

The Last Passover, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 26:17–19

Code: 2382

INTRODUCTION

The purpose and climax of the life of Jesus Christ was His sacrificial death. He came into the world to die. In Mark 10:45 Jesus says, "Even the Son of man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many. " That was not an alteration in the plan; that was the plan. It was not a bad ending to a good beginning. Jesus came to die for the sins of the world. One writer that the cross was not the end of the story, but the theme of the story.

A. The Theme of Sacrifice

1. In the Old Testament

The meaning of sacrifice has been progressively given by Old Testament revelation. In the story of Adam and Eve we first learn that sacrifice is necessary to cover sin (Gen. 3:21). In the sacrifice of Abel we learn that a certain sacrifice is necessary to please God—a sacrifice of death (Gen. 4:4). From Abraham we learn that God will provide that sacrifice, just as he provided an animal in the place of Isaac (Gen. 22:13). The Passover reminds us that the sacrifice must be without spot or blemish (Ex. 12:5). All those aspects of a sacrifice prepare us for Jesus Christ, the ultimate sacrifice.

2. In the New Testament

Everything in the New Testament focuses on the cross. Between twenty and forty percent of the text of the gospels center around the final week of the Lord's life. The book of Acts is the record of the world's reaction to the death and resurrection of Christ. The epistles were written to those who believe in the death and resurrection of Christ to instruct them in the implications of it. In the book of Revelation we meet the Lamb that was slain. And He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords. The death of Jesus Christ is the focal point of all redemptive history. It is no accident; it is the apex of the plan of God. From the slain animals whose skins were used to clothe Adam and Eve to the slain Lamb of Revelation who is worshiped in glory and majesty, the cross is everything.

B. The Theme of Matthew's Gospel

Throughout his gospel Matthew has successfully presented Jesus as king. But the end of Christ's life forces Matthew to accomplish something that appears to be impossible: maintaining the majesty and dignity of Jesus Christ in the midst of His betrayal and execution. It is thrilling to see how there is no diminishing of His glory. In Matthew 26:17-30 He appears more majestic and sovereign than at any time in the gospel of Matthew. Beginning in chapter 26, Matthew unfolds the glorious event of the death and resurrection of Christ. Verse 17 begins a section where we see Christ prepare Himself for His death by experiencing His final Passover and then establishing the Lord's Supper.

I. EXPERIENCING THE FINAL PASSOVER (vv. 17-25)

A. Setting the Time (vv. 17-19)

"On the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them, and they made ready the passover. "

1. The persistence

The Lord was committed to keeping the Passover. Matthew 3:15 tells us He came to fulfill all righteousness, which is the law of God. One element of the law of God was keeping the Passover. Luke 22:15 tells us Jesus had an intense desire to keep the Passover with His disciples.

The Feasts of Israel

The Jewish year was filled with special feasts, not unlike our own. We have customs, such as Christmas, Thanksgiving, Good Friday, and Easter. Some churches celebrate other holy days throughout the year. The Jewish people were no different. They held commemorative celebrations and festivals, which were occasions for remembering God's work in the past.

1. The Feast of Pentecost (Weeks)

Pentecost celebrated God's provision in the harvest of their crops.

2. The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths or Tents)

This feast commemorated Israel's wandering in the wilderness when they lived in tents. God provided for them by giving them food and water as He led them through the wilderness.

3. The Day of Atonement

This festival was highlighted by a sacrifice in the Holy of Holies. The high priest entered into the Holy of Holies once a year and sprinkled blood on the altar to atone for the sins of the nation for that year.

4. The Feast of Purim

This feast celebrated the deliverance of the people of Israel by Queen Esther. She intervened at a time when the Jewish race could have been wiped out.

5. The Feast of Dedication (Hannukah)

This feast, also called the Feast of Lights, commemorated the deliverance of Israel under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus during the intertestamental period (about 167 [sc]B. C.).

6. The Feast of Trumpets

This feast celebrated the new year.

7. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover)

Both are mentioned in Matthew 26:17. This was an eight-day festival. The Feast of Unleavened Bread lasted one week, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of Nisan (called Abib before the exile) as prescribed in the Old Testament (Lev. 23:5-6). Passover was celebrated the day before, on the fourteenth. Those two celebrations were so connected in the minds of the people that they often referred to the entire eight-day period as the Feast of Unleavened Bread or Passover.

