

THE STORY

READ THE STORY. EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE.

Chapter 26: The Hour of Darkness

Key Question: Why did Jesus die?

The Last Supper

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Jesus gathered with his disciples to eat the Passover meal on Thursday of his final week. They recalled how Pharaoh refused to believe Moses came from God, despite miraculous signs; how the Israelites painted the blood of a lamb on the top and sides of their homes' doorframes so the destroyer would pass over their homes without bringing death;¹ how God freed the Israelites from slavery to Egypt; and how God led them to the Promised Land.

Before they ate, no servant had washed their feet, which were dusty from walking dirt roads. So Jesus arose from the meal and performed the lowly task.

1. (a) What was Jesus to the disciples (John 13:12–13)? (b) Washing feet was a lowly servant's job. What did Jesus want them to do for each other (13:14–15)? (c) Consider prayerfully if there's an area of service which you've considered beneath you. What do Jesus' words tell us about this attitude (13:15–16)? (d) What does Jesus say will happen if we follow his example (13:17)? (e) In Jesus' time, footwashing was welcomed and necessary. What is an equivalent welcome and needed service² you could do for someone this week?

During the meal, Jesus did something special with the bread and wine.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them,

¹ Exodus 12:21–23.

² The early church treated footwashing as a good deed, not a universal rite: "The heart of Jesus' command is a humility and helpfulness toward brothers and sisters in Christ that may be cruelly parodied by a mere 'rite' of footwashing that easily masks an unbroken spirit and haughty heart" (D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991], 468).

saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” ~Matthew 26:26–28

When Moses confirmed the Book of the Covenant³ with the Israelites, he sacrificed young bulls, sprinkled half their blood on the altar and half on the people who agreed to obey the covenant, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you.”⁴

Jeremiah foretold that God would one day establish a new covenant, for the Israelites had broken the old one.⁵

2. (a) Whose blood would be shed to establish this new covenant (Matthew 26:28a)? (b) What would the pouring out of blood bring (26:28b)?

Jesus told his disciples to eat bread and drink wine in memory of him,⁶ a practice we call Communion.

Final Words

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Jesus continued to teach his disciples.

3. (a) Jesus knew difficult events would soon shake the disciples. What did he tell them to do (John 14:1)? (b) How can you apply these words to a situation you are currently going through?

4. (a) Where was Jesus going and what was he going to do there (14:2)? (b) What did he promise (14:3)? (c) What comfort do these words offer?

³ Today, Christians call the covenant established through Moses the *Old Covenant* and the covenant established through Jesus the *New Covenant*.

⁴ Exodus 24:6–8.

⁵ Jeremiah 31:31–32.

⁶ Luke 22:19.

8. (a) What did Jesus say all the disciples would do that night (Matthew 26:31)? (b) What did Peter declare he would never do (26:33–35)? (c) Jesus knew his disciples wouldn't stand by him. Briefly describe a time someone didn't stand by you, without naming names. What did you learn?

Jesus took Peter, James, and John aside.

9. (a) Was the task Jesus was about to accomplish easy for him (Matthew 26:38)? (b) What can we learn about prayer from Jesus (26:39–42)?

Judas Iscariot arrived with an armed crowd. They arrested Jesus and brought him before the Sanhedrin.⁷ The Jewish leaders looked for false evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death.

10. (a) What did the high priest command Jesus (Matthew 26:63)? (b) Where did Jesus say they would see him in the future (26:64)?⁸

Thus Jesus gave himself a position of heavenly authority, and applied to himself a prophecy from Daniel in which one like a “son of man”⁹ would be given authority, glory, and sovereign power; would be worshipped by people from all nations; and would rule forever.

11. What does Jesus' statement tell us about Jesus (Matthew 26:64)?

⁷ The Sanhedrin was the governing body for the internal affairs of Jews and was made up of Pharisees and Sadducees.

⁸ He combined Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13. See Daniel 7:13–14

⁹ Jesus called himself *the Son of Man*.

