

we have on the Eucharist, Cyril uses the ancient Bread of the Presence to explain the mystery of Jesus' real presence:

In the Old Testament also there was the Bread of the Presence; but this, as it belonged to the Old Testament, has come to an end; but in the New Testament there is bread of heaven, and a cup of salvation, sanctifying soul and body. . . . Consider therefore the bread and the wine not as bare elements, for they are, according to the Lord's declaration, the body and blood of Christ; for even though sense suggests this to you, yet let faith establish you. Judge not the matter from the taste, but from faith be fully assured without misgiving, that body and blood of Christ have been vouchsafed to you. (SAINT CYRIL OF JERUSALEM, *MYSTAGOGICAL CATECHESIS* 4:5-6)

Again, for all this to be true, Jesus' action at the Last Supper would have to have been a *miracle*, and not just a sign or symbol. But, as Saint Cyril himself also points out, this isn't really a problem, given Jesus' record of performing miracles of supernatural transformation. As Cyril says: "Jesus once in Cana of Galilee turned the water into wine, akin to blood; is it incredible that He should have turned wine into blood?"

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THE FOURTH CUP AND THE
DEATH OF JESUS

Let's take a moment to recap our journey through Jewish Scripture and tradition up to this point. We've seen how the Jewish people in Jesus' day were awaiting the new exodus of the Messiah, and how Jesus signaled the fulfillment of those expectations. We've studied their hope for a new Passover, and how at the Last Supper Jesus identified himself as the true Passover lamb whose blood would be poured out in sacrifice. We've encountered their longing for the return of the miraculous manna, and how Jesus promised to give it to them in the form of his own body. Finally, we've seen their devotion to the Bread of the Presence, and how Jesus fulfilled this mysterious sign of God's covenant love in his actions over the bread and wine.

As we bring our examination to a close, there is one

final but very important point to make. At the Last Supper, Jesus not only looked *back* to the Jewish history of salvation—the Passover of Egypt, the manna of Moses, and the bread of the Tabernacle. He also looked *forward* to his own passion and death. By doing so, he deliberately tied his actions over the bread and wine at the Last Supper to both the history of redemption and his own “exodus” that he was to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). This exodus, the new exodus, would somehow take place through what was about to happen to him in the holy city, when he went to his death on the cross.

In this chapter, we will explore this connection between the Last Supper and what Christians have come to refer to as the Paschal mystery—the mystery of Jesus’ passion, death, and Resurrection from the dead. In order to do so, we’ll need to bring our journey full circle by returning to the topic of the Passover. This is entirely appropriate, since the expression “Paschal” mystery actually comes from the Greek word *pascha* (Passover). Jesus’ Paschal mystery is, quite literally, a Passover mystery.

In this chapter, we will not focus so much on the Passover sacrifice in the Jerusalem Temple as on the Passover meal that was eaten by the Jewish people after the sacrifice had been offered. As I hope to show, when the Last Supper is compared to the ancient Jewish Passover meal, we find something very strange. We find that, according to the Gospels, *Jesus did not finish the Last Supper*. At least, he did not finish it in the Upper Room.

Before I begin, however, I should issue a small caveat. What I am about to argue is somewhat more speculative than the previous chapters. Nevertheless, as I will try to show, the hypothesis that Jesus did not finish the Passover meal in the Upper Room will provide us with a plausible

historical explanation for three otherwise puzzling facts in the Gospels: Jesus’ vow at the Last Supper *not* to drink wine until the coming of the kingdom; his description in Gethsemane of his impending death as “drinking” a *cup*; and Jesus’ unexpected act of *drinking wine* at the last moment before he dies on the cross. In order to see how these can be explained, we’ll have to return to the topic of the Jewish Passover.

THE SHAPE OF THE JEWISH PASSOVER MEAL

In an earlier chapter, we spent a good bit of time studying the ancient Jewish Passover sacrifice, and how the lambs were killed in the Temple. But in Jesus’ day there was much more to Passover than just the sacrifice. There was also the Passover *meal*, which had its own rules and regulations, its own steps and stages. Eventually, this well-regulated meal came to be known as the Passover Seder, from the Hebrew word for “order.”

