

CFM15 – Easter “O Grave, Where is thy victory? (1 Cor. 15:55)” – Matt. 21-28

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Happy Easter, and also Happy Passover. This year the two Holidays overlap pretty well, only off one day, since Passover is on Friday. Today we will be taking a look at the connection between Easter and Passover, so we can better understand the religious significance of both.

First, we will take a look at the ancient setting of Jesus’ final Passover, the original Holy Week. Then we will review the religious symbolism of the Passover, and it’s connection to Holy Week. We will talk about the resurrection of Christ, and, finally, the Redemption.

Setting

Jerusalem, the week before Passover. Jerusalem would have been absolutely packed with people gathering into the Temple for Passover.

One reference in the Talmud (Pesachim 64b) places a number in the 2-3 million range shortly before Jesus’ birth:

King Agrippa (lived 63-12 BC) once wished to take a census of the hosts of Israel. He said to the high priest, “Cast your eyes on the Passover offerings.” He took a kidney from each, and 600,000 pairs of kidneys were found there, twice as many as those who departed from Egypt, excluding those who were unclean and those who were on a distant journey, and there was not a single paschal lamb for which more than ten people had not registered; and they called it: “The Passover of the dense throngs.”

Josephus places about 3 million Jews at Jerusalem during the Feast of Pesach on AD 65:

“upon the approach of the feast of unleavened bread, the people came about him not fewer in number than three millions” (Flavius Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book 2, Chapter 14, Paragraph 3).

Granted, in an ancient setting, there wouldn’t have been a lot of the technological means we have for counting people. But, even if the estimates were wildly inaccurate, clearly, there were many hundreds of thousands of people at Jerusalem, the place was packed.

The Roman occupiers were also present in force, to maintain order and make sure there would be no political problems.

Pilate was described by Philo and Josephus as generally being insensitive to the religion and concerns of the Jews and quite ruthless in putting down and rebellion. He would have had approximately 3000 Roman soldiers at his command (see

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontius_Pilate footnote 35 reference to *Lehmann, Clayton Miles*

(11 August 1999). "[Administrative and military organization of Roman Palestine](#)". *Online Encyclopedia of the Roman Provinces*. University of South Dakota. Archived from [the original](#) on 19 December 2010. Retrieved 24 February 2016.) Pilate definitely would have called up the soldiers from Caesarea to Jerusalem to deal with the influx of people for the Passover holiday.

The Romans would have taken note and were possibly on edge having Jesus ride into the city and being heralded as a king, with the people waving palm fronds, which represented military victory and royalty. This is precisely what the Sanhedrin is complaining about in John 11:48.

47 Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. 48 If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. 49 And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, 50 Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

Mitigating this would have been Jesus' riding on a young donkey, as that was not a regal mount. The Jews would have seen that as fulfilment of Zech. 9:9, while the Romans would have seen it as a mark of humility, and it would serve to dismiss concerns with them.

The Jewish population in general heard of the many miracles Jesus had performed, and the very recent miracle of bringing Lazarus back from the dead was being gossiped abroad among the crowds. Their expectation was very much that Jesus was the Messiah, the Davidic King, and he would deliver them from Roman bondage and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel. They are very much anticipating a miraculous routing of the Romans, just as Moses did to the Egyptians.

In the gospel of John, he recounts all three of the Passover feasts during Jesus' ministry, and in all three cases he makes it explicitly clear that Jesus is not interested in being a king, despite the people's wishes (cf. John 2, John 6).

This expectation on the part of the common Jews would have discouraged any outward militancy, as they would expect Jesus to fill the role of Moses in calling down plagues from heaven. The Jews were sitting there waiting to see what Jesus would do. They had no plans for insurrection or rebellion, none at all. This is why Pilate did not slaughter Jesus' disciples and was willing to let Jesus go, since neither he nor his followers posed a political or military threat to Rome.

However, Jesus fails to deliver on the Jewish expectations for a restored earthly kingdom, and ends up in the hands of the Romans. The Sanhedrin seals his fate.

Religious Symbolism

Let us review the religious context of the Passover in the events of the Holy Week.

