

THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Lesson 89, Chapter 26 Continued

When we closed our study on Matthew chapter 26 last time, we had been looking at the rather strange act of the common Jewish woman in Bethany that had just poured a great deal of costly perfumed ointment on Christ's head. She probably didn't quite know why she did it... other than she was overcome with some inner urge to do so... and Yeshua's disciples were none too happy about it because they viewed it as a silly and extravagant waste of resources.

Bethany was a relatively small village that was an easy 2 mile walk from Jerusalem. During the festival periods like Passover, it became a sort of customary overflow area for Jewish pilgrims to find lodging as they arrived from all over the Roman Empire including North Africa and even parts of Europe, to obey the Torah commandment to come to the Temple for these God appointed times so that they could sacrifice and celebrate. On the surface, that is why Yeshua and His disciples were there; under the surface, it was to fulfill the Prophets that the Messiah would die an atoning death to save humanity from our just reward of eternal death.

So far in this chapter we have seen that within Jewish society there were two starkly different reactions to this Holy Man's presence in Jerusalem. The first was the opposition that is represented by the High Priest and the Elders of the Synagogue, and the second was of welcome by many of the common Jews (although those residents of Jerusalem proper were a mixed bag of suspicion and adoration). As we begin to enter into the rather dark story of Yeshua's march to the cross, as Matthew frames it, despite the divine act and nature of Jesus we must always keep in mind that He was also fully human. He lived a real life, suffered from thirst and hunger as we all do, had emotions that ranged from

sad, to apprehension, to anger and frustration, all the way to wonder, awe, and joy. And very soon He was to suffer from terrible pain. First, however, Jesus would suffer betrayal.

It must also be kept in mind that Yeshua was not a victim of circumstances; in fact, it was He that was orchestrating the course of events. It was He who charted the exact path of His journey to the cross, using the wickedness of men as the vehicle to get there.

Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 26. Since we've already read this chapter all the way through, we'll re-read in short segments in order to get our footing.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 26:14 - 16

Judas the betrayer makes his appearance. The story of Judas has fascinated scholar, pastor and layman alike for centuries. Why he did such treachery to his Master that he knew so well is filled with mystery. Exactly how long after Yeshua being doused with perfumed ointment this plot Judas hatched takes place we don't know; no doubt, however, it was no more than a few hours. Judas was one of the twelve disciples, which is what makes his act all the more perplexing and treacherous. Might he have been present in Bethany to witness the woman pour her expensive perfume over his Master's head? Could it have been this act somehow was the catalyst that drove him to take such a despicable action against Yeshua? The way Matthew places these 2 events in such immediate proximity in his Gospel, it is my impression that this is exactly what we are meant to understand; the one was the cause for the other.

The Apostle John in his own Gospel account of Yeshua's life reveals a little more about just who this man Judas was in John chapter 6 verse 71.

^{CJB} **John 6:71** *(He was speaking of Y'hudah Ben-Shim'on, from K'riot; for this man- one of the Twelve!- was soon to betray him.)*

This man's full name was Judas son of Simon. Christianity more traditionally knows him as Judas Iscariot. The "Iscariot" part of his identification has always been somewhat of an enigma in trying to decipher just what it was designating. Some believe, as the CJB tenders, that it was the name of the town he was from. And indeed, there may have been a town in ancient Judah called Keriioth. On the other hand, the English term Keriioth is probably taken from the

Hebrew **qeriy'yot** that simply means cities. So, I cannot buy in to the concept that Iscariot is a Greek/English term that is a but a town name that Judas hails from. More likely is that Iscariot is a translation of the Latin **sicarius**. Most of our modern English translations of the New Testament have come from the Latin, which is what the Greek New Testament manuscripts were first translated to. And even when they have not come as direct translations from the Latin versions, certain loan words are taken from it and they appear in our Bibles.

