

# Go and Make Preparations for the Passover

Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 13:1

## Thursday the fourteenth of Nisan

**DIG:** What do you know about the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:1-30)? Why do you think Jesus was so secretive about the His arrangements for the Passover Seder? What risk was involved (Luke 19:45-48)? How does John 13:1 reconcile with the rest of the Synoptics? What information did Judas need to obtain? For whom? Why were the men divided into three groups? Where did each group assemble? What duties did the Levites perform? Why was there an underlying tension in **the upper room**?

**REFLECT:** How does the scene of the slaughtering of the lambs make you feel? Why was it necessary? What would have happened if they had not been sacrificed? How do you feel when preparing to celebrate your Seder? How would your feelings differ from those of the apostles? From Yeshua? From Judas?

**Singing at the Temple:** Fifteen semicircular steps led from the Court of the Women, through the Nicanor Gate and into the Court of the Gentiles (see Nb - **The Nicanor Gate**). At the great feasts these magnificent steps served as a podium for the choir and the orchestra. **From the Talmud Tractate *thamid* we know exactly which Psalm would have been sung on which day of the week in connection with the daily burnt offering in the Temple. It is marvelous how closely each of the Psalms coincides with the singing of these daily readings.** On this Thursday, **Psalm 81** rang out over the Temple plaza. It was no coincidence that this psalm matched exactly with the events here on this fifth day of Holy Week. **Psalm 81** refers to the exodus from Egypt and was **warning**, denouncing, and in the final analysis condemning contemporary **Isra'el** who was about to slaughter **the Lamb of God**.<sup>1366</sup> The Levitical choir accompanied by the musicians (see Nb2 - **Levitical Musicians at the Nicanor Gate**) sang:

Sing for joy to God our strength! Shout to the God of Jacob! Start the music! Beat the drum! Play the sweet lyre and the lute! Sound the shofar at the New Moon, and when the moon is full, on the day of our festival, because this is a decree for Isra'el, a ruling of the God of Jacob. He placed it as a testimony in Joseph when He went out against Egypt. I heard an unfamiliar voice say, "I lifted the load from their shoulders, their hands were set free from the [laborer's] basket. You called out when you were in trouble, and I rescued you; I answered you from the thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah [by saying], "Hear, My people, while I give you warning! Isra'el, if

you would only listen to Me! There is not to be with you any foreign god. I AM ADONAI your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. Open your mouth, and I will fill it. But My people did not listen to My voice; Isra'el would have none of Me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to live by their own plans. How I wish My people would listen to Me, the Isra'el would live by My ways! I would quickly subdue their enemies and turn My hand against their foes. Those who hate ADONAI would cringe before Him, while [Israel's] time would last forever. They would be fed with the finest wheat, and I would satisfy you with honey from the rocks" (Psalm 81:1-16 CJB).

Preparation for **the Passover** had begun long beforehand. The previous month (on the fifteenth of Adar), bridges and roads had been repaired for the use of the pilgrims. That was also the time for administering the testing to women suspected of adultery, for burning the red heifer, and for boring the ears of those who wished to become a bond slave - in short, for making all the preliminary arrangements before the festive season began. In general, cemeteries were outside the cities, but any dead body found in the field was, **according to tradition traced back to the time of Joshua**, to be buried on the spot where it had been discovered. Then, as the festive pilgrims might have contracted some "uncleanness" by unknowingly touching such gravesites, it was ordered that all tombs be whitewashed a month before **the Passover**.<sup>1367</sup>

It was the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Mattityahu 26:17a, Mark 14:12a, Luke 22:7a). The exact date when **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** started was one of those major debating point between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Did **the Feast** begin on the fifteenth of Nisan and go to the twenty-first day of Nisan like the Pharisees believed, or did it begin on the sixteenth of Nisan and go to the twenty-second day of Nisan like the Sadducees believed? Basically, the Pharisees made **Passover** equal to **the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread**, whereas the Sadducees separated the two.<sup>1368</sup> Today these two feasts are so connected that **Passover** is considered as one seven-day holiday.

