

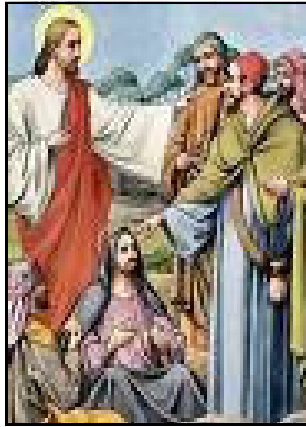
Jesus Last Supper Prophecies

The synoptic authors and John's Gospel all include Jesus' prophecies about the betrayal of Judas, and Peter's denial. The condemnation given by Jesus in the synoptic gospels to the traitor 'better for that man that he was never born' precludes any thesis that Judas was acting on Jesus' behalf. Matthew and Mark's account of Peter's denial differs from that in Luke, who states how Satan wishes to sift Peter like wheat but that Jesus has prayed for him 'that his faith will not fail'. Luke also alludes to Peter's leadership by adding 'once you have recovered, you in turn must strengthen your brothers'.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes and John's Discourse on the Bread

In the synoptic gospels there is no temporal connection between the miracle(s) of the loaves and fishes (Mtt.14 and 15// Mk. 6 and 8// Lk.9) and the institution of the Eucharist. However, these miracles and the Eucharist are absolutely connected. The miracles show how Jesus can feed thousands from little, a parallel for the Eucharist.

In John's Gospel (Jn.6), the link is made abundantly clear. Soon after his account of the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus gives a great discourse at Capernaum about himself as the bread of life. His words are extreme, stating that eternal life is only possible by belief in him and demanding that people eat his flesh and drink his blood. Such language verifies its authenticity, as Jesus' instruction was abhorrent to all Jews and contrary to their religious laws about what could be eaten. For this reason many of his followers deserted him. There is irony here because after the miracle of the loaves the people are depicted as wanting to make Jesus king, now only a little later many of the same people have rejected him.



Jesus in the Gospels

17. The Eucharist in the Gospels



Questions

1. Why does John's Gospel not include the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper?
2. What argument can be made for a literal interpretation of Jesus' words of initiation over the bread and wine?
3. What is the significance of the miracle of the loaves and fishes?

For Reflection

Jesus and the Passover

The synoptic authors all state that on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples asked Jesus where he was to celebrate the Passover. (Mtt.26// Mk.14// Lk.22). In actual fact, this day was normally the one that **followed** the Passover (Exodus 12), but it is unclear whether it had a wider meaning at the time.



In any event, Jesus is shown to have already made preparations for the Passover: **Matthew** tells us the disciples were to go to a certain man in Jerusalem and tell him the master will keep Passover in his house; **Mark** tells how two disciples were sent to meet and follow a man carrying a pitcher. This man would lead them to a house where the owner would have an upper room ready for them; **Luke** is very similar to Mark, but adds that the two disciples sent were Peter and John, and Jesus told them the room would be furnished with couches.

This level of detail is fascinating. It reveals, like the preparations made for the entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, that Jesus had planned this week in advance. It is as Jesus was leaving nothing to chance, he was in control of all the events that would unfold on what he knew would be **the most important week in human history**.

It is interesting to note as well that the day Jesus and his disciples celebrated the Passover was not, in all probability, the actual day of Passover. It is important to remember that the Jewish day commenced at sunset each evening. If we read the account in John's Gospel (ch.18) where Jesus is taken to the Praetorium, it is explained that the Jewish religious leaders did not enter for fear of being defiled and, therefore, **unable to eat the Passover**. John's Last Supper, it is made clear, took place before the festival of the Passover (ch.13) and Jesus' body was not to remain on the cross during the Sabbath, as it was 'a day of special solemnity' (ch.19), that is, the Passover day itself, beginning that evening.

Jesus' Last Supper was, therefore, an anticipatory Passover meal with his disciples.

The Institution of the Eucharist

The Synoptic authors all contain accounts of the institution of the Eucharist, albeit with slight variations (Mtt.26// Mk.14// Lk.22).

John's Gospel does not. Instead there is a detailed account of Jesus' discourse on the meaning of the miracle of the loaves and fishes (Jn.6).

Matthew's Gospel 'take it and eat, this is my body' describes the wine as his blood 'the blood of the covenant poured out **for many for the forgiveness of sins**'. He adds that he will not drink it again until he drinks 'new wine with you in the **Kingdom of my Father**'

Mark's Gospel describes the wine as his blood 'the blood of the covenant poured out **for many**'. His addition is that he will not drink any more wine 'until the day I drink the new wine in the **Kingdom of God**'

Luke's Gospel is unique in that he makes the distinction between the Passover food of the OT and the Eucharist of the new covenant. So, he has **two sets** of eating bread and drinking wine, the Passover occasion of drinking wine having the words 'I shall not drink wine again until the **Kingdom comes**'. It may be that the other gospel authors have conflated the two meals, or Luke presented the separate meals as a theological device. His institution of the Eucharist adds to the giving of the bread the words 'do this in **remembrance of me**'. For the giving of the wine he stated 'this cup is the **new** covenant in my blood poured out **for many**'.

All three highlight Jesus' blood being **poured out for many**. The differences in wording show Matthew's emphasis on Jesus as the Son of God and his death as being for the forgiveness of sins, while Luke stresses the need to perpetuate the meal and emphasises the new covenant that the Eucharist represents.

