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It was sundown and the beginning of Passover, circa. A.D. 33. A year of anticipation had come to an end as Jewish people gathered in homes and rented rooms in Jerusalem to recount God’s deliverance of His Chosen People from bondage in Egypt.

But, this night would be different than any other Jesus’ disciples had experienced. Tonight, Jesus would make an announcement that Israel had been waiting almost two millennia to hear. As He spoke, His Jewish disciples understood the significance of the announcement to the nation of Israel; they were slower to grasp that it had implications for the whole world.

While many artist’s depictions of

what took place in the upper room portray a placid group suspended in time, we know from the words of Scripture that the evening was full of animated conversation (Lk. 22:24-38). The disciple’s banter about who would be greatest in the kingdom seems inappropriate to us in light of Jesus revelation of His impending suffering, but corresponds with the convivial atmosphere characteristic of the Passover celebration.

After a festive dinner, as is customary, the *afikomen*—a half sheet of matzoh broken earlier and hidden—was brought back to the table. Everyone at the table had to eat a piece of the afikomen (unleavened bread) in connection with the third cup of wine (Cup of Redemption). Even today, it is the last morsel eaten during the seder followed by the third cup.

The Afikomen

Jesus took the afikomen and Cup of Redemption as the group prepared for this part of the Passover celebration. Holding the afikomen so the pierced holes and scorched stripes were clearly visible, Jesus told His disciples, “With fervent desire I have desired

to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. . . . **‘This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me’**” (emphasis added, Lk. 22:15).

No explanation was given because none was needed. The eating of the afikomen had already become part of the Passover tradition in the 1st century B.C. and emphasized the Messianic symbolism inherent in the celebration.

Fast forward to 1925, when Jewish scholar Robert Eisler wrote two articles in *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* demonstrating the significance of the afikomen in the Last Supper. His articles created a firestorm of controversy in both Christian and Jewish circles that caused the information to be suppressed for four decades. Then, in 1966, Jewish Oxford scholar, David Daube, delivered a lecture entitled “He That Cometh”. “[H]ailed on two continents as one of the world’s foremost biblical scholars, David Daube dedicated his life to bridging the gulf between Judaism and Christianity.”¹

Reasserting that the afikomen ceremony was the portion of the Passover in which Jesus instituted the Lord’s supper, Daube built on Eisler’s original premise effectively demonstrating that the afikomen, “represented a longed-for redeemer who had not yet appeared.”² He goes on to say, “The *afikoman* energized the Seder with a deep sense of expectancy: the hope of an even greater, future Passover redemption.”³

Afikomen is a Greek word and simply means, “the coming one”. There was no ambiguity in Jesus statement. He was revealing Himself as the promised Messiah. He told the disciples the afikomen representing

Messiah, “is My body”.

With His Messianic proclamation still ringing in their ears, Jesus passed the wine to His disciples and instructed them to divide it between them. As they were doing so, He announced, “**this is the New Covenant in my blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins**” (emphasis added, Mt. 26:28).



The New Covenant

Jesus’ mention of the New Covenant would have caught everyone’s attention. It is significant that none of the disciples reclining around the table asked Jesus to clarify or explain because He referenced a specific covenant that would have been familiar to everyone who heard His words.

Only one covenant, known as the New Covenant, is mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures—it is a covenant between God and Israel that literally will be fulfilled for Israel (Jer. 31:31). In stark contrast to the Mosaic Covenant which is the conditional covenant God made with Israel at Mt. Sinai, the New Covenant falls into the same category as the three other unconditional unilateral covenants (Abrahamic, Land and Davidic) that God made with Israel.⁴ Although the unilateral covenants are all fulfilled in the Messianic Kingdom,

THE NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant is a literal covenant made with the nation of Israel that will be fulfilled in the Messianic Kingdom.

TEMPORAL PROVISIONS

Israel will be a unified nation in the Messianic Kingdom.
Jer. 31:31 • Ezek.11:17

Israel will enjoy the full extent of land promised to Abraham.
Jer. 30:1-3

Israel will be the location for the Millennial Temple.
Ezek. 37:26-28

SPIRITUAL PROVISIONS

Israel will be nationally forgiven of sin.
Jer. 31:34 • Ezek. 36:25 • Zech. 13:1

Israel will be nationally regenerated.
Isa. 59:21 • Jer. 31:33 • Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26

Israel will be nationally indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
Jer. 31:33-34 • Ezek. 11:19; 36:27

BENEFITS TO THE CHURCH

Christians during the Church Age benefit from the New Covenant through the sacrificial death and resurrection of the Messiah.
Mt.26:28 • I Cor. 11:24- 25 • Heb. 8:8-13

Indeed the LORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.'"
Isa. 62:11





the New Covenant is essential to their fulfillment.