The lesson at <https://www.lds.org/study/manual/come-follow-me-for-individuals-and-families-new-testament-2019/15?lang=eng> presents the following chronology:

- Sunday: Triumphal entry into Jerusalem ([Matthew 21:6–11](#))
- Monday: Cleansing the temple ([Matthew 21:12–16](#))
- Tuesday: Teaching in Jerusalem ([Matthew 21–23](#))
- Wednesday: Continued teaching ([Matthew 24–25](#))
- Thursday: The Passover and Christ's suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane ([Matthew 26](#))
- Friday: Trial, Crucifixion, and burial ([Matthew 27:1–61](#))
- Saturday: Christ's body lies in the tomb ([Matthew 27:62–66](#)) while His spirit ministers in the spirit world ([D&C 138](#))
- Sunday: The appearance of the resurrected Christ ([Matthew 28:1–10](#))

This is a nice layout for the events of Holy Week. What it doesn't do is connect the events of Passover with the calendar. The Passover calendar is what drove the events of Holy Week. If we review Exod. 12 we can connect the events:

1 And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.

3 Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, **In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:** 4 And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. 5 Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:

It is spring time, the time of lambing, so there would be lambs available among a pastoral community. On the tenth day, they are to select out a male lamb without any defects less than one year old. The lamb is to be sequestered for four days.

The Sunday of Holy Week, the day of the Triumphal Entry, would be the tenth day of Nisan where the people were to choose a male lamb without spot to be sacrificed. The religious significance is that Jesus is chosen by the people to be their king, but he ultimately rejects their overtures, and is killed for it. But, here on the tenth day, Jesus is chosen by them, as is the paschal lamb.

The regulations continue:

6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. 7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. 8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9 Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. 10 And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.

The Thursday of Holy Week would be the Passover meal where the lamb is slaughtered and the blood is placed on the door frame.

11 And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover. **12 For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord.** 13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.

The blood of the lamb protects the inhabitants against the destroying angel. The destroyer passes over them, sparing the firstborn, by virtue of the blood of the lamb

The fourteenth of Nisan is the Passover Seder, which becomes the Last Supper. And that night after the Last Supper is the night Jesus spends in the garden of Gethsemane.

The blood of the lamb that protects the Israelites is symbolically connected to blood Jesus sheds in the garden. In the Passover, the lamb is killed and the blood spares the first born of the Israelites. That night, Jesus suffered for us and shed his blood, so we are passed over at Judgement. We are spared destruction because of his sacrifice.

Jesus taught this same principle at the immediately preceding Passover, as recounted in John 6. There at the Passover, Jesus feeds the multitude, who upon seeing the miracle want to force Jesus to be king. Jesus rejects their overture and questions their physical approach to the miracle. They question him, insisting he act like Moses did, if he is the prophet like Moses, at which point Jesus rejects them as spiritually dead. During the conversation, Jesus likens his own sacrifice to that of the paschal lamb:

1 After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. 2 And a great multitude

followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. 3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. 4 And the **passover**, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, **Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood**, ye have no life in you. 54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. 56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. 58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.

Jesus is clearly not speaking literally here. He is using the Passover context of the paschal lamb to make a spiritual point. They need to focus on spiritual food, not physical food. Their forebears who only ate Moses' manna are dead, because they relied on physical food. Instead, they need to see the spiritual food, which Jesus is offering them.

Ancient Christians definitely connected Jesus' sacrifice with the Passover, as discussed by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 5:

6 Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? 7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even **Christ our passover is sacrificed for us**: 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

When we take the Sacrament, we should see it in the context of the ancient Passover. The Passover spared Israel from the destroyer, and provided a means of escape from Egypt. The Israelites could establish a national identity and worship the Lord without Egyptian influence or interference because the Lord separated them out.

When we take the Sacrament, we should consider the spiritual symbolism of being spared the destruction of spiritual and physical death, being called out of the world, and being fed spiritually. We are given an opportunity to worship the Lord in truth, away from the influence of unbelievers.