Sicarius means assassin. There was a known group among the radical Zealot sect of Jews (the group that advocated for violent rebellion against Rome), called the **Sicarii**. This group was what we might today call the “terrorists”. They were fanatics, with no act of violence or criminality beneath them in attempts to achieve their purpose. They were most feared not by the Roman occupiers of the Holy Land, but rather by the Holy Land Jews because the **sicarii** would assassinate Jews they thought might have collaborated with the Roman enemy, or those who refused to support them if asked. It is believed that the 1000 men, women, and children who fled to the desert fortress of Masada, and then committed mass suicide rather than be captured by the Roman foreign legion, were **sicarii**. This term being transliterated into Greek easily becomes Iscariot, and considering his radical actions it fits Judas to a tee.

So, was Judas a Zealot infiltrator that somehow burrowed his way into the inner group of Christ's 12 disciples? Perhaps. Or, just as likely, he truly thought that Yeshua of Nazareth may have been the Messiah in the typical Jewish sense of it; a charismatic military commander in the mold of King David that would lead the Jews into an overthrow of Rome, a recapture of the Holy Land, and then he would sit on the throne as the first Jewish king of Judah to reign since Zedekiah, who ruled some 6 centuries earlier. However, Yeshua's open prediction that within but a few hours He would die by crucifixion, and then His display of humility and allowing this woman to pour perfume on His head as symbol of His burial procedure, might have disillusioned Judas to the point of wanting Jesus done away with. The way Christ could draw the multitudes to Himself, His triumphal entry into Jerusalem in the mode of a king, and His actions in the Temple grounds where He took on the cowardly and deceitful religious authorities had Judas believing that Yeshua was the one he and most of Judaism had yearned for, for so long. Yet, Christ's most recent actions knocked Him off the pedestal Judas had built for Him. Now Judas determined that He had mistakenly joined with the wrong man. So, he waited for the right opportunity to approach the Jewish religious leadership to help them do what they so vigorously

wanted to do: kill this threat to their lofty and lucrative positions.

It is regularly offered in Christian circles that Judas betrayed Jesus simply for money (although 30 pieces of silver wasn't all that much money). Others comment that it was out of his Zealot idealism. Both the Gospels of Luke and John characterize it as Judas operating in co-operation with Satan. However, the Church sometimes takes this view too far by spiritualizing it to the point that Judas loses his human nature and nearly becomes the embodiment of Satan himself. The mention of the money cannot be dismissed; while the silver may not have been the entire motive, it clearly played a significant role in his decision. His greed for money reveals that despite Judas's place among the 12, He was no longer a true follower of Yeshua.

Judas seeks out the chief priests and makes a bargain. This is NOT the High Priest Caiaphas that is being spoken about. Rather these are the most senior among the regular priests, because the term "chief priests" is presented in the plural; he made the dirty deal with a small group of them. Judas was paid, and then went off to plot how best to turn Yeshua over to them. I'll insert here that if we pause to think about it, why did the chief priests need Judah at all to capture Jesus? They knew who Yeshua was and that He wasn't a violent man. I suspect the issue was that they didn't know WHERE He was, and because Jesus was a rather non-descript man in appearance, He wasn't easily identifiable in a crowd. I'll remind you yet again that this was Passover week, and so Jerusalem and its surrounding villages were overrun with crowds of Jews from everywhere. Yeshua was the classic needle in a haystack and who better to know His whereabouts and His identity than one of His most trusted disciples. After Matthew makes this insertion (probably for the sake of creating a kind of timeline), he moves on to what came next. Open your Bibles again to Matthew chapter 26.

RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 26:17 – 30

This is what is popularly known as the Last Supper. I'll frame this section by saying that the story begins in Bethany, moves to Jerusalem, and then once again moves to outside the city walls, across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives. I'll also mention that the term "Last Supper" doesn't appear in the narrative; it is but a name that later Christianity gave to it. Exactly what this ceremony was, is actually controversial if not enigmatic. I'll delve into this as we go.

So, this passage begins with words that seem rather straightforward:

^{CJB} **Matthew 26:17** *On the first day for matzah, the talmidim came to Yeshua and asked, "Where do you want us to prepare your Seder?"*

Different Bible versions choose very slightly different words, but there is no disagreement in substance among them. This is speaking about the 1st day of the biblical Feast of Unleavened Bread (**matzah**), which according to the Torah is a 7-day feast. However, when we know the Torah, and we know Jewish Tradition of the 1st century, this statement in verse 17 actually presents all sorts of conundrums.