2. The purpose

a) The significance of Passover(1) The symbol of deliveranceThe Passover celebrated God's deliverance of Israel out of four hundred years bondage in Egypt. In Exodus 7:8[en]12:36 God sent plagues on the Egyptians. The last plague was the death of the firstborn in every family in Egypt (Ex. 12:29-30). God told the people of Israel to kill a spotless lamb and put its blood on the doorposts and the crosspiece of their homes. When the angel of death came to kill all the firstborn in Egypt, he would see the blood and pass over that house (Ex. 12:3-13). When the firstborn were killed, the Pharaoh sent Israel out of Egypt, and God ultimately delivered them. So the celebration of the Passover commemorated the sacrificial lamb whose blood enabled Israel to escape the judgment of God. It became a symbol of Jesus, God's Passover Lamb, whose blood enables one to escape the eternal judgment of God. Selecting the Passover LambAccording to Exodus 12:3, the Passover lamb was to be selected on the tenth of Nisan. As I have studied the book of Matthew, I believe Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem on Monday for several reasons. It fits the chronology of events better than a Sunday entrance. It also eliminates the problem of what has been called a silent Wednesday: if Christ entered Jerusalem on Sunday, then nothing happened on Wednesday of Passion Week--a vacuum that's hard to imagine. But most significantly, Monday was the tenth of

Nisan in the year [sc]A. D. 33, the year in which our Lord died. On that Monday everyone in Jerusalem was selecting their Passover lamb. After the lamb was selected, it was to live with the family until it was slaughtered. When it was slaughtered, it was like slaughtering pet. That was so the people might better understand the price of sin. If Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Monday, He entered as the Passover Lamb of the people on the proper day. Christ fulfills the symbolism of the Passover lamb in every way. (2) The slaughter of lambs Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, tells us that over a quarter of a million lambs were slain at Passover and that there were probably two and a half million people in Jerusalem for the celebration. They had to have their lambs slaughtered within a two-hour period (Josephus, Wars vi. 9. 3). The impact of a slaughter of that magnitude is mind-boggling. It caused a river of blood to run out the back of the Temple and down the slope into the Kidron Valley. It filled up a brook so it ran red with blood toward Bethlehem. The Passover was a very dramatic time of year for the nation of Israel. They were brought face to face with their sin and reminded that an innocent lamb had to die to atone for their sins. Now we know that none of those lambs could take away sin, but what a profound example it was. Thousands upon thousands of lambs were slaughtered for millions of people, yet all combined couldn't take away one sin. Hebrews 10:3, 14 tell us that in one sacrifice Jesus Christ did what all the lambs, goats, and bulls could never do--take away sin forever. b) The significance of unleavened bread Unleavened bread doesn't rise because it contains no yeast. When the Hebrew women made bread, they would remove a piece of dough before baking and save it as a starter for the next piece of dough. If they didn't use a starter, the bread wouldn't rise, making it unleavened bread. When Israel came out of Egypt, God told the people not to take leavened bread because leaven represented influence. God was telling them that He didn't want them to take any part of their Egyptian life and implant it into their new life. He was delivering them from their past and starting a new people in a new land. The symbol of that was unleavened bread.

3. The preparation

Matthew 26:17 tells us it is the first day of the eight-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?" Mark 14:12 adds that was "when they killed the passover. " That tells us specifically that the Passover lamb was sacrificed on the first of the eight days. Beforehand, each household had to rid itself of any leaven so there wouldn't be any in the house during the eight-day period (cf. , Ex. 12:18- 20). Only then could the Passover meal be eaten.

The Day of Christ's Crucifixion Passover always took place on the fourteenth of Nisan. So from one year to the next it would fall on a different day of the week. In the year our Lord was crucified, the Passover fell on a Friday. We can be sure it was Friday because Mark 15:42 says, "It was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath. " The Sabbath of course is Saturday. The Jewish people referred to Friday as the day of preparation because that was the day they prepared for the Sabbath. Since the people couldn't work or prepare meals on the Sabbath, the day before was important.

In John 19:14 Jesus is being tried before Pilate on "the preparation of the passover. " That was also the normal day of preparation for the Sabbath, which just happened to occur on the Passover that year. Verse 31 says, "The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was an high day). " That's another text showing that Christ was crucified on Friday, the day before the Sabbath. Verse 42 says, "There laid they Jesus, therefore, because of the Jews' preparation day. "

Jesus was crucified on Friday, either in [sc]A. D. 30 or [sc]A. D. 33. The fourteenth of Nisan fell on a Friday in those years. I lean toward [sc]A. D. 33 as the proper year for Christ's death based on the chronology of other events.

