

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series - Matthew (Lesson SB_MT26A)

Matthew 26

Introduction

Crucial to an understanding of this passage is the events of the week of the Passover leading up to our Lord's crucifixion. During the Passover week, Jewish (and Gentile proselyte) pilgrims made their way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. Jesus had already presented Himself to Israel as the nation's Messiah and King through His triumphal procession into Jerusalem on what is known as Palm Sunday (Matt 21:1-11). This was the Sunday of Passover week and the Sunday just prior to His crucifixion.

During Passover week, there was a day of preparation for the Passover and then the day of Passover. Since the Passover feast was actually eaten during the evening of the day of preparation, then according to the Jewish method of counting the start of a day at 6 p.m., the Passover feast was eaten on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was considered a Sabbath day in addition to the normal Saturday Sabbath during that week. So, if the day of the feast of Unleavened Bread (and the eating of the Passover meal) that year fell on any day other than the normal Sabbath, it was possible that there were two Sabbaths during the Passover week the year our Lord was crucified. We have examined this subject in depth in a previous study of the day of the Lord's crucifixion as an Easter special so I will not reexamine it in depth here. Rather, I will just summarize some of the pertinent points as they relate to our study. Our purpose will be to gain a chronological frame of reference for the events of Passover week so that we may understand these last chapters of Matthew more fully.

Summary Points Regarding The Day of Jesus' Crucifixion

- Scripture documents the fact that Jesus was resurrected by daylight on Sunday morning (Matt 28:1, Lu 24:1; Jn 20:1).
- The word Passover is the term used to designate the Feast of Unleavened Bread which is an annual Jewish festival of seven days duration. It began at sundown at the close of the 14th day of Aviv (April) which was the beginning of the 15th day of Aviv. The first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were special Sabbath days, i.e. days in which no work was done.
- The day before the Sabbath during which preparation is made for the Sabbath so that no work was done on the Sabbath is known as the Day of Preparation.
- John 18:28 – "Then led they 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." This is the day of Jesus' crucifixion – the 14th of Aviv.
 - In this verse Jesus is being taken before Pilate for his fourth trial on the day of His crucifixion, the 14th of Aviv.
 - On the 15th of Aviv, which begins at sundown on this day, the Passover begins.
 - **Passover was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.**
 - The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a special Sabbath day per Lev 23:5-7 and Ex 12:15-16.
 - Since the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread were special Sabbath days, this means that the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread would have two Sabbaths if the Feast did not begin at sundown on Friday.
 - The day of Jesus' crucifixion is called the "preparation." "Preparation" means "the eve of the Sabbath." John 19:31: - The Jews therefore, because

it was the preparation [*the day before a Sabbath during which preparation was made for the Sabbath; the specific Sabbath in view is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread*], that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day [*specifically, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread*], (for that Sabbath was a high day [*the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread*]), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

- The Roman custom was to abandon the corpses of criminals to dogs and vultures, but Jewish law forbade leaving a body on the cross overnight.
- In this case, the law would be more stringently enforced because the next day, beginning at sundown on the evening of Jesus' crucifixion, was a high day [the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread].