According to the Hebrew biblical calendar (something the entire Bible is based upon), the 1st day of the Feast of Matzah is Nisan 15. So, to read this passage literally, as it stands, means that the Feast of Passover, which occurs on Nisan 14, must have already ended. This, however, presents a major problem because it also speaks of preparing the Passover meal (the seder) several hours prior to eating it. The problem is that the preparation for the Passover meal doesn't occur on the 1st day of Matzah, because the 1st day of Matzah is a special Sabbath day and no work can be done. This is why Passover day (the 14th) was given the traditional nickname of Preparation Day.

We've already discussed in earlier lessons that just as in the modern Western world we'll speak about our various holidays using different terms... usually not terms that are technically precise... still everyone knows by context and custom what we're talking about. I gave the example of the last half of December being called things like the holiday season, the Christmas Holidays, or just the Holidays, or speaking of Christmas as including not just Christmas Day but also Christmas Eve, and even extending something we call Christmas week to include New Year. None of this troubles or confuses us because we're familiar with how all this terminology is meant. It worked like that for the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread in Yeshua's era. Thus, there is no way that the scrupulously Torah observant Christ would have instructed His disciples to do the work of feast preparation on a Sabbath... something that is expressly forbidden in the Torah and is a grave sin. OK, so we must have some calendar issues at work here.

Let's begin unpacking this puzzle by destroying a misconception among many Jews and most Christians who know little if anything about these biblical feasts.

It is regularly said that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is an 8-day event, and yet the Torah clearly says it is a 7-day event. Why this difference? It is because of what happens when we overlay a Hebrew calendar upon a Roman calendar. Because the Hebrew and Roman calendars each assume different starting and stopping points to define a day (a 24-hour period), and the names and lengths of Roman months differ from Hebrew months, then to say something like “the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15th of Nisan and ends on the 21st” gets confusing. When we overlay those 2 calendars, we see that in relation to a Roman calendar (our modern-day calendar) each Hebrew day stretches across portions of 2 Roman calendar days. So, it can appear on a modern Roman calendar that the Feast of Matzah lasts 8 days and not 7. Further the date of the Hebrew month (such as the 15th of Nisan) only rarely coincides with the same date (in our example, the 15th) within a Roman month. Of course, this was not an issue biblically nor is it confused in the Bible because the Jews never entertained the use of the Roman calendar, and the Bible only uses the Hebrew calendar.

The underlying nature of the issue begins in that when taken together, the consecutive feasts of Passover and then Unleavened Bread last for a total of 8 days. Due to the logistics and many practicalities of later Hebrew society, the 2 feasts eventually became conjoined in Jewish eyes, even though technically everyone knew they were 2 separate feasts. The result was that it was common among Jews to call the entire 8-day feast period Passover or just as common to call the same period Unleavened Bread. That’s not too tough to grasp; unfortunately, it gets more complex. The reason for this added complexity is that Galileans seem to have created some of their own traditions for this holiday period that differed somewhat from how the Jews who lived in Judea celebrated it. Partly this was because the Jews of Judea all lived in close proximity to the city of Jerusalem, while all other Jews... including those of the Galilee... had to pack up and travel 2 or 3 days, even a week or more, to get to the Temple in Jerusalem. So, the realities of distance and travel time played a major role in how Jewish festival Traditions evolved.

After all, when the Torah Laws concerning the required observance of these feasts were first created and given to Moses, it was 1300 years earlier at the time that the Wilderness Tabernacle was the place of worship for the Israelites. They hadn’t completed their journey to the Promised Land, yet; let alone had they conquered it. During those 40 years in the wilderness, all Israelites lived encamped, tribe by tribe, in rings around the Tabernacle so no one had to make a journey to get to it. But a long time later, when Joshua captured Canaan, Israel

was divided into 12 tribal regions, greatly spread out over the entire land; distance now became a barrier to overcome. Jerusalem was where the Temple would eventually be built, and thus nearly all Israelites had to leave their homes and make a substantial journey to get there to celebrate the feasts; except of course for those Israelites that lived in Judah, the tribal territory where Jerusalem was located.

