

## A Comparison Between Passover and The Last Supper

The establishment of Passover is recorded in Exodus 12:1-36 and was stipulated to be a feast taken annually on Nisan 15 to remember that God delivered his people from slavery into freedom and guided them to the land he had promised to Abraham for his descendants. In the original Egyptian Passover the central element of this complete meal was a flawless lamb. When slain the blood of the lamb was to be sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel of the house in which family units ate the meal so that the Lord would observe the blood and “pass over” the house, sparing the first born from death. The meal was to be eaten in haste, wearing traveling clothes, because the Lord was soon delivering his people. The bread was to be unleavened, I think because there was no time to let it rise, and bitter herbs, symbolizing the bitter time in Egypt, were to be part of the meal.

Observe the following:

1. The meal was symbolic of the Lord honoring his covenant with Abraham.
2. The meal was a joyous anticipation of the freedom from slavery delivered by the Lord.
3. A flawless lamb was sacrificed as a blood offering to save the life of the firstborn.
4. The meal symbolized that God was in the midst of his chosen people to do for them what they could not do.
5. The seal of the covenant was blood.
6. The meal meant a new beginning and identity for Israel.

The gospels tell the story of the Last Supper. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all identify it as a Passover meal but John’s account does not, though it is clearly the same occasion. Luke’s account in some ways is the most complete rendering though John fills in some blanks and John 6, earlier in his gospel account, should be consulted for the meaning of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper. Jesus deliberately chose this meal, filled with such meaning, to explain why he was going to the cross. As host of the meal he altered the traditional language surrounding the unleavened bread and pronounced it to be his body. At the cup he pronounced the wine to be his blood of the covenant “poured out for many.” He asked his disciples to remember him when they took the meal in the future and promised that he would drink the cup with them in the Kingdom of God.

Observe the following:

1. The Last Supper pointed to the very thing that the first Passover did. Jesus was the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. He was the seed in whom “all nations would be blessed.”
2. Jesus was making possible freedom from the guilt and slavery of sin.
3. Jesus himself was the perfect lamb to be slain to give life.
4. Jesus, as Emmanuel (God With Us), was God in our midst doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.
5. The seal of the new covenant was blood.
6. The meal meant a new beginning and identity for all mankind in the Kingdom.

Jesus clearly chose the Passover meal to describe his mission because he was about to fulfill all that it meant. I think it likely that the original Passover was inaugurated by the Lord as a prototype of the Last Supper to come so many years later as the fulfillment of the original covenant. Both meals illustrate in the most intimate way the desire of God to be one with his people. That intimacy is found in eating, ingesting the Lamb that gives life. Both meals were commemorative, to remember what was being done by the Lord. I would caution that when we take "The Lord's Supper" as a reenactment of the Last Supper we not treat it as memories at a funeral, morbid and guilt ridden. Sometimes to "get in the proper frame of mind" we beat ourselves up in a penitential way bemoaning our own guilt as the cause of the crucifixion. We are also prone to only remembering the awful death of Jesus. We need to acknowledge those facts but recognize the larger theme of the supper, the great deed of deliverance and forgiveness that only Emmanuel could do! The Passover was a freedom feast that rejoiced in the delivery that the Lord brought and the Lord's Supper should have a mighty element of rejoicing over the love of God which brings us freedom! When Jesus said to remember him he was talking about all of his life. Let's have balance. Remember the sacrifice and cry but remember the stories of his earthly presence and smile.

As parallel as the Passover and Lord's Supper are I caution against being too rigid in type. Passover was annual. The early Christians took the Lord's Supper frequently. I think that is fine. We use unleavened bread in the supper because it parallels the Passover but if it does not fall on Passover would you have to? Leavening was used in the gospels as both a symbol of good and bad so I would not lean on that analogy. Wine was drunk at Passover but in deference to those who prefer not to tempt addiction we use grape juice. I think that appropriate and in the spirit of Christ. The original Supper was a full meal around a table. I think our celebration would be more effective in such a setting but it is fine to seek the main themes of the supper in the way we currently take communion.

There is much to think about and we are all constantly learning. Whatever the Lord wills.

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