

Thursday -- The Last Supper

22:7 Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

22:8 And Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it."

22:9 They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?"

22:10 And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters.

22:11 "And you shall say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'"

22:12 "And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there."

22:13 And they left and found everything just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

Harmonizing the Synoptic Gospels with the Gospel of John is one of the most complex chronological issues in the NT and the amount of literature written on the subject is immense. The Gospel of John seems to say that Jesus and the disciples did not eat the Passover meal. However, D.A. Carson (EBC, Matt. 530-532) and Bock (BECNT, Luke, pages 1951-1960) give many good reasons to believe that they did eat the Passover and that John can be reconciled to the other gospels. In my opinion, their view has the fewest problems to overcome.

In Luke 22:7 Luke writes, "Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed."

The Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover were originally separate festivals, but over time the two blended into one celebration so the Feast of Unleavened Bread became synonymous with Passover (see Lk. 22:1; Exo. 23:15; 34:18; Deut. 16:16; 2 Chr. 8:13, etc.). Both festivals took place in the month of Nisan (also called Abib) which is the first month in the Jewish year that corresponds to March or April.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is spoken of in a number of places in the Bible. Exodus 12:15 says, "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses. . ." Next Exodus 12:18 says, "In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day." It should be noted that if the 14th through the 21st are speaking inclusively, the feast would be eight days, not seven. However, this is not a problem when the Jewish reckoning of days is considered. In our timeframe, a day starts and ends at midnight; in Judaism a new day began at sunset¹. So "the evening of 14" was actually the beginning of 15th. Typically, the leaven was removed from the house at noon on 14 Nisan (Carson, EBC, Matt, 530) and the celebration began that evening (15 Nisan).

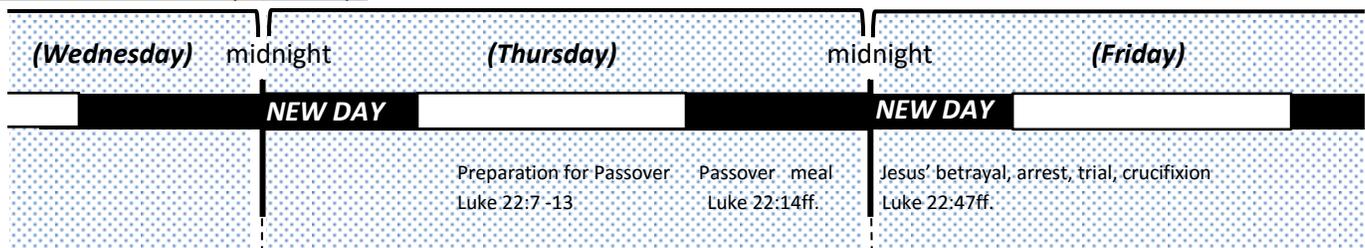
So when Luke says, "Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread," we must assume he is speaking loosely of the day when the yeast was removed from the house, not the beginning of the actual feast itself. The first century historian, Josephus, also spoke in this way; he spoke of the feast beginning on 15

Nisan and of it beginning on 14 Nisan (Carson, EBC, Matt, 530). Either could be said depending upon what the writer meant.

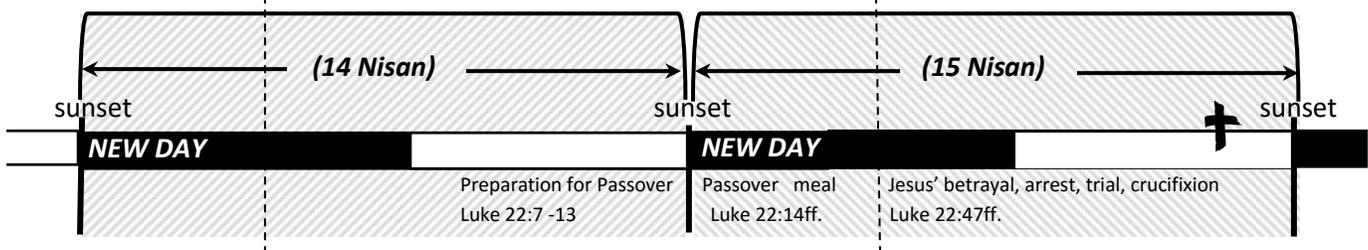
According to Exodus 12:6 and Numbers 9:3 the Jews were to kill the Passover lamb on 14 Nisan at twilight (literally, between the two evenings, which actually meant sometime between late afternoon and sundown). Josephus wrote that the lambs were killed between 3 and 5 PM. The lamb was then eaten after sundown. Once again, from our perspective of time the killing of the lamb and the Passover meal would have been on the same day (Thursday). However, since the lamb was eaten after sunset, the killing of the lamb and the Passover meal would have occurred on two separate days in the Jewish calendar.