A Typical Preparation for the Passover

The people had many things to do in preparation for eating the Passover meal. They had to prepare the unleavened bread. A bowl of saltwater was put on the Passover table to remind them of the tears they shed in slavery and the parting of the Red Sea. They prepared a mixture of bitter herbs, frequently made up of horseradish, chicory, endive, lettuce, and horehound. That was done to remind them of the bitterness of slavery and the bunch of hyssop with which the blood of the lamb had been spread on the lintel and doorposts. They also made a paste made out of crushed apples, dates, pomegranates, and nuts called the charoseth. It was into this sauce that they dipped the bread during the meal. It is best seen as symbolizing the clay and mud they used in making bricks in Egypt. They also would put sticks of cinnamon in the sauce, which reminded them of the straw they used in making the bricks. Four cups of wine were prepared to remind them of the covenant of God in Exodus 6:6-7, "I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments; and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. "

Most importantly, the lamb had to be slain at a specific two-hour interval during the day. Exodus 12:6 says it had to be slain in the evening. The Hebrew text literally says "between the two evenings. " The Jews recognized an early evening at three o'clock, and a late evening around five o'clock. Josephus tells us that the lamb had to be slain between the ninth and the eleventh hour, which is between three and five in the afternoon (Wars vi. 9. 3). It had to be slain by the priests in the Temple court. When they people arrived home, they had to roast their lambs right away. Following sunset, sometime later in the evening, they ate the Passover meal (Ex. 12:8). According to Josephus, there had to be at least ten people assembled to partake of the paschal lamb (Wars vi. 9. 3).

a) The request of the disciplesThe disciples knew they had to prepare the Passover meal in Jerusalem where the lamb was required to be slain, but they needed to know a specific location. Everyone who was staying in the periphery of Jerusalem had to crowd into the city and find a place where they could eat the Passover and have room for at least ten people and as many as twenty. That meant every available room in the city was filled up. So the disciples had a legitimate question. b) The response of Jesus(1) The secret preparation(a) The representatives of the Saviors) The indefinite manIn Matthew 26:18 Jesus says, "Go into the city to such a man. " The phrase "such a man," is the translation of the Greek word deina. The best way to translate it would be "Mr. So-and-so. " It's a non-descript term for when you want to be indefinite. Now with two million people milling around the city, it would be impossible for them to find someone named "So-and-so. " It's as if Jesus was saying, "Go into the city and find a man, but I'm not going to tell you who he is. " We have two options in interpreting Jesus' intention. Either He didn't know who the man was, or He didn't want the disciples to know who he was. Since Jesus knew everything, He must not have wanted the disciples to know. Fortunately for the disciples, Jesus gave them a clue. Mark 14:13 says, "Go into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water. " It was not common for a man to carry a pitcher of water because the women usually did that chore. Once the disciples found the man, they were to follow him (Mark 14:13). ii) The intimate disciplesWe know from Luke 22:8 that the Lord sent only Peter and John into the city while the rest stayed with Him. There were several reasons for that. One was that only two people were allowed to accompany a lamb to the sacrifice. You can certainly understand why when there were only two hours available to kill so many lambs. There was no way the priests could finish in time if everyone went to the Temple. Peter and John were chosen also because they were the intimate, trusted disciples of Christ. (b) The reason for the secrecyWhy was Jesus so secret about the identity of the man and the location of his house? One simple reason: Judas Iscariot. Matthew 26:16 says, "From that time he sought opportunity to betray him. " Judas was looking for a quiet, secluded place away from the mob where he could turn Jesus over to the religious authorities. Jesus knew if Judas were aware of where they were going to eat

the Passover, that would be the perfect setting for the betrayal. Peter and John never came back that day. They left early in the day and the rest of the disciples never saw them until that night. By then it was too late for Judas to make a deal with the leaders. Why did Jesus not allow Judas to betray Him before the Passover? Because it was essential that Jesus celebrate the Passover with His disciples. He wanted to use the Passover as an example of His own death so He could transform that Old Covenant celebration into the table of communion as a memorial to His death. In addition, Jesus still had much to teach the disciples--He wanted to give them the promise of His Holy Spirit. (2) The significant obligation In Matthew 26:18 Jesus tells Peter and John, "Say to him [the man], The Master [Gk. , ha didaskalos, "the teacher" or "the rabbi"] saith. " The man probably was one of Jesus' followers. Perhaps Jesus had even made prior arrangements with him. Peter and John were to pass on this message: "My time [Gk. , kairos, "a special time"] is at hand. " The moment of Christ's death was imminent. Many times Jesus had said, "Mine hour has not yet come. " But now He said "My time is at hand. " Then Jesus told Peter and John to tell the man, "I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples" (v. 18). The form of "I will keep" is a prophetic (futuristic) present, which makes it an obligation. Jesus was obligated to keep the Passover at the man's house with His disciples. Jesus was on a divine mission with a divine timetable. c) The reaction of the disciples Matthew 26:19 says, "The disciples did as Jesus had appointed [commanded] them, and they made ready the passover. " Peter and John went into town, found the man carrying the pitcher of water, followed him into his house, and made all the necessary preparations.