Although we have no evidence that the Passover meal was actually called a Seder in Jesus’ own day, the oldest descriptions of it outside the Bible do in fact describe a well-ordered sequence of actions. The most detailed descriptions we have can be found in two sources: the Jewish Mishnah and the Jewish Tosefta. We have used the Mishnah quite a bit already; the Tosefta was a collection of Jewish traditions put together shortly after the Mishnah as a supplement to the traditions found in the Mishnah. (The Hebrew word for “addition, supplement” is *tosefet*.) By studying the striking parallels between these ancient Jewish traditions and the descriptions of the Last Supper found in the first-century Gospels, scholars have been able

to produce a plausible reconstruction of the basic shape of the Passover meal at the time of Jesus.

As we work through these Jewish texts, keep in mind that, with a few key exceptions, this is (to the best of our knowledge) what Jesus and the disciples would have been doing in the Upper Room on the night before he died. As we will see, the differences between the Last Supper and an ordinary Passover meal will be just as significant as the similarities.

The Four Cups of Wine

According to the most ancient descriptions we have outside the Bible, the Jewish Passover meal seems to have been organized around four cups of wine, which were essential to any celebration. Both the Mishnah and the Tosefta agree on this point:

On the eve of Passover, from about the time of the Evening Offering, a man must eat naught until nightfall. Even the poorest in Israel must not eat unless he sits down to table, and *they must not give them less than four cups of wine to drink.* (MISHNAH, PESAHIH 10:1)

On the eve of Passover, from just before the afternoon daily whole offering, a person should not eat, until it gets dark. Even the poorest Israelite should not eat until he reclines at his table. And they should provide him with *no fewer than four cups of wine.* (TOSEFTA, PISHA 10:1)

Notice two things here. First, the consumption of the Passover lamb was to be preceded by several hours of

fasting, from the time of the evening sacrifice (about 3 p.m.). This should ring a bell for Christians who fast for a period of time before receiving the Eucharist, a practice going back to the ancient Church. Second, the drinking of at least four cups of wine was considered mandatory. Even the poorest person in Israel, for whom wine may have proved hard to come by, could not celebrate the Passover without these four cups.

Why was the wine so important? The rabbis don't say. But one reason may be that the overall structure of the Passover meal seems to have revolved around the drinking of these four cups of wine. Let's take a moment to familiarize ourselves with each of these stages so that when we return to the Last Supper we can see how it does (and does not) fit with the ancient Jewish Passover meal described in rabbinic literature.

The 1st Cup: Introductory Rites

According to the rabbis, the Passover meal itself would begin in the evening, shortly before "nightfall." At this time, the father of the Jewish family would gather his household together at a large table. There they would all recline around the table, apparently symbolizing the freedom won for them by God in the exodus from Egypt.

Once this was done, the introductory rites (this is my language, not the rabbis') of the Passover meal proper would begin with the pouring and mixing of the first cup of wine. The "mixing" refers to the mingling of the cup of wine with a little water. This first cup was known as the cup of sanctification—in Hebrew, the *kiddush* cup. Once the first cup was poured and mixed, the father began the meal by saying a formal blessing over the cup of wine and

the feast day. According to the Mishnah, the standard Jewish blessing over wine went something like this:

"Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine" (SEE MISHNAH, BERAKOTH 6:1).

After this blessing was said, the food would be brought to the table and laid out before the father. It consisted of at least four key dishes: several cakes of unleavened bread, a dish of bitter herbs, a bowl of sauce known as *haroseth*, and the roasted Passover lamb. Intriguingly, the Mishnah refers to the last of these as "the body" (Hebrew *gufh*) of the Passover lamb (*Pesahim* 10:3).

At this point, a kind of preliminary course (what we call appetizers) would begin. The father would take some of the bitter herbs, dip them in the *haroseth* sauce, and eat them. He probably did the same for others at the table. Once he finished this, the opening rites were ended, but the meal proper had not yet begun.

