

## Passover Info from Fishing the Abyss

As we move into Holy Week, I thought it would be both interesting and informative to examine the Jewish holy days and ways in which they may have significance. There are a number of interesting “coincidences” that can be examined in the Jewish Traditions of the Second Temple period which hold significant parallels with Christian understanding of the last week of Jesus’ life, leading up to his resurrection.

This is Part I in the series (Palm Sunday), with further parts planned for later this week, to correspond with the days being celebrated.

### Lamb Selection Day

On the tenth day of the first month of the year (five days before passover), every family was required to choose a lamb for passover, per the instructions given by God to Moses:

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. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. (Exodus 12:3-6)

Jewish historians record that the lambs were brought from the fields of Bethlehem to the south up to Jerusalem and through the Northeast gate of the city by the pool of Bethesda, called the “Sheep’s Gate” (see above). (Because the sheep of Bethlehem were owned by the Sadducees, only these sheep were allowed to be sacrificed on Passover - for the purpose of filling their coffers.) So that the families could comply with the instructions from Exodus 12, the lambs were chosen the afternoon of the 9th so that they would be with the family from the 10th (which began at sundown) through the 14th.

The year of Jesus’ death, He and his disciples began the trip into Jerusalem on a donkey at Bethphage (which is exactly one Sabbath day’s walk from the city walls). Bethphage is to the east of Jerusalem, and the road travels over the Mount of Olives down to the Sheep’s Gate. On the west side of the Mount of Olives, which received moisture from the afternoon winds off of the Mediterranean Sea, olives and dates were primarily grown, with the Date Palm Branches (right, taken on the Mount of Olives) in abundance.

The Palm Branch was a symbol which it is believed was not allowed within the city of Jerusalem, because it was associated with the zealots who wanted to overthrow Rome. The war cry of the zealots was “(God) Save Us!” chanted over and over again. In Hebrew, this would be pronounced “Ho-sha-NAH”, which we pronounce today Hosanna. This comes from Psalm 118:25-26, which is at the end of the Psalms of Jewish blessings (Ps 113-118) called the *hallel*, sung during Jewish holidays.

O LORD, save us;

O LORD, grant us success.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.

From the house of the LORD we bless you. (Psalm 118:25-26)

### Palm Sunday

This is the setting for Lamb Selection Day - which we Christians call “Palm Sunday”. And it is on this day that the Lamb of God, born in the flocks of Bethlehem, who was sacrificed for all of our sins entered the city. This was done at the end of the day (Mark 11:11) which would have been the same time at which the

Passover lambs were being selected for each family group (and it is also the time that the disciples would have chosen the lamb for their own Passover Meal, the evening of the 14th day).

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

"Say to the Daughter of Zion,  
'See, your king comes to you,  
gentle and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

"Hosanna to the Son of David!"  
"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"  
"Hosanna in the highest!"

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?"

In [Part I](#) of this series, we examined Lamb Selection Day, which we Christians celebrate as Palm Sunday (though technically, since the selection happens on Sunday evening, it is actually on Monday in the Jewish calendar).

In Part II, we will examine some more of the traditions of Passover as practiced in the first century - in very similar manner as is done today - with the intention of examining some significant details relevant to Christianity.

### **Removing the Leaven**

For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread (Exodus 12:19-20)

In Hebrew practice and tradition, seven days before Passover, all families would search their houses for yeast (in some Jewish families, a paternal figure would hide bits of bread for the children to search out and find - which may have been borrowed later by Christians in 'Easter Egg Hunts'. We do not have evidence, though, that this particular tradition was practiced in the first century). All yeast found in the houses would be brought to a central place and burned.

While the elimination of yeast was a remembrance of the Children of Israel leaving Egypt so quickly that there was not time to make bread with yeast, this elimination is also symbolic of systematic removal of all traces of sin in one's life. Yeast is used throughout the scriptures - both the Old and New Testaments - as a symbol for sin. While it is important to always keep sin out of our lives, it is this purposeful searching that it done at Passover that seeks ALL the sources by which it may have crept into our lives. Both King Josiah ([II Kings 23:1-25](#)) and King Hezekiah ([II Chronicles 29-30](#)) took care to cleanse their entire kingdoms of the sin of idolatry as a way of preparation for Passover.

