



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Focus Article:

📖 Table Fellowship
of God's People
(*Food and Hunger*,
pp. 11-17)

What do you think?

Was this study guide useful
for your personal or group
study? Please send your
suggestions to:

Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu

Christian Reflection

Center for Christian Ethics
Baylor University
PO Box 97361
Waco, TX 76798-7361
Phone 1-866-298-2325
www.ChristianEthics.ws

© 2004 The Center for Christian Ethics

Jesus and the Passover

What has the Passover meal meant to Jewish and Christian communities of faith? Paul says the Corinthian Christians, as “unleavened” people, should lead “unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth.” He bases this breathtaking metaphor on the sacrificial death of Christ, “our paschal lamb.”

Prayer

Scripture Reading: Luke 22:7-23

Responsive Reading (1 Corinthians 5:6-8):

Your boasting is not a good thing. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened.

For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Reflection

“Festivals were part and parcel of Israel’s life together as God’s covenanted people,” Todd Still notes. Jerusalem overflowed with pilgrims for three weeklong feasts every year: (1) Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread commemorated the Exodus from slavery in Egypt; (2) the Festival of Weeks (or, Pentecost) celebrated the harvest of wheat; and (3) the Festival of Tabernacles remembered with penitence the people’s wilderness suffering.

The Passover is the most significant festival in the Gospels. Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for Passover every year (Luke 2:41). Perhaps he attended in his early adult years; from the three references to the festival in John 2:13, 6:4, and 11:55, the tradition grew that his public ministry lasted three years. Jesus’ final trip to Jerusalem was near the time of Passover (Luke 22:1; Mark 14:1; Matthew 26:2; John 11:55).

The Gospel of John says Jesus was crucified on the day of Preparation, at the hour when Passover lambs were slain at the Temple (19:14-16). The Synoptic Gospels, however, report that Jesus’ last meal with his disciples occurred at the time of the Passover feast (Mark 14:12, 16; Matthew 26:17-19; Luke 22:8, 15). They do not describe the usual Passover menu; instead, Jesus compared a shared loaf of bread with his body and a common cup of wine with his blood. “These significant variations signal that the supper Jesus shared with his disciples on the night of his betrayal was different in kind from the Passover meals that were shared at other Jewish tables,” writes Still. “The fact that this meal, which we call ‘the Last Supper,’ is the model for the Lord’s Supper in the earliest churches suggests that Jesus’ first followers considered his instructions to the twelve during their final meal to be especially valuable and readily applicable to all would-be disciples (note especially 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).”

Several scripture passages go further and identify Jesus with the slaughtered paschal (Passover) lamb. Two of these draw out the implications for holy living.



Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

Robert B. Kruschwitz, the author of this study guide, directs The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. He serves as General Editor of *Christian Reflection*.

© 2004 The Center for Christian Ethics

“Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves” and “do not be conformed to the desires you formally had in ignorance,” the writer of 1 Peter urges, because “you know that you were ransomed from the futile ways...with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.” With our minds readied and desires disciplined, we’ll be prepared to show “genuine mutual love, [and] love one another deeply from the heart” (1:13-22).

Similarly, Paul warns the Corinthian congregation about its need for moral purity. Because “our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed,” they now should live “unleavened [lives of] sincerity and truth.” They must “clean out the old yeast,” which here serves as a metaphor for malice and evil (cf. Galatians 5:7-10), so that they may be the “new batch” that they have already become in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). In Paul’s wonderful metaphor, they are called to “celebrate the festival” as “unleavened,” morally righteous people.

Study Questions

1. What is the significance of each menu item of the Passover meal (Exodus 12:1-13; Deuteronomy 16:1-8)? It is not especially delicious fare. How does it build a community of faithful disciples?
2. Bishop Melito of Sardis, in the oldest known Easter sermon, explores the link between Passover and the Lord’s Supper with remarkable metaphors: “For [Jesus Christ], who was led away as a lamb, and who was sacrificed as a sheep, by himself delivered us from servitude to the world as from the land of Egypt, and released us from bondage to the devil as from the hand of Pharaoh, and sealed our souls by his own spirit, and the members of our bodies by his own blood” (*Peri Pasha*, 68). How can knowing its background in the Passover meal deepen your experience of the Lord’s Supper?
3. In what contexts of worship does your congregation observe the Lord’s Supper? Do you remember an especially significant celebration of this meal? What made it special?
4. Study how the metaphor of Jesus as our paschal lamb is employed in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 and 1 Peter 1:13-22. What similarities do you notice? Are there important differences?

Departing Hymn: “Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread” (verses 1 & 2)

Be known to us in breaking bread,
but do not then depart;
Savior, abide with us, and spread
Your table in our heart.

There eat with us in love divine;
Your body and Your blood,
that living bread, that heavenly wine,
be our immortal food.

James Montgomery, 1825 (altered)
Suggested Tune: ST. AGNES

Jesus and the Passover

Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Responsive Reading	Responsive Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

Teaching Goals

1. To understand the role of Passover in the formation of the community of disciples.
2. To explore the importance of the Passover festival in interpreting Jesus' ministry.
3. To reflect on the call to holy living implicit in the Passover and Lord's Supper.

Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 2-3 and ask members to read the Bible passage in the guide. Distribute copies of *Food and Hunger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article before the group meeting. For the departing hymn, "Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread," locate the tune ST. AGNES in your church hymnal or at www.cyberhymnal.org.

Begin with an Story

Many congregations still mark New Year's Eve with a "Watch Night Service." The tradition traces back to 1862, when Blacks gathered in churches and homes on "Freedom's Eve" to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation taking effect. At the stroke of midnight, January 1, 1863, all slaves in the Confederate States were declared legally free.

When I was growing up, Watch Night was a big deal. Church members enjoyed a pot-luck supper, family games, and a movie. At the concluding worship service, my pastor father read the Passover story from the book of Exodus and we celebrated the Lord's Supper. Every year it was a powerful moment – welcoming the New Year by eating the bread and drinking the juice of Holy Communion with my church family. We were reminded that, like the people of ancient Israel, together we had been "bought with a price" and set free (1 Corinthians 6:20).

Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by praying that God will help members live together in love and truth that is grounded in the Gospel.

Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Luke 22:7-23 from a modern translation.

Responsive Reading

The leader begins and the group reads the lines in bold print.

Reflection

A number of New Testament passages, including the descriptions of heavenly worship in the book of Revelation, portray Jesus as our slaughtered paschal (or Passover) lamb. This study, which covers the first half of Todd Still's *Table Fellowship of God's People*, explores some implications of this metaphor for our discipleship. The next study guide, "Table Fellowship," continues the discussion of Still's article by focusing on how the Lord's Supper and common meals can shape communities of faithful disciples today.

It is important to distinguish three meals mentioned in this study: (1) the Passover meal observed from the days of ancient Israel, (2) Jesus' final meal with his disciples as described in the Synoptic Gospels, which we call the "Last Supper," and (3) the Lord's Supper celebrated by the church. Since Luke 22:7-23 weaves the three meals together and reveals their *continuities*, it's a wonderful prism for exploring, with Still, "what prompted our predecessors in the faith to sup together" and discovering "how table fellowship can mold our communities of faith."

Study Questions

1. The Passover menu included (1) a specially prepared, unblemished, year-old male lamb—roasted and eaten on the same night, with its bones preserved unbroken and the remains burned before the next morning, (2) unleavened bread, and (3) bitter herbs. Some of the lamb's blood was to be spread around the door of the house. "For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians," Moses told the elders of Israel; "when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down" (Exodus 12:23). The meal is to be eaten hurriedly, and the people are to be dressed to travel (12:11). The lamb is "a sacrifice for the LORD your God." The unleavened bread is "the bread of affliction—because you came out of the land of Egypt in great haste" (Deuteronomy 16:2-3), which is interpreted in the tradition to mean that yeast was not added because there was not enough time to wait for the dough to rise. Scripture does not explain the "bitter herbs" (often, horseradish is used), but tradition says they represent the bitterness of life in slavery.

Each element is symbolic and helps participants to form shared memories: "This day shall be a day of remembrance for you" (Exodus 12:14) in order that "all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 16:3). Their common meal is a reminder of their sharing God's salvation. With this memory, the people are bound forever to one another as recipients of God's grace.

2. Members might meditate on each phrase of Bishop Melito's sermon: (1) We are rescued by one "who was led away as a lamb, and who was sacrificed as a sheep" — what an incredible paradox and reversal! (2) We are delivered "from servitude to the world" and "released... from bondage to the devil." And (3) Jesus' rescue operation involves not only "his own blood," but also "his own spirit." Bishop Melito emphasizes the continuity of pattern in God's action (it is an improbable rescue from slavery) as well as the distinctiveness of Jesus' death—for he is a paschal lamb who gives himself for us, body and spirit.
3. Invite members to reflect silently for a few minutes in order to remember an especially meaningful celebration of the Lord's Supper. When and where did it occur? Was it shared with friends and relatives, or with strangers? By what method was the Supper served? Why was the occasion significant? Discuss how your congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper. Is it a significant and memory-shaping part of your worship?
4. Members might divide into two groups, one looking for similarities and the other for significant differences. Some similarities include: (1) the opposite of sinful behavior is "sincerity and truth," or "obedience to truth" of the Gospel; and (2) the result of unresolved sinfulness is described as perishing like the grass or suffering "destruction of the flesh." Perhaps another similarity is the general context—a Corinthian congregation divided by "arrogance" and "boasting," and a group that is lacking "genuine mutual love." One difference is that Paul lists specific sins—sexual immorality, greed, idolatry, drunkenness, and thievery—while 1 Peter refers generally to disordered "desires that you formerly had in ignorance" (i.e., before knowing God in Christ Jesus, cf. Acts 17:30; Ephesians 4:17-18).

Departing Hymn

If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the hymn text in unison, or silently and meditatively as a prayer.