In sum, the events took place as follows: Leaven was removed from peoples' homes at noon on 14 Nisan. The lamb was sacrificed between 3 and 5 PM on 14 Nisan, as well. The new day (15 Nisan) began at sundown. It was then that the Feast of Unleavened Bread started and the Passover meal was eaten (from sundown until midnight - see chart below).

The solar calendar day (our day)



The Jewish (lunar calendar) day



The disciples were told to go into the city and make preparations for the Passover (22:8). They would probably enter the eastern gate which was closest to the Mount of Olives where they were staying. When they entered the city they were to look for a man carrying a pitcher of water – which would be unusual, for women usually carried pitchers while men carried water skins (22:10; Morris, 332). The man would take them to the home where they would eat the Passover. Once they reached the house, they were to ask the owner of the house about the room (22:11), and he would lead them to a fully furnished room (22:12) with the couches and table already set up.

For the Passover celebration one lamb per household (about 10 to 12 [20?] people) was taken to the temple courts and sacrificed by a priest. The blood was collected in a basin and passed down a line of priests until it reached the foot of the altar where it was poured out. The lamb's fat was also collected

and burned on the altar of burnt offerings. The singing of the *Hallel* (Psa. 113–118) accompanied these steps.

Thus it appears that Jesus' disciples entered the city shortly after noon on Thursday. They "procured the room, took the lamb to the temple court and killed it, roasted it with the bitter herbs (Exo. 12:8-9) and made other arrangements for the meal, including the purchase of wine and unleavened bread" (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 530). Their preparations were quite extensive.

Jesus joined His disciples after it was dark and they ate the Passover. "On these points the synoptics agree; and this places Jesus' death on Friday, 15 Nisan, probably around 3:00 PM" (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 530).

Bock summarizes this section:

Luke 22:7–13 shows Jesus preparing to celebrate Passover with His disciples, thus fulfilling another event in God's plan. The great Feast of Passover draws near, when the nation reflects on its deliverance and birth as a free nation. Jesus makes plans to celebrate as a pious pilgrim in the capital city. The disciples followed His directions and find things to be exactly as He has told them. Another era of salvation is about to be established – again inaugurated with death. As the disciples prepare a Passover lamb, another innocent life is being readied for death, but first must come one last meal and time of instruction with the disciples. Jesus is portrayed as faithful in worship, as He also will be faithful in death. This is no criminal or fugitive, but a righteous, pious martyr (Bock, 1714).

22:14 *When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him.*

22:15 *And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer;*

22:16 *for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."*

"The hour had come" (22:14); that is, the time God had set for Jesus to be sacrificed was set into motion. Jesus did not die because the Jewish leaders hated Him, or because Judas betrayed Him, or because Satan was at work. He died because God had established His hour. He died because His death was planned by God before the world was born.

In verse 15, "I have earnestly desired" is a Hebraism which literally reads, "with desire I desired," and stresses the great importance of what is to take place (Garland, 853). Jesus explains why He was so desirous to eat the Passover with His disciples in verse 16: "for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

This was Jesus' last paschal meal; after this another feast awaited Him – the great messianic feast at the coming kingdom of God. Jesus had spoken of the messianic banquet elsewhere. In Luke 14:15 He exclaimed, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" In Luke 13:29 Jesus said many "will come from east and west and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God." Revelation 19:9 says, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage

supper of the Lamb.” This feast is probably also alluded to in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet in Matthew 22 (Carson, EBC, Matt, 456) and the Parable of the Great Dinner in Luke 14.

Jesus’ pledge not to eat the meal again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God was also a pledge that the kingdom of God would come and that He that would celebrate with His followers again (22:18). Thus, the meal was a shadow that looked forward to the coming kingdom of God; it was a foretaste of the messianic banquet that would occur when the kingdom comes in power and glory.