The prophet Jeremiah had outlined the specifics of the New Covenant some six centuries before:

“Behold the days are coming says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah” (Jer. 31:31).

Jeremiah was not the first or the only Hebrew prophet to speak of the New Covenant. Almost a century before, the prophet Isaiah linked the New Covenant to the Davidic Covenant defining it as, “the sure mercies of David” (Isa. 55:3). Through the prophet Ezekiel, God says to Israel,

“I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean . . . I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep my judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God” (Ezek. 36:24-28).

The temporal provisions of the

New Covenant include:

- Israel’s regathering and eternal preservation as a unified nation,
- Israel’s permanent restoration to their homeland, and
- Israel’s centrality in the Messianic Kingdom as the location for the Millennial Temple (Jer. 31:31-37; Ezek. 36:24-28).

The spiritual provisions of the New Covenant include:

- Israel’s national forgiveness of sin,
- Israel’s national regeneration, and
- Israel’s national indwelling of the Holy Spirit with one prerequisite—the shed blood of a perfect substitutionary sacrifice for sin (Lev. 17:11).

Jesus’ announcement during that final Passover with His disciples followed by the agony of the crucifixion confirmed that He was that sacrifice. Although the New Covenant will not be inaugurated until the coming of Messiah to establish His Messianic Kingdom, the prerequisite guaranteeing fulfillment has been accomplished.

As Jesus and the disciples celebrated the Passover together, He announced that the prerequisite for the inauguration of the New Covenant would be fulfilled in Him as the perfect sacrifice for sin: “this is my body . . . this cup is the new covenant in My blood” (Lk. 22:19-20).

The disciples were undoubtedly thrilled by the Messianic implications of Jesus’ words as He broke the afikomen and shared the Cup of Redemption at the end of the Passover celebration. They expected the kingdom to become an immediate reality and were willing to defend Jesus from

anyone who would stand in the way saying, “Lord, look, here are two swords” (Lk. 22:38).

The Significance for Us

What the disciples were slower to understand was the significance of the New covenant to the world. God promised, that in addition to fulfilling His covenant promises to Israel, Messiah’s coming would also benefit Gentiles (Isa. 42:6 cf. Lk.2:30-32).

The apostle Paul relates the Last Supper discourse to the church saying, “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). The church legitimately memorializes Jesus’ sacrifice, symbolized by the afikomen and the Cup of Redemption in the Passover.

The writer of the book of Hebrews shows that Messiah, as the mediator of the New Covenant, and on the basis of His grace, makes the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant available to all who trust Him in the present age (Heb. 8:7-13). Specifically, those benefits include:

- forgiveness of sin,
- regeneration, and the
- indwelling of the Holy Spirit all of which are made possible through Messiah’s sacrificial death.

The imagery embedded in the afikomen and the Cup of Redemption Jesus shared with His disciples during their final Passover together is poignant. What a powerful and infinitely wise God! The sacrifice that guarantees complete fulfillment of God’s covenant promises to Israel is the same sacrifice that ensures forgiveness of sin, regeneration and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to all who place their trust in Him today!

SHMURAH MATZOH

It should be on your bucket list! Rustic, crisp and round, fresh from the oven, full of wheaty flavor—you have to try it—handmade, shmurah matzoh!

The image on the cover shows a commercial operation where shmurah matzoh, an extra-special unleavened bread, is made today under a highly guarded process to prevent fermentation. Baked with the simplest ingredients of freshly milled wheat and spring water, matzoh has been on the table for Passover celebrations for the last 3500 years.

Shmurah matzoh today is virtually the same recipe as that used by Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper. And while sampling this artisan matzoh may take you closer to the unleavened bread eaten in the upper room, savoring the history and rich culture surrounding the final Passover Jesus celebrated with His disciples is even more satisfying.



ENDNOTES:

¹<http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/10358/noted-bible-scholar-david-daube-dies/>.

²Deborah Bleicher Charmichael, "David Daube on the Eucharist and the Passover Seder", *Journal of New Testament Studies*, Vol. 42 (1991).

³ibid.

⁴The key to understanding unilateral covenants is recognizing that God is the sole party responsible for their fulfillment and that the unilateral covenants are ongoing with no expiry date.



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