The Apostle Paul also reminds us of this need to remove the yeast from our lives at the time of Passover:

Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? 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. (I Corinthians 5:6-8)

### **The Setting of the “Last Supper”**

In the gospels, we read of the supper had by Jesus and his disciples in the Upper Room. This room, most likely in the Essene Quarter of the Upper City (and possibly called an “upper room” because of its location rather than it being on the second floor of a dwelling place), would have looked nothing like DaVinci's painting of the Last Supper. For at least 200 years prior to the Last Supper, it was customary to eat the Passover meal while reclining, and archaeological evidence supports the tradition that in the first century, this meal would have been shared around a [triclinium](#), a short 3-sided table arrangement with the fourth side open to allow food to be served. (This, in itself sheds a great deal of context to the Last Supper that we won't have time for in this article.)

After going to the Temple at the end of the day to sacrifice the family lamb selected four days previously, Jesus and his disciples would have returned to the Upper Room to prepare the meal. In that year, this would have been Thursday evening. Josephus claims that 500,000 lambs were slaughtered in the Temple at Passover, though some scholars believe it might have been sacrifices for 500,000 people comprising a fewer number of family units. Still a large number of lambs, nonetheless!

It is this family Passover meal that Jesus and his disciples would have celebrated on that Thursday/Friday night 2,000 years ago. Then, less than 24 hours later, Jesus would become the Passover Lamb for all of Israel (which we Christians have been grafted into, per Paul's writing in Romans).

In Part III, we will examine the Last Supper and the evening worship, and in Part IV, we will examine the significance of the sacrifice as part of Passover. Parts V and VI will cover the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Firstfruits.

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” (Matthew 21:1-11)

As Westerners, we may miss this, but to Hebraic audiences, the picture is a stark one being painted here: Jesus is proclaimed a messiah by the people, but in doing so, they were selecting him as the Passover lamb to cover all the sins of the people for all time. He was from the flocks of Bethlehem, as all lambs were required to be in that time. The people waved the Palm branches, declaring Yeshua the Messiah. And so it is that the early Christians understood this day (which we celebrate as Palm Sunday) as the day in which Jesus was selected to be our sacrifice.

And so it is that this perfect lamb would have additional significance 5 days later, on the day of Passover...

In [Part I](#) of this series, we examined Lamb Selection Day, and in [Part II](#), we examined the preparations for Passover.

In Part III, we will examine the banquet traditions of Passover as practiced in the first century - in very similar manner as is done today - with the intention of examining some significant details relevant to Christianity. It is not my intention to give an all-encompassing look into what is now referred to by faithful Jews as the *Seder* (which is most likely **not** the name used for this meal in the first century). If you want to see all of the parts of the service, there are a number of Christian and Jewish websites which document this.

## The Banquet

Unlike the traditional Christian “Lord’s Supper”, this meal was a four-course banquet, each with a specific cup of wine to symbolize it. While we are certain that this was practiced in the First Century, we do not know whether Jesus and his disciples each had four cups or if only Jesus had the four cups (there is evidence of both, though the synoptic accounts seems to indicate that Jesus shared from one cup for at least the third cup), which also signified where they were in the meal. We know, though, that the tradition of the cups of wine began some 200 years before Jesus and his disciples met in the Upper Room.

These four cups are given their meaning from Exodus 6:6-7

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will deliver you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

The four cups are (sometimes the English translations for the names differ, but the meaning is consistent):

1. The Cup of Blessing/Thanksgiving (*I will deliver you*)
2. The Cup of Judgement (*I will free you*)
3. The Cup of Redemption (*I will redeem you with an outstretched arm*)
4. The Cup of Praise (*I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God*)

Each of these cups symbolized one of God’s promises, and it is believed from numerous early Jewish sources that wine was representative of life/blood, and that God was promising on His own life (which you will understand more after tomorrow’s article) that He will keep His promises.

### Cup of Blessing/Thanksgiving

After the cup of blessing was drunk, the host (Jesus, in this case) would talk about God’s promise to remove us from slavery in Egypt - which is symbolic of our slavery to sin. It is also after this cup that the foot washing would occur, typically done by the person in the least honored position at the table (which seems likely to have been Peter, based on his interaction with John and his reaction to Jesus’ washing of feet). Jesus broke with tradition at this point to wash the feet of his *talmidim*, demonstrating his teaching of leadership through service.