The 2nd Cup: The Proclamation of Scripture

At this time, the second cup of wine would be mixed, but not drunk. This cup was known as the cup of proclamation—in Hebrew, the *haggadah* cup. Why? At this point in the meal, the father would begin to "proclaim" what the Lord had done for Israel when he set them free from Egypt in the exodus. Thankfully, the rabbis describe this second stage of the meal in some detail:

Then they mix him [the father] *the second cup*.
And here the son asks his father . . . "Why is this

night different from other nights? For on other nights we eat seasoned food once, but this night twice; on other nights we eat leavened or unleavened bread, but this night all is unleavened; on other nights we eat flesh roast, stewed, or cooked, but this night all is roast." And according to the understanding of the son his father instructs him. He begins with disgrace and ends with the glory; and he expounds from "A wandering Aramean was my father . . ." [Deut 26:5] until he finishes the whole section. (MISHNAH, PESAHIM 10:4)

Notice that the son's questions are directly tied to the drinking of the second cup of wine. Notice also that the father would answer his question by quoting a specific section of the Bible: the story of the exodus from Egypt and the entry to the promised land (see Deuteronomy 26:5–11). In this way, we can already see that an important part of the Passover meal was the reading of Scripture and the act of looking back to the redemption won in the exodus.

But this was not all the father did. He would also *explain* the meaning of the parts of the Passover meal—the lamb, the bread, and the bitter herbs. According to the Mishnah, this had been required at least since the time of Rabbi Gamaliel, who was a contemporary of Jesus:

Rabban Gamaliel used to say: Whosoever has not said [the verses concerning] these three things at Passover has not fulfilled his obligation. And these are they: Passover, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs: "Passover"—because God passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt; "unleavened

bread"—because our fathers were ransomed from Egypt; "bitter herbs" because the Egyptians embittered the lives of our fathers in Egypt. In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written: "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt.' (Exod 13:8) Therefore, we are bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, 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 feast-day, and from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah!" (MISHNAH, *PESAHIM* 10:5)

The act of explaining the meaning of the meal was arguably the heart of this part of the meal. For one thing, it fulfilled God's original command to keep the Passover as a day of "remembrance" (Exodus 12:14). In addition, it was the point at which the past significance of the exodus and its present meaning merged into one. No matter how many centuries had passed, by explaining the meaning of the meal, each person was somehow made capable of sharing in the redemption won in the exodus.

In response, all of the Passover participants were "bound to give thanks" for what God had done for them. To express a spirit of thanksgiving, at this point, they would sing Psalms 113–114, which praised the Lord for his goodness and thanked him for saving Israel from Egypt (Mishnah, *Pesahim* 10:6). These two psalms, along with Psalms 115–118, were known as the Hallel Psalms, psalms

of "praise" (Hebrew *hallel*), which would be sung over the course of the entire meal.

The 3rd Cup: The Eating of the Meal

Next, a third cup of wine would be mixed. It would signal the beginning of the actual supper, when the Passover lamb and the unleavened bread would finally be eaten.

Unfortunately, it is fairly difficult to reconstruct exactly what took place at this point, because customs varied from place to place. However, it probably consisted of at least three basic steps. First, a blessing would have been said over the unleavened bread, before beginning the meal. The standard Jewish blessing went something like this:

"Blessed are you, Lord God, who brings forth bread from the earth" (SEE MISHNAH, *BERAKOTH* 6:1).

Second, the meal probably began with the serving of an hors d'oeuvre, consisting of a small morsel of bread dipped in the bowl of sauce. This morsel is referred to in the Mishnah as a kind of appetizer. It may also have been the "morsel" that Judas dipped in the "dish" before leaving the Last Supper to betray Jesus (John 13:26–27). Third, after the appetizer, the main meal would have been eaten, consisting primarily of unleavened bread and the flesh of the Passover lamb.

Once the meal itself was finished, the father would say another blessing over the third cup of wine. The third cup was known as the cup of blessing—in Hebrew, the *berakah* cup. When this cup was drunk, the third stage of the Passover supper was complete.

The 4th Cup: Concluding Rites

The concluding rites of the Passover meal, like most liturgies, were more concise. They consisted of two main parts.

First, the remaining portion of the Hallel Psalms would be sung. These were Psalms 115–118, the last of which was known as the Great Hallel. Now, this might not mean much if you aren't very familiar with these psalms. But Jesus and his disciples would have known them quite well, since they would have sung them every year at Passover, both in the Temple when the lambs were being slain and in the course of the Passover meal. Now, given what was about to happen to Jesus, *imagine him singing these words* at the Last Supper:

What shall I render to the LORD for all his
bounty to me?

*I shall lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the LORD . . .*

Precious in the sight of the LORD
is the death of his holy ones.