- The Passover Feast
 - The institution of and commands related to the Passover are recorded in Exodus 12.
 - The 1st month on the Jewish calendar is Nisan (Aviv) which corresponds to our March/April timeframe.
 - A male lamb without blemish is set aside on the 10th of the month. This could have corresponded to Palm Sunday.
 - The lamb was kept until the afternoon of the 14th when it was to be killed as the sun began to go down.
 - The blood would be caught in a basin and then applied to the door post with hyssop.
 - The lamb was then taken into the house, roasted whole and eaten that very night (Nisan 15) with nothing to remain until morning. Anything not eaten had to be burned.
 - At daylight on the 15th of Nisan, the Israelites started their journey from their homes out of the land.
 - The 15th of Nisan was known as the Feast Day whereas the 14th was known as the Passover.
 - The 15th of Nisan marked the beginning of the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and was considered a Sabbath. (See Lev 23:5-7 and Ex 12:15-16).
- There are three major theories regarding the day of our Lord's crucifixion – the Wednesday theory, the Thursday theory, and the Friday theory. (See previous study for a more detailed analysis)
- The Gospel of John was written later than any of the other Gospels (i.e. 85 to 95 AD). It contains the most clear detail regarding the timing of Christ's crucifixion during the week of the Passover in my opinion. It is quite possible that by the time John wrote, the other accounts had raised questions as to the day of Christ's crucifixion among the readers of the other Gospels (i.e. Matthew, Mark, and Luke). John might have added the extra detail to attempt to clarify issues. If so, I believe that the evidence tends to favor a Wednesday or perhaps a Thursday crucifixion view even though both views have their difficulties. The prophecy that Jesus uttered in Matthew 12:40 (i.e. three days and nights as Jonah) would require a minimum of 72 hours to be literally fulfilled. This could only be accomplished if Christ was crucified on Wednesday. However, the typology of the Passover week is perhaps best demonstrated with a Thursday view (i.e. a 72 hour period in the grave and crucifixion as the Passover sacrifice). Whether one adopts a Wednesday, Thursday or Friday view, the most important issue is not the day, but the fact of the resurrection. Secondly, it is important that we recognize that "Good Friday" is based more upon religious tradition than solid fact.
- Was Jesus' last meal the Passover meal?
 - The eating of the lamb is characterized in every instance as a ceremonial feast and never as an ordinary meal or supper.
 - If the meal that Jesus and His disciples ate was the feast of the Passover, then Jesus was tried and crucified on this special sabbath and not on the day preceding it.

- However, we are told that Jesus was crucified on the preparation of the Passover (John 19:14) which was Nisan 14.
- John 18:28 indicates that the Jews had not yet eaten the Passover.
- No matter what day of the week that the 14th and 15th of Nisan occurred during the week of our Lord's crucifixion, we must consider the fact that the events surrounding the Passover were meant to be a type of our Lord's death. The slaying of the Lamb on the 14th of Nisan as the sun began to go down should correspond to the actual events that were played out in our Lord's life and death.
- If true, then Jesus couldn't have been the Passover lamb and at the same time eaten the Passover lamb in the week He was crucified. Admittedly, this is not the strongest argument against the last supper being identified with the Passover; however it is worthy of note.
- None of the accounts directly state that the supper that Jesus ate was the Passover. It is by inference from such passages as Mark 14:12; Matt. 26:17; Luke 22:7. The background for these passages is found in Exod. 12:15, 18.
 - It is possible however that the Jews had begun a practice even in Jesus' day that is still common among the orthodox Jews of today. The threat of being cut off from Israel was taken so seriously that it was universal practice to put away leaven a whole day before the prescribed period. This would increase the possibility that there would be no overlooked portion of yeast which had not been put away.
 - This could explain the fact that unleavened bread was used by our Lord at the Last Supper.
 - Therefore the reference in these passages to the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread might be interpreted to mean the first day that the Jews start to eat unleavened bread.
 - The reference to the killing of the lamb in these verses would therefore be an explanatory clause further identifying the particular feast.
- It is possible that Judas made his bargain with the priests on Palm Sunday, the day of triumphal entry. This would correspond with the setting aside of the Lamb for death on the 10th of Nisan.
- Preparation for the Passover would need to begin in Jerusalem even prior to the 14th of Nisan. There were thousands of visitors arriving in Jerusalem for Passover. Rooms were at a premium and the itinerant disciples had no headquarters of their own. John was one of the two disciples sent to prepare the upper room per Luke 22:8.
- John 13:28-29 provide further evidence that the supper the Lord and His disciples were eating might not have been the Passover in that some of the disciples thought that Jesus had to buy those things they had need of for the feast.
- Luke 22:15-16 seems to refer to the meal as the Passover. However, it is possible that Jesus was merely informing them that He was not going to be able to eat it with them.
- When the time came to take Jesus' body from the Cross and bury it, where were the disciples? It might be that they were engaged in eating the Passover.

Therefore, as we move into Matthew 26, this brief review of the week of Passover can provide a chronological frame of reference for us. While we will never know with certainty the exact day of Jesus' crucifixion and whether it was the Passover meal that He ate, we can have a better appreciation for the setting of these last three chapters of Matthew. We can see Jesus more clearly as the anti-type of the Passover sacrifice since we realize that there are other acceptable alternatives to the last meal He ate than the Passover itself. In the next lesson, we will examine some of the major characters that will play a role in the events of this last week.