

JESUS GIVES PASSOVER NEW MEANING
(Mark 14:1-25) Printed text: Mark 14:12-25

SETTING THE TABLE—The events surrounding the “last supper” Jesus had with his twelve disciples are filled with irony, tension, and *pathos* of the deepest kind when all the parallels to Mark are considered (Mk 14 paralleled in Matt 26, Lk 22, partially in Jn 12-13 and 1 Cor 11:23-25). Two days before the Passover the Sanhedrin was looking for a way to arrest and kill Jesus (Mk 14:1-2). They found their “sly way” in Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve (Mk 14:10-11). As with many betrayers, he needed money; money to *replace* what he had stolen out of the treasury of the twelve (Jn 12:6). Mark reveals the irony of this story of betrayal by sandwiching it within the story of the anointing of Jesus by a woman (Mary, Jn 12:3) in Simon’s house in Bethany (Mk 14:3-9; cp. Jn 12:1-8). This woman was rebuked harshly by the Twelve, for the perfume was worth *a year’s wages*. Jesus said, “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial” (Mk 14:8). In a typical Markan “irony,” one person (a woman) “*wastes*” money on Jesus in “preparation” for his burial while the other (a man) *wants money* in “preparation” for his (Jesus’) *arrest and killing*, i.e., his burial. One, a forgiven sinner, shows appreciation; whereas the other, an unforgiven thief, demonstrates avarice. The tension in this story leads up to a “last supper” narrative that, itself, could be *cut with a knife*. First, the reader is confronted by the *clandestine* way in which the upper room had to be prepared (Mk 14:12-16); i.e., a *man* carrying a jar of water (unusual in that culture), the omission of names other than “The Teacher” (a *secret term*), and finally a large upper room already furnished and ready for the finishing touches by the disciples themselves! Second, this drama is continued when during the supper Jesus *reveals* that one of the Twelve will betray him (Mk 14:17-21). In order to heighten the tension, Mark does not give the details to the story (cp. Jn 13:2-30). The fact that Judas could say with the others, “Lord, is it I?” betrays his hypocrisy. As if that is not enough, sometime during the supper, “a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest” (Lk 22:24). At this point (Jn 13:2-5) Jesus began to wash the filthy feet of quarreling men—by example Jesus taught them how to be true servant leaders! However, the deepest pathos is yet to be seen in this story, as Jesus gives the Passover new meaning (Mk 14:22-25).

MY BODY – The story of Passover is initially told in Ex 12. The lamb for each family or group was selected on the tenth day of the first month (Jesus’ triumphal entry was the day the people in Jerusalem selected their lambs!). Subsequently, on the fourteenth day the lamb was sacrificed and some of its blood was to be placed on the door frames in order to “protect” that door!¹ Without that protection every first-born would die! Bitter herbs and bread without yeast were to be eaten with the roasted lamb. The bones of the lamb were not to be broken (Ex 12:46; cp. Jn 19:36). On that first night they were to eat in haste, with cloaks tucked in and sandals on their feet and staff in hand ready to go. Emphasis was placed upon the unleavened bread (Ex 12:14-20; 13:6-10), for it represented the haste of the exodus events, especially how God miraculously delivered His people overnight from Egyptian bondage. (Yeast would not have time to work in the dough.)

By New Testament times additional items and traditions belonged to the Passover meal. Salt water (tears of bitterness!) was used to dip the bitter herbs. *Haroset* (pasty mixture of nuts, fruit, and wine) and a raw vegetable dipped into a tart liquid were designed to symbolize the bitter experience of making bricks as slaves in Egypt. Four cups of wine consumed throughout the meal was a symbol of joy (redemption from slavery). “Ritual hand-washings, prayers, and portions of the Hallel (Pss. 113-118) also punctuated the observance.”² The participants ate in a reclining position to symbolize their present “freedom.” (See the Mishnah³ *M. Pes.* 10:1-7 for these and other details.)

Jesus, however, gave new meaning to this old tradition when he “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body’” (Mk 14:22). Luke adds: “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk 22:19), an occasion confirmed by Paul in his Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 11:24). Jesus, speaking in Aramaic, probably meant “This is my body, i.e., a corpse!” For some time, Jesus had been preparing his disciples for this shocking statement (Mk 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Indeed, Mary’s anointing at Bethany should have provided a clue: “She poured perfume on *my body* beforehand to prepare for my burial.” Now, in Jesus’ hands, this broken, unleavened bread came to represent the broken, bruised, sacrificed body of Jesus (Compare Isa 1:5,6 with 53:4,5—Israel’s sins are atoned for by the vicarious suffering of the Servant.). The Lord’s death would mean the redemption of the world from

its slavery to sin. As long as believers participated in this “new” meal, they would “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). The one loaf without yeast would represent, from this point forward, the one community *without yeast*, a concept well-expressed by Paul: “Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7-8). Consequently, as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper with unleavened bread, we celebrate our redemption unto a purity of life based on Christ’s sacrifice for us. While the unleavened bread still represents “a hasty redemption” by a miracle of God, it is now centered on Jesus, the true Israelite, upon whom the sins of the whole world have been placed.

MY BLOOD – The Gospels hint that the later Mishnaic tradition of four cups of wine was used during the first century. If so, Jesus may have taken the second cup just before the meal when the full account of the Passover events was given in answer to the child’s question: “Why is this night different from other nights?” (*M Pes* 10:4) and blessed it (Lk 22:17-20). Most scholars agree that it was the third cup, the cup of redemption (“blessing”), which followed the meal when Jesus said: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mk 14:24). Mark’s account does not tell us. “This is my blood” parallels “This is my body.” The body is a corpse precisely because the blood has been poured out. The expression “blood of the covenant” clearly echoes Ex 24:8. While Mark does not use the adjective “new” with “covenant,” it certainly is implied (see Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; possibly alluding to Jer 31:31-34). Furthermore, Mark’s citation of Jesus’ words, “poured out for many,” suggests an allusion to LXX Isa 53:11-12 (Greek translation). The vicarious death of Jesus, already referred to by Mark (Mk 10:45), is now clearly made available for the “many,” which does not only include his immediate disciples but all of us today.

INVITED TO THE TABLE -- Mark records Jesus’ Passover conclusion: “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God” (Mk 14:25; cp. Matt 26:29, Lk 22:16-18). Thus, the Lord moves from drinking the cup of death (v.24) to the consumption of the cup of glory (v.25)! R.T. France has noted: “When Jesus drinks wine again it will be

in a situation where God's kingship is more fully realized than was yet in evidence at that Passover meal before Jesus' death."⁴ This "new situation" apparently finds fulfillment in Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and exaltation to God's right hand, as well as with the Holy Spirit's empowerment of the new Christian community in Jerusalem. Indeed, Jesus gave the Passover a *new meaning*, a newness that we continually experience as we celebrate and worship each week around the Lord's Table. Mark intends that each one of us will ask, "Lord, is it I?", and accept the invitation to eat and drink a meal in which we participate in and proclaim the death of our Lord. *This is pathos* of the deepest kind.

¹ The word "Passover" should more properly be translated "Protection." Use this word in place of "passover" in Ex 12:11,13,23,27,43,48. Vs. 23 especially makes more sense this way. However, since "Passover" is so *established* in all cultures in the English speaking world, it would be useless to change it.

² *ISBE*, vol. 3, p. 677.

³ Written collection of Jewish oral traditions, probably encompassing the first century.

⁴ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary), Eerdmans, 2002, p. 572.