

Mark 14:12-16 - PREPARATION FOR THE PASSOVER (Geddert)

12 On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, 'Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?'¹³ So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him,¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'¹⁵ He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.'¹⁶ So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. 17 When it was evening, he came with the twelve.¹⁸ And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.'¹⁹ They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, 'Surely, not I?'²⁰ He said to them, 'It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread* into the bowl* with me.'²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.'

22 While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body.'²³ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.²⁴ He said to them, 'This is my blood of the* covenant, which is poured out for many.'²⁵ Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'

According to Mark, this last meal is a bridge event. On one end of the bridge, we see the Jewish Passover. This was an annual reminder and symbolic reenactment of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt [Egyptian bondage].

On the other end of the bridge, we see the Christian communion (Lord's Supper, eucharist). The church eats bread and drinks wine in remembrance of Jesus' death, celebrating the covenant created through it. Both Passover and the Christian communion also have a forward-looking focus. Passover anticipates the great final salvation God will bring in the end time (which Jesus will now claim to fulfill). Christian communion anticipates a still future "messianic banquet," when God's kingdom is fully established in the new heaven and new earth.¹

Mark 14: 12-16 indicates that the meal Jesus is about to share with his disciples is a Passover meal. Passover is supposed to be celebrated only within Jerusalem (Deut. 16: 5-6). Since Jesus and his disciples have been staying in Bethany, they need to find a place in the city for observing Passover. Participants have to stay in the city till the next morning: the Mount of Olives is defined as within the ritual boundaries of the city (cf. 14:26).

Jesus plays the role of head of the household, the one responsible for leading the Passover celebration.²

14: 22-26: This is my body and blood

At Passover, household heads explain to their families the meaning of the bitter herbs and sauces, the reason the bread is unleavened, and the significance of the lamb and so on. Jesus, by contrast, does not highlight the *unusual* features of the Passover meal. He lifts out those two elements that are *common* to other celebrative meals, the bread and the wine, and links them to his own coming death. (As Mark's community and later believers reenact this meal, they identify again with all that Jesus' passion means and accomplishes.)³

During the meal, Jesus takes bread, says a blessing, and shares the bread with his disciples. NRSV says Jesus blesses *the bread*, but this is not in the text. Jews explicitly blessed God for the food, rather than blessing the food. The disciples would have expected Jesus to explain the reason why the bread was unleavened (because Israelites left Egypt in haste). Indeed, he identifies the bread with himself (my body).⁴

¹ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 333.

² Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 334.

³ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 337.

⁴ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 337.

Similarly, the cup is shared. Two words are spoken over the cup. The first word is an explanation of its significance: *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*. What is symbolized by the blood?

Mark seems to be highlighting the celebration of covenant (14:24). For Jews, animal sacrifice (shedding blood) are part of covenant-making: eating together is part of covenant-keeping. In the sharing of the cup (blood), Jesus is here renewing covenant; indeed, he is establishing a new covenant, as predicted by Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; I Cor. 11:25). Some Christian scribes added the word *new* to the text to make explicit this connection (Mark 14:24, NRSV note). Jesus' death (his shed blood) seals that new covenant. By their identification with that death, the disciples can celebrate that new covenant in their common meals.⁵

Another blessing that derives from Jesus' passion is forgiveness for sin. The whole fabric of Mark's narrative highlights the fact that Jesus' faithfulness becomes the means of forgiveness and renewal for his unfaithful disciples.⁶

Jesus speaks a second word over the cup: *I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God* (14:25). Indeed, for Mark the inauguration of God's kingdom is not delayed until some distant future event. Before next 24 hours have passed, Jesus will be crowned king. His crown will be of thorns, and this throne will be a cross. But through his death, his kingdom will be established. In one sense, this was Jesus' last meal with his disciples; in another sense, it was the first of many they would celebrate not only in his name, but in his presence.⁷

Jesus and his disciples leave the upstairs room after singing a final Passover hymn. In keeping with regulations for the Passover, they remain within the ritual boundaries of Jerusalem until morning. They spend the *midnight* watch (9:00-12:00) in a garden on the Mount of Olives, rather than returning to Bethany for the night (13:35; 14:26).⁸

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Passover and Lord's Supper

The OT Passover celebration was designed to provide annual opportunities for Israel to reexperience (not just recall) the miracle of deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The sacrificial lamb was understood to be a real substitute for the oldest son, who would otherwise be slain along with the Egyptians' firstborn. As Jesus transformed Passover into the Christian communion, he (God's firstborn) takes the place of the Passover lamb.

He substitutes for the lamb; but more important, he substitute for humans who are (like Israel's firstborn) destined to death. Jesus becomes the great and final sacrifice that accomplishes deliverance from all bondage to sin and its consequences.⁹

What is the relationship between Jesus' last Passover celebration with his disciples and the Lord's Supper celebrated in the Christian church? Clearly, Mark understands Jesus' last meal with his disciples before his death as the first Lord's Supper (communion, Eucharist). The church had been reenacting this meal for 30-40 years before Mark wrote his Gospel. Their celebration no doubt influenced the way the traditions were handed down and finally recorded.¹⁰

THE CONTEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

⁵ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 338.

⁶ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 338.

⁷ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 338.

⁸ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 338.

⁹ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 339.

¹⁰ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 339.

Jesus is present at communion, but not simply in the elements or in the remembering. He is chiefly present in the *gathering*. (Matt. 18:19-20). The church is not a collection of individuals mystically bound by common participation in a sacrament; instead, the church is a real, living and interrelating family (Mark 3:34-35). This family experience the presence of Jesus in every gathering and especially so when we gather to relive and reenact our mutual participation in the "body" of Christ (the church), symbolized by the sharing of the one loaf and communion cup (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16-17). Thus communion requires no sacred food, no sacred place, no sacred officiating person, and no sacred occasion. Where believers gather in unity to celebrate their oneness in Christ, there communion is rightly experienced in the presence of Jesus who died and rose to make it all possible. There our covenant with Christ and with each other is regularly renewed.¹¹

¹¹ Timothy J. Geddert. *Believers Church Bible Commentary on Mark* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 343,