22:17 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves;

22:18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes."

After nightfall on Thursday evening (now 15 Nisan), households gathered in homes to eat the Passover lamb. “. . . the head of the household began the meal with thanksgiving for that feast day and for the wine, praying for the first four cups. A preliminary course of greens and bitter herbs was, apparently, followed by the Passover haggadah - in which a boy would ask the meaning of all of this, and the head of the household would explain the symbols in terms of the Exodus and the singing of the first part of the Hallel (Psa. 113 or Psa. 113-114). Though the precise order is disputed, apparently a second cup of wine introduced the main course, which was followed by a third cup, known as the cup of blessing, accompanied by another prayer of thanksgiving. The participants then sang the rest of the Hallel (Psalm 114–118 or 115–118) and probably drank a fourth cup of wine” (Carson, EBC, Matthew, 533).

The cup in 22:17 is *most likely* the first cup of wine of the Passover celebration. If Jesus celebrated the Passover according to typical Jewish custom, He would thank God by praying something like, “Blessed are you who created the fruit of the vine.” This prayer of thanks is why the celebration of communion by the church is often called the Eucharist. “Eucharist” is derived from the Greek term “*eucharisteo*” (εὐχαριστέω) meaning “to give thanks.”

The cup was then passed among the disciples who drank from it as they remembered God’s provision and salvation at the Exodus. Drinking from a common cup was unusual but not unheard of. The act intensified the oneness of fellowship that was central to the meal (1 Cor. 10:16-17) (Bock, 1723; Marshall, 799).

In 22:18 Jesus repeated His vow of abstinence from drinking wine until the kingdom comes (cf. 22:16). This could mean that He only drank the first cup of the Passover meal and then stopped, but it more likely means that after this Passover celebration the next celebration they would enjoy together would be the celebration of the fulfillment of the kingdom of God.

For now, Jesus and His disciples can share in celebration and fellowship, but something is about to change that will ultimately lead to the coming kingdom of God.

22:19 And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

The second cup of wine (not mentioned) introduced the main course. Most likely Luke cuts the story down to focus on the most important aspects of the evening – the significance attached to the bread and the third cup (Marshall, 801). After drinking the second cup of wine, Jesus passed out the unleavened bread which had been cut into small thin wafers called *mazzot*. “The reference is to the bread served at the beginning of the main course of the Passover meal, over which grace was said” (Marshall, 802). In the typical Passover Feast the unleavened bread symbolized the haste in which the Israelites had to leave Egypt – they had no time to even let the bread dough rise; however, when Jesus passed the bread out, He assigned a new meaning to it; the bread symbolized His body *which is given “for them”*.² The preposition “for” (*hyper/ ὑπέρ*), when used in sacrificial contexts, often means “on behalf of” and can express substitutionary action. It is unlikely that the disciples would have understood a sacrificial significance when Jesus spoke; however, in time they would; the giving of Jesus’ body is the giving of His life on our behalf through His sacrificial death on the cross.

Jesus also told the disciples that they should continue to remember the giving of His body for them through the repeated practice of eating the bread with its given symbolism.

The idea of recollection has OT roots with the Passover (Exo. 12:14; 13:9; Deut. 16:3). The “remembering” in the Passover meal was achieved primarily by projecting the reality of the “world” of the Passover and drawing participants of later generations into it (Thiselton, NIGTC, 1 Cor. 879). When believers take the bread and the cup we project the reality of His death to our generation and declare its reality “for us”; the symbols proclaim His death nonverbally by virtue of the reality they symbolize (1 Cor. 11:26).

22:20 And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.”

“In the same way” means that Jesus also gave thanks for this cup as He had done earlier. Mark states it more clearly: “when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it” (Mk. 14:23).

The phrase “after they had eaten” (*μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι*) separates the taking of the bread and the cup with the meal (also see 1 Cor. 11:25). Thus, the cup spoken of in verse 20 is most likely the third cup of wine in the Passover ceremony, the so-called cup of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; Marshall, 805; Bock, 1727).

