

Synopsis of the last supper accounts

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Synoptic of the Last Supper Nona Odom William Carey New Testament Dr.
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The last supper refers to the last meal that Jesus shared with His disciples on the night of his betrayal. The New Testament refers to the last meal using terms such as the Lords Supper, Eucharist, communion and mass. The last supper serves as an encouragement and a unifying factor to Christians (LaVerdiere, 1996). It binds them in fellowship of love, trust and mutual acceptance. Sharing of the last supper is one of the orders that Jesus gave to his church. Inherently, the last supper helps Christian to remember Jesus, accept his presence, reminds them of His second coming, fellowship with him and his people, self-examination, thanksgiving and giving thanks.

Description of the Last Supper

Notably, Jesus sent two of his disciples to prepare for the Passover meal, on the first day of the Unleavened Bread. On the evening, Jesus invited his twelve disciples in a table and informed them that one of them will betray him (Lietzmann, 2000). Jesus took the unleavened bread, broke it into pieces and asked his father to bless it. He gave the pieces of bread to his disciples telling them " This is my body, given to you. Do this in remembrance of me" Luke 22: 19. In the same regards, he took the cup of wine and shared it with the disciples telling them that that is his blood that will be shed for the atonement of their sins.

Interesting elements of the story

The Passover ceremony was commemorated by the Israelites for their escape from bondage in Egypt. In the book of exodus, the Israelites were

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asked to paint their door post with the blood of a lamb that was blemishing (Stag, 1962). The event resulted to plagues that forced pharaoh to release the Israelites after the death of the first-born. Therefore, Jesus used the day to celebrate with his disciples and remind them that his mission on earth is over. Jesus showed his disciples that he was the Lamb of God who will shed his blood for the atonement of their sins. The wine was served to the disciples four times during the last supper, which signified the redemption (Lietzmann, 2000). Notably, the first cup according to Jewish tradition was the sanctification cup; the second was the cup of judgment; the third was the redemption; while the last was the cup of kingdom.

Differences between the four Accounts

The three Gospel books, present a detailed description of the events that happened the night of the Last Supper. However, the book of Acts that was probably written before the other Gospels talks about the Supper but it puts emphasis on the theological basis of the event instead of giving details and background of the event (Stag, 1962). The Gospel of Luke, 22: 19 contains some words that are not in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, “ Do this in remembrance of me.” These words are however found in 1st Corinthians 11: 23-26 in its earliest account of the Lords Supper. Although this last meal Jesus shares with his disciples, the night prior to his death is referred to as the “ Lords supper.” The name “ Lords Supper” is only found in 1st Corinthians 11: 20.

In the New Testament, the word Eucharist means “ thanksgiving.” The New Testament describes the observance of the Last Supper as including giving of thanks (Lietzmann, 2000). The participles for giving thanks and blessing are used inter-changeably. Mark describes Jesus as a “ blessing,” the bread
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and “ giving thanks” for the cup. Paul reverses the terms, and he talks of the “ cup of blessing that we bless” in 1 Corinthians 10: 16 and describes Jesus as “ giving thanks” for the bread and for the cup.

The three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, give a detailed event of the preparation of the last supper. They categorically state that the preparation took place on the first day of unleavened bread (Stag, 1962). In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus instructs the disciples go out to the city and meet a man who will direct them on where to hold the last Supper. There are no details on the preparation of the Last Supper in 1st Corinthians.

In 1st Corinthians, Paul issues guidelines on how the Lords Supper should be celebrated. Paul emphasizes that the common meal (bread and wine) is the Lords Supper only if the partakers observed unity (Lietzmann, 2000). He urges the partakers to wait for one another and eat together and in doing so see themselves as the body of Christ. In the books of Matthew and Mark, Jesus breaks the bread after blessing it. In 1st Corinthians and Luke, Jesus breaks the bread after giving thanks.