4. The problem

Notice that Matthew 26:17 says, "Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?" Verse 19 says, "They made ready the passover. " And verse 21 says, "As they did eat. " Putting those three verses together we can assume they were eating the Passover meal. Mark 14:12, 14, 16 and Luke 22:7-8, 11-12, support that assumption. There is no doubt that they ate the Passover meal. But there are problems that many Bible scholars have debated over.

a) The chronological discrepancy On Thursday the disciples made preparations for the meal. That afternoon the lamb was killed, and later that night they ate the meal. Just before the meal Judas left them and went to the religious leaders to betray Jesus. After Jesus and His disciples withdrew to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was captured by the soldiers. The dawn of Friday morning followed as He was brought to trial. After the Jewish leaders held their mock trial, John 18:28 says they led "Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment; and it was early. And they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. "Now we are faced with a chronological problem. How could Jesus have eaten a Passover meal the night before when the Jewish leaders didn't want to be defiled because they had yet to eat the Passover? Some claim Jesus had a private Passover. That can't be true because the lambs could be slain only at the authorized time. The leaders certainly weren't late in eating it because they were extremely religious. In addition John 19:14 says, "It was the preparation of the passover," which you recall means it was Friday. So we know it's Friday, yet the Jewish leaders haven't eaten the Passover. How do we resolve this?

b) The consistent proofs We know Christ came to die as the Passover Lamb. Matthew 27:46 says that Jesus died (on Friday) at the ninth hour, which is three o'clock. He died at the exact moment when the screams of the lambs would echo throughout the Temple as the slaughter began. First Corinthians 5:7 says, "Even Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us. " Jesus died on the day and time the lambs were slaughtered that He might fulfill every prophecy to the letter. But how could He eat the Passover on Thursday night? We know it wasn't just another meal because Jesus insisted that it be eaten inside the city of Jerusalem. They constantly referred to it as the Passover. Furthermore, it was unusual for Jewish people to have a meal at night. To recline at the table was unusual for anything other than a festival meal. In a normal meal the breaking of bread occurred at the beginning, not in the middle of the meal as in this case. The use of red wine also