The cup (i.e. the contents of the cup – the wine) symbolized Jesus’ blood. It has been adequately proven that in the OT life was said to be in the blood (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 17:11-14; Deut. 12:23), and the shedding of blood referred to death. Blood was also used when the “old covenant” that was made at Sinai was ratified. In Exodus 24:8 it says, “So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

The expression “new covenant”³ is a reference to Jeremiah 31:31. The new covenant comes into being through the sacrificial death of Christ. Matthew 26:28 says, “for this is My blood of the covenant, which

is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." Mark 14:24 is similar: "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

Thus, Jesus compares two salvific eras, "one past, the other yet to come. Both involve death, in one a lamb, in the other a Messiah" (Bock, 1726).

Once again Bock gives us an excellent summary:

The account of Jesus' last meal in Luke 22:14–20 is loaded with significance. This is the last time that Jesus will be with His disciples in His earthly life. As He gathers with them, they recall in the Passover the last great salvific event, the exodus. They are gathered to look back, but Jesus looks forward to His approaching suffering and a new sacrifice that opens a new era. Jesus of Nazareth is like the lamb of the exodus meal.

But death is not the end. Jesus knows that the kingdom will be consummated and that He will sit at the table with His disciples again. Such a meal, however, will not be His again until the kingdom is consummated. In the meantime, those who gather are to remember this meal and what the end of Jesus' life means.

A variety of truths are portrayed. Oneness is expressed in the sharing of the cup. A new age of salvation will be found in the new, united community that is being formed on the basis of Jesus' approaching death. Jesus speaks of His body being broken for the disciples and of His blood being shed for them, the blood of the new covenant. The covenantal reference makes it clear that a new era is in view, an era that Jesus brings. We have here a clear note that God's plan has reached a new phase. At the center is a death and an inauguration of benefits. The mediating source is Jesus, who gives His body and blood so that those who ally themselves to Him may receive salvation's benefits. He is sacrificially offered for them, and thus a fresh covenant comes. The apostles here take bread and wine to picture this; the church declares it at the Lord's Table. As they take a meal, they are to look backward and forward. There is, in fact, a greater meal yet to come (Bock, 1728, 1729).

22:21 "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table.

22:22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"

22:23 And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.

Jesus had said that He would be given over into the hands of His enemies (9:44; 18:32; 22:4, 6). "The deed has already been set in motion. And the hand of the traitor shares the master's wine and bread (Psa. 41:9). In brief, the suffering so often predicted is as close as the traitor himself. Set as this announcement is in the context of Jesus' declaration about the 'new covenant', Luke's auditors could not fail to catch the main point - through Judas, Satan now confronts God" (Danker, 347).

The term "determined" defines God's overarching providence and purpose in connection with Jesus Christ. Jesus' betrayal was determined because it had already been determined that His body and blood would be given for the disciples. The betrayal was the means to the end.

God's purpose for Christ was that He become a better sacrifice than the sacrifices of the old covenant (Heb. 2:10, 14, 17). This is explained in depth in the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews 10:1-4 says that the law of Moses was only a shadow of the things to come, not the reality of the good things Christ has done for us. The sacrifices under the old covenant needed to be repeated year after year, "but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship. If they could have provided perfect cleansing, the sacrifices would have stopped, for the worshipers would have been purified once for all time. . ." (NLT) "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins" (Heb. 10:3 NIV). "For it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4 NLT).

Simply put, the inferiority of the OT system is demonstrated by the fact that though the OT believers were able to "draw near" to God (Exo 16:9; 34:32; Lev. 9:5; Num. 10:3-4), the worshippers themselves could not be made perfect. The Day of Atonement was an annual reminder of sin. It was a day of fasting (Lev. 23:26-32) and confession of sins (Lev. 16:20-22), while the act of the High Priest entering behind the veil reminded the people of their separateness from God. But the OT sacrifices could not bring a once-for-all cleansing. They were only a ceremonial expression of pardon for sin, and ones that had only temporary results. Had the sacrifices really dealt with sin, they would not have had to be repeated year after year, but would have permanently cleansed the worshippers' consciences, allowing them to have unrestricted access to the presence of God. But no OT sacrifice could bring peace like a pardon bestowed on someone once for all, for "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

God knew from the beginning that when He commanded that bulls and goats be offered as sacrifices, they were "shadows" of a greater reality; Hebrews 10:1 explains that Christ has always been the answer to man's need; His sacrifice is what all the shadows were pointing to. This is clear in Hebrews 10:5 where it says, "when He (the Messiah) comes into the world, He (the Messiah) says [to God], 'sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body You have prepared for Me.'"

