

## HOLY WEEK

What is the significance of Holy Week?

Holy Week was holy even before Jesus' death.

Before there was a Passover celebration, the Israelites had two festivals. They had one for the spring harvest and one for the Festival of the Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:14–17, 23:15). Yeast is referred to many times throughout Scripture. Yeast was symbolic of sin because just as yeast expands in bread and cannot be removed once it is in the bread, sin is similar in our lives. Sin grows and is impossible to remove...except through Jesus.

Scholars believe Passover was a result of merging these two festivals together. The Passover was symbolic of God saving the Israelites from death as the angel of death traveled through Egypt killing all the first-born male children (the blood over the doorframe allowed the angel of death to "Passover"). This celebration was a time to reflect upon, be thankful for, and to pass down the story to their children of how God allowed the Jewish people to escape their bondage in Egypt. The Passover meal (also known as the Seder) places a special emphasis on children. It is the youngest member of the family who is responsible for asking the four questions that are always asked during the Passover meal preceded by this question, "Why is this night different?"

1. "Why do we eat matzah (unleavened bread) instead of leavened bread?"
2. "Why do we eat bitter herbs?"
3. "Why do we dip herbs twice?"
4. "Why do we sit in a reclining position during the meal?"

It is interesting that Jesus' death occurred during this very Holy Week for the Jewish people. He, along with his disciples, followed God's commands and took part in their own Passover meal on the night Jesus was arrested.

Jesus sat with his children. He spoke with his children (his disciples) and placed a special emphasis on them. They sat reclining at the table and ate bread without yeast in it. He had a meal with his disciples as he spoke the New Covenant to them.

There is an Old Testament account of another meal taking place with God when the Old Covenant was handed down. In Exodus 24:1–11, something special took place:

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a distance, but Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near. And the people may not come up with him."

When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey."

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders had a meal with God wherein the Covenant was confirmed. Jesus had a meal with his disciples wherein the New Covenant was given. It’s significant when God meets with his people and we should take note of it.

Only one of the Gospel accounts tells of Jesus washing the disciple’s feet during Jesus’ last supper. John’s account (John 13:1–17) tells how Jesus knelt and washed each disciple’s feet. As Jesus washed their feet, they protested that Jesus should not do such a lowly thing. However, Jesus responded that not only would he do it, he expected his disciples to do it for others as well as a demonstration of love and humility. I’m still not sure why Matthew and Mark’s accounts don’t include this very important lesson for us. Jesus said, “Unless I wash you, you have no part of me” (John 13:8). Jesus’ blood washes our sin away. His blood offering purified our sin once and for all.

Jesus’s words at the Last Supper, “This is my blood, which seals the covenant” (Matthew 26:28) were the words (except for *my*) Moses used at the institution of the Old Covenant in Exodus 24:8, “Look, this blood confirms the covenant the Lord has made with you in giving you these instructions.” Jesus was using language they would understand to institute the New Covenant (John 13:34).

Jesus broke the unleavened bread, which was a staple of the Passover meal. The yeast less bread would be broken. This represented both the breaking of the Old Covenant and the fact that for the Old Covenant to be broken, Jesus' body must also be broken. He was sinless...he was the ultimate unleavened bread.

Jesus invites all people to the banquet table (he mentions this in the Parable of the Great Banquet in Luke 14:15–24).

So much else takes place during the Last Supper. Jesus told the disciples that one of his disciples would betray him and he said that Simon Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. He also said some very important words, "Very truly I tell you, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (John 13:20).

Jesus reemphasized that followers of Jesus are to love. Whoever he says is accepted by him, we must also accept. Jesus died for all...not just the ones we get to pick and choose.

After they finished the last supper, Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Matthew 26:36–45). He knew what was about to come and he needed to have a conversation with his Father. He set eight of the disciples in one place but took Peter, James and John to another. The three disciples were instructed to stay awake and wait as Jesus went further into the Garden to pray. But they fell asleep over and over. He needed them to stay awake and to engage in paying attention to what was taking place in the spiritual, but they chose sleep—their flesh was weak.

It was then, after the third time, that Jesus got them up and told them his betrayer was coming. And shortly thereafter, Jesus was arrested and the final hours of his life on earth were underway.

Everything the Scriptures prophesied about his death came true. Jesus was arrested, beaten, mocked, judged, spit on, hung on a cross, his clothes divided up, and he died on that cross in between two criminals. His body was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb. The Roman soldiers stood guard in front of the tomb, and their power could not prevent the angel from raising Christ from the dead. The tomb was empty when the women went to anoint his body. And he gloriously appeared to many after his resurrection. He restored Peter and commissioned Peter. He breathed the Holy Spirit onto the disciples. And he ascended into heaven.

What ever happened to the one who betrayed him? Poor Judas, wracked with guilt, hung himself. How do we know he was filled with guilt? Because he tried to give the money back to the religious leaders and he asked them to stop,

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. (Matthew 27:3–5)

Judas confessed his sin, but we never see Judas ask for forgiveness. A year before Jesus' death, Jesus said that one of his disciples was a devil (John 6:70–71), and after Judas left the Passover meal, Jesus said that Judas was doomed to destruction (John 17:12).

This is a sober reminder for all of us. The Father draws people to Him through the Holy Spirit and we must confess Jesus as Lord and Savior to

be saved and have a seat at his banquet table in heaven for all eternity. Nothing has changed since Jesus' death close to two thousand years ago. Nothing. We may fail to pass on the stories of God's goodness and to pause and remember the significance of this season in history, but the end results don't change. Jesus' death and resurrection changed everything.

We celebrate a risen Savior every single day of the year. We can accept Jesus as Savior any day of the year, and in any place. This weekend is symbolic of what happened during these fateful last hours of Jesus' earthly ministry. Talk about it with your children...and with your families. It is important that we never forget why Jesus did what he did. If we stop talking and instead absorb the secular aspects of this most holy holiday, we fail to love. If we love people as Jesus commanded people, we will be moved by the fact that there are people who will suffer the fate of eternal separation from God the Father because their hearts are hardened, and perhaps they have been either entered into by Satan or sifted by Satan and failed the test.

Love compels us to share the most beautiful love story...Jesus. Jesus loved you enough to die for you. Somehow (assuming you are a born-again believer) you heard about this love from someone or read it somehow (perhaps through the words in the Bible that were written out of love for you). Make sure you are passing along this love story. Gathering together over a meal is a great place to start.