. And, HE WAS THIS PASSOVER.

**1 Corinthians 5.7: For indeed, Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.**

His hour had now come. And, His hour was at the time of the offering of the Passover sacrifice.

**THE TRADITION**

The Passover celebration was one of Israel's oldest traditions. Israel had been observing the Passover ever since the days of Moses and the Exodus. The Passover was older than every other ceremonial tradition and service; it was older than the law itself. The Passover was the event that birthed them into a nation. It was the blood service that not only saved them from the plague of death that swept over the land of Egypt, but it also bound them in covenant relationship with Yahweh, their God -- and with each other.

**JESUS AND THE PASSOVER**

Jesus had been coming to Jerusalem with His family from childhood to observe and celebrate the Passover feast. ***Luke 2.41-42: His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast.***

Even then, He knew that He had come to do His Father's will, and to finish the work His Father had sent Him to do (*Luke 2.49*). We can only wonder how He must have taken it all in even during all these years before He was publicly announced as the Christ.

**PASSOVER CELEBRATION**

Passover was a holiday. It was one of the three feasts every Jewish male was required to attend -- and almost always, the whole family and clan would come together and celebrate the festive occasion. This was true especially of Passover. They would all converge on Jerusalem from the surrounding villages and towns -- and even from foreign countries where they had taken up residence since the days of the Babylonian captivity and the Dispersions.

They would travel together in caravans and sing the Psalms of Ascents as they journeyed...and especially as they came within sight of Jerusalem (see the headings and titles of *Psalms 120-134*).

When they got to Jerusalem, there would be endless festivities and preparations for the climactic Passover Supper. There were jostling throngs of people. Relentless din and buzz of voices -- everybody trying to be heard over everybody else. The constant bleating of thousands of sacrificial sheep.

Families would be congregating where they could get together. You could find them rolling out their unleavened dough for baking the unleavened bread...stirring up the fruits and spices into their traditional *charoseth* sauce for the dipping...and washing the bitter herbs. And, of course, everybody would set an extra spot at the table -- and nobody would recline at that spot, just in case this was the year that Elijah would come (*Malachi 4.5*).

**A BLOODY REMINDER**

Passover was one of Israel's happiest holy days. But, it was also a sobering reminder of the price and cost of their redemption from slavery in Egypt...so long ago.

Josephus was a contemporary Jewish historian around the time of Christ. He estimated that more than 250,000 (that's a quarter-million) lambs would be slaughtered during a typical Passover season. On the average, ten people would go together to make a Passover family unit—sometimes smaller families would join together. That means that probably 2.5 to 3 million people would congregate in Jerusalem during this Feast time.

All of these Passover lambs being slaughtered would create copious quantities of blood. Some of it would run out into the streets of Jerusalem. Most of it would be swept into a drainage system which was built into the temple complex -- and it would run off behind the temple, down the slopes into Brook Kidron. Kidron would run red with the blood of the lambs for days. Jesus would cross Kidron on His way to Gethsemane on this final night of His earthly life before dying as our PASSOVER the next day (**John 18.1**).

**“LET US KEEP THE FEAST...” 1 Corinthians 5.8**

Jesus, the Christ, had come to earth for this time. The Passover itself had been created for Him. He was the perfect fulfillment of this Feast. When the first Passover lamb had been slaughtered to save each Hebrew family from the plague of death, that lamb and every lamb since then had promised and pointed to Him.

The main difference being: not one of those millions of lambs—nor all of them put together—could take away not even one sin. But now He had come to be The Lamb of God to take away all the sins of God's people forever.

So, Jesus had made arrangements for a place where He and His disciples could keep this last great Passover.

He didn't make a public announcement to all of His disciples what kind of arrangements He had made, nor where it would be. **WHY DO YOU SUPPOSE HE DIDN'T? WHO DO YOU SUPPOSE HE DIDN'T WANT TO KNOW?**

**Judas, of course (Matthew 26.16).** Judas was watching and listening surreptitiously trying to find out about Jesus' plans and schedule. But, Jesus wanted this time alone with His committed disciples...to share these final moments with them, teach them, and shore them up for the events which He knew would follow -- events for which they were still woefully unprepared.

Jesus put Peter and John in charge of finding the place He had already reserved...and most likely also to secure the lamb and the other elements of the supper that night (**Matthew 26.17-19; Luke 22.8**). {You know that the streets would probably be full of people carrying pitchers of water for all their needs during these days. How did the disciples know which water-carrier to follow? Some have suggested that Jesus told them to look for “a man” bearing the pitcher of water. Women were the usual water-bearers. Whatever.}

**ONLY JESUS WILL DO**

The Passover supper goes all the way back to **Exodus 12**.

