

LEADER TIMES WEEKEND RELIGION ARTICLE FOR MARCH 11, 1995

By William H. Scarle, 412/297/3392 code:A:LT PASS.1

Passover this year falls on Saturday, April 15 (Nisan 15) in the Jewish year 5755. Good Friday falls on April 14. In the year 30 A.D. both fell on the same day. Jesus of Nazareth was crucified on Passover, which in that year fell one day before the Sabbath.

The proximity of these occasions in our own time reminds us that they are intimately related, not only in fact but in religious meaning. It is this relationship I would like to explore during this Lenten season.

Two of the prominent celebrations of the Christian Year correspond directly to two of the Pilgrimage Festivals of Israel: Passover and Pentecost. The final and third Pilgrimage Festival, Booths or Tabernacles, involves the "blessed hope" of the Christian faith. We spent some time considering Pentecost a few years ago in this column. In the next few articles we will do the same for Pesach, or Passover.

It should be noted that for a hundred years or more the Feast of the Resurrection among Christians was called Pesach, and not Easter. For the earliest Church, which was entirely Jewish, and the Mother Church in Jerusalem, which remained Jewish for a hundred years, the Jewish and Christian elements of the celebration were woven together in a single, and beautiful

fabric. The meanings of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Greek Scriptures blended together in patterns that represented the work of God in redemption throughout sacred history. To this Church it would have seemed not only strange but unseemly to speak of two celebrations: one Jewish and one Christian. The celebration was Pesach.

It is because Jesus was crucified on Passover that Jerusalem was crowded with people. In the time of Jesus the population was about 40,000. The walled city enclosed about 230 acres, but the 36 acres of the Temple Mount need to be subtracted from that, because it could not be used for habitation. At the times of the three pilgrimage feasts the population may have grown ten times. Of course all these people did not crowd into the walled city. They camped around the city or lived with friends or relatives in nearby villages. Jesus and his Disciples were accustomed to staying with the family of Lazarus at Bethany, on the east side of the Mount of Olives. Much of the story of the last week of Jesus' life involves these crowds of people, made of groups that had differing attitudes toward the Rabbi from Galilee.

The festival also accounts for the presence of Pilate and Herod Antipas in the city. Pilate would usually have been in Caesarea, on the Mediterranean. Herod Antipas would usually be in the Galilee, in his palace in Tiberias, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They were in Jerusalem for Pesach. Herod was there to demonstrate that he was an observant Jew. Pilate was there to

oversee his troops and keep order. Pesach was a festival celebrating Jewish deliverance from a Pagan empire. Pilate hated Jerusalem, but he could not afford to lounge by the Mediterranean during Pesach.

LEADER TIMES WEEKEND RELIGION ARTICLE FOR MARCH 18, 1995

By: William H. Scarle, 412/297/3392 code LTPass.2

Passover season not only explains the presence of Pilate and Herod in Jerusalem, but the presence of Jesus and his Disciples. We need to be aware that Jesus was an observant Jew. He attended the Pilgrimage Feasts in Jerusalem. Most of Jesus' ministry was in the Galilee, but at festival time he came to the Temple.

The Gospel of John records three Passovers attended by Jesus. The first is toward the very start of his ministry, following the miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. "When it was almost time for the Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem (Jn. 2:13)." The second is mentioned in connection with the feeding of the five thousand in John, chapter six. The third is recorded following the raising of Lazarus in John 11 (11:55).

Of course Jesus not only attended Passover in Jerusalem. We find him in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) in John, chapter seven. He seems to attend the Feast of Purim at Jerusalem in John five. We find him attending Hanukkah in the holy City in John ten (10:22). Purim and Hanukkah are not Pilgrimage Festivals. Attendance in Jerusalem was not required. However, there were celebrations and crowds that could be taught.

The Gospel of John mentions the festivals because John structures his Gospel around the Temple and its relation to the Messianic

mission. In this sense, John is the most Jewish of the Gospels. Passover becomes the occasion for the long teaching passages in John thirteen through seventeen.

