



The Investigator's Gospel

Session 22 – Chapter 22 – The Last Supper

Luke 22:7-20

7 Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8 Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”

9 “Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked.

10 He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11 and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 12 He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.”

13 They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15 And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16 For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread

Passover is the Jewish festival commemorating the deliverance of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. The angel of death spared the firstborn sons of the Hebrews, “passing over” those households that sacrificed a lamb and placed its blood on the doorframes (Ex. 12). It was celebrated on the 15th of Nisan (March/April), the first month in the Jewish calendar. Lambs were sacrificed in the temple on the afternoon of Nisan 14 and were roasted and eaten with unleavened bread that evening (Nisan 15 began after sunset). Family or larger units celebrated Passover together. Unleavened bread was then eaten for the next seven days—the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The term “Passover” was sometimes used for both festivals. Extensive traditions and liturgy eventually became attached to Passover, though how much of this was practiced in Jesus’ day is unknown.

Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts that Jewish males were expected to attend; the other two were Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles. Joseph and Mary made the pilgrimage from Nazareth annually, together with Jesus, as we read about in the story of Jesus being lost, and then found by his parents in the Temple – this was a Passover event (Luke 2:41-42 - Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom). During Passover, Jerusalem

would be inundated with more than ten times its normal population – perhaps a half a million or more! Josephus, a contemporary Jewish historian, reports over one million pilgrims, but this is regarded as optimistic. Nevertheless, it speaks to why the disciples wonder where they will be able to celebrate the meal – and it also speaks to Jesus and the disciples spending the nights on the Mount of Olives, rather than in the city.

It also speaks to why the Temple authorities required assistance from Judas in effecting the arrest of Jesus. First, they had to know where he was when the city was overflowing and bursting at the seams. Secondly, we are told that “they were afraid of the people” and were looking to arrest him when “no crowd was present (Luke 22:1-6).” An insider, who would know exactly when and where Jesus would be staying, particularly at night, was essential.

The Original Passover – Exodus 12

12 The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2 “This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. 3 Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household... Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. 7 Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. 8 That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast... 11 This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord’s Passover.

12 “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. 13 The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

14 “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance. 15 For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel...

17 “Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come...

21 Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. 22 Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning. 23 When the Lord goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

Passover Today - Jews still celebrate the Passover today. A liturgy, known as the Passover Haggadah, is used to provide structure to the celebration. Central to the Haggadah is the retelling of the story of the delivery from slavery in Egypt. A special plate with a symbolic collection of foods, known as the Seder Plate, has the following: matzah (unleavened bread), the zeroa (shankbone), egg, bitter herbs, charoset paste and karpas vegetable.

- Matzah, something like a large soda cracker, represents the unleavened bread;
- The shankbone (sometimes a chicken bone is used) symbolises the lamb;
- the egg represents the offering of the people (an egg represents the totality of an offering);
- the bitter herbs (often horseradish), the bitterness of slavery;
- the charoset paste (a mixture of apples, pears, nuts and wine) resembles the mortar and brick made by the Jews when they toiled for Pharaoh;
- parsley is used for the karpas, the letters of which can be rearranged to spell “perech,” or “backbreaking work.”
- A small dish of saltwater, representing the tears of the people in slavery, as well as the tears of the Egyptians as they suffered the plagues, is also provided
- There is also wine – four glasses of wine are consumed at specific points during the meal.



Another central component of the Passover meal are the Four Questions. These are traditionally asked by the youngest child, again at various points of the meal:

1) On all nights we need not dip even once, on this night we do so twice!

- Slavery: The salt water into which we dip the karpas represents the tears we cried while in Egypt. Similarly, the charoset (fruit-nut paste) into which the bitter herbs are dipped reminds us of the cement we used to create the bricks in Egypt.
- Freedom: Dipping food is considered a luxury; a sign of freedom — as opposed to the poor (and enslaved) who eat "dry" and un-dipped foods.

2) On all nights we eat chametz or matzah, and on this night only matzah!

- Slavery: Matzah was the bread of slaves and poor, cheap to produce and easy to make.
- Freedom: Matzah also commemorates the fact that the bread did not have enough time to rise when the Jews hastily left Egypt.

3) On all nights we eat any kind of vegetables, and on this night maror!

- Slavery: The maror (bitter herbs) reminds us of the bitterness of slavery in Egypt.

4) On all nights we eat sitting upright or reclining, and on this night we all recline!

- Freedom: We commemorate our freedom by reclining on cushions like royalty.

Jesus' Celebration of the Passover

Luke 22:14 When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table.

You can see how Jesus and the disciples, in reclining at table, are celebrating Passover in a way similar to today.