After Rome conquered the Holy Land, and after Israelite tribalism and (along with it) tribal boundaries had long been extinguished, the Roman governing districts of Judea and Galilee were established in the former Holy Land (and a couple of others as well), and in time the Jewish residents of those districts became less than harmonious. Hatred of the residents of one district for another is probably too strong, but each went out of their way to establish their own customs and traditions that suited their circumstances. And, it seems, that nearly certainly this is what was at play when trying to unravel this strange event that we call The Last Supper. It is really with the growing influence of modern-day Jewish Believers and their academics that these matters that involve the 7 biblical feasts are being re-examined and in some cases it is leading to a few of the stories in the New Testament having to be redefined.

Here's the deal: there is no way that the Last Supper was the biblical Passover seder (Passover meal) because Passover would have to have ended for it to occur and Jesus is known to have been crucified on Passover day. If He wasn't crucified on Passover day, but rather during the next day, it would have been on the 1st day of Matzah, which is a Sabbath. This makes no sense because later we'll read that there was a huge urgency to get His body down from the cross so as to get him interred BEFORE a Sabbath began. Dr. Baruch Korman and Rabbi Joseph Shulam are among those who have offered possible solutions to the problem, and despite some technical differences, they agree that while the Last Supper happened on Passover, it was in the first hours of Passover, which is at night time (somewhere in the 7 pm to 10 pm timeframe). Remember: a Hebrew day BEGINS at sunset. So, in the first hours of Passover, Nisan 14 (night time), there was a gathering of Yeshua with His 12 for some kind of a ceremonial meal. The following afternoon (which in the Hebrew calendar was still the same day), He would be killed. Whatever Last Supper was, clearly it was customary for Jesus and those who made up His 12 disciples to celebrate it. Also remember: Jesus and His 12 disciples were **all** Galileans and so had their own traditions apart from those typically celebrated in and around Jerusalem of Judea.

Rather than further try to characterize the meal that night, let's move on to what happened during it. I want to begin by our reading Mark's version. Turn your Bibles to Mark chapter 14.

READ MARK CHAPTER 14:12 – 26

Notice how Mark time-stamped the day of the Last Supper. He, like Matthew, says it was the 1st day of the Feast of Matzah. But then, unlike Matthew, he adds that it was the day when the lambs were slaughtered. From a technical standpoint, this doesn't work. The lambs are not slaughtered on the 1st day of Unleavened Bread; they are slaughtered the day before that, on Passover day. This is why we mustn't try to apply the technical Torah sense to these words, but rather to understand it from the casual conversational way of the era in which these festival holidays were spoken about. For the common Jewish person, Passover and Unleavened Bread had become synonyms, and so the 1st day of Unleavened Bread meant the 1st day of the 8-day feast period that conjoins 1 day of Passover with the 7 days of Unleavened Bread to form one big event. Let me also add that eating unleavened bread was NOT a biblical requirement for Passover day. Therefore, it would not have been a requirement for the Last Supper... even though by a created Galilean tradition they may have started eating only unleavened bread a couple of days earlier than was required by the Torah (but this is my speculation and there's no real written evidence for it). This would not have been a sin; we could choose to eat only unleavened bread every day of the year, and this is perfectly in tune with Torah commandments.

Of a few differences between Mark's and Matthew's versions of the Last Supper, perhaps the one we need to notice most is that in Matthew in verse 28 it says that Jesus's blood (as symbolized by the wine) is for the forgiveness of sins. Mark makes no mention of this. Matthew seems to have a better understanding of the atoning power of Christ's sacrifice, and it is something he emphasizes and has built up to, in his Gospel. Beyond these differences is a point that I'll make up front so that you can watch for it: the words chosen by Christ and the way things proceed during the Last Supper has a direct link to the words spoken by Moses at Mt. Sinai as he makes covenant with God. I bring this up because a few times during our extensive study of Matthew I've urged you not to miss this underlying characterization of Yeshua as the 2nd Redeemer... the 2nd Moses (which He surely is, only greater even than Moses).