O LORD, I am your servant;

I am your servant, the son of your handmaid.

You have loosed my bonds;

I will offer you *the sacrifice of thanksgiving*,
and call on the name of the LORD.

(PSALM 116:12–13, 15–17)

This is exactly what Jesus is doing at the Last Supper: he is offering to God the “sacrifice of thanksgiving,” the new “thank offering” (*zebah todah*), what Greek-speaking Christians would call the “thanksgiving” (*eucharistia*).

Even more striking, given what he was about to suffer on the cross, imagine Jesus chanting (probably in

Hebrew) these words of the Great Hallel on the night he was betrayed:

Out of my distress I called to the LORD;
the LORD answered me and set me free . . .

I shall not die, but I shall live,

and recount the deeds of the LORD.

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

Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them and give thanks
to the LORD.

This is the gate of the LORD;
the righteous shall enter through it.

*I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.*

*The stone which the builders rejected
has become the head of the corner.*

This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

(PSALM 118:5, 17–22)

Once again—as we have seen over and over in this book—when the Gospel accounts are placed in context of Jewish Scripture and Jewish tradition, they suddenly spring to life, with new meanings and astounding connections. In this case, the words of the Hallel Psalms are almost a kind of “script” for the servant of God who would offer up a “sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Psalm 116:17). In the midst of singing these Jewish hymns, it would have been easy for Jesus to see his own fate as Messiah outlined in the words of the suffering servant of God described in the psalms.

After the singing of Psalm 118, the fourth cup of wine would be drunk. According to the Mishnah, it was forbid-

den to drink any wine “between the third and the fourth cups” (*Pesahim* 10:7). This fourth cup of wine was known as the cup of praise—in Hebrew, the *hallel* cup. When it was drunk, the Passover meal was complete.

DID JESUS FINISH THE LAST SUPPER?

With these Jewish traditions in mind, we can now turn back to the details of the Last Supper and compare them with what we’ve found in the rabbinic writings. When we do so, we find similarities and differences with an ordinary Passover, both of which are very revealing. On the one hand, the most detailed account of the Last Supper (in the Gospel of Luke) does in fact mention more than one cup of wine. This provides a strong parallel with the descriptions of multiple cups in the Mishnah and Tosefta. Likewise, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark both speak of Jesus and the disciples singing “a hymn” at the end of the meal. This seems to clearly reflect the Jewish tradition of singing the Great Hallel. On the other hand, when we look a bit more closely at the Gospel accounts, they also seem to suggest that Jesus didn’t actually finish the Passover meal.

Let’s take a few moments to look at the details.

How Many Cups at the Last Supper?

How many cups of wine were there at the Last Supper? Before I ever studied rabbinic tradition, the answer to this question was easy: one. However, the Gospel of Luke says otherwise. This difference is easy to miss (I missed it for years) if you aren’t familiar with the traditional four cups

of the ancient Jewish Passover. But look closely at Luke’s account, and there you’ll see it:

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; for I tell you that I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*” *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”* And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” *And likewise the cup after supper, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”* (LUKE 22:14–20)

There they are—two different cups: one over which he gives thanks, and the other which he identifies as the new covenant in his blood. But which of the four Passover cups are they?

Thankfully, Luke gives the clues we need to answer the question. He refers to the cup that Jesus identified with his own blood as “the cup *after supper*” (Luke 22:19). In the rabbinic descriptions of the Passover, this could only refer to the *third* cup, the “cup of blessing” (the *berakah*), which was drunk after the meal. We find confirmation for this suggestion in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, written around A.D. 50. In this letter Paul actually refers to the Eucharistic cup of Jesus’ blood using the rabbinic expression for the third cup:

The *cup of blessing* which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (I Corinthians 11:16)

Now, if it was indeed the third cup that Jesus identified as his blood, then the other cup mentioned by Luke is in all likelihood the *second cup*, the “cup of proclamation” (*haggadah*). In support of this suggestion, it’s important to note that after saying the blessing, Jesus does in fact explain the meaning of the unleavened bread, just like a Jewish father would do after drinking the second cup. But instead of referring to the past exodus from Egypt and the “body” of the Passover lamb, Jesus identifies the bread with his own “body”—that is, with himself (Luke 22:19). In other words, the Last Supper was a Jewish Passover meal. But it was no ordinary Passover. It was the new Passover of the Messiah.