Knowing that God willed that there be the perfect and final sacrifice through the incarnation, Christ responded by saying, "Behold, I have come to do Your will" (Heb. 10:9).

The conclusion follows: "By this will (that is, by God's will that Christ be offered as the sacrifice for sin) we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). It was "through the offering of His body" (that is, it was through the voluntary yielding up of His own body) that Jesus accomplished the will of God, becoming the "once for all" offering for sin, and bringing about the sanctification of God's people. This is what we are to remember when we take the bread and the cup.

ENDNOTES

¹ Some Jews reckoned days from sunrise to sunrise as well. This would place the Passover meal on the 14th of Nisan (Thomas/ Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels, 321). Others used a midday-to-midday system, but this was uncommon (Bock, 1710).

The system of keeping time in the Old Testament was based on the cycles of the moon rather than a solar calendar like we use today. In fact, the Hebrew term for "month," chodesh, means "new [moon],"

referring to the new moon that began the month. The lunar cycle played a significant role in the cultural and religious life in ancient Israel so that time could be counted by the cycles of the moon (Ex. 19:1). The New Moon was a festival day, observed by burnt offering and sacrifices as well as banquets (Num 29:6, 1 Sam 20:5, 1 Chron 23:31). The New Moon festival was often listed along with Sabbath as an important religious observance (2 Kings 4:23, Ezek 45:17). Like Sabbath and other rituals, it also came to symbolize empty and self-centered religion when not accompanied by faithfulness to God in other areas (Isa. 1:14, Amos 8:5). Likewise, the middle of the month or the Full Moon was an important marker of the passing of time. Two of Israel's most important festivals fell in mid-month (Passover, Tabernacles; cf. Psa 81:3).

The Hebrew lunar calendar contained 12 months of 30 days, which was also the customary period of mourning (Deut 21:13, Num 20:29). Yet the actual lunar cycle is only about 29 ½ days, which resulted in a year of only 354 ½ days. Keeping the lunar calendar coordinated with the seasons of the year required adding a 13th month to the lunar calendar seven out of every nineteen years. This additional month was added to the end of the year following the last month Adar, and was simply called Second Adar.

. . . Because of the differences between the solar and lunar systems of timekeeping, the Old Testament festivals that were linked to the New Moon fell at a general time, but the specific dates according to our solar calendar would vary. . .

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² This is not the doctrine held by the Roman Catholic Church known as transubstantiation where it is believed that the bread and wine literally become the actual physical body and blood of Jesus although the superficial properties of the bread and wine's appearance and taste remain the same. Nor do we believe in consubstantiation. According to those who believe in consubstantiation, the substance (the essential nature) of Christ's body and blood exist together with (are alongside of) the substance of the bread and wine. Although modern day Lutherans hold different views on the subject, Luther taught that the body and blood of Christ are present "in, with, and under the forms" of bread and wine. Some see this as a physical presence of Christ's body and blood; others see it as a spiritual presence. Both transubstantiation and consubstantiation describe the nature of the Christian Eucharist in concrete metaphysical terms.

In contrast to both these views, we believe that Jesus was using symbolism. When Jesus passed the disciples the bread, His body was still fully intact; it was not present in or with the bread in any way; the bread was in His hand. Eating the bread is picture of appropriating His death, in being a partaker in the benefits of His death.

³ In Scripture the old covenant (that is, the Mosaic covenant) extends from Exodus 20:1-Deut. 26:68. The parties involved are God and Israel with Moses acting as Israel's representative. The old covenant was ratified with blood and sealed with the glory of God (Exo. 24:1-11). The key provision was the 613 commandments in the law. Emphasis was on blood sacrifice (Lev. 17:11) which provided forgiveness of sin [not removal of sin (Heb. 10:1-4)] and restoration of fellowship with God.

The new covenant is spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31, but it has other names and descriptions. The main provisions of the new covenant include possessing a new heart (Ezek. 11:19-20), enjoying the permanent forgiveness of sins (Jer. 33:8), experiencing the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:27), and having the law written in the believer's heart (that is, having the inward desire to obey and follow God – Jer. 31:33). It also includes the consummation of Israel's relationship with God (Jer. 31:33).