Luke 22:15-16 And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

Earlier in the Gospel of Luke, the Heavenly Banquet is referred to – as in the prelude to the Parable of the Great Banquet (and the subsequent great excuses): *When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."* (Luke 14:15). The Heavenly Banquet is a common image in the Old Testament, when describing God's coming Kingdom (Isaiah 25:6-8):

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

The fact that Jesus proclaims this to be his final Passover meal is one reason why it is referred to as The Last Supper. It should be noted that there is at least one reference to Jesus eating "post-Resurrection" – when he eats a piece of fish to demonstrate that he is not a ghost (Luke 24:42). Jesus also prepares a meal of bread and fish disciples, although it is not explicitly stated that he also ate (John 21:9-13). Note, however, Jesus does not say he will not eat again; only that he will not eat another Passover "*until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.*"

Luke 22:17 After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. 18 For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

There are four cups of wine in modern Passover celebrations, and at least two in Jesus' day, as Luke points out (this one, and the "one after supper"). The meal begins with the following prayer: *Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine. Blessed are You, G-d, our G-d, King of the universe, who has chosen us from among all people, and raised us above all tongues, and made us holy through His commandments. And You, G-d, our G-d, have given us in love Shabbaths for rest and festivals for happiness, feasts and festive seasons for rejoicing, and the day of this Feast of Matzot and this Festival of holy convocation, the Season of our Freedom in love, a holy convocation, commemorating the departure from Egypt. For You have chosen us and sanctified us from all the nations, and You have given us as a heritage Your holy Shabbat and Festivals in love and favor, in happiness and joy. Blessed are You, G-d, who sanctifies the Shabbat and Israel and the festive seasons.*

The second cup is not consumed in completeness; when the plagues are recited, some wine should be spilled with each plague, representing the suffering accompanying the plague, and the sadness that ensued.

The Breaking of the Bread

The Matzoh bread is broken and shared, with the following prayer: Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth. Blessed are You, L-rd, our G-d, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us concerning the eating of Matzah.

Prayers and Scriptures are recited; the bread forms an integral part of the ceremony throughout, beginning and concluding the meal. While we do not know at which point of the celebration Jesus refers to himself as the bread (I think it is at the beginning, when the Matzah is first broken), it is doubtless a complete shock to the disciples:

Luke 22:19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." With this statement, everything which is done in the Passover meal is now done in the context of the sacrifice of Jesus, transforming the understanding and symbolism for the disciples.

The third cup is consumed upon the conclusion of the meal and the recitation of the post-meal Grace; this grace includes thanksgiving for the coming of the Messiah: *"May the Merciful One grant us the privilege of reaching the days of the Messiah and the life of the World to Come. He is a tower of salvation to His king, and bestows kindness upon His anointed, to David and his descendants forever. He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen."*

The New Covenant

It is then, dramatically, Jesus takes the fourth cup – the cup after supper:

Luke 22:20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

The covenant – the declaration that God is God, and the Hebrew nation is the people of God, ratified by the following of the Commandments, has featured throughout the Passover, as in the following prayer:

We thank You, L-rd, our G-d, for having given as a heritage to our fathers a precious, good and spacious land; for having brought us out, L-rd our G-d, from the land of Egypt and redeemed us from the house of slaves; for Your covenant which You have sealed in our flesh; for Your Torah which You have taught us; for Your statutes which You have made known to us; for the life, favor and kindness which You have graciously bestowed upon us; and for the food we eat with which You constantly feed and sustain us every day, at all times, and at every hour.

Now, Jesus declares there is a new covenant; rather than sealed with the blood of a lamb spread over a doorpost, it is sealed with the very blood of Jesus, the new Passover Lamb. Remember the meal began with the statement (Luke 22:7), *"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed."* It is now Jesus who will be sacrificed, delivering people not from slavery in Egypt, but from the bondage of sin and death. As John the Baptist declared (John 1:29) - *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Living Faith

7.5 Sacraments

7.5.1 In obedience to our Lord's command and example we observe two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. These are visible expressions of the Gospel given as means of entering and sustaining the Christian Life

7.5.2 In Baptism and the Lord's Supper, there is a sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified. Water signifies forgiveness and new life in Christ; bread and wine, the body and blood of our Lord.

7.5.3 The grace effective in the sacraments comes not from any power in them but from the work of the Holy Spirit. Rightly received, in faith and repentance, the sacraments convey that which they symbolize.

7.7 Holy Communion

7.7.1 In breaking bread and drinking wine Jesus told us to remember him. In this action called Holy Communion, Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, Christ offers himself to us and we present ourselves to him in worship and adoration.

7.7.2 In Holy Communion Christ places his table in this world to feed and bless his people. The Holy Spirit so unites us in Christ that in receiving the bread and wine in faith we share in his body and blood.

7.7.3 The Lord's Supper is a joyful mystery whereby Jesus takes the bread and wine to represent his atoning sacrifice, deepening our union with himself and with each other, giving us of his life and strength. Here Christ is present in his world proclaiming salvation until he comes-- a symbol of hope for a troubled age.

7.7.4 The Eucharist is thanksgiving to God. We pray for the world and with gratitude offer our lives to God. We celebrate his victory over death and anticipate the joyous feast we shall have in his coming kingdom. We pledge allegiance to Christ as Lord, are fed as one church, receive these signs of his love, and are marked as his.

7.7.5 Those who belong to Christ come gladly to his table to make a memorial of his life and death, to celebrate his presence, and together as his church offer him thanks.

The Invitation given at Communion

Welcome to the joyful feast of the people of God! This is the Table of the Lord. Come, not because you are strong, but because you are weak. Come, not because any goodness of your own gives you a right to come, but because you need mercy and help; Come, because the Lord loves you and gave himself for you.

Let this bread and wine be for you the token and pledge of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit, all meant for you if you will receive them in humble faith. O taste and see that the Lord is good.