Jesus’ Vow and the Fourth Cup

These are not the only parallels between the Last Supper and the Jewish Passover. When we turn to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, they also contain similarities and differences with rabbinic tradition that are potentially revealing. Immediately after the words of institution, Jesus said something and did something that would have baffled any ancient Jew:

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. I tell you *I shall not drink again of this fruit*

of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” And *when they had sung a hymn, they went out* to the Mount of Olives. (MATTHEW 26:27–30)

And he said to them “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Amen, I say to you, *I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine* until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” And *when they had sung a hymn, they went out* to the Mount of Olives. (MARK 14:24–26)

Did you catch it? In both accounts, two things are strange.

First, he vowed not to drink of “the fruit of the vine” until the coming of the kingdom of God. This is a big problem. As any first-century Jew would have known, at this point in the Passover meal (just after supper), there was still another cup of wine to be drunk (the fourth cup). But Jesus said he wouldn’t drink again—at least, not until the kingdom came.

Second, like other ancient Jews, after drinking the third cup, Jesus and the disciples “sang a hymn” (Greek *hymnesantes*). As most commentators recognize, this is clearly a reference to the singing of Psalms 115–118, the final Hallel Psalms. But notice again what is missing. Although Jesus sang the hymn, neither Matthew nor Mark says that he drank the final cup of the Passover meal, the fourth cup of wine. Instead, they say only that he and the disciples “went out” of the Upper Room, out of Jerusalem, and across the valley to the Mount of Olives.

When we put these two things together—Jesus’ vow not to drink wine again and the silence about him drink-

ing the fourth cup—a compelling case can be made that Jesus both referred to the fourth Passover cup and refused to drink it at the Last Supper. This, at least, was the opinion of the great twentieth-century Jewish scholar David Daube, who years ago argued the following:

There is . . . in Matthew and Mark a reference also to the fourth and last cup of the Passover liturgy. It is contained in the words: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until I drink it new in my father's kingdom" or "in the kingdom of God." *The meaning is that the fourth cup will not be taken, as would be the normal thing, at a subsequent stage of the service; it will be postponed till the kingdom is fully established. . . .* [In this light,] the notice that "when they had sung a hymn they went out into the mount of Olives" now acquires a fuller sense. The implication is that they go out directly after the "hymn," without drinking the fourth cup and probably also without reciting "the blessing of the song." This portion of the liturgy is postponed till the arrival of the actual, final kingdom.

In other words, when the Last Supper is viewed through Jewish eyes, *Jesus did not actually finish his last Passover meal.* This is extremely significant. Jesus not only altered the meal by focusing on his own body and blood rather than the flesh of the paschal lamb. He also seems to have deliberately left the Passover liturgy incomplete, by vowing not to drink of the "fruit of the vine" and by leaving the Upper Room without doing so.

It is hard to overestimate just how puzzled the disciples must have been by such actions. (Although, by this point in

Jesus' ministry, they might have become fairly accustomed to being surprised.) Every other Jewish Passover they had ever attended would have ended with the celebratory drinking of the fourth cup, the *hallel* "cup of praise." But this Passover was cut short. This meal was different. Why? Why did Jesus vow not to drink of the Passover wine until the coming of the kingdom of God? Why did he leave the Upper Room after singing the hymn?

Jesus' Prayer in Gethsemane

The answer to this question may lie not in the Last Supper itself but in events surrounding Jesus' subsequent passion and death. Indeed, strong support for David Daube's interpretation of Jesus' vow can be found in the accounts of Jesus' agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Although many readers may be familiar with the scene, read it again, with the Last Supper and Passover liturgy in mind:

Then Jesus went out with them to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I go over there and pray." And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me." And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.*" And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is will-

ing, but the flesh is weak." Again for the second time, he went away and prayed, "*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.*" And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, *saying the same words.* Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (MATTHEW 26:36-46)

There it is, as plain as day. In the garden of Gethsemane, in the midst of his distress, Jesus prayed to the Father *three times* about the "cup" that he must drink. Why? Isn't this a rather strange way to refer to a crucifixion? Why did Jesus describe his death through the metaphor of drinking a cup? To what cup did he refer?

