

# PASSOVER AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

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See Matt. 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26; Luke 22:14-39; John 13:1–18:1; 1 Cor. 11:23-25.

The *Mishnah*, Pesach 10 summarises the Jewish passover meal as follows:

1. The first cup of wine is mixed (with warm water for serving) and the blessing over the day and over the wine is said.
2. The bitter herbs and fruitnut-mix are eaten with unleavened bread.<sup>1</sup> The body of the lamb is brought in.
3. A second cup of wine is mixed. The son asks his father about the peculiarities of the meal (Exod. 12:26-27) and the father answers with the confession of Deut. 26:5ff.
4. The first part of the Hallel (Pss. 113—118) is sung, that is, to the end of Psalm 113 or 114. A blessing (praise to God for the redemption out of Egypt) concludes the singing. We can assume that the lamb is now eaten.
5. The third cup of wine is mixed, whereupon the blessing over the meal is said, which marks the end of the meal proper.
6. The fourth cup of wine is mixed and the rest of the Hallel is sung, after which the wine is consumed and a blessing over the song is said.

## *Notes with respect to the portrayals of the Last Supper in the Gospels*

A number of questions regarding the order of events present themselves from the various descriptions of the last Supper in the New Testament. What were the disciples eating when the betrayer was revealed? Did the revelation of the betrayer occur before or after the lamb was served?

It should be noticed that both Matthew and Mark in their description of events are deliberately vague. They elect to separate the description of the events into two topical paragraphs. Both evangelists begin with an introductory sentence setting the scene. We are told that when it was evening (gen. abs.), Jesus was reclining / coming with the 12.<sup>2</sup> There follow two separate paragraphs, each introduced by a genitive absolute 'while they were eating'. The first paragraph relates the indication of the betrayer Judas. The second paragraph records the institution of the Lord's Supper in two steps. The bread and the wine are given separate sentences and explanations. We know from 1 Corinthians 11 that they in fact occurred at different points during the evening. The whole discussion is rounded off in both Matthew and Mark by a concluding sentence that after they had sung, they departed.

The breaking of the bread and consequent blessing, which by implication in 1 Corinthians 11 took place before or during supper, would seem to fit best with the blessing for the main meal after the reading and singing of the first part of the Great Hallel. The blessing at the end of the meal was the moment Jesus chose to indicate the wine as a symbol of the blood of the covenant.

Matthew and Mark, wanting to keep the institution of the elements of the Lord's supper together, place the identification of the betrayer beforehand as a separate topic. Luke places the identification of the betrayer after the institution of the Lord's Supper and thus after the meal proper. This may also be schematic, although it is just possible that this is the actual chronology. He adds that the disciples discussed which of them was the betrayer and that this led to an argument about who was the greatest among them. Jesus quells this argument by referring to he who serves as the greatest. He tells his disciples that they will eat and drink at his table in the kingdom and sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel. At this point Luke adds the reference to the sifting of Simon and his denial before the cock crows.

There appears to have been considerable discussion between Jesus' statement that one of them would betray Him, and the moment when he added that the betrayer had dipped his hand with him in the bowl. If there was only one bowl, then it would appear that this revelation was made during the meal. If two people

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1 The bitter herbs were to remind the partakers of the bitterness of the slavery in Egypt. The fruit-nut-mix was an edible reminder of the clay which the Israelites used to make bricks in Egypt.

2 The use of the imperfect (Mt.) or present (Mk.) tenses is deliberate and emphasises continuing action. The narration is not of a series of chronological events, but we are introduced to a bird's eye view of the dinner as it is progressing.

shared one bowl, then the revelation could easily have been made after the meal. Now John makes clear that it was he, John, who was reclining on Jesus' breast. If there were shared bowls, Jesus would be sharing his bowl with John and not with Judas. However John states that Jesus gave the morsel which He himself dipped to Judas. John seems to place Jesus' indication that there is a betrayer after his lesson (and prior foot-washing) concerning who is the greatest. Yet he does indicate that Satan had entered Judas before this lesson. We may therefore perhaps conclude that already at that point He indicated a betrayer, the discussion of the disciples about the identity led quickly to the discussion as to who was the greatest. Jesus solved this argument with the foot-washing and a lesson. He then repeated that there was a betrayer. Peter asked John who it was. John in turn asked Jesus. Jesus indicated that it was the person who dipped with him in the bowl (Matt., Mark) and dipped a new piece and gave it to Judas. At this point Judas left. The fact that the disciples thought that Judas was leaving to purchase things needed for the feast seems to indicate that the lamb had already been eaten (otherwise his leaving would have been strange). It also suggests that they had not heard Jesus' reply to John about 'dipping with the betrayer'. Was the grand speech recorded in John, including the promise of the Comforter, and the 'high priestly' prayer to the Father before or after the cup of blessing?

Luke adds that before the institution of the Supper Jesus indicated his desire to eat this Passover with them, for he would not eat it again until the kingdom of God would come. At this point Jesus takes a cup, gives thanks, has the disciples share it, and repeats that he will not drink wine again until the kingdom of God comes. Only after this is the Supper itself instituted.

I propose the following order for the recorded events of the Last Supper (events not recorded in the Gospels, but known to have occurred according to Jewish custom are in italics):

1. Jesus indicates his desire to be sharing this last meal with the disciples. The first cup of wine is mixed and a blessing is said over the day and the wine. Jesus gives the cup to the disciples to share.
2. *The bitter herbs and fruit-nut-mix are eaten with unleavened bread. The body of the lamb is brought in.*
3. *The second cup of wine is mixed. The ritual questions about the meal are posed and the confession of Deut. 26:5ff is recited in answer.*
4. *The first part of the Hallel (Pss. 113—118) is sung to the end of Psalm 113 or 114.* Jesus takes the bread, says the blessing, and institutes the token of bread as His body. *The lamb is eaten.* During the meal Jesus indicates a betrayer, there is consternation and a discussion over who is the greatest. Jesus gets up and washes the disciples' feet, teaching them a lesson about serving. Jesus indicates Judas, having dipped into the bowl of fruit-nut-mix simultaneously with him and also given him a morsel. Judas leaves.
5. *The third cup of wine, called the cup of blessing over the meal (which marks the end of the meal) is mixed.* Jesus says the blessing and institutes the token of wine as His blood. Probably at this point the long speech recorded in John is held culminating in Jesus' prayer to the Father. The comment in Matthew and Mark that Jesus repeats the remark that He will no longer drink wine with them until the coming of the kingdom is their summary of this speech.
6. *The fourth cup of wine is mixed and the rest of the Hallel is sung, after which the wine is consumed and a blessing over the song is said.*

It is of course possible that Jesus said an extra blessing when he broke the bread and did this just before the cup of thanksgiving. But this seems unlikely given that at that moment one would not expect there still to have been a whole bread to share. In addition, the Gospels say that Jesus did this "while they were eating," not at the end of the meal.