

Here we see that the final step was for the Passover liturgy to be repeated. Every year, in the spring, on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, Israel was to celebrate this "day of remembrance" in honor of the salvation that had been won for them by God through the hands of Moses (Exodus 13:1-10; Deuteronomy 16:1). This command to renew the sacrifice every year shows that for ancient Israel, Passover was not just a one-time event. It did not happen once and then pass away. The Passover was to be observed forever, until the end of time.

To sum up what we have seen so far, in the Old Testament itself, there are five basic steps of the ancient Passover. They are as follows:

- Step 1. Choose an unblemished male lamb.
- Step 2. Sacrifice the lamb.
- Step 3. Spread the blood of the lamb on the home as a "sign" of the sacrifice.
- Step 4. Eat the flesh of the lamb with unleavened bread.
- Step 5. Every year, keep the Passover as a "day of remembrance" of the exodus forever.

This is the Passover of the exodus from Egypt. This is the biblical shape of the Passover liturgy, with which every ancient Israelite would have been familiar through reading the Scriptures and by celebrating the annual feast.

However, the first Passover was not identical to the Jewish Passover as celebrated at the time of Jesus. In addition to the Jewish Scripture, there is also Jewish tradition. By the first century A.D., the Jewish feast of Passover had developed both similarities and differences with the Passover of the exodus. So before looking at the Last Supper itself, we

these differences, so that we can understand them in their proper context.

### WHAT WAS PASSOVER LIKE AT THE TIME OF JESUS?

Over the fifteen or so centuries that passed between the exodus from Egypt and the time of Jesus, the Jewish Passover developed and changed. This happens to most liturgical celebrations; over time, they expand, they contract, some elements are added, others are taken away. With regard to the Passover, certain steps, like the spreading of the lamb's blood on the doorposts of the home, dropped out. Other steps, such as the eating of the Passover lamb, were kept, and their meanings were explained (and even expanded) by later generations. Moreover, new rites and rituals attached themselves to the Passover feast as it changed with time, such as the drinking of cups of wine.

Because of the changing shape of the Passover, in order to understand what it was like at the time of Jesus, we need to look not only at the Old Testament but also at ancient Jewish descriptions of the Passover outside the Bible. In these writings, there are at least four key differences between the original Passover of Egypt and later Jewish Passovers that merit our attention.

#### *The Passover Sacrifice in the Temple*

The first difference has to do with location. In the original Passover, the lambs were sacrificed and eaten in the homes of the Israelites in Egypt. At the time of Jesus,

the lambs had to be sacrificed in the Temple and eaten in the city of Jerusalem. Moreover, in the original Passover, every Israelite father was able to offer sacrifice on behalf of his family. But at the time of Jesus, only the Levitical priests could pour out the blood of the lambs on the altar. This restriction of the Passover sacrifice to the Jerusalem Temple is laid down by God in the Torah:

You may not offer the Passover sacrifice within any of your towns which the LORD your God gives you; but at the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell in it, there you shall offer the Passover sacrifice, in the evening at the going down of the sun, at the time you came out of Egypt. And you shall boil it and eat it at the place which the LORD your God will choose. (DEUTERONOMY 16:5-7)

Two things stand out in this passage. First, it is clear that the Jewish Passover is not just a meal, but a "sacrifice" (Hebrew *zebah*). It is "the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:27; Deuteronomy 16:5). Second, like every other blood sacrifice at the time of Jesus, the Passover lamb could only lawfully be offered in one place: the Temple in Jerusalem, where God had chosen to make his name dwell.

This link between the Passover and the Temple is important to emphasize. If you were a Jew living at the time of Jesus, in order to keep the Passover feast, you could not simply go down to the local market and buy a lamb to be killed and eaten privately in your own home. You first had to take the lamb to the *Temple* in Jerusalem and give it to an ordained *priest* to sacrifice it. It is for this reason that during Passover the city of Jerusalem would be

brimming with Jewish pilgrims coming to the Temple to offer sacrifice. Fortunately, we don't have to imagine what this would have been like. In the writings of Josephus, we have an eyewitness account of this from Jesus' own day. Recall that Josephus was not only a historian, but a priest in the first century. In his history of the Jewish war, he gives us a detailed description of the number of sacrifices offered each year at Passover in the Temple:

So these high priests, upon the coming of their feast which is called the Passover, when they slay their sacrifices, from the ninth hour [about 3 p.m.] to the eleventh [about 5 p.m.], but so that a company not less than ten belong to every sacrifice (for it is not lawful for them to feast singularly by themselves), and many of us are twenty in a company, found *the number of sacrifices was 256,500*; which, upon the allowance of no more than ten that feast together, amounts to 2,700,200 persons. (JOSEPHUS, WAR 6:423-27)

Even if somewhat exaggerated, this is a staggering figure: more than two hundred thousand lambs for some two million people! For the modern reader, who probably has never witnessed a single animal sacrifice, much less several thousand in one day, it is difficult to imagine just *how much blood* would have been poured out by the priests at Passover. But for ancient Jews, like Jesus and his disciples, who attended Passover every year of their adult lives, it would have been impossible to forget. No one living at the time of the Temple could have ever had any misconceptions about the fact that the first-century Passover was first a sacrifice and then a meal.

This sacrificial aspect of Passover at the time of Jesus is important to stress because modern people's concept of Passover is often shaped primarily by their knowledge of the contemporary Jewish Passover meal, known as the *Seder*. As we will see in Chapter 6, "The Fourth Cup and the Death of Jesus," the *Seder* certainly has ancient roots, as well as various parallels with the Passover meal as celebrated at the time of Jesus. However, one key way the modern Jewish *Seder* is fundamentally different from the first-century Jewish Passover is that *the Jewish Seder meal is not a Temple sacrifice*.

Historically, this difference is the result of the fact that, forty years after the death of Jesus (A.D. 70), the Roman army came and destroyed the Jerusalem Temple. From that day until our own, it has never been rebuilt. Because of this, all of the blood sacrifices commanded in the Mosaic Law have ceased. With the destruction of the Temple in the first century also came the end of a functioning Levitical priesthood, whose chief task was to offer sacrifice in the Temple. Without a Temple or an active priesthood, Judaism after A.D. 70 was forced to change. In the place of the Temple, the synagogue emerged as the primary place of Jewish worship. (The Greek word *synagogue* means "assembly" or "gathering place.") In the place of the Levitical priests, the rabbis emerged as the primary teachers of the Jewish people. (The Hebrew word *rabbi* means "my great one" or "my teacher.") Although synagogues and rabbis had certainly existed before the Temple's destruction—they are repeatedly spoken of in the Gospels—both were ultimately subordinate to the central sanctuary and its priests, where worship, according to the Mosaic Law, took the form of cultic sacrifice.

At the risk of being anachronistic, Judaism at the time of Jesus was much more like Catholicism (priests, leading

worship centered on sacrifice), whereas rabbinic Judaism after the Temple's destruction was much more like Protestantism (Scripture teachers, leading worship without blood sacrifice). In short, because Jesus lived during the time of the Temple, when he celebrated the Passover, it would have involved a sacrifice led by a priest, not just a meal led by a layperson.

### *The Crucifixion of the Passover Lambs*

The second difference between the first exodus and the Passover at the time of Jesus has to do with the *way* the Passover lamb was sacrificed in the Temple. Fascinatingly, we have evidence that, in the first century A.D., the Passover lambs in the Temple were not only sacrificed; they were, so to speak, *crucified*.

As the Israeli scholar Joseph Tabory has shown, according to the Mishnah, at the time when the Temple still stood, after the sacrifice of the lamb, the Jews would drive "thin smooth staves" of wood through the shoulders of the lamb in order to hang it and skin it (*Pesahim* 5:9). In addition to this first rod, they would also "thrust" a "skewer of pomegranate wood" through the Passover lamb "from its mouth to its buttocks" (*Pesahim* 7:1). As Tabory concludes, "An examination of the rabbinic evidence . . . seems to show that in Jerusalem the Jewish paschal lamb was offered in a manner which resembled a crucifixion." This conclusion is supported by the writings of Saint Justin Martyr, a Christian living in the mid-second century A.D. In his dialogue with a Jewish rabbi named Trypho, Justin states:

For the lamb, which is roasted, is roasted and dressed up *in the form of a cross*. For one spit is

transfixed right through from the lower parts up to the head, and one across the back, to which are attached the legs of the lamb. (JUSTIN MARTYR, *DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO THE JEW*, 40)

If these descriptions of the Passover lambs in the Mishnah and Justin Martyr are accurate—and there is no good reason to doubt them—then on numerous occasions, Jesus himself would have witnessed the “crucifixions” of thousands of Passover lambs in the Jerusalem Temple. This is an aspect of the Passover in his day that is neither mentioned in the Bible nor part of the modern-day Jewish Seder, but which has the power to shed light on Jesus’ conception of his own fate.