Given the Passover context of his prayer (it is still Passover night), and given the fact that he had just left the Upper Room, by now, the answer seems clear: Jesus is praying to the Father about the fourth cup, the final cup of the Passover liturgy. He has just celebrated the Last Supper, in which he identified his own *body* as the sacrifice of the new Passover. He has also just identified one of the cups of wine as his own *blood*, about to be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. In other words, Jesus implicitly identified himself as the new Passover lamb. The implication of this self-identification is sobering: *by the time this new Passover is finished, Jesus will be dead.* That's what happens to Passover lambs. They don't make it out alive.

In short, through his words of institution and his

prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus has woven his own fate into the completion of the Jewish Passover meal. When the meal is finished, and the final cup, drunk, it will mean his own death has arrived. That is why Jesus did not finish the Last Supper. That is why Jesus didn't drink the fourth cup. As the Protestant commentator William Lane states:

The cup from which Jesus abstained was the fourth, which ordinarily concluded the Passover fellowship. . . . Jesus had used the third cup, associated with the promise of redemption, to refer to his atoning death on behalf of the elect community. The cup which he refused was the cup of consummation.

If this interpretation is correct—and I think it is—then there's really only one last question for us to ask, did Jesus *ever* finish the Last Supper? And if he did, when did he drink the fourth cup?

I THIRST

One thing is clear: Jesus did not drink the final cup of wine on the way to the cross.

After Judas arrived in the Garden of Gethsemane with the soldiers, a whole series of tragic events quickly unfolded. Jesus was arrested. He was brought before the Jewish council of chief priests and elders (known as the Sanhedrin), as well as before Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator. He was publicly sentenced to execution, and then scourged, mocked, and handed over to be crucified.

But in the midst of all these sufferings, the Gospels make it a point to emphasize that Jesus did not drink of the fruit of the vine:

And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him. As they were marching out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means "the place of the skull"), they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots; then they sat down and kept watch over him there. (MATTHEW 27:31-36)

This is Matthew's account. Mark says the same thing, but even more forcefully: "They offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but *he did not take it*" (Mark 15:23). Why not?

The Jewish Custom of Giving Wine to the Dying

One possible explanation comes from the ancient Jewish custom of giving "wine" to a man sentenced to death. This custom is referred to in the Talmud:

When one is led out to execution, he is given a goblet of wine containing a grain of frankincense, in order to benumb his senses, for it is written, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul" [Prov 31:6]. And it has

also been taught: The noble women in Jerusalem used to donate and bring it.

(BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SANHEDRIN 43A)

Two things are interesting about this tradition. First, it explains why Jesus was offered wine on the way to the cross: it was an act of mercy, done in order to numb his senses before experiencing the horrible pain of death by crucifixion. From this perspective, Jesus refused to drink the wine while carrying the cross because he did not wish to dull the pain of his sufferings in the midst of his passion. Second, this custom may also explain how Jesus could have deliberately left the Passover incomplete, while still expecting to eventually drink of the fruit of the vine. Even apart from any prophetic foreknowledge on his part, if he knew of the Jewish custom of giving wine to those condemned to die—which for the Talmud is rooted in a biblical command (Proverbs 31:6)—he could reasonably count on receiving the same mercy in the final moments of his life.

Either way, when we turn from the carrying of the cross to Jesus' final moments before he died, we find something surprising. We find that, at the very end, Jesus *did* in fact drink of "the fruit of the vine." Both Matthew and Mark say so, telling us that one of the bystanders "took a sponge, filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink" (Matthew 26:48; Mark 14:36). The most detailed description of Jesus' death, however, comes from the Gospel of John. According to John, Jesus not only accepted the wine of his execution; he explicitly *requested* a drink at the moment before his death:

After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "*I thirst.*" A

bowl full of sour wine stood there; so they put a sponge full of the wine on hyssop and held it to his mouth. *When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished";* and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (JOHN 19:23-30)

Notice what just happened. When Jesus said, "It is finished," he was not just referring to his life or his messianic mission. For he did not say it until his request for a drink had been answered. He did not say it until "he had received the wine." Why? What does this mean? Once again, when we remember Jesus' vow at the Last Supper, and his prayer about drinking the "cup" in Gethsemane, then the meaning of Jesus' last word becomes clear. It means that Jesus did in fact drink the fourth cup of the Jewish Passover. It means that he did in fact finish the Last Supper. But he did not do it in the Upper Room. He did it on the cross. He did it at the very moment of his death.