One final note, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the Lehites in the New World, he did so just before or during the Passover. The time line given (cf. 3 Ne. 2:7-8, 3 Ne. 10:18-19) makes it clear the people were beginning to gather at the temple at Bountiful to observe the Passover

when Jesus appeared and taught them. The context of the Passover and Jesus' connection to it is important enough to wait a full year for him to appear to the Lehites and make that symbolism clear to them during the Passover holiday.

Jesus is First Fruits of the Resurrection

Why is Jesus the first one resurrected?

No place in the Scriptures ever clearly state why nobody before Jesus was resurrected. Passages in the Book of Mormon hint at it without explicitly stating it:

2 Nephi 2 (Lehi speaks to Jacob)

6 Wherefore, redemption cometh in and through the Holy Messiah; for he is full of grace and truth. 7 Behold, **he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law**, unto all those who have a broken heart and a contrite spirit; and unto none else can the ends of the law be answered. 8 Wherefore, how great the importance to make these things known unto the inhabitants of the earth, that they may know that there is no flesh that can dwell in the presence of God, save it be through the **merits, and mercy, and grace of the Holy Messiah, who layeth down his life according to the flesh, and taketh it again by the power of the Spirit, that he may bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, being the first that should rise**. 9 Wherefore, he is the firstfruits unto God, inasmuch as he shall make intercession for all the children of men; and they that believe in him shall be saved.

Mosiah 15 (Abinidi lecturing the corrupt priests of Noah)

19 For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people, which was prepared from the foundation of the world, I say unto you, were it not for this, all mankind must have perished. 20 But behold, the **bands of death shall be broken, and the Son reigneth, and hath power over the dead; therefore, he bringeth to pass the resurrection of the dead**. 21 And there cometh a resurrection, even a first resurrection; yea, even a resurrection of those that have been, and who are, and who shall be, even until the resurrection of Christ—for so shall he be called. 22 And now, the resurrection of all the prophets, and all those that have believed in their words, or all those that have kept the commandments of God, shall come forth in the first resurrection; therefore, they are the first resurrection. 23 They are raised to dwell with God who has redeemed them; thus they have eternal life through Christ, **who has broken the bands of death**.

So, according to Lehi, Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice for sin to lay down his life, so he can raise it up again. And, according to Abinidi, Jesus breaks the bands of death and has power over the dead. But, how?

It wasn't that Jesus was given priesthood keys over death at some point. It was that Jesus died, having lived a sinless life.

Jesus is the only one who lived a sinless life, so he never sinned in or against his flesh. So, he is the only one who deserves to be resurrected. Jesus earned that right. Everyone before him, and after him, sins against their flesh. So, none deserve to be resurrected. Without Jesus being sin free, none would be resurrected.

And, his covering Adam's transgression means everyone gets resurrected.

Law of Redemption

In the Hebrew Bible, the Law of Redemption is detailed.

Lev. 25

25 If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.

The KJV doesn't accurately reflect the tenor of the text, the NASB does a better job.

Lev. 25 (NASB)

25 If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold.

This reading makes it clear there is an expectation and duty to redeem the land your family has sold off, not just an option.

A bit later in the chapter, we see the Law extends to personal indenture, not just land:

Lev. 25

47 And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: 48 After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: 49 Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.

The right of redemption extends well out to cousins. Any family connection entitles you to redemption.

This OT Law of Redemption carries over to inform the NT perception of the Atonement:

Titus 2

13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

1 Peter 1

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Rev. 5:9

9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

Jesus' sacrifice of himself as the paschal lamb was to redeem us from debts we ourselves could not pay back.

He was motivated by family connection to bring all of us back to our Father, and he did so the only way possible: by living a perfect life, earning the right of resurrection, and paying the price for sins he did not commit. In doing so, he redeems us, and returns us to our heavenly family.

Chalkboard Outline

Setting

Religious symbolism

- Sunday: Triumphal entry (Matt. 21:6–11) [Nisan 10]
- Monday: Cleansing the temple (Matt. 21:12–16)
- Tuesday: Teaching in Jerusalem (Matt. 21–23)
- Wednesday: Continued teaching (Matt. 24–25)
- Thursday: Passover and Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26) [Nisan 14]
- Friday: Trial, Crucifixion, and burial (Matt. 27:1–61)
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Resurrection of Christ

Law of Redemption