

How many were with Jesus at his Last Supper? From Seder to Holy Communion.

Some scholars say Jesus' Last Supper was not a Passover Seder. There are scholars that say the early church gradually created the Eucharist from an early potluck fellowship dinner. That could be considered to be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. However it is such a radical change, there is not time enough for gradual development. The Seder change to the Eucharist and the change from Sabbath worship to the first day of the week require deliberate decisive action. Both involve abandonment of the revealed word of God's command, Torah, and the establishment of something else in its place.

Pious people of God do not on their own volition reject God's command and invent something new. Jesus' disciples, in order to be faithful, had to maintain what Jesus taught. All twelve had to agree or there would have been conflict. Acts 15 records the first Jerusalem council. It was serious consideration of a much more minor matter that was an extension of revealed principles.

The discussion of the Seder change often mentions Jesus' last meal was on Thursday and the lambs for the Passover were killed on Friday before the Seder. Therefore it could not have been a Seder. Jesus himself was killed on Friday as the Passover Lamb. However there is historical record that lambs were killed on Thursday and Friday. Various reasons are given and some accounts are from many years later. The fact they exist does prove that there was a remembrance of the two day practice. It is known that Essene teaching and practice was to celebrate the Seder the day before the rest of Israel. Jesus's Last Supper was on the Essene Seder.¹

Does this prove Jesus was Essene? Perhaps Jesus observed the Passover on the normal day in the prior years. This year He told them to prepare on Thursday. They knew this was to be exceptional. His followers were filled with anticipation. Many thought Jesus was going to reveal Himself as the Messiah and bring in the Messianic age. Everything about this Passover meal was exceptional. The normal practice was to celebrate in family groups, those without families were mixed in. Jesus' followers were either at the olive press, Gethsemane, or at the top of the hill at Lazarus' home in Bethany.

Jerusalem was overflowing with pilgrims from all the diaspora for the Passover. Those who traveled together from a town or synagog would camp and eat in close association. Most expected to sit on the floor in a circle around the common bowls. That is how they ate at home, all had to be in reach of the food. Ten people make a circle less than seven feet in diameter. Crowded three hundreds would fit in a large room 30 feet square.

Jesus broke the normal practice for this Seder. He ate with His chosen twelve disciples. That meant they could not eat with their families. Should we suppose that the twelve left their families behind and went off by themselves? That would have been a horrible violation of social mores. Everyone came along, otherwise Jesus would have been publicly crude and selfish. What great man proclaiming

love among his followers could do otherwise? Just because the Gospels do not mention them is no proof that all the rest were not there. Lazarus, Mary, Martha and their families, Jesus' mother Mary, Clopas and his wife Mary, Matthias and Joseph Barsabba, Mary Magdalene. What about those He healed? Do you think Jairus whose daughter had been raised would have sought Jesus out? Would Zachaeus have gone somewhere else? Counting the known followers of Jesus, adding family members quickly leads to a figure over 250. The only ones missing would have had social obligations that kept them away. Joseph of Aramathia and Nicodemus were members of the Sanhedrin. Luke lists Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, Susanna, and many other socially prominent women, who might not have been able to attend. The Centurion, whose servant was healed, may have been out of place. The Picture of the Last Supper is changed from the Twelve at table to close to 300 sitting in circles on the floor. The second image is much closer to the truth.

The upper room was prepared for passover and available. Unbelievable! Every space for miles around was packed tight, roofs, every bare patch of ground covered with campsites. How could a room have been available, much less a room prepared for passover celebration? Distant synagogues, Alexandria, Antioch, Babylon, had guest houses for their members when they came to Jerusalem. There were a reported 500 of such guest houses in Jerusalem. The Torah mandated all Israelites come to the Temple for three festivals a year. In between the festivals those places were for students and travelers from their community. It was not just the upper room that was prepared and empty. The whole large house was ready for a large contingent and equipped to prepare their feast. Jesus' followers would have prepared nearly 30 lambs. That was not a major task when scattered at many camp sites but requires an establishment with great facilities. Records state between 200,000 and 250,000 lambs were sacrificed for Passover in the years before the Temple was destroyed.

Perhaps the pilgrims had a problem, the rabbi fell and was injured, slowing their travel. A messenger was sent to inform the people at the house. Jesus told the disciples they would meet a man carrying water, who would lead them to the house. That still does not explain why the steward would permit them to use the building, unless, he realized this was by divine intervention. He might have sent the man for water, anticipating their imminent arrival. Then another messenger came saying they were further delayed until the next day. If it was a house for Essenes, they would have been forced to celebrate Passover where they stopped and not at the house. It was custom, not law, that the lamb was sacrificed at the Temple. The steward of the house, the disciples, recognized a miracle. Jesus knew this house was available before the steward of the house knew.

Having a reason for the time and place of Jesus' final meal does not explain how that became the weekly Sunday Eucharist celebration of bread and wine. The Decalog mandates Sabbath worship. How can the obedient faithful decide to break that commandment in order to worship on Sunday? Only the one they knew as the Son of God, Lord, Messiah - Christ, could have the authority to change God's Torah - Law. Just because Jesus rose from the grave on Sunday is not authority for them to make that change, without His clear command.

Jesus walked with Clopas/Cleopas on the way to Emmaus. His wife Mary is called the sister of Mary, Jesus' mother. The best understanding is that Clopas was Mary's husband Joseph's brother. Clopas' son Simeon became the second Bishop of the Jerusalem church. Probably Clopas' whole family

were present when Jesus revealed himself in the breaking of bread. They hurried back to tell the news and were present when Jesus appeared again.

Very little is recorded. Could it be that the Sunday evening group had been praying? They might have been following the familiar synagog liturgy and then shared a snack? Bread and wine? Did someone remind them that when they shared bread and wine Jesus commanded at His last supper with them, they were to share the bread as His body and wine as His blood. They might have joined in the prayer Jesus taught them. As they were remembering Him, did they feel His presence and realize He was standing in their midst? Actually, not mere imagination. Could He have said something to remind them He was present when they shared the bread and wine, remembering, celebrating the day He rose?

The following Sunday more were present. Were they again following the synagog liturgy, concluding with the bread and wine as He commanded them? Had He told them to meet on Sundays, and He would be with them in the bread and wine? Again Jesus appeared and spoke with them. It is only the clear command of the Master that could change God's decalog commanded day of worship. The new covenant, the new creation, the new messianic age had begun. The annual elaborate Seder dinner of the first covenant became the weekly sharing of bread and wine.

Was it on Sunday, Jesus appeared on the mount in Galilee to more than 500? Did they worship following the synagog service and then share the bread and wine? It was on Sunday that the Holy Spirit was poured out on them all. Had they been praying the liturgy, sharing the bread and wine? The worship of the Christian Church ever since is based on the synagog Service of the Word followed by the Service of the Eucharist. I think that only could have occurred by the clear direction of the Lord of the Church, Himself.

To God alone be Glory

He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves,
but for him who died and was raised for them. 2 Cor. 5:15

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¹ The traditional location is in an area that had a large Essene community. <http://www.centuryone.org/apostles.html>
BARGIL PIXNER <http://www.centuryone.org/pixner-q-a.html>