The scene begins with the disciples asking Jesus where He wants them to

prepare the seder. While we find those words in the CJB, in fact the question that is asked is where to prepare the Passover. So, the underlying CJB assumption is that this is referring to the Torah-commanded Passover meal, which I claim it is not. I will say this again, and probably again still later, because it can be so hard to wrap our minds around. Indeed, the Last Supper was a Passover meal but only in the sense that it occurred on Nisan 14th (Passover). However... this is not same as the biblical Passover meal as prescribed in the Torah... the one that Jews call the Passover seder... and I know this for 2 reasons: 1st, the Passover lambs had yet to be slaughtered (you can't have a Passover seder without the Passover lamb), and 2nd, because the actual biblical Passover seder doesn't occur on Passover despite its name; it happens in the first few hours of the next day (which begins just after dark), on the 1st day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is exactly the way it happened in the exodus from Egypt. The Passover seder is indeed prepared on Passover, but it is not actually eaten until the sun sets and the day changes to Nisan 15th, the beginning of the Feast of Matzah.

Therefore, because Christ is talking to His fellow Galileans, and they are all thinking in terms of Galilean traditions, and because the conversation is merely using standard terms of the times, then Yeshua's reference to the Passover merely means the meal that Galileans eat shortly after dark, the first couple of hours after the day turns to Nisan 14th, Passover. This is the Last Supper. One of the assumptions often made in sermons about this event is that we ought to notice that Jesus did not eat the Passover with His biological family; rather He chose to do this with His disciples. And that we are to understand from this that this is due to the replacement of His physical Jewish family with His new spiritual family. While this is an interesting thought... and one gentile Christians prefer to hear... we can outright dismiss it because even though it was biblical tradition to eat the Passover meal with family, I've already demonstrated that the Last Supper was not the Passover meal.

Yeshua instructs the disciples to go from Bethany, into the city of Jerusalem, and find a certain unnamed man, and tell him that the Rabbi says that His time is at hand (His time to be arrested and killed), and that they are going to celebrate Passover at his house. It can only be that this had to be something that was prearranged and whoever this man was, the disciples knew of him. Mark puts it a little differently saying:

^{CJB} **Mark 14:13-14** ¹³ *He sent two of his talmidim with these instructions:*

"Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him; ¹⁴ and whichever house he enters, tell him that the Rabbi says, 'Where is the guest room for me, where I am to eat the Pesach meal with my talmidim?'"

So; the disciples are to find this man carrying a jar of water who is waiting to meet them. The disciples are to follow this man to the house he has reserved for the purpose of this Last Supper meal. And, they are to say that their Rabbi (the better translation for us is Master) wants to know where the guest room for Him is, and also where is the room where they are to eat the Passover. That is, one place is for Jesus to sleep, the other is for Jesus to have this meal with His 12. What is happening here was common in Jerusalem during the busy feast days. The thousands of pilgrims needed places to stay, and so the local residents would open their homes and rent out rooms not so much as a money maker but as a righteous deed of hospitality. The place was known to be on the 2nd floor of a building; 2 and 3 story buildings being common in the densely populated Jerusalem.

I want to pause here to address the matter of the Upper Room that one can visit on tour today in Jerusalem. I can confidently say that this is not where the Last Supper took place. Located in the modern Greek section of Jerusalem on Mount Zion, the tourist is taken to is very large room (you can easily put 100 people in it) but it was actually built during the Crusader era. Sorry to pop any bubbles.

In any case the disciples left Bethany, went into the city, found the man and the room prepared for them as Yeshua said they would. There, the disciples made the meal preparations and when evening came (meaning the day changed), they ate while reclining (a usual Jewish custom for a festival meal). Essentially, the Last Supper became a farewell meal. I mentioned a few minutes ago about the relationship of the Last Supper to the Mt. Sinai covenant ceremony with Moses, so I'll take a moment to read to you a short section from Exodus.

^{CJB} ***Exodus 24:3-7 ³ Moshe came and told the people everything ADONAI had said, including all the rulings. The people answered with one voice: "We will obey every word ADONAI has spoken." ⁴ Moshe wrote down all the words of ADONAI. He rose early in the morning, built an altar at the base of the mountain and set upright twelve large stones to represent the twelve tribes of Isra'el. ⁵ He sent the young men of the people of Isra'el to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings of oxen to ADONAI. ⁶ Moshe***

took half of the blood and put it in basins; the other half of the blood he splashed against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read it aloud, so that the people could hear; and they responded, "Everything that ADONAI has spoken, we will do and obey."