As we will see in a moment, Jesus is going to compare his suffering and death to the death of the Passover lamb. One reason he might have done this is that he expected that the manner of his death would resemble that of the lambs in the Temple. Not only would his lifeblood be poured out; but he, too, would be “crucified,” his body transfixed to the wooden beams of a Roman cross, like many other Jews before him (compare Matthew 16:24).

### *A Participation in the First Passover*

The third important difference between the original Passover and later Jewish tradition is that the ancient rabbis saw each annual celebration of the Passover as a way of participating in the first exodus. At the time of Jesus, the Passover was not just a sacrifice; it was also a “memorial” or “remembrance” (Exodus 12:14) by which the Jewish people would both remember and somehow *make present* the deliverance that had been won for their ancestors in the exodus from Egypt.

As the centuries passed, this double element of both remembering the past and making it present came to be expressed by various rituals recorded in ancient Jewish tradition. For example, according to the Mishnah, in the midst of the Passover meal, the son would ask the father, “Why is this night different from other nights?” and the father would answer by retelling the story of Abraham and the exodus (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:4). The father would also remember the exodus by explaining the meaning of the various parts of the Passover meal. He would tell how the “Passover” was a reminder of how God “passed over” the Israelites’ houses, how the unleavened bread was a reminder of the redemption from Egypt, and how the bitter herbs were a memorial of the suffering of the enslaved people (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:5). All these together not only looked back to the original experience of deliverance but somehow made it present:

*In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written . . . “It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt” (Exod 13:8). Therefore we are bound to give thanks . . . and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our fathers and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a Festival-day, and from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah. (MISHNAH, PESAHI 10:5)*

With these words, we see quite clearly that for ancient Jews, the Passover feast was not just a remembrance of what God had done for their ancestors. In some mysterious way, they saw each Passover, “in every generation,” as a way of

sharing in the original act of redemption. Although living centuries after the first exodus, the father would speak of the event as if it were something he himself had experienced.

In other words, ancient Jewish celebrants did not just remember the exodus; they actively *participated* in it. From their perspective, no matter how much time had passed since the days of Moses, the salvation won in the exodus was not just for "our fathers" but "for us." And the chief way both of remembering and of participating in the original act of redemption was, of course, by keeping the Passover itself.

### *The Passover of the Messiah*

The final difference between the original Passover and Jewish tradition is that some traditions tied the Passover feast to the coming of the Messiah and the dawn of the age of salvation.

For example, in one ancient Jewish commentary on the Book of Exodus, Rabbi Joshua, son of Hananiah, who was of priestly descent and had served in the Temple before it was destroyed, says: "In that night they were redeemed, and in that night they will be redeemed" (*Mekilta* on Exodus 12:42). In other words, the future redemption will take place on the same night as the original redemption: Passover night. Along the same lines, in the ancient Jewish commentary the Midrash Rabbah, God says to his people: "On that very night"—that is, Passover night—"know that I will redeem you" (*Exodus Rabbah* 18:11). And again: "The Messiah who is called 'first,' will come in the first month" (*Exodus Rabbah* 12:42, alluding to Isaiah 41:27). The "first month" of the Jewish liturgical year was the month of Nisan, the month when the Passover was celebrated. All of these rabbinic traditions are apparently based on the fact that in

the Bible, the night of Passover is called "a night of watching" (Exodus 12:42). The first Passover was a night of watching for the coming of the destroying angel. In later Jewish tradition, the Passover became a night of watching for the coming of the Messiah and the redemption he would bring.

Once again, we find evidence for an ancient Jewish belief in early Christian writings. Saint Jerome, who was arguably the greatest biblical scholar of the early Church (ca. A.D. 400), is well aware of the link between the Jewish Passover and the coming of the Messiah:

It is a tradition of the Jews that the Messiah will come at midnight according to the manner of the time in Egypt when the Passover was (first) celebrated. (JEROME, *COMMENTARY ON MATTHEW* 4 ON 25:6).