The New Sacrifice of the New Passover

If this interpretation is correct, then there are at least three implications for how Jesus seems to have understood his own death.

First, by vowing not to drink the final cup of the Last Supper, Jesus *extended* his last Passover meal to include his own suffering and death. In this way, the Last Supper was not just a symbolic enactment of how he was going to die. It was a prophetic sign that actually set his passion and death in motion, a sign that was not totally complete until his life had come to its end.

Second, by praying three times in Gethsemane for the "cup" to be taken from him, Jesus *revealed* that he understood his own

death in terms of the Passover sacrifice. For, when the final cup of the meal was drunk, his own sacrifice would be complete, and his blood would be "poured out" like that of the Passover lambs. To be sure, the order of this new Passover is reversed. In the old Passover, the sacrifice of the lamb would come first, and then the eating of its flesh. But in this case, because Jesus had to institute the new Passover before his death, he preenacted it, as both host of the meal and sacrifice.

Third and finally, and most important of all, by waiting to drink the fourth cup of the Passover until the very moment of his death, Jesus *united* the Last Supper to his death on the cross. By refusing to drink of the fruit of the vine until he gave up his final breath, he joined the offering of himself under the form of bread and wine to the offering of himself on Calvary. Both actions said the same thing: "This is my body, given for you" (Luke 22:19). Both were done "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). Both were done "as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). In short, *by means of the Last Supper, Jesus transformed the Cross into a Passover, and by means of the Cross, he transformed the Last Supper into a sacrifice.*

This link between the Last Supper and the Cross—between Holy Thursday and Good Friday—is worth pausing to consider. For most Christians, the idea that Jesus' death on the Cross was a "sacrifice" is a given, almost a commonplace. But this would not have been the case for any Jewish passerby who happened to witness the crucifixion. All he or she would have seen was one more torturous Roman *execution*—not a sacrifice. From an ancient Jewish perspective, in order to have a sacrifice, you need a *priest*, you need an *offering*, you need a *liturgy*. None of these were present at Calvary.

What was it, then, that made the early Christians refer to the crucifixion as a sacrifice? It was the Last Supper. For

all of these things—a priest, a sacrificial offering of body and blood, a liturgy—were present at Jesus' final Passover meal. As the Protestant scholar A.E.J. Rawlinson says in his analysis of the Last Supper:

Interpreting in advance the significance of his coming Passion, [Jesus] was in effect making it to be, for all time, what it otherwise would not have been, viz., a sacrifice for the sins of the world. *It is the Last Supper which makes Calvary sacrificial.* It was not the death upon Calvary per se, but the death upon Calvary as the Last Supper interprets it and gives the clue to its meaning which constitutes our Lord's Sacrifice.

This is one of the great "secrets" of the Last Supper, a secret that can only be unlocked by a close study of the Passover. When we view the supper and the cross through the lens of Jewish liturgy, it becomes clear that Jesus *himself* saw both events as one single sacrifice. That is why he united the offering of his body and blood in the Upper Room to the offering of his body and blood on the wood of the cross. That is why he instituted a new Passover liturgy that was directly tied to his death.

In sum, by refusing to drink the final Passover cup until his dying moments, Jesus gathered up everything that would happen to him between Holy Thursday and Good Friday—his betrayal, his supper, his agony, his passion, his death—and united it to the new Passover that would be celebrated "in memory" of him. As the memorial of his new Passover, the Eucharist therefore not only makes present the actions of Jesus of the Upper Room; it also makes present the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary.



THE JEWISH ROOTS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Over the course of the last several years, I've spent a good deal of my time traveling around the country and speaking on the topics covered in this book. After the lectures are over, people who come up to talk with me have all kinds of different responses. A few, I'm humbled to say, have been moved to tears, for they see in the Jewish roots of the Eucharist a sign of the fact that God's hand is indeed at work in history, paving the way and preparing for what he would accomplish through the new exodus of the Messiah, who has indeed come. Others have found the faith of their youth strengthened and deepened, so that they are inspired once again to make the Eucharist the center of their lives. Still others have been challenged by a vision of the Eucharistic mystery that goes far beyond