Whenever the word **leaven** is used symbolically in Scripture, it is *always* a symbol of sin. That is why **God** would not even allow this symbol of sin to be eaten by the Jewish people during this period or to have it in their homes or to have it anywhere in the land of **Isra'el**. While **the Passover** itself was fulfilled by the death of **the Meshiach**, **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** is fulfilled by the sinlessness of **His** blood-offering. In the **Hebrews 9:11 to 10:18** **His** offering of sinless blood was for three things: first, for the cleansing of the heavenly Tabernacle; secondly, for the removal of the sins of the righteous (see my commentary of **Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**); and, thirdly, for the application of the blood to believers in the New Covenant.<sup>1369</sup>

**It was just before the Passover Festival (John 13:1a).** This is the third of three **Passovers** mentioned in the ministry of **Christ**. The first is mentioned in **John 2:13a**. The second is in **John 6:4**, while the third is referred to in **John 11:55, 12:1, here, 18:28 and 39, and 19:14**. By dating these, we are able to conclude that **His** public ministry lasted three-and-a-half years. The Gospel tradition suggests that **Jesus'** ministry began shortly after the John the Baptist's. **Luke** says that **Messiah** was **about thirty years of age** when **His** ministry began (**Luke 3:23**). Consequently, if our **Savior** were born in the winter of 6 or 7 BC, **He** would have been 33 or 34 in 33 AD (see **Aq - The Birth of Jesus**).

**Yochanan** opened this section of the narrative with a summary statement of **Yeshua's** ministry among **His** **talmidim**. **Jesus** knew that the hour had come for **Him** to leave this world and go to the Father. **Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end (Jn 13:1b)**. As the evening passed, **Jesus** spoke of life and ministry on earth without **His** physical presence. **The apostles** quickly began to understand the gravity of **His** words. **Their** troubled hearts were soon gripped by the same forsaken dread that orphans feel once they realize they are alone in the world. **They** couldn't imagine life without **Him**.<sup>1370</sup>

That morning the **talmidim** came to **Jesus** and asked **Him**, **"Where do You want us to go and make preparations for You to eat the Passover"** (**Matthew 26:17b; Mark 14:12b; Luke 22:7b-9**)? **Pesach** is the busiest holiday in the Jewish community, and **the apostles** had **their** work cut out for **them**. The room and food would have to be kosher. All **leaven** would be removed and all utensils either boiled in water or replaced with some that were kosher. A kosher, ritualistically pure **lamb** would need to be purchased from the kosher markets in Jerusalem or the Temple. The final preparations were critical for this most important feast. Three elements were required for the first century **Pesach Seder**: a **lamb, unleavened bread**, and bitter herbs. These three continue to be central elements of the modern seder meal, along with many rabbinic traditions over the centuries.<sup>1371</sup>

**Judas Iscariot** watched **Yeshua** with a quiet intensity, waiting for **Him** to reveal **His** plans for **Pesach** so **he** could sneak out and tip off the high priest. It would be easy enough to have the Temple guards merely arrest **Jesus** at Lazarus' house in Bethany. Arresting **the Nazarene** so far from **Jerusalem**, however, would end up being nothing but a debacle. The sight of **Messiah** marching back to **the City** in chains would cause a riot, and that was the last thing the Sanhedrin needed at **the Passover**. Sooner or later, **the Master** would surely go back to **Yerushalayim**. So **the traitor** just waited until **Yeshua** would tell **the Twelve** when it was time to depart. It seemed inconceivable to **Judas** that **He** would not return to **the Holy City** at least one more time. Maybe **Christ** was waiting until **the Passover** to announce that **He** is **the Meshiach**. But whenever and wherever it was, **Judas** would be ready. **He** was sure that none of the other **talmidim** knew of **his** plan.<sup>1372</sup>

So **Jesus** told **Peter** and **John** to go into **Jerusalem** to prepare for the **Feast**. He told them to walk into the **City** by the way of the **Fountain Gate** (near the pool of **Siloam** and **Hezekiah's tunnel** where water was brought into the **Old City**), and where **Jesus** had earlier opened the eyes of the blind man (see **6t** - **Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind**), and once inside, **a man carrying a jar of water will meet you**. This was a sign because it was unusual for **a man** to be **carrying a jar of water** and not a woman. **Water** was an important element in every Seder because there were two different hand washings. And in the first century it would have included the mandatory foot washing to welcome the guests (**John 13:1-17**).

Another believer had kindly provided a room for **Jesus** in the **Lower City**. They were to **follow him to the house that he enters. Say to the owner of the house, "The Rabbi says: My appointed time is near. Where is the guest room, where He may eat the Passover with My apostles?" He will show you a large room upstairs (Matthew 26:18; Mark 14:13-14; Luke 22:10-11)**. This was usually the best room in the house. It was on the second level and had an outdoor stairwell. **Messiah** had not mentioned the name of the man, but both **apostles** recognized **him** at once as the wealthy father of **Mark**.