### Cup of Judgement

After drinking from the Cup of Judgment, the host would recount the story of the children of Israel, their deliverance from Egypt, finishing with the Judgment of Egypt. During this part of the meal, the first part of the loaf of bread is removed (which is called the Afikomen) and the remainder is shared with all at the banquet. During this part of the dinner, the bitter herbs, called *maror* (often horseradish root in modern Passover banquets), are eaten, dipped from a dish. These bitter herbs were to represent the bitterness of sin. This bitterness of sin would then be washed away by the wine in the Cup of Redemption. What an amazing picture!

It was here during the last supper that Jesus told John that the one who would betray him would be one who dipped into the bowl with him. Since three people would share a bowl in a triclinium arrangement, this would place Judas on Jesus’ left hand, where it would also be easy for him to leave the room without disturbing anyone else.

Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

“What you are about to do, do quickly,” Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. (John 13:26-30)

Notice that, since Judas leaves immediately after eating the bitter herbs (the only item dipped from a dish as part of the meal), he does not share in the Cup of Redemption, and he is left with the symbolic taste of sin in his mouth.

### **The Cup of Redemption**

Just prior to drinking the third cup, the *afikomen* (the bread set aside earlier) is broken and given to all participants, as a “taste of freedom” at the end of the meal, to remind them all of the freedom given by God from sin. It is here that we read

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” (Mark 14:22)

The blessing Jesus would have said over the bread is the Jewish blessing for bread that had been said for hundreds of years before him, and which is still said today.

Baruch attah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Haoolom, hamotzee lechem min ha-oretz.  
“Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.”

So, for the participants in the last supper, here is what Jesus would have said in its entirety:

*“Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth. Take and eat; this is my body.”*

And so, again, we have Jesus predicting his death, burial and resurrection, and (again) his disciples do not understand.

Next, the Cup of Redemption is shared by those at the banquet. This cup is understood to be representative of God’s grace and forgiveness of sin. Thus it is fitting that this would be the same cup which we Christians share when we share in the Lord’s Supper.

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. “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.” (Mark 14:23-25)

After this part of the banquet, the host would then share the fourth cup, the Cup of Praise, symbolic of God gathering all of His people to Him. Some scholars indicate that Jesus seems to cut the meal short, by saying that he will not drink this cup again until after his resurrection (the arrival of the kingdom of God). This seems likely, as this symbolism is consistent with Jesus’ teaching.

### **The Hallel**

After the Passover banquet, the traditional Passover hymns are sung. These hymns, collectively called the hallel, are comprised of six Psalms (Psalm 113-118), and are sung at all the Jewish festivals except Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. From the gospel accounts, we read that after the meal, Jesus and the disciples sang hymns and went to the Garden of Gethsemane, which is on the Mount of Olives. In order to get to the

Garden, they would have had to cross the Kidron valley, north (and downward) of the Temple Mount. Here, at the bottom of the valley, the blood of all of the sheep sacrificed that day, according to Josephus, flowed from a channel from the altar as a stream more than a foot deep.

So, picture in your mind Jesus and his disciples, after the Passover banquet, singing Psalms 113-118. Read these words and keep this picture in your mind - this is what Jesus would have been singing, hours before his trial and horrible death.

### **Psalm 113**

1 Praise the LORD.

Praise, O servants of the LORD,  
praise the name of the LORD.

2 Let the name of the LORD be praised,  
both now and forevermore.

3 From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,  
the name of the LORD is to be praised.

4 The LORD is exalted over all the nations,  
his glory above the heavens.

5 Who is like the LORD our God,  
the One who sits enthroned on high,

6 who stoops down to look  
on the heavens and the earth?

7 He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

8 he seats them with princes,  
with the princes of their people.

9 He settles the barren woman in her home  
as a happy mother of children.  
Praise the LORD.

### **Psalm 114**

1 When Israel came out of Egypt,  
the house of Jacob from a people of foreign tongue,

2 Judah became God's sanctuary,  
Israel his dominion.

3 The sea looked and fled,  
the Jordan turned back;

4 the mountains skipped like rams,  
the hills like lambs.