Just as Pharaoh refused to believe Moses came from God despite miraculous signs, so the Jewish leaders refused to believe Jesus came from God. They rejected Jesus' claim as blasphemy, and condemned him to death.

Peter & Pilate

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Peter had followed the soldiers to the high priest's house.

12. (a) Peter had assured Jesus he would never deny him. But what happened (Luke 22:60–62)?
- (b) Next week we'll see Jesus forgive and strengthen Peter. Briefly describe what you learned from failing at something you thought you could handle.

They tortured and mocked Jesus throughout the night. Early Friday morning, the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate, the Roman governor.¹⁰ Pilate asked Jesus if he was the king of the Jews and what he had done.

13. Why didn't Jesus want his supporters to fight for him (John 18:36)?

Repeatedly Jesus had taught on the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ Yes, he was the Messiah, but he wasn't there to establish an earthly kingdom, as most Jews expected.

14. How does remembering we belong to a heavenly kingdom help us when we, like Jesus, are treated unfairly?¹²

¹⁰ When describing the Roman execution, John probably used Roman time, in which a day started at midnight, while Mark used Jewish time, in which a day started at daybreak.

¹¹ For example, Matthew 4:17, 4:23, 5:10.

¹² "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Also see Colossians 3:1–4.

Jesus' Crucifixion

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At 9:00 a.m. Friday, Roman soldiers crucified Jesus, the Holy One of God. They nailed his wrists and feet to a wooden cross and lifted him from the earth. He endured excruciating pain and the insults of bystanders and criminals. Then at noon, darkness covered the land. At 3:00, still in darkness, Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

In this prayer, Jesus quoted the first line of Psalm 22. Anyone who recognized the words could have turned to the psalm and read an amazing prophecy of the crucifixion.

15. Compare the following verses and explain how Psalm 22 was fulfilled in Christ:

Matthew 27:35

Psalm 22:16, 18

Matthew 27:39

Psalm 22:7

Matthew 27:43

Psalm 22:8

Matthew 27:46

Psalm 22:1

John 19:28

Psalm 22:15

John 19:30

Psalm 22:31

The prophecy would have encouraged them to trust God as they struggled to understand the dying of the one whom they thought was the Messiah come to rule the world.

However, there was more to Jesus' cry to his Father, for in these words he proclaimed to humankind that he too suffered in darkness without sensing God's presence or hearing God's answer.¹³ Even in this, he became like us.

Shortly after uttering the first line of Psalm 22, Jesus echoed the psalm's last line by crying out, "It is finished."

Jesus died.

Perhaps the spiritual forces of darkness thought the victory won.

But at Jesus' last breath an earthquake shook the land and the curtain that separated humans from the temple's Most Holy Place ripped in two from top to bottom,¹⁴ for something had happened in the heavenly realms: Jesus' torn body had opened the way to the throne of grace in heaven.¹⁵

Jesus' work was finished. With the Father's purpose achieved, light returned to the land.

16. In the midst of our own dark times when we cannot sense God's presence or hear his voice, we must remember that when the Father's work is finished, light returns. (a) What can we learn from Jesus' willingness to drink the cup the Father gave him? (b) What encouragement can we take from Jesus' endurance through darkness?

Although light returned to the land, Jesus' followers could not yet see the parallel of Jesus' last meal with them to the sight before their eyes. They did not comprehend that the blood that dripped from the wooden cross was the blood of the Great Passover Lamb. It was the blood that would protect those who trust in it from death and free them from slavery to sin. It flowed from the body that opened the Way to the heavenly Promised Land.

But we have not reached the end of his story, for Jesus promised that in three days he would rise.

¹³ Though scholars offer many views as to what exactly happened when Jesus uttered this cry, at the least it was a separation of the sense of the Father's presence.

¹⁴ Matthew 27:51.

¹⁵ Hebrews 10:19–20 (see also 9:23–28).