**Jesus** told **Peter** and **John** to **make preparations there (Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12)**. During the Second Temple Period the procedure for killing the **lamb** was different than today. **A lamb** was selected after five days of examination. It was then brought into the Temple compound and slaughtered. While individuals brought other sacrifices, a household always has a **Passover lamb**. If one household was too small other groups participated, so that the same **lamb** might suffice for several different family groups. Therefore, **Peter** and **John** would have gone to the Temple to purchase a **lamb** and have it slaughtered.

The Torah required that the sacrificial **lambs** for the **Passover** be selected on **Sunday, the tenth of Nisan** and that the **lamb** be kept in the household until it was **slaughtered at twilight** on the **Thursday, the fourteenth of Nisan**. Although the incident is not mentioned in the Gospels, the **talmidim** would have selected a **lamb** on the day of **Jesus'** triumphal entry into **Jerusalem** (see **It** - **The Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah**), perhaps keeping it at the home of **Mary, Martha** and **Lazarus** in **Bethany** where **they** were staying.

At midday on **the thirteenth of Nisan**, the men who brought **their lambs** to the Temple would have been divided into three large groups. The evening sacrifice had already been offered. Ordinarily the **single lamb** for the evening sacrifice was slain at 2:30 pm and offered about 3:30 pm. But on the eve of the **Passover**, it was killed two hours earlier because they had hundreds of thousands of **Passover lambs** to sacrifice. Each group waited, the first in the Court of the Gentiles; the second on the Court of the Israelites; and the third in the Court of the Women (see **Mw** - **The Diagram of the Second Temple**).<sup>1373</sup>

The slaughter of **the lambs** began at **twilight** on the **fourteenth** of Nisan (Exodus 12:6). Three Levites, standing over three lambs, lifted the jaws of the little animals and, with a single stroke, drew sharp knives across the three throats. By ritual, the killing had to be done in one stroke and the victim must not utter a sound. This would point to **the Lamb of God** who would be slaughtered that very same day **and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth (Isaiah 53:7)**.

Inside the Nicanor Gate in the Court of the Women (see **Nc - The Court of the Women**), the priests were lined up all the way up to the bronze altar. They stood in two rows, one row holding golden bowls and the other row the silver bowls. In these the blood of the **Passover lambs**, which each Israelite slew for himself (as representative of his family), was caught by one of the priests. The bowls were then passed from priest to priest until they reached the priest who was nearest to the bronze altar.<sup>1374</sup> That priest took the bowl and sprinkled the blood in one motion at the base of the altar. He then received another full bowl of blood and returned the empty one back to be filled again. During this entire ceremony the Levites would keep chanting the *Hallel*, which is **Psalms 113-118**. They chanted until all the sacrifices for the first group were completed, and then went on to the second group, then on to the third until they all had their lambs sacrificed and the blood spilled at the base of the altar. **It is estimated that up to 275,000 lambs were sacrificed in Jerusalem at the Passover during the time of Christ**. We can only imagine the stench, the blood and the flies.

Finally, warm water was poured over the sacrifices as they hung from racks and flayed. The wool was sheered carefully from **the lambs**. When this was done, the carcasses were examined by other priests for imperfections. If any were found to have moles, cysts, or discolorations of any kind on the skin **they** were rejected. Three priests signaled that the sacrifices were acceptable and, in an instant, the slaughtering Levites cut the bellies of the hanging lambs with a single downward stroke. They removed **all the fat on the internal organs, the long lobe of the liver and both kidneys with the fat on them (Exodus 29:13; Leviticus 3:4 and 9:10)**.

These **internal organs** were placed upon the bronze altar and the offering remained steaming and burning on the embers until it was consumed. Caiaphas, as befitting the presiding officer of the Sanhedrin, stood composed in his priestly robes loaned to him from the Roman governor. He saw the priests rub salt into the flesh of **the lambs**, and, in silence he saw them remove **the shoulder, and the meat from the head** of each animal as an offering to the priests of the Temple - for **ADONAI said that is their inheritance among their fellow Israelites (Deuteronomy 18:3)**.<sup>1375</sup>

Therefore, **Peter and John** would have gone to the Temple to purchase a **lamb** and have it killed just as **Jesus had directed them** to do. When **the two men** again reached **the upper room**, it was dark and **they** hurried to build the fire and roast **the lamb**. It was forbidden to break any bone in **the animal** because to them it symbolized **Isra'el**, whole and undivided. Little did **they** know that it actually pointed to **the Messiah**. Later, **John** would write: **These things happened so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones will be broken"** (John 19:36; Psalm 34:20).

**Peter and John** divided the tasks and, while **Kefa**, because **he** had more experience, split **the lamb** down the middle and set it in the brick and tile oven so that no part of its skin would touch the sides, while **John** made the round, thin **unleavened bread** into little cakes. This was the matzah, the so-called bread of affliction because the Israelites had left Egypt in such haste that their women had no time to mix **leaven in the bread**.