5 Why was it, O sea, that you fled,  
O Jordan, that you turned back,

6 you mountains, that you skipped like rams,  
you hills, like lambs?

7 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,  
at the presence of the God of Jacob,

8 who turned the rock into a pool,  
the hard rock into springs of water.

### **Psalm 115**

1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us  
but to your name be the glory,  
because of your love and faithfulness.

2 Why do the nations say,  
“Where is their God?”

3 Our God is in heaven;  
he does whatever pleases him.

4 But their idols are silver and gold,  
made by the hands of men.

5 They have mouths, but cannot speak,  
eyes, but they cannot see;

6 they have ears, but cannot hear,  
noses, but they cannot smell;

7 they have hands, but cannot feel,  
feet, but they cannot walk;  
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

8 Those who make them will be like them,  
and so will all who trust in them.

9 O house of Israel, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.

10 O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.

11 You who fear him, trust in the LORD—  
he is their help and shield.

12 The LORD remembers us and will bless us:  
He will bless the house of Israel,  
he will bless the house of Aaron,

13 he will bless those who fear the LORD—  
small and great alike.

14 May the LORD make you increase,  
both you and your children.

15 May you be blessed by the LORD,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.

16 The highest heavens belong to the LORD,  
but the earth he has given to man.

17 It is not the dead who praise the LORD,  
those who go down to silence;

18 it is we who extol the LORD,  
both now and forevermore.  
Praise the LORD.

### **Psalm 116**

1 I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;  
he heard my cry for mercy.

2 Because he turned his ear to me,  
I will call on him as long as I live.

3 The cords of death entangled me,  
the anguish of the grave came upon me;  
I was overcome by trouble and sorrow.

4 Then I called on the name of the LORD :  
“O LORD, save me!”

5 The LORD is gracious and righteous;  
our God is full of compassion.

6 The LORD protects the simple hearted;  
when I was in great need, he saved me.

7 Be at rest once more, O my soul,  
for the LORD has been good to you.

8 For you, O LORD, have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling,

9 that I may walk before the LORD  
in the land of the living.

10 I believed; therefore I said,  
“I am greatly afflicted.”

11 And in my dismay I said,  
“All men are liars.”

12 How can I repay the LORD  
for all his goodness to me?

13 I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD.

14 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people.

15 Precious in the sight of the LORD  
is the death of his saints.

16 O LORD, truly I am your servant;  
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant;  
you have freed me from my chains.

17 I will sacrifice a thank offering to you  
and call on the name of the LORD.

18 I will fulfill my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people,

19 in the courts of the house of the LORD—  
in your midst, O Jerusalem.  
Praise the LORD.

### **Psalm 117**

1 Praise the LORD, all you nations;  
extol him, all you peoples.

2 For great is his love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.  
Praise the LORD.

### **Psalm 118**

1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

2 Let Israel say:  
“His love endures forever.”

3 Let the house of Aaron say:  
"His love endures forever."

4 Let those who fear the LORD say:  
"His love endures forever."

5 In my anguish I cried to the LORD,  
and he answered by setting me free.

6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?

7 The LORD is with me; he is my helper.  
I will look in triumph on my enemies.

8 It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the LORD  
than to trust in princes.

10 All the nations surrounded me,  
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

11 They surrounded me on every side,  
but in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

12 They swarmed around me like bees,  
but they died out as quickly as burning thorns;  
in the name of the LORD I cut them off.

13 I was pushed back and about to fall,  
but the LORD helped me.

14 The LORD is my strength and my song;  
he has become my salvation.

15 Shouts of joy and victory  
resound in the tents of the righteous:  
"The LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"

16 The LORD's right hand is lifted high;  
the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"

17 I will not die but live,  
and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

18 The LORD has chastened me severely,  
but he has not given me over to death.

19 Open for me the gates of righteousness;  
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

20 This is the gate of the LORD  
through which the righteous may enter.

21 I will give you thanks, for you answered me;  
you have become my salvation.

22 The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone;

23 the LORD has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

25 O LORD, save us;  
O LORD, grant us success.

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.  
From the house of the LORD we bless you.

27 The LORD is God,  
and he has made his light shine upon us.  
With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession  
up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will give you thanks;  
you are my God, and I will exalt you.

29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
his love endures forever.