In light of such Jewish and Christian evidence, the modern biblical scholar Joachim Jeremias has this to say about the Passover of the Messiah:

The Jewish passover celebration at the time of Jesus is both retrospect and prospect. At this festival the people of God remember the merciful immunity granted to the houses marked with the blood of the paschal lamb and the deliverance from the Egyptian servitude. *At the same time the passover is a looking forward to the coming deliverance of which the deliverance from Egypt is the prototype.* This typology is a concept which "most comprehensively determined in early times, as no other did, the form that the doctrine of final salvation took." The Messiah comes in the Passover night!

The Messiah comes on Passover night, and God will redeem his people on that same night. With these ancient Jewish beliefs firmly in mind, we can now turn to Jesus' actions during his own final Passover meal, which he celebrated the night on which his passion began.

### JESUS AND THE NEW PASSOVER

With all this in mind, we can now make some connections between the biblical Passover, ancient Jewish tradition, and Jesus' own words and deeds. If Jesus saw himself as inaugurating a new exodus, and if he expected the new exodus to be preceded by a new Passover, then when did he think this new Passover would take place? When we turn to the Gospels, there is really only one possible answer: at the Last Supper, when Jesus celebrated the final Passover of his life, immediately before his own "exodus," which he was to "accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31).

As I suggested above, at the Last Supper, Jesus was not just keeping another annual memorial of the exodus from Egypt, important as that was. Instead, he was deliberately instituting a new Passover through which the new exodus would finally be set in motion. In order to see this clearly, we need to pay close attention to how the Last Supper was *similar* to other Jewish Passover meals, as well as how it was *different*. By focusing on these similarities and differences, we will see that Jesus was both keeping the old covenant Passover and, at the same time, fulfilling the Jewish expectation of a new Passover, the Passover of the Messiah.

The first similarity is the most basic: Jesus celebrated the Last Supper on Passover night, the very night the lambs

were eaten by the Jewish people. Before describing the supper itself, the Gospels explicitly and repeatedly identify the Last Supper as a Jewish Passover meal:

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you *to eat the Passover?*" He said, "Go into the city to such a one, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand; *I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.*'" And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and *they prepared the Passover.*

(MATTHEW 26:17-19)

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, *when they sacrificed the Passover lamb*, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" (MARK 14:12)

And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired *to eat this Passover* with you before I suffer." (LUKE 22:14-15)

Here we see very clearly that Jesus' final supper took place immediately after the "sacrifice" of the Passover lambs, once the disciples had finished preparing the Upper Room for the celebration of the Passover (Greek *pascha*). The Gospel writers go to great pains to stress this point: as observant Jews, Jesus and his disciples kept the Passover feast the night before he died.

Second, for anyone familiar with the Jewish Passover meal, there are numerous similarities of detail that are fairly easy to spot. For example, Jesus and his disciples ate

the Last Supper *in Jerusalem*, not in the town of Bethany where they had been staying (Mark 14:13; John 18:1). This fits with the Jewish tradition that the Passover had to be eaten within the city gates of Jerusalem. Jesus and the Twelve celebrated the Last Supper *at night*, something which was distinctive of the Passover meal, which was eaten "in the evening" (Deuteronomy 16:6). Moreover, Jesus and his disciples drank *wine* at the Last Supper, which was required for keeping the Jewish Passover, but different from the water usually drunk with ordinary meals (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:1). Perhaps most important of all, Jesus' act of *explaining the meaning of the bread* unquestionably points to the Passover. As we saw above, it was at Passover that the father of the house would answer his son's questions by explaining the meaning of the unleavened bread (Exodus 12:26–27; Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:5). If this all wasn't enough, the Last Supper also ended with the *singing of a "hymn"* (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26). The mention of the hymn refers to Psalm 118, known as the "Great Hallel" psalm, which in Jewish tradition was sung toward the end of the Passover meal.

In addition to these similarities, the Last Supper was also different—radically different—from an ordinary Passover meal. Any ancient Jew, including the apostles, could easily have seen this. For one thing, most Passovers were celebrated within families, with the father leading and acting as head. At the Last Supper, by contrast, Jesus acted as host and leader of the Twelve, even though he was not the father of any of the disciples. Even more, at an ordinary Passover, the focus was on God's covenant with Abraham, the exodus from Egypt, and the entry into the promised land of Canaan. Yet Jesus spoke instead of the "new covenant," prophesied by Jeremiah to be fulfilled in the age

of salvation (1 Corinthians 11:25; Jeremiah 31:31–33). Perhaps most significant, at an ordinary Jewish Passover, the entire liturgy revolved around the body and blood of the sacrificial Passover lamb. First, the lamb would be slaughtered, and the priests in the Temple would pour out the blood of the lamb on the altar. Then the Jews would bring the body of the lamb from the Temple to the Passover meal, and the father would explain its meaning at the meal. Yet, at the Last Supper, Jesus did something entirely different. With his words of explanation, he shifted the focus away from the body and blood of the Passover lamb (of which there is no mention), and turned it toward his own body and blood.