**The two men** filled a bowl with vinegar, in which the bitter herbs would later be dipped. The wine was already made - the poor were able to buy it at the Temple at cost - and this would later be mixed by the hose in the measure of one part of water to four parts of wine. Finally **Peter and John** made the charoset, which is a dark chunky paste made of apples, nuts, honey cinnamon, lemon juice and wine. **The lamb** was eaten with both **unleavened bread** and bitter herbs. Everything that was not eaten was burned the next day.<sup>1376</sup>

**Jesus and the other apostles** then left from Bethany where **they** were staying, and went into the lower City and found things just as **He** had instructed them (Matthew 26:19; Mark 14:16; Luke 22:13). When **the Master** walked in **the room**, the greetings were subdued. **The Meshiach** studied **the upper room** carefully. This was an important **room** and an important night to **Him**. **He** didn't discuss **His** feelings; but to **the talmidim** **He** seemed abnormally introspective. **They** looked for signs of despair, or even of elation - a sign of sorts would have guided **their** feelings; much as when lightening flashes and thunder rolls the sheep don't look to the sky but at the shepherd.

There was an underlying tension in **the room**. **Their** greetings were whispered; a group of bearded men, averaging about thirty years of age, men of assorted sizes and coloring, simple men who were certain, now and then, that **they** were in the presence of **the Son of God**, although at other moments **they** became frightened and **their** belief wavered. **Their** faith in **Yeshua** was strong as long as it was not tested too strenuously. Though **they** had, of course, withstood trials in the past, this was a moment of great strain. **They** had heard **the Lord** discuss **His** impending death before with obvious sadness. And each feared to ask the question **they** all wanted to ask, "Can You not call upon **Your Father's** angels and destroy your enemies and then let **us** sit with **You** today and judge the souls of men?" No one asked it.

**Jesus** had a truly compassionate heart and loved all mankind, and as **He** waited for the lamb to be made ready, **He** must have given some thought about **Judas** (see **Cy - These are the Names of the Twelve Apostles**). Before the Seder was over, **Jesus** would accuse one of **His talmidim** of betraying **Him** and **He** already knew who it was. And **He** also knew why.

**Judas** had always been an outsider. All the others were Galileans, while **he** wasn't. **He** had a working knowledge of economics, and sometimes became so immersed in the business of finding money for **Jesus** and giving alms that **he** had little time for the eternal lessons being taught to the other **apostles**. **The money-keeper** was condescending to the others because **his** wealth of experience was greater than **theirs**; sometimes **he** appealed directly to **Messiah** to stop **the other eleven** from doing things that **he** regarded as unwise.

**He** continued to collect the money's, as **Jesus** wished, and **he** continued to pay the bills, dispense all alms and keep the purse just as though **he** was not a thief (**John 12:6**). **Judas** was never out of favor with **his Master** and had **he** believed that **Yeshua** was **God**, **he** would have known that **Jesus** could read **his** heart. In that case, **the dark little man** with the superior attitude would have been compelled to explain **his** act and beg for forgiveness.

There is no record that **Judas** ever approached **the Savior of sinners** with a personal problem. Forgiveness awaited **him** because **Jesus** had stressed forgiveness again and again. Once, when **Peter** has asked in a discussion between **the Twelve** if it were enough to forgive a brother seven times, **Messiah** had smiled a little and said seventy times seven, and then forgive **him** again. Therefore, **Yeshua** believed that the sinning brother should continue to be forgiven. It follows then, that **phony talmid** did not believe that **Jesus** was **God**.

**Judas**, wily and self-seeking, did not ask for forgiveness because **he** believed that **Jesus** was a victim of self-delusion. And finding that **his** theft was not punished in any way, **betrayed** was encouraged to sell **his Master** to the high priest for thirty pieces of silver.<sup>1377</sup> Nevertheless, this was probably a very tense time for **the betrayer**. **He** knew where **Yeshua** was located. The question now was how could **he** find a way to slip out and alert Caiaphas?

That same evening twelve Roman soldiers hunched over their meals. They were hardened men. No matter how many people were tortured before their eyes, it had become routine. A job. Done without emotion or feeling. There were always four soldiers assigned to a crucifixion. A fifth man, a centurion, would oversee the slaughter. Three teams of killers would be needed the next day because three men were condemned to die. One of the men was a zealot named Barabbas. The other two were suspected of being his accomplices. In the morning they would begin the ritual crucifixion process. It would be intensely physical work, and by the end of the day they would be drenched in blood.<sup>1378</sup>