

# Matthew 26:17-19

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-26/matthew-2617-19/>

## *Instructions for Passover*

*Jesus's disciples ask Him on the first day of Unleavened Bread where He wants to keep the Passover. He sends them into the city to find a certain man and deliver a message that Jesus will observe Passover at His house. The disciples follow Jesus's instructions and Passover preparations are made. This short passage also contains important clues to help us piece together the final days and hours of Jesus's life.*

The parallel gospel accounts of this event are found in Mark 14:12-16 and Luke 22:7-13.

See [“The Bible Says Timeline of Jesus's Final 24 Hours”](#) to learn more about the timing and sequencing of this event.

The scriptures of this passage refer to the Jewish holidays of *Passover* and *Unleavened Bread*. Both holy days commemorate God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. And both were commanded by God to be celebrated annually (Exodus 12:14-16; Leviticus 23:4-8).

*Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?”*

Matthew's narrative shifts scenes again. This time Matthew changes from Judas's bargain with the chief priests (Matthew 26:14-18) to *Jesus and His disciples' preparations to eat the Passover meal together*. The word, *Now*, indicates this transition of historical scenes.

This was a natural question for them to ask. *Passover* meals, also called “*Passover Seders*,” required a good deal of preparation for it to be kept.

Matthew establishes the timing of *the disciples' request* with the phrase *on the first day of Unleavened Bread*.

But there is some ambiguity as to what Matthew (and Mark) meant by this phrase (Mark 14:12). *The disciples* are clearly asking *Jesus where He wants to prepare to eat the Passover*, which would indicate that their question was before *Passover* night. Matthew and Mark must not have meant the technical first day of the feast of *Unleavened Bread*, but rather the customary first day.

Technically speaking, the feast of *Unleavened Bread* began on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month of Nisan (Leviticus 23:6), and this feast comes the day **after** *Passover*. *Passover* lambs were to be slaughtered on Nisan 14 (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5).

But it would not make sense for *the disciples* to ask Jesus where He wanted to eat the Passover after it was already over. It would be like asking a citizen of the United States where they wanted to watch the Fourth of July fireworks on July 5.

But Jews thought of *Passover* and *Unleavened Bread* as synonymous terms that celebrated the same event—God’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. These two festivals were back-to-back holy days. And the Jews customarily spoke of these holy days interchangeably. Moreover, Jews customarily spoke of Nisan 14 as the “first day of Unleavened Bread” because they stopped eating leaven on that day in preparation for *the Passover* Meal and the Festival of *Unleavened Bread*.

Matthew and Mark then were speaking customarily, not technically, when they said that the disciples came to Jesus with their request about eating the Passover meal on the first day of Unleavened Bread.

And Luke confirms that this took place on Nisan 14 (*the day* before *Unleavened Bread* technically began) when he reports that *Jesus* sent James and John to secure the place where He would *eat the Passover*. He specifies that this happened on “the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed” (Luke 22:7). The day *the Passover* lamb had to be sacrificed was Nisan 14 (Exodus 12:6; Leviticus 23:5). The Passover meal was that evening. Because Jewish days begin and end at sunset, *the Passover* meal is eaten as the Jewish calendar turns from Nisan 14 to Nisan 15. There is no leaven eaten during this meal, which is another reason why the Jews customarily refer to Nisan 14 as *the first day of Unleavened Bread*.

*Jesus* most likely ate *Passover* on the official day the evening of (Nisan 14-15).

But *He* also may have chosen to celebrate it *the day* prior to the official date (Nissan 13 *instead of Nissan 14*). Moses’s Law allowed (even commanded) those who missed the *Passover* because they were ceremonially unclean or out of town to celebrate *the Passover* on a different date (Numbers 9:10-11). As the *Passover* Lamb, *Jesus* was preparing to become the sacrifice on the day of *Passover* (Nissan 13). Also, if He observed the *Passover* celebration the day prior to *Passover*, *Jesus* might have been demonstrating that *He* was starting something new, which *He* will call the “new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20).

According to Matthew and Mark, *Jesus’s disciples* came to Him on *the first day of Unleavened Bread* and asked Him: “*Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?*”

This was a natural question for them to ask. *Passover* meals, also called “*Passover Seders*,” required a good deal of preparation for it to be kept.

