

Book Three
THE KING CROWNED
Chapter Six
SEDERS

By Stephen H. Funck, July 17, 2021

All over Jerusalem and for miles around the smell of lamb cooking filled the air. Charoset, karpas, matzoth and all the rest were being readied for the feast. This was the greatest festival. The great crowd, close to three million¹, packed tight together, excited children, elders remembering, pilgrims from far away reveling in their once in a life time dream come true, even those who had been working hard all day slaughtering lambs, cleaning hides, washing pavements, carrying away the offal were filled with joy at their part in making this all possible.

There were only two places that were not packed tight, filled with rejoicing. The Antonia fortress and the great palace fortress were built to house many more. Each only had a cohort who were watching the activity around them. Even they would be having lamb for dinner. Everyone had lamb this day. The Prefect always invited his top staff to join him. The appropriate exotic entertainment for the night was arranged, The young senator had had the gall to invite a centurion to join them. A lowly centurion. He was not even serving a Roman unit. He served Antipas.²

A week prior in Tiberias the centurion was astounded to receive the invitation. Delighted, disturbed, why him? It was not something he could refuse. He asked his commander. He knew nothing about it, did not understand, but gave him leave to comply. The centurion had not been with the contingent Antipas took to the Passover. Now he was able to follow his family and join the members of their synagog. He had built their synagog building.³ They all were delighted to see him. Duties had permitted him to attend several Passovers before in Jerusalem. Of course he reported to Antipas and informed him why he was in Jerusalem. Antipas and his brother Phillip of Perea were allowed the small postern gate into the southern palace. Across the great plaza

¹ "the people came about him not fewer in number than three millions". Josephus The Wars of the Jews Book II, Ch. 14 ", "amounts to two millions seven hundred thousand and two hundred persons " Flavius Josephus. "The Wars of the Jews; or the history of the destruction of Jerusalem." Book VI Chapter 9:4

David Instone-Brewer Traditions of the Rabbis in the Era of the New Testament vol. 2A: Feasts and Sabbaths: Passover and Atonement. t.Pes.4.15 (Z.4.12): The crowded Passover of King Agrippa "One time Agrippa the King wanted to know how many workers. He said to them, the priests: Set aside for me the kidney from each and every Passover [offering]. And they set aside for him 600,000 pairs of kidneys "-Three hundred thousand Passover lambs suggests a minimum of 5 million adults

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod_Antipas

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Healing_the_centurion%27s_servant

with fountains, pools, trees and plantings was the northern palace the Prefect used. There was nothing so grand in Rome. The centurion wondered if there was anything so grand in the world.⁴

The morning of Passover changed everything for him. He heard Yeshua had been arrested, tried overnight, convicted, crucified. He had been profoundly mistaken. Nothing was as he thought it would be. He would step back, be quiet, show nothing. Many were stunned, distraught. Many others seemed relieved, Yeshua was gone. Centurions obey orders, lead men in battle to carry out orders. It is not their position to evaluate how the battle is to be fought. If the commander is wrong, the battle lost, they may die. If they do not follow orders, nothing will be better. Carry on. He was with his family, all his friends from the synagog for Passover. He would not be celebrating this Passover with them. What would Passover be like in the palace with all the high Roman officials? He had never been in such a place. Even Antipas' palace in Tiberias was above him.

The centurion polished his helmet, sword, breastplate, greaves, until they were even more brilliant. The Roman guard at the main gate gave him a good looking over. The uniform of Galilee was seldom seen on this side. He felt very conspicuous as he was directed up the grand staircase, and thru the palace to the private plaza beyond. A beautiful fountain welcomed him, splashing into a large beautiful pool, three great towers soared over the high walls before him.⁵ He turned around to the palace behind him. Everywhere, carvings, pillars, paintings, statues, plantings. Astounding magnificence. It was everything he had heard of Herod.