Similarities of the three accounts

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the Synoptic Gospels because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is comparatively distinct. The term synoptic comes from the Greek syn, meaning " together", and optic, meaning " seen". This strong parallelism among the three gospels in content, arrangement, and specific language is widely attributed to literary interdependence. The question of the precise nature of their literary relationship the " synoptic problem" has been a topic of lively debate for centuries and has been described as " the most

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fascinating literary enigma of all time". The longstanding majority view favors Marcan priority, in which both Matthew and Luke have made direct use of the Gospel of Mark as a source, and further holds that Matthew and Luke also drew from an additional hypothetical document.

Notably, the meal was shared shortly before the crucifixion of Jesus at the end of the same week. In the course of the meal, Jesus foretells of his betrayal by one of his disciples present (Stag, 1962). Further, Jesus foretells that before the next morning, Peter will deny him. The four texts, Matthew, Mark, Luke and 1st Corinthians all talk of Jesus taking the bread, breaking it. In addition, they say that Jesus gave the pieces of bread to his disciples while describing it as his body that is given to them (disciples). Further, in all the four texts, there is a cup that Jesus shares with his disciples and describes it as a covenant in his blood or blood of the covenant.

Theological Focus of Each of the Four Accounts

An act of Obedience: Jesus told to his disciples, " Do this in remembrance of me? (I Cor. 11: 24, 25). This is a command. Jesus wanted his followers to continue observing the act only in His commemoration. Paul writes Jesus said, " As often as you drink, do it in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11: 25). The regularity of observation of Lords Supper is not a straight command of the Bible. It is more essential that Christians appropriately remember Jesus Christ in the sharing of the bread and wine, every time it is observed (LaVerdiere, 1996). The point that Jesus did command this continuing act of commemoration forms the basis for its continued celebration. In essence, this is the base of the Church referring to it as one of its " ordinances" all over its history, and encouraging Christians to take part in it as an act of obedience.

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An act of Identification: Paul specifies that part of the purpose of Christians gathering was to have the Lords Supper (I Cor. 11: 20). The sharing of the food items in the observation of Lords Supper will have little or no importance to those who have not accepted spiritual union with Christ. In the latter, they won't be able to remember the importance of what the death of Jesus means to their lives. Lords Supper is envisioned for those who know Christ as the Lord Jesus of their lives, & for whom the continuous commemoration of his sacrifice reminds them of their association with Him.

An act of Covenant: Jesus told his disciples, " this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1st Cor. 11: 25; Luke 22: 20). When Jesus said, " The cup is the new covenant in my blood," implying the blood He would shed in crucifixion would function as the endorsed of the " new covenant." The new covenant is built on the Spirit of grace (1Cor. 3: 6). Jesus took accepted to die a death he did not deserve, in order to give the man his spiritual and everlasting life.

When we share of the Lords Supper, we recall the " new covenant" which God was achieved by the blood that Jesus shed on the cross.

An act of Thanksgiving: Luke's Gospel states that during the Last Supper, Jesus gave thanks before encouraging the disciples to share the bread and the cup (Luke 22: 17, 19). To give thanks is to recognize God's good grace (Stag, 1962). When we participate in Lords Supper, we give thanks by recognizing the wonderful grace of God in the completed work of Jesus Christ.

An act of Examination: Paul said that a man should to assess himself before taking the bread and the cup (I Cor. 11: 28). The self-examination refers to the examination of our mind-set within the sharing of Lords Supper, and a discernment of our correct relation with the body of Jesus.

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Reasons for Discrepancies in the Account

There is a problem of identifying the last supper or determining the exact date when it took place between the synoptic and Paul. The three Synoptic Gospels evidently recognize the Last Supper as the Passover (Mark: 12, 14, 16, Matthew 26: 17-19, Luke 22: 7-15). Paul appears to fix the death of Jesus at the time of slaughtering of the Paschal Lamb, hence prior to the Passover Meal (1 Corinthians 5: 7). This variation explained by the fact that, there were two different feasts one coming immediately after the other. For instance, the Passover Feast observed the night after the slaughter of the Paschal lamb and the feast of Unleavened Bread that was celebrated for seven days. The two feasts could be differentiated or referred to as a single eight days feast referred to by the two names.

References

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