Additionally, there were security matters to be considered as the chief priests plotted to kill *Jesus*. Pulling this off would require planning and forethought.

*Jesus* answered *the disciples’* question about *where* they would *eat the Passover* together with specific instructions.

*He told them: “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”””*

*The city was the city of Jerusalem. The reason the disciples had to go into it was because they were staying in the village of Bethany (Matthew 21:7; Mark 11:11-12) which was “about two miles off” from the city of Jerusalem (John 11:18).*

*The disciples were to find a certain man. The term certain man indicates that Jesus had someone specific in mind that was unknown to the disciples who ran this errand. Mark and Luke both record how Jesus told His disciples to distinguish this man from the throngs of other people in the city: “When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water” (Luke 22:10, also see Mark 14:13). It was considered a servant or woman’s job to carry water pitchers, so this would make the certain man stand out to the disciples. When the disciples found this specific man, the disciples were to follow him to his house and deliver a message to the owner of that house (Mark 14:13-14; Luke 22:10-11).*

We can theorize that a man carrying a pitcher of water could have meant one of two things: either this man was an Essene; or Jesus was using evasive maneuvers to avoid being captured.

Essenes were a mystic, Jewish religious sect that had largely withdrawn from the wider society. They removed themselves from the influence of Pagan cultures, first from the Seleucids (Greek rulers) and later from Rome. Neither did they participate in the Temple ceremonies administered by the Sadducees (Jewish rulers). Instead, the Essenes dedicated themselves to the meditation on and copying of the Jewish scriptures. A monastic community of Essenes lived near the Dead Sea (and were the copyists of the Dead Sea Scrolls—discovered in 1947). But it is believed that the Southwest corner of Jerusalem was the Essene quarter during Jesus’s day. Because there were few women in Essene communities, men performed women’s tasks like carrying water.

A second possible meaning for the man carrying a water pot was that it was a signal as part of a plan. Jesus was aware of the chief priests’ plot against Him (Matthew 26:3-4) and of Judas’s imminent betrayal (Matthew 26:21). He may have been taking safeguards to avoid being detected. The certain man carrying a water pitcher might have been a secret signal known only by a few to allow Jesus to celebrate the festivals with His disciples in Jerusalem. If this was the case, then Jesus was following the advice He taught the disciples to be as “shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16). That Jesus chose to honor a man who was doing a servant’s job could reflect the biblical principle that Jesus will reward those who serve (Matthew 10:41-42; Mark 9:41).

The message the disciples were to deliver to the man carrying water was: *‘The Teacher says, “My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’*

The expression, *The Teacher*, seems to be a not-quite-subtle, but just-subtle-enough code for Jesus.

The statement, *My time is near*, likely meant to communicate that He was “ready to keep the Passover.” It was also another prophetic reference to the time Jesus would be sacrificed as the

ultimate Passover Lamb for Israel (Matthew 26:51; Mark 14:41; Luke 22:53). His *time* was indeed *near*. Within roughly twenty-four hours of saying this, *Jesus* would be dead.

The message, *I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples*, was to confirm to the owner of the *house* that *Jesus* would be keeping *Passover* in his *home*. Because of the conspiracy to kill *Jesus*, it's possible that there were multiple locations prearranged and ready for *Jesus* to secretly *keep the Passover* with His *disciples* throughout *the city*. And that when *the disciples* asked *Jesus* *where He* wanted them to *prepare to keep* it, they were asking Him, which location have you decided upon?

Church tradition holds that the owner of *the house where Jesus kept the Passover with the disciples*—in the “Upper Room”—was the father of Mark, the author of the second Gospel narrative and the ministry partner of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:25).

Matthew concludes this portion of his narrative by summarizing the action: *The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover*. This is Matthew's way of saying that “*The disciples* obeyed *Jesus* and these events unfolded according to plan.” Matthew's remark that they prepared for *Passover* is another explicit indicator suggesting that *Jesus's* last supper was a *Passover Seder*.

Luke reveals that *the two disciples Jesus* sent on this errand were Peter and John (Luke 22:8). They were among His most trusted *disciples*, which may be why *He* sent them to carry out this important and potentially dangerous task. Christ may also have sent other pairings of *disciples* into *the city* to throw His enemies off the trail.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>17</sup> Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?” <sup>18</sup> And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’” <sup>19</sup> The disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover.**