Today the Passover meal is taken in the Jewish home. However, while the Temple stood, the lamb was taken to the Temple for sacrifice, and then brought back to the family for the Passover meal. Passover, in Jesus' time as in ours was a family occasion. However, it was not an occasion to stay home. It needed to take place in Jerusalem. The Lamb was a sacrifice, and the Temple alter was the place that offering was to be made. The Passover offering contains within itself all the elements of the other blood sacrifices of Israel. These offerings are delineated at the beginning of Leviticus, and are used for specific occasions. The Passover offering, given at the beginning of the sacred year, combines all the elements into one. It signifies forgiveness, release from guilt, the freedom of fellowship, the gift of life, and the covenant of Holy People with their Holy god.

The Disciples were Jesus' family. At this Passover Jesus gathers them around the table and says, "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 (Lk. 22:15 & 16)." The aspect of Passover being a family meal is something the Church has often forgotten in their doctrine and practice. It has not been forgotten in Judaism. There, it is still a family meal. The youngest at the table has the privilege

of asking his father, grandfather, or whoever is sitting as head of the table, "Why is this night different from all other nights?" It is that question toward which this Lenten series of articles is directed.

LEADER TIMES WEEKEND RELIGION ARTICLE FOR March 25, 1995

By: William H. Scarle, 412/297/3392 code: A:LTPASS.3

The main elements of the "Seder," or the "order" of service for the Passover Meal must have been in place in the first century AD. They are recognizable in the record of Jesus' last Passover with his Disciples, especially in Luke. The printed order of service is called today "The Haggadah," or the "The Telling." It is based around the drinking of four cups of wine during the evening, each with its own special meaning.

In Luke we read, "When the hour came, Jesus and his Apostles reclined at the table (22:14)." Reclining was the posture of freedom. It was a part of the ritual, and still is observed by each chair at the table being provided with a pillow. This was a meal to be eaten as a free people, not as slaves. We read also in John 21:20 that the Disciple closest to Jesus was "leaning back against Jesus" while he spoke to him.

The first cup is drunk as the blessing on the wine is pronounced at the beginning of the meal. It is recorded in Luke 22:17 in these words: "After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'" The normal blessing on the wine is today, and surely was then, "Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the World, Creator of the fruit of the vine."

In the Gospel of Luke there seems to be a break in the record at that point, since the next words recorded come at the end of the meal. There is a second cup prior to the meal called the "Cup of the Plagues," at which times the plagues on Egypt are remembered. The third and fourth cup follow the dinner. They are called the Cup of Redemption and the Cup of Praise. It seems that Jesus used the Cup of Redemption to initiate the sign of the New Covenant: what we usually call Eucharist, or Communion, or the Lord's Supper. Immediately prior to the taking of this Cup of Redemption there is a mysterious ceremony of hunting for the Afikomen, a Greek word which means "that which comes last."

The Afikomen is one of three pieces of matzah which are placed in a matzah cover, which has three compartments. This "matzah tosh" is placed at the head of the table at the beginning of the feast. Toward the beginning of the Seder, the host takes out the middle matzah and declares the matzah a symbol of Israel's affliction in Egypt. He breaks the matzah, returns one half to the cover, and hides the second half, which then becomes the Afikomen for the end of the meal. Jesus seems to have used the Afikomen and the third cup, which immediately follows it, to institute the Sign of the New Covenant we call "The Lord's Supper."

Enough has been said to make clear that the institution of the Lord's Supper rose out of elements familiar to Israel. Jesus did

not create something totally new, but added something new to what was already understood.

The early Church observed the Lord's Supper in connection with something they called a "Love Feast." This was consistent with that which was practiced by the Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Next week we will look more closely at the meanings of these practices, and the new elements added by Jesus as a sign of the Messianic Covenant.

LEADER TIMES WEEKEND RELIGION ARTICLE FOR APRIL 1, 1995

By: William H. Scarle: 412/297/3392 code: A:LTPASS.4

The essential symbolism of the Passover was established from the very beginning. Exodus 12:25 - 27 reads: "When you enter the land that the Lord will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.'" "The unleavened bread is therefore "the bread of affliction (Deut. 16:3)." The wine represents the sacrifice, and the blood which marked the door posts and lintel of each Israelite home. As the wine is drunk and the meal is eaten, Israel remembers that they sit at God's table as God's people and share the sacrifice offered to him as in the "Peace Offerings" later presented at Jerusalem's Temple. This was so in Jesus' time. It is also true today, except that there is no lamb at the meal. Other symbolic items replace the lamb, since there is no Temple at which to make the offering.

When Jesus took the bread, broke it and said, "This is my body," he drew on an established tradition. The bread was the "bread of affliction." He said to them in symbol what Isaiah says of the Messianic Servant - "Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, for we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our

transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Jesus did not have to give his followers new information. He needed only to call their attention to truth they already had, but had not yet put into it's place in the Messianic plan of the Almighty.

When Jesus took the third cup, the "cup of redemption," he drew again on existing tradition. Judaism expected a "New Covenant." Jeremiah described it in the thirty-first chapter of his prophecies. The cup represented the blood of the lamb upon which the Mosaic covenant was established. Jesus simply moved forward and said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is poured out for you." Again, Isaiah's words ring in our minds and hearts, as they surely did as the Disciples listened to these words for the first time. "By his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Matthew tells us that when the supper was over they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives." The hymn we know about from the Jewish traditions of today that reach all the way back to the time of Jesus. The hymn, or hymns, are known as the "Hallel," or the "Praise." They are the Psalms of praise, and are grouped in the later third of the Book of Psalms as we have it today. Perhaps they sang Psalm 116. "I love the Lord for he heard my voice..... The cords of death entangled me, the anguish

of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.  
Then I called upon the name of the Lord: 'O Lord save me.'"

LEADER TIMES WEEKEND RELIGION ARTICLE FOR APRIL 8, 1995

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It was not until after the death and resurrection of Jesus that his Disciples fully understood the symbolism of the sign of the New Covenant. The meaning of bread and wine in the Passover meal was close enough to these new meanings that there would certainly have been confusion before the fact. The phrase, "Do this in remembrance of me," is found only in Luke and in the description of Paul in First Corinthians 11:25. This is not to say Jesus did not utter these words. It is only to observe that before the fact these particular words found no fertile soil in the mind of the Disciples gathered around the table. Jesus' death was not acceptable to them as yet.

Once the Church began to meet regularly following the ascension of Jesus in Jerusalem the questions related to the command to "do this" needed attention. How often were they to "do this?" How was the memorial to be observed? Passover was observed on a yearly basis. Was this new sign of the New Covenant to be observed more often, and if so how often?

There is no doubt that the meeting place for the earliest congregations was a home. In Acts the home appears to be the home of Mary, mother of John Mark, which was on what today is called Mount Zion. It was there the last Passover with Jesus was taken and where the first Church business meeting was conducted.

It also appears clear from Acts 3:1 and Acts 2:1 that the Church met daily for prayer at the regular morning and evening sacrifice hours in the courts of the Temple. No observance of the Last Supper could take place under those conditions. However, in Acts 20:7 we meet the expression, "On the first day of the week." Paul was at Troas, a port on the northeast coast of Asia. The full text reads, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." It seems clear here that the first day was a specified meeting time for the early house churches. It may also be inferred that the memorial meal was observed as they "broke bread."

First Corinthians was written about the same time as the reference in Acts by the Apostle Paul. In the eleventh chapter of that letter the Apostle refers to the Church coming together to eat "The Lord's Supper." It seems to be in connection with a full meal, which is not difficult, since they were meeting in homes, and the group would not be overly large. Later in the letter, in chapter sixteen, Paul refers to the "first day" as the time the church should bring their offerings. It does appear, then, that the earliest churches met weekly, on the first day, as an observance of Jesus' resurrection, and that in connection with that meeting they had what in the early literature is called "The Love Feast," a dinner together. At that dinner they observed "The Lord's Supper," much as it was observed by Jesus when he ordained the memorial.