was unusual. They sang a hymn when they were finished with the meal, which was true of the Passover. And when Judas left, the disciples thought that he was going to give money to the poor, which was a typical thing to do at the Passover. So we can be sure they ate a Passover meal. c) The contrasting reckoningsThe answer to how we can account for Jesus and disciples eating the Passover on a different day than the Jewish leaders is based on how days were reckoned. We reckon a day from midnight to midnight. The Jewish people reckoned their days differently, and they had two options: from sunset to sunset or sunrise to sunrise. The normal routine was sunrise to sunrise, but certain festivals, special days, and the sabbath were reckoned from sunset to sunset. (1) Sunset to sunsetExodus 12:18 says the Feast of Unleavened Bread had to be celebrated from sunset to sunset on Nisan 14 to Nisan 21. The Day of Atonement and the weekly sabbath also were reckoned from sunset to sunset. Leviticus 22:6 says that any uncleanness needed to be dealt with before sunset. Perhaps things were reckoned that way because the order of creation seems to have followed that pattern. Genesis 1:5 says "The evening and the morning were the first day," which indicates that God reckoned from evening to evening. (2) Sunrise to sunriseThe Jews reckoned from sunrise to sunrise as the normal calendar day. Although we reckon from midnight to midnight, we think of our day as beginning when we rise in the morning. Their day officially began in the morning. Matthew 28:1 says, "In the end of the sabbath . . . it began to dawn toward the first day of the week." The first day of the week began at dawn. d) The critical calculationsRegarding the Passover we can see a sunrise to sunrise reckoning in Deuteronomy 16:4. Combining that with Exodus 12:18, the Passover day could be calculated from sunset to sunset or sunrise to sunrise. Josephus, who was a Pharisee living in Jesus' day, explained that the law of the Passover called for the Paschal lamb to be eaten during the night with nothing left for morning (Antiquities, iii. 10. 5). The Talmud, the codification of Jewish law, says it had to be eaten by midnight, which seems to indicate that the new day began after sunset (Pesahim x. 9, Zebahim v. 8). It is thought that the Galileans and Pharisees reckoned the Passover day from sunrise to sunrise, whereas the Judeans and Sadducees, who made up the ruling body in Jerusalem, reckoned it from sunset to sunset. The Talmud tells us that the Galileans would not work on the day of Passover because their day began at sunrise. The Judeans would work until midday because their Passover day didn't begin until sunset (Pesahim iv. 5). So the Galileans and Pharisees calculated the beginning of Passover on Thursday morning. The Judeans and Sadducees didn't calculate the beginning of Passover until Thursday evening at sunset running until Friday evening at sunset. e) The convincing harmonizationMatthew 26:17 follows the Galilean reckoning, so Jesus and the disciples had to kill their lamb on Thursday and eat the Passover meal Thursday evening. The Judeans and Sadducees didn't begin their Passover day festivities until late on Thursday and wouldn't kill their lambs until the prescribed time of day on Friday. That harmonizes John 18:28 with the other gospels. Jesus had to die on Friday between three and five o'clock because that's when the Judean Passover lambs would be killed. But He also had to keep the Passover to transform it into the Lord's Table. How could Jesus keep the Passover and still be the Passover lamb? Only if God allowed the two options for reckoning days to take place in history. When it came time for Jesus to die, there was no problem in having Him participate in the Galilean Passover on Thursday night and die during the Judean Passover on Friday afternoon. Certainly the priest accommodated the two reckonings because it would be virtually impossible for them to kill all the lambs in one two-hour period. With the Galileans coming to the Temple on Thursday and the Judeans on Friday, at least the killing of the lambs could be divided into two days and they could accomplish their task much more easily. Since it was difficult to find a room in Jerusalem to hold the Passover meal, how convenient it was to be able to double the capacity of the city by having two different days to eat the Passover.

CONCLUSION

God rules history and all tradition and customs to bring about the minute fulfillment of His perfect

plan. Jesus had to keep the Passover to fulfill all righteousness, instruct His disciples, and give them a new memorial feast. Yet He had to die as the Passover Lamb. He did both because God controls history. We see Jesus Christ as anything but a victim. In three brief verses Matthew is able to present the majesty of Jesus Christ. This isn't something Jesus could have arranged on the weekend. It had to have been planned before the foundation of the world by the providence of God. Our Lord controlled every event on His path to the cross. None of His glory and dignity are lost in the midst of His betrayal.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was the purpose of the life of Christ?
2. Explain how the theme of sacrifice is revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.
3. What feasts were celebrated by Israel? What was the significance of each one?
4. What does the Passover symbolize? Explain.
5. How did Christ's entrance into Jerusalem on Monday symbolize the Passover lamb?
6. What did the Passover remind the nation of Israel about?
7. Explain the significance of unleavened bread.
8. On what day of the week was Christ crucified? How can we be sure?
9. What did the people have to do in preparation for the Passover? What do the different preparations represent?
10. Why did the disciples need to know where they were going to eat the Passover?
11. Why did Jesus send only Peter and John into Jerusalem?
12. Why was Jesus secretive about where they would eat the Passover?
13. What is significant about the phrase "I will keep" in Matthew 26:18?
14. Define the problem raised by John 18:28.
15. How can we be sure that Christ and His disciples did in fact eat the Passover meal?
16. How did the Jewish people reckon their days? Explain.
17. Explain how Jesus could eat the Passover with His disciples yet die as the Passover Lamb the next day.

Pondering the Principles

1. What does the sacrifice of Christ mean to you? If His death is the focal point of all redemptive history, how does that affect you? Thank Christ for His willingness to offer Himself. Are you willing to make a sacrifice for someone else? List some specific things you might do. Now commit yourself to doing those things this week.
2. Read Hebrews 10:1-25. What do those verses teach you about how sin is removed? Verses 19-25 detail how we should respond to what Christ has done. To what extent are you actively responding? Make a list of each response you should have. You may want to carry it in your Bible. At the end of each day this week, record next to each response how you fulfilled each one that day. Challenge yourself to pursue ways that you can fulfill the role God wants you to have.

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