There are a few more connections, but for the moment notice the number 12. At the Last Supper Yeshua involves 12 disciples; at the Mt. Sinai covenant ceremony the 12 tribes of Israel are represented by the 12 large stones set upright. We'll soon get to the use of blood in the ceremony. I have no doubt that Yeshua choosing 12 men to be His disciples is meant to represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and we're told in other places in the New Testament that these 12 will sit in judgment of the 12 tribes... a one-to-one relationship.

Next we read that during the eating of the meal Yeshua drops a bomb on the proceedings: one of those seated at the table will betray Him. No details of it, or when, are put forward. I think it is hard to overstate how agitated this would have made them all. They believe Him, even to the point that each seeks to be exonerated. The concern for them is less that Yeshua is going to be betrayed and suffer the consequences, than it is that one of them will do the deed. Since the beginning of the collecting of the 12, they have always been concerned about themselves; who will be greatest, who will gain the most. We can sort of stand back and shake our heads in disgust at them for thinking like that, but they were being no more or less than human. In some ways we are to be comforted in this knowledge that if those great men who were taught directly by the Messiah could battle over self versus service, then we shouldn't beat ourselves up too badly when we inevitably do the same. This isn't an excuse or are we to feel enabled to be self-oriented. Rather it is that while our goal as followers of Messiah is to be perfect in devotion to Yeshua and the Torah principles, yet the spirit is willing while the flesh is weak. It is a process that takes effort, and despite our best intentions we will fail at it from time to time. The 12 disciples are perhaps one of the best biblical examples of this kind of failure inherent to our fallen nature, but also a revelation of how all but one would soon right themselves and rise above those failures.

During the turmoil when each disciple nervously asked if the Lord was referring to them, He replied with the equally cryptic: ***"The one who dips his matzah in the dish with me is the one who will betray me."***

Although the CJB takes some unneeded liberties with this verse when it says

“the one who dips his **matzah**...”, there is no reference to bread or to matzah in the passage. Rather it says “the one who dips his hand in the dish..” The **matzah** reference continues to incorrectly assume that this meal is the official biblical Passover seder. This comment from Yeshua no doubt didn’t at all soothe the disciples’ anxiety because there is no particular disciple that has put his hand into the bowl... all have. One by one they seem to question Yeshua if it is them. Clearly this is a matter of Yeshua knowing something that only a person with divine foreknowledge could, and that’s the context of what their questioning asks. That is, their question is more “will it be me” rather than “it is NOT me”.

Yeshua scares them all a bit further by again invoking His favorite title for Himself... the Son of Man... and says that “it is written” that He will be betrayed and die. “It is written” meant two different things to a Jew. One, it meant a written biblical prophecy. And two, it meant something like we would say today: “It is written in stone”. That is, it is predestined and cannot be changed. There is no specific Scripture that says such a thing, so the point is that neither the coming betrayal nor its consequences are a surprise. Evil can’t overtake Yeshua without Him knowing about it in advance, and by implication choosing to allow it to happen. This is a classic case of God using what is intended as evil, for good. Even though this is the case, says Christ, woe to the person who will betray the Son of Man. The consequences will be so severe for him that he will wish he hadn’t been born to suffer them. No doubt this expresses the eternal punishment that will result. Finally, Judas speaks up and feigning innocence asks if it could be him (what else could he do... wouldn’t it be terribly suspicious if he were the only one who didn’t inquire?). Yeshua nails him; He says “the words are yours”. This is a Jewish expression that in this case means you have just condemned yourself.

Strangely enough, the topic just seems to get shelved for the time being with Yeshua identifying Judas in front of the other eleven. Just as strangely, in Mark’s Gospel it is left out that Yeshua exposed Judas as the betrayer. Either way, the reader already knows who it is. What comes next is what was eventually transformed into the Church sacrament of Communion. There’s much to discuss about it, but our time is over for today so we’ll pick-up with that next time.