1. The Passover was observed at the same time God commanded the first one. In fact, God began to mark time for the Hebrews from that day on. **Exodus 12.1-2**
2. Four days before the plague of death struck in Egypt, the believing Hebrew families would select their lamb to be offered for their salvation. **Verses 3-4**

3. The lamb had to be perfect...without spot or blemish or imperfection of any kind. **Verse 5**  
**Leviticus 22.19-24; Deuteronomy 17.1**
4. Its blood must be shed...and the blood must be applied to the door posts and mantle of the house. **Verses 6-7**
5. The family then would roast and eat the lamb that night...with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. What did the bitter herbs signify? (Not only the bitterness of their own sufferings and experiences in Egypt, but also the bitterness of the sufferings of the lamb who would die in their place -- so they could be spared from the curse of death and redeemed from slavery -- to belong to Yahweh, their God!) **Verses 8-10**
6. They were to eat that supper that night...fully clothed, packed and ready to move out, and with their walking sticks in hand -- and EAT IT IN A HURRY! **Verse 11**
7. WHAT DOES PASSOVER MEAN? (**Verses 12-14, 26-27**)

### **JESUS, THE CHRIST, IS OUR PERFECT SACRIFICE**

**1 Peter 1.18-20:** ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you...

**Hebrews 9.14:** ...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the Living God?

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The only way we can be acceptable at all to God IS BY BEING PURGED AND CLEANSED OURSELVES by God's Perfect Sacrifice...and to be MADE ACCEPTABLE TO GOD through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Ephesians 5.25-27:** ...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

**2 Peter 3.14:** Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...

### **IS THERE A DISCREPANCY IN THE DAY?**

Jesus would be crucified the next day, which was the Passover Day. But, how could He also keep the Passover Meal with His disciples on the evening of the day before...and this still be the Passover?  
**Matthew 26.17 and 20.**

Different regions of Palestine reckoned their days differently. The Pharisees, along with the Jews from the northern regions and Galilee, reckoned the day from sunrise to sunrise. The Sadducees and the peoples from Jerusalem and Judea and the surrounding regions marked their days from sunset to sunset. So, when they all got together in Jerusalem, they could actually observe the Passover holiday and festivities on two separate days. They needed this much time to allow for the slaughtering of all the lambs they needed to kill. Hundreds of priests were employed for this one task alone.

If the estimated number of lambs were slaughtered in one evening, it would require about 600 priests slaughtering 4 lambs per minute. Even divided up over two evenings' time, the same number of priests would still have to slaughter a lamb every 30 seconds over a 2-hour period just before twilight.

### GATHERING FOR THE FEAST

Over the years of keeping the Passover Feast, the Jewish people have developed a very elaborate scripted event. Most of these elements of the supper event are traditions they have cultivated and added. But, even during Jesus' time, there were certain ceremonies and symbols which God had not specifically prescribed -- but which had become a significant part of their remembrances and celebrations.

We won't take the time right now to give a sample "program" which might have been followed during a typical Jewish Passover Seder (*seder*: arrangement). But, these elements of the supper are described for us in the Gospel accounts.

1. Make arrangements for the place to host and observe the Supper. Jesus had already done this. (If you don't live in Jerusalem, you will need to find a place you can rent or borrow for the occasion).
2. Buy the lamb for roasting and the other ingredients of the meal -- both the dishes to be eaten and the ceremonial food items (bitter herbs, charoseth (dip), ingredients for the unleavened bread, and the wine, etc).
3. Jesus sat down with The Twelve that evening, probably around 6:00. **Matthew 26.20**. At this time, He also shared some very personal and intimate sentiments about His Divine purposes for this moment. **Luke 22.14-16**.
4. The supper often began with the passing around of the First Cup of Wine: The Cup of Sanctification. **Luke 22.17-18**. Jesus blessed the cup and thanked God for this momentous occasion which had promised and prophesied His own slaughter for our redemption. (There would probably be 3-4 cups of wine served throughout the course of the supper meal).
5. There would be a ceremonial washing of hands before the serving of the food items began. This is likely when the tensions rose and the arguments began among the disciples about which of them should be considered chief among them. **Luke 22.24-30**. This is most likely when the Lord Jesus "rose from supper, laid aside his own outer garments, took the basin and towel, and washed their hands and feet Himself. **John 13.1-20**.
6. After this ceremonial washing, the Supper continued with the eating of bitter herbs (like parsley, endive, etc -- look good for garnishes and presentation, but not exactly tasty appetizers). **Exodus 12.8**. These bitter herbs would remind them of their bitter and painful experiences in slavery in Egypt.
7. Along with the herbs, they would eat a portion of the unleavened bread dipped in *charoseth*. Charoseth was a thick sauce made from apples, pomegranates, dates, figs, raisins, and vinegar. It looked like mud. It was a reminder of the mud and mortar they used in Egypt to supply the Egyptians with bricks for building.
8. Then, the Second Cup was passed: the Cup of Plagues.
9. All along, they would be singing and chanting *Hallel* (Praise) Psalms {**113-118**}, and perhaps giving commentary on the significance of each event, and offering prayers to God.
10. They would then serve the main supper course -- the roasted lamb. **THAT BLESSED LAMB!** It had died to provide their own deliverance and redemption from death by the giving of its own blood.
11. Sometime during the course of this meal, Jesus dropped the ominous bombshell: that one of them would betray Him. That started the flurry of whispers and startled questions: "Is it I? Who is it?" Judas himself asked Jesus if it was him. Jesus was serving the unleavened bread dipped in charoseth to several of them, probably -- but Judas understood well the significance of Jesus' serving him in particular.
12. Jesus consecrated some of the bread by telling His disciples: **"This is My body which is broken for you."**
13. After the supper meal, Jesus blessed another cup of wine. Paul calls it, **"The Cup of Blessing"** (**1 Corinthians 10.14-22**). (The Jews would call these last two cups: Cup of Redemption and Cup of Praise). This was the "after supper cup" **Luke 22.20**.
14. After all the festivities were finished, they would again sing from the *Hallel* Psalms -- and then Jesus went out into the night with His disciples to be delivered to death. **Matthew 26.30**