Some of the key verses to keep in mind, as well, are Psalm 118:22-24. Too often, we Christians use “This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” to describe each and every day. Yes, every day IS a blessing from the Lord, but this particular verse is not descriptive of every day - it is descriptive of the day that “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone” - the day that Jesus died for our sins. THIS day is the day that the LORD has made; let all of us, forever, rejoice and be glad in it!!!

*Pesach Shalom,*

Chris

In Part IV, we will examine the significance of the sacrifice as part of Passover.

In [Part I](#) of this series, we examined Lamb Selection Day, and in [Part II](#), we examined the preparations for Passover. In [Part III](#), we delved into the Passover Banquet, now called the *Seder*. Tonight, in Part IV, we will examine the passover sacrifice.

### **Origins**

The origins of sacrifice in Hebraic tradition, and so, too, for us, goes back hundreds of years before Moses and the Exodus to the time of Abram. In Genesis 15, we read:

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:  
“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”

Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:1-6)

So here, God has promised to protect Abram and to reward him. In Abram’s culture, the two most important things one could have were children and land - because these were the only things that could carry on as a legacy to future generations. Abram, unlike many of us Westerners, when told by God, Himself, that He would reward him, immediately asked God about children, and had faith in God’s answer to him.

He also said to him, “I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”

But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?”

Here, Abram has the chutzpah to ask the God of the universe for a sign by which he will know that God will give him land. And so God sets up a Covenant with Abram.

So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”

Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. (Genesis 15:7-10)

Note that God did not have to tell Abram what to do with the animals, as this was a common means of creating a covenant between a greater party and a lesser party. This type of covenant, sometimes called a “bloodpath” is still practiced by the Bedouin of the Negev in modern Israel - particularly in arranged marriages.

In this bloodpath ceremony, the lesser party provides an animal - or animals - to be sacrificed and the greater party provides the terms of the covenant. Then, the lesser party kills the animal(s), and drains the blood into a trough. The greater party then walks through the blood, stamping his feet in the liquid to say “If I do not provide what I promised, you may do this to me (i.e. you may kill me)”. The lesser party then walks through the blood to say “If I do not keep my end of the bargain, you may do this to me (i.e. you may kill me)”.

[Even today, in Bedouin culture, if a husband or wife is found to be unfaithful or lazy or somehow less than what was promised in the bloodpath ceremony, the father of the unacceptable spouse is very likely to end up at the bottom of a *wadi* with his throat slit and shoeprints spattering his blood. As you might imagine, then, there is a good deal of pressure for everyone in the family to help each other’s marriages to work out!]

Back to the story in Genesis. Abram had supplied the animals for sacrifice, but what terms was God bringing to the table? In return for God giving Abram children and land and being their God, Abram would need to walk blameless before God. If God did not keep his end of the bargain, Abram could ‘kill’ him (we

Westerners scoff at this idea, but this is the Eastern picture being drawn for Abram, an Easterner). However, if Abram didn't keep his end of the bargain, God could kill him.

At this point, Abram had to be wondering what he had just gotten himself into. How could he expect to walk blameless before God? We read:

As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. (Genesis 15:12)

"A thick and dreadful darkness came over him" is a Hebrew colloquialism which means, in modern English - "he was scared out of his wits". However, here is what happened next:

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. (Genesis 15:17)

Throughout scripture, God is symbolized by two primary images - fire and smoke. And so it is that first, as the greater party, God walked through the blood. Then, rather than Abram walking through the blood - which would have been an almost instant death sentence - God, in the form of a blazing torch, walked through the blood *as the lesser party*, as well! In doing so, He was saying "Abram, if you do not walk blameless before me, I will pay the penalty for your sin", and in doing so - **at that moment - Jesus was sentenced to death.**

### **Sacrificial System**

Many Christians have a misconception that the Jewish belief was that their sins were forgiven by the sacrifice of animals. This cannot be farther from the truth. The reason for sacrifice was (at least) two-fold:

1. It had to cost something, and in being so, it had to be messy and vile - because that is what our sin is to God
2. It was a call to God to 'remember' his promise of mercy and grace - His covenant with Abraham. Not that God could "forget" and require "remembering" (as we think of the words), but that He would "remember" as He had throughout the Hebrew scriptures, by giving specific attention to the person.