We can feel the force of this difference more if we compare Jesus' words at the Last Supper with other descriptions of the ancient Jewish Passover. For example, in its account of what the Passover was like when the Temple still stood, the Mishnah focuses on "the body" of the Passover lamb: "Rabbi Eliezer son of Rabbi Zadok says . . . And in the Holy Temple they used to bring before him *the body of the Passover offering*." (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:3–4)

Contrast this with what Jesus says at the Last Supper: "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is *my body*.'" (Matthew 26:26).

Along the same lines, before the Temple was destroyed, the climax of the Passover sacrifice was the pouring out of the lamb's blood by the priests in the Temple. The Mishnah again describes this in striking detail:

The Passover-offering was slaughtered in three groups. . . . When the first group entered in and the Temple Court was filled, the gates of the Temple Court were closed. . . . The priests stood

in rows and in their hands were basins of silver and basins of gold. In one row all the basins were of silver and in another row all the basins were of gold. . . . An Israelite slaughtered his offering and the priest caught *the blood*. The priest passed the basin to his fellow, and he to his fellow, each receiving a full basin and giving back an empty one. *The priest nearest to the Altar tossed the blood in one action against the base. . . .* When the first group went out the second group came in; and when the second group went out the third group came in. . . . [In the meantime] the Levites sang the *Hallel*. If they finished it, they sang it anew.

(MISHNAH, *PESAHIM* 5:5-7)

The pouring out of the Passover blood must have been a truly awesome sight, especially if some two hundred thousand lambs were being sacrificed. Again, contrast the rabbinic focus on the lambs' blood with what Jesus says at the Last Supper:

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for *this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many* for the forgiveness of sins." (MATTHEW 26:27-28)

When we compare Jesus' actions to these ancient Jewish traditions, it doesn't take much imagination to figure out his point. By means of his words over the bread and wine of the Last Supper, Jesus is saying in no uncertain terms, "*I am the new Passover lamb of the new exodus. This is the Passover of the Messiah, and I am the new sacrifice.*"

If this interpretation is right, then the implications are enormous. For one thing, it shows that Jesus not only kept the Jewish Passover, he also deliberately altered it, thereby instituting a new Passover. As a Jewish man, he had celebrated Passover many times before; he knew full well what he was doing by changing it this time. He was showing that this was no ordinary Passover; it was the Passover of the Messiah, the night on which some Jews believed that Israel would at last be "redeemed" (*Exodus Rabbah* 18:11). That is why Jesus can say that *his* blood—not the blood of the Passover lamb—will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

A second sign that the Last Supper was a new Passover is Jesus' command for his actions to be repeated. When he told the disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25), he was echoing the command of God to keep the ancient Passover as a "remembrance" forever (*Exodus* 12:14). By means of these words, he was commanding his disciples to perpetuate this new Passover sacrifice in the future. Although we might miss it, by means of this command, Jesus was in effect restoring the original priesthood of the twelve tribes of Israel. As any ancient Jew would have known, only the priests could "pour out" the blood (*Matthew* 26:27-28); yet that is precisely what Jesus commanded the Twelve disciples to do in memory of him. Significantly, although the sacrifice of the Passover lambs in the Temple ceased when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the offering that Jesus commanded his disciples to do "in memory" of him continues to this day.

In short, by placing his own body and blood at the center of this new Passover, Jesus revealed that he saw himself as the new Passover lamb. As the great Lutheran scholar Joachim Jeremias said more than fifty years ago, by means of his actions in the Upper Room, Jesus was saying

to his disciples, "I go to death as the true passover sacrifice." With these words, Jesus revealed that he saw himself as the unblemished male lamb that would be put to death so that others might live.

### YOU HAVE TO EAT THE LAMB

With all of this in mind, we can now go back to our original question about the mystery of the Last Supper. How is it that Jesus, as an observant Jew, could have ever commanded his disciples to eat his body and drink his blood?