Some of the guests preceded him. Servants were plying them with dainties and wine, musicians played. He joined them, introducing himself. They were, as he expected, the Prefect's lead staff. He was far beneath them in rank. They did not know why he was invited, heard only rumor that the young senator had requested it. When they mentioned the senator's name, Titus Flavius Sabinus, he realized why. He saved his father's life in Asia. His father was an honest tax gatherer, for which he was hated and narrowly escaped assassination.⁶

The prefect arrived with the young senator, the rest close behind. They were nine in all, the proper number for the banquet. None of them were in uniform, he felt very out of place, he did not even own a toga. The young man introduced himself and welcomed him. His father had asked him to find him and thank him. The centurion, in his most gracious manner, thanked him for remembering him. And also for inviting him, a mere centurion, to join this august company. The Prefect, Pilate, greeted him and asked him to tell them what he had done to save his life.

Lucian, the centurion, apologized for coming in uniform. He could not help but emphasize that it was because Titus' father was honest that he was hated and nearly assassinated. They all nodded their heads. Life was like that. There was no safety. Either good or bad, someone would be your bitter enemy.

They asked how long he had been here and why he was in Galilee's army.

"Fifteen years, I was hired to train Antipas' army in the best Roman tactics. I carry the rank of centurion officially, but I am unofficially compensated as a junior tribune.⁷ Antipas' army and the Judean are superb

⁴ Most of the area this covered has not been built over. It is the Garden of the Arminian Monastery south of the citadel, tower of David. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Palace_\(Jerusalem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Palace_(Jerusalem))

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phasael_Tower http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_of_David

⁶ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titus_Flavius_Sabinus_\(consul_AD_52\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titus_Flavius_Sabinus_(consul_AD_52)), [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titus_Flavius_Sabinus_\(father_of_Vespasian\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Titus_Flavius_Sabinus_(father_of_Vespasian))

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus_Pilus <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auxilia>

warriors. Their cavalries, Perea's especially, are excellent. They get enough practice with the raiders from the east."

"A Roman army would tear them apart."

"They would relish the opportunity to meet Rome in combat. I do not want to see it. Varus lost his three legions to Arminius. Arminius was trained in Rome.⁸ We train the army here. Do not underestimate them."⁹

"They don't know what war means."

"They are undefeated. There is a story, well known here. Near Babylon are some Jewish bandits.¹⁰ The Parthian king Artabanus III tried to eliminate them. Those bandits, untrained, defeated the best Parthian soldiers. In order to make peace, they were given official control over their area."

Titus said, "Back in Rome there was talk about all the gold here in the Temple. Some thought Rome should take it away. The Jews would not be able to stop them."

Lucian replied, "They know what they have. How close they are to Arabia. The armies of Parthia are much closer than the armies of Rome. They are ready to keep what they have. There are few Roman soldiers, only six cohorts here. Rome depends on Galilee, Perea and Judea for protection, not the other way around."

Titus laughed.

Lucian continued, "Before the new fortification were made, they withstood a siege of 50,000 Arabs. Antipas' wife is a daughter of their king. Their army fought at the side of Varus when he was here."¹¹

"Pompey took Jerusalem.¹² Crassus pillaged the Temple. He took all the gold."¹³

"They were divided against themselves. Crassus broke his vow. He was immediately defeated and killed. They are sure it was their God's punishment. And that was before the present walls were built. They won't be tricked again, against a united people, it would not be the same."

"Rome would pen them up and wear them down."

"The whole country, all the people would fight as one. I do not think our army would be able to survive here long enough. This is their home. They would fight for their homes and their God. Their God promises them victory."

⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminius>

⁹ [Josephus, Antiquities 18.181](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminius) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aretas_IV_Philopatris The father of Herod's legal wife invaded and devastated his army. The Galileans considered it God's punishment. He and Herodias were exiled by the Emperor Caligula to Spain.

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anilai_and_Asinai [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artabanus_III_\(of_Parthia\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artabanus_III_(of_Parthia))

¹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aretas_III http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aretas_IV_Philopatris

¹² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_\(63_BC\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_(63_BC))

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marcus_Licinius_Crassus <https://www.quora.com/If-Caesar-led-instead-of-Crassus-could-the-Romans-have-defeated-the-Parthians>

The tribune, commander of the cohort in Antonia, put a halt to the discussion by saying, "Master Titus, I will show you the forces they have here. It would be good training for you to calculate what Rome would need to carry out your idea."