After the fall of the Temple in 70 A.D., the Jewish people looked at verses like I Samuel 15:22

Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

And so their Rabbis taught as our Rabbi Paul did:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)

**It is to be through obedience to God, not through sacrifice of animals, that they would worship the Lord - not to earn grace, but out of love for Him.**

### **The Crucifixion**

During the Second Temple period, each day there were two sacrifices made for all the people of Israel, one at 9 a.m. and one at 3 p.m. The evening sacrifice of passover (remembering that this would have been the evening BEFORE Passover in our Western measurement of day and night) was for each family unit's lamb,

which was then shared with the family in the Passover Banquet. The afternoon sacrifice, at 3 p.m. (also called “the ninth hour” of the day), was to be the Passover sacrifice for the entire nation of Israel.

And so it is that we read:

About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”—which means, [“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”](#)

When some of those standing there heard this, they said, “He’s calling Elijah.”

Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. The rest said, “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to save him.”

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. (Matthew 27:46-50)

And do it was that, at the very time when the Passover lamb in the Temple was being slaughtered for the nation of Israel, the Lamb of God was being sacrificed for ALL the nations, for those who would be grafted into Israel. According to John, the only disciple we know was present at the crucifixion, we know that Jesus’ last words were “It is finished”. And so it was - all the blood, all the sacrifices, all of it! The promise made by God back in Genesis was made complete, and the sins of all who would accept His grace were forgiven and forgotten.

Greetings, and a blessed Passover to you!

Just as a refresher, here is where we have been thus far in this series:

[Part I: Lamb Selection Day](#)  
[Part II: Passover Preparation](#)  
[Part III: Passover Banquet](#)  
[Part IV: Passover Sacrifice](#)

as an added bonus, we’ve also discussed [Jesus’ use of remez](#) while on the cross

Today, in Part V, we will be examining the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

### **Timing**

“Celebrate the Feast 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. In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. (Exodus 12:17-18)

” “These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: The LORD’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. On the fifteenth day of that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.” (Leviticus 23:4-8)

On the Jewish Calendar, the Passover Festival is often a combination of 3 Celebrations, spread over a 7-9 day period (depending on which day Passover falls). These three festivals are: Passover, Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, while it lasted a week in total, was celebrated in sacred assembly on the first Sabbath after Passover - whether it was the day after or seven days after Passover. Firstfruits was then celebrated, per Leviticus 23:15, the day after the Feast of Unleavened bread (and then the Feast of Weeks - *Shavuot* or Pentecost - seven weeks later).

So, in the year Jesus was crucified, Passover was on Friday, the Feast of Unleavened Bread was on Saturday and Firstfruits was on Sunday - a sequence that only happened one out of every seven years.

### **Jesus' Burial & Burial Customs From the Gospel accounts, we know that Jesus was buried just before sunset on Friday.**

From the Gospel accounts, we know that Jesus was buried just before sunset on Friday.

Now it was the day of Preparation, and the next day was to be a special Sabbath. Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down. (John 19:31)

Now there was a man named Joseph, a member of the Council, a good and upright man, who had not consented to their decision and action. He came from the Judean town of Arimathea and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, **one in which no one had yet been laid**. It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment. (Luke 23:50-56)



The women were preparing spices and perfumes for Jesus' body, because it would be the Jewish custom for them, beginning the day after the Sabbath, to sit in the anteroom of Jesus' tomb (see #6 on the diagram at the right of a First Century tomb which some believe to have belonged to Joseph of Aramathea). Here, in this anteroom, they would be greeted and comforted by other mourners for up to a week after the burial. However, with the placing of the guards by the tomb and the sealing on the stone may have created a problem, unless Pilate had granted permission to open the tomb (though, with great celebration, we never had to find this out!)

After the period of mourning, the tomb would have been sealed for a year, during which the flesh on the body would decay or dessicate and slough off. After a year, the bones of the deceased would then have been placed in an ossuary (a bone box) in the tomb, so that the tomb could be used by more family members. In the Hebrew Scriptures, this 'second burial', interring the bones of the deceased in an ossuary, was referred to as 'resting with their fathers' or 'buried with the fathers'. This is most likely what is being referred to by the potential disciple in [Matthew 8:21](#) and [Luke 9:59](#).