Part of the answer lies in who Jesus thought he was and what he thought would happen to him. When we study the Last Supper closely, we find that Jesus not only saw himself as the long-awaited Messiah, the "Son of Man" who would one day come on "the clouds of heaven" (Mark 14:61-62; Daniel 7:14). He also saw himself as *the new Passover lamb*, who would be sacrificed in order to inaugurate the new exodus, and whose blood would be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Perhaps this is one reason why he not only expected to be executed, but to be crucified, just as the Passover lambs were crucified in the Jerusalem Temple. The reason Jesus' identification with the lamb matters is that, as we saw earlier, in both the Old Testament and ancient Jewish tradition, the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was not completed by its death. It was completed by a meal, by *eating the flesh of the lamb* that had been slain. Therefore, if Jesus saw himself as the new lamb, then it makes sense that he would speak of his blood being poured out and command the disciples to eat his flesh.

Of course, this immediately raises the question of

whether Jesus meant his words realistically or only symbolically. When he said the words "This *is* my body," did he mean only "This *represents* my body"? Or did he see the Last Supper as one of the last miracles he would perform, in which he actually transformed the bread and wine into his body and blood? Did he actually expect the disciples to eat his flesh, under the form of bread?

Endless battles have been waged over the meaning of the word "is" here, all to no avail. However, if we put Jesus' words *in context*, we can discover a possible solution. For the context of his words is quite clear: it is the Jewish *Passover*. Well, then, let's look again at the Passover. In the Old Testament, was it ever enough simply to sacrifice the lamb? No. Did the actual flesh of the lamb have to be eaten in order for the sacrifice to be complete? Yes. Could a *symbol* of the lamb's flesh suffice? By now, we know that the answer is negative.

In other words, Jesus knew full well what any first-century Jew would have known: when it came to the Passover, you did not only have to kill the lamb; in order to fulfill God's law, in order to be saved from death, you had to *eat* the lamb. As with the old Passover of the first exodus, so with the new Passover of the Messiah. The main difference between the two is that in the new Passover, the lamb is a *person*, and the blood of redemption is the blood of the Messiah.

Should there be any doubt about this link between Jesus' death as the lamb and the eating of his flesh at the Last Supper, it's important to remember that this is exactly how the first-century Eucharist was understood by one of the most Jewish of all early Christians: the apostle Paul. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says:

Christ our *Passover lamb* has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the feast! (1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8).

The *cup of blessing* which we bless, is it not a communion in *the blood of Christ*? The *bread* which we break, is it not a communion in *the body of Christ*?

(1 CORINTHIANS 10:16)

In both of these statements, Paul is referring to the Lord's Supper. In the first quotation, he not only identifies Jesus as the new "Passover lamb" who has been sacrificed. He also bases the celebration of the Eucharistic "feast" on Jesus' identity as the lamb. Perhaps this is why, in the second quotation, Paul can affirm without hesitation that the Eucharist is a real communion in the body and blood of Jesus. For Paul, who sees the Lord's Supper through Jewish eyes, it is nothing less than a new Passover. Christ "the Passover lamb" has been sacrificed; therefore, Christians must keep the new Passover "feast" of his body and blood.

In short, just as the ancient Jews saw their Passovers as a participation in the exodus from Egypt, so, too, Saint Paul and other early Christians saw the Eucharist as a real participation in both the Last Supper and the death of Jesus.

However, the Passover is not the only key that unlocks the mystery of the Last Supper. Nor does it answer every question we might ask. For one thing, if we grant that Jesus saw himself as the Passover lamb, how could he actually give his disciples his flesh to eat? Wouldn't this be cannibalism? And what about the Mosaic law against drinking blood? To be sure, the Passover lambs' blood was poured out on the altar, but it was never drunk. In order to answer these questions, we'll need to turn to the next chapter. For Jesus spoke of the Last Supper not only as a new Passover, but as the new manna from heaven.

## 4



## THE MANNA OF THE MESSIAH

Now that we've looked at the Last Supper through the lens of the new Passover, other questions begin to emerge. For example, if Jesus saw himself as inaugurating the new exodus, then *what food did he think would be given for the journey?*

Remember that in the Old Testament, the people of Israel did not go straight from Egypt to the promised land. Their journey took years of wandering in the desert—forty years, to be exact (Numbers 32:13). Known by ancient Jews as the "wilderness wandering," this journey was a time of great trial and tribulation. During those years, Israel's fidelity to their God was tested over and over again. And during that time in the desert, God sustained them on a daily basis by giving them a special food: the manna from heaven.

In this chapter, we will turn to our second key to