"Yes, I would like to see what is here. We have heard Masada is spectacular."¹⁴

"You will not be disappointed. The strongest fortresses in the Empire are here."

Lucian looked around at the statues and mosaics. He was amazed. He had to comment. They were the first nudes, male and female, some erotic, he had seen in this land. They were forbidden by the Jews, hated. Pilate explained, Herod had everyone who complained killed, so no one said anything. Herod copied the finest of Roman work. Actually he did his best to exceed it. Pilate added, he did not allow the locals to come inside where they could see them. They refused to set foot inside anyway.

The others began to make crude comments about the Jews and their prudery. The Jews did not know how good sex was. A Roman could have anyone anytime he wanted. The more the better. They knew what life was about. Crazy god, why should he care to make rules about what a man did with his own phallus. Everywhere else in the Empire, there were statues of Priapus standing in gardens, shop doors and crossroads. That was a god to worship.¹⁵

Lucian understood their attitude, but he was embarrassed by it. He felt he had to say something. He had lived in Galilee a long time and came to value their God, the wisdom of His statutes, commandments. "Well, I certainly know what you mean, their God is very different than anything we know. I've been here a long time. It took me a long time to grasp what their God was like. I thought it would be wise if I learned something about their religion, so I would go to their synagogues. It did help me in my position."

The tribune continued to Lucian, "You said you have come to understand what their god is like. We have never been able to make any sense of what they say or do."

"Tribune, their God has nothing similar to any other god. He is unique. Where to start?"

"Start with sex. Why is he against it?"

"He is not. He created man and woman. They think it is wonderful for husbands and wives."

"You married a Galilean?"

"Yes. I live here. Many are happy to think I am one of them."

"The army of Galilee lives in Galilee."

"The Roman army fights for Rome. These men will fight for their family, their home, their God."

"So sex is only for husbands and wives? Soldiers are married. This is too much. The world is not like that. Their god does not know what life is like. He asks the impossible."

"This world is evil. Nothing is safe. We are attacked by evil and we do evil. God is righteous. His will for us is righteous." Lucian paused to collect his thoughts. "His commandments, His will, is total perfection, always. Perfection is husband and wife to perfectly enjoy each other. Anything else is less than the ideal."

¹⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masada>

¹⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Priapus>

“Perfection or else nothing.” “My wife is in Bithynia, so nothing for me?” “He is a male god? He has no woman?”

“He is one. ‘Hear O Israel, The Lord, your God is one God. Him alone are you to serve’. He is complete in Himself. Needs nothing beyond Himself. Perfect.”

“He demands to be the only one to worship. No other god demands exclusive worship.”

“He claims He is the only real God. All the rest are something men made up. Not many Romans really believe in them any more.”

“Augustus did everything he could to encourage devotion to the old rites.”

“Modern times. We know so much more today, Jupiter, Venus does not move anyone anymore. Sol driving a chariot across the sky every day. The gods are too small. Like giant men. Foolish, flawed, no better than us. Who needs gods like that.”

“So you don’t worship our Roman gods?”

“I think I believe in them about as much as most Romans.” Lucian continued, “The Hebrew God is big enough. Creator of the heavens and earth. He doesn’t live in them. He is before, will be after they are gone. He claims He created every nation and tribe, rules the destinies of all.”

“That is too much. One god watching over everyone, everywhere.”

“A real God would be able to. He knows even the secrets of each man’s heart.”

“Lucian, you have been here too long. Your mind is twisted.”

The butler came for the prefect, a member of the Sanhedrin insisted on seeing him immediately.

Some of the party had gone on to the baths, and they followed them. No real Roman could really be a Roman without the Roman Bath. Every palace Herod built had wondrous baths. Using them made being the Prefect almost pleasant for a time. He liked to invite his compatriots to share those baths. They were social activity. Pleasant. Everything was prepared, full staff of attendants, masseuses, waiting, more than enough hot water. When the Prefect was not in residence, the steward and high staff enjoyed the bath also. Pilate’s wife had relaxed there this morning.¹⁶

Titus hated the bath. He was not so well endowed. He had to undress, be seen. He overcompensated by being over bold and aggressive. They noticed and understood. He could be dangerous to them. They continued talking in the Tepidarium as they sat or lay on the heated benches. The bath attendants oiled and massaged them.

Lucian reveled in the bliss, old good memories. His peace was broken when one asked him what made the Jews so stubborn. He asked what do you mean? His questioner, the others too, complained, all the other peoples get along with us. Most are happy to be part of our empire. These Jews hate everything about us, fight, argue about everything.

Lucian nodded. “They don’t hate you, don’t hate Rome. It is just the world is upside down. The world is supposed to be under them. Only God above them. Their God is God of gods, Lord of lords, King of kings. He

¹⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_bath <http://www.vroma.org/~bmcmanus/baths.html>

always has and always will deliver them from anyone else's rule. To accept Rome's rule is to reject their God. If they do that, they are afraid their God will destroy them."

The prefect returned.¹⁷

His steward said, "That's what we said, they hate us."

"The only good thing Rome can do is leave. Maybe, if a way could be found for them to have dominion over Rome, Rome's whole empire."

"That's impossible."

Lucian admitted, "They know their God will rule all the nations of the earth. The Temple will be His throne. When Messiah comes, all the nations of the earth will flow here. The ends of the earth will be blessed with perfect peace, perfect justice, perfect righteousness. He will take care of all."

The prefect commented, "So you say it is hopeless."

Lucian replied, "Ruling over them is hopeless. But if it is a matter of getting along, they are wonderful, honest, generous, good friends. At least most of them. The high and mighty, those who want to be famous, like to argue so they can show how great they are."

"Those are the only ones I have dealings with," Pilate said.

"I don't know your situation. In combat, if a man reaches too far, he exposes himself, I can take him down. 'Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall'."

Pilate nodded, Lucian was wise. He asked if he had been to Passover dinners? If he knew how they were conducted? Lucian admitted he had. Pilate asked him if he would lead the ceremony tonight. In the past they just ate the proper foods. Lucian said he would do the best he could. After roasting in the Caldarium, they stopped the heat in the Frigidarium. They relaxed, talking in the plaza until the banquet. Pilate had his man servant bring Lucian a toga.

Titus asked a Tribune why Jews throughout the Empire were exempt from military service?

He answered, "It is more than that, Caesar granted no soldier could be raised or quartered in Judea. It is why we have only six cohorts here. Rome does not control, or pay for, the armies here. So it is a savings for us."

Titus asked how that came about. The prefect continued. "It was Herod. He was crafty. When Mark Anthony looked to be the winner, Herod and his army were his friend. You should see the date groves and palace by the Jordan. Mark Anthony offered Cleopatra anything she wanted in the world. The only thing she could think of was Herod's date orchards. Anthony leased them for her. Anyway, when it looked like Anthony and Cleopatra would lose, Herod switched sides. He drove a hard bargain with Octavian. That is why the Jews are exempt till this day. Rome has real power. I have real power and use it. Judea is worth a great deal to Rome. We want to get as much out of here as possible without unnecessary problems, expense."¹⁸

¹⁷ [John 19:39-42](#)

¹⁸ [Paul L. Maier in "Pontius Pilate" ISBN-13: 9780825432965 reports page 56 "Jews throughout the Empire were exempt from military service". Page 57 Caesar granted that "no soldier could be raised or quartered in Judea". That infers that they had their own military under their own control.](#)

The butler announced that the banquet was ready and invited them into the triclinium.¹⁹

At the Palace of the High Priest

It had been a long grueling day, coming after an even worse night. All the leading priests, the entire Sanhedrin were exhausted beyond enduring. Now before them was the Passover dinner, the Seder. The highest, most holy, most important event of all.

Annas ben Seth²⁰ was getting old. He felt ancient. He was the head of the family, the most important family in the