It is also an important detail that no bodies had yet been laid in this tomb, as anyone who went into this tomb would become unclean if anyone had been previously buried there. Thus, when Jesus was resurrected, he would have been ceremonially unclean (and unable to go into the Temple, among other things, without sinning). However, because there had been no other dead bodies there, when he was resurrected, the tomb would still have been ceremonially clean - a detail we Christians may not fully appreciate, but many Jews would.

## The Feast of Unleavened Bread

This feast commemorated the giving of *manna*, the bread from heaven, by God to the Israelites during their wanderings in the desert, and it was a thanks to God for providing rain and a harvest - for providing food from the earth.

The main prayer for the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the same one as is spoken during the breaking of the afikomen during the Passover meal:

**Baruch attah Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Haoolom, hamotzee lechem min ha-oretz.**

“Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.”

So, imagine for yourself, somewhere between 500,000 and 3 million people (if we accept Josephus’ figures) in the Temple on Saturday calling out this prayer to God - *Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Who brings forth bread from the earth.*

During this time, who is buried in the earth? Jesus. Who is the Bread of Life? Jesus! Where was he born? **Bethlehem (which means “House of Bread”!)**

And so, whether they knew it or not, **these people blessing God for bringing bread out of the earth would have their prayers answered in the most spectacular way ever.** If you believe this is a coincidence, you must believe in a different God than I do - because my God is not a God of coincidence!

Jesus said:

I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. (John 6:48-50)

Happy Resurrection Day!

This is the final post in the current series of articles on Holy Week:

[Part I: Lamb Selection Day](#)

[Part II: Passover Preparation](#)

[Part III: Passover Banquet](#)

[Part IV: Passover Sacrifice](#) (also inserting [Jesus’ use of remez](#) while on the cross)

[Part V: The Feast of Unleavened Bread](#)

Today, in Part VI, we will briefly discuss the Feast of Firstfruits.

As we discussed in yesterday’s article, the feast of Firstfruits is the third celebration during Passover week, and it is celebrated the day after the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

## The Meaning of Firstfruits

**Many Christians do not realize that the Jewish calendar, as established by God, is set up around the agricultural calendar of Israel.** There have been number of discoveries of ancient agricultural calendars from Israel, which link the religious and agricultural calendars together. One of the most prominent was the discovery of the “Gezer Calendar Stone” (right), which is housed in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum in Turkey.

When you have entered the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the LORD your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come to the land the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us." The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God. Then you shall declare before the LORD your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me." Place the basket before the LORD your God and bow down before him. And you and the Levites and the aliens among you shall rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given to you and your household. (Deuteronomy 26:1-11)

So, the same way that we are to give to God the first part of our money, resources, time and everything else, these people brought the first part of their crop to God.

In the case of the Feast of Firstfruits, the celebration is of the first grain from the barley harvest - planted between the two rainy seasons of the year. Unlike modern farming, each family unit had its own plot of land on which they were to grow food for their family. From this farm, each family was supposed to collect the first grain of the harvest (which was typically fully ready in the weeks after this festival) and bring it to God to say "I am bringing you the very first part of my harvest, and I trust that you, God, will provide the rest for me and my family so that we will not starve."

The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest, bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. He is to wave the sheaf before the LORD so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath. On the day you wave the sheaf, you must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the LORD a lamb a year old without defect, together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil—an offering made to the LORD by fire, a pleasing aroma—and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. (Leviticus 23:9-14)

### **The New Meaning of Firstfruits**

In the year of Jesus' crucifixion, we know that Jesus was sacrificed on Passover at 3:00 p.m., the time in which a lamb was sacrificed for the sins of all of Israel, representing God's deliverance of His people from Egypt. And thus, Jesus became the sacrifice who has saved all who will believe in him and make him Lord, delivering them from the spiritual Egypt, sin.

On Saturday, he was buried (or "planted", as [Ray VanderLaan](#) likes to say), and the people in the Temple celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread, praying for God to bring forth life out of the ground.

And so on Sunday, Jesus became the firstfruits of those who would be resurrected, leaving us with the promise that we would be the harvest to follow. And we know we can trust God with this! As Paul wrote to us:

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. (I Corinthians 15:20-23)

Amen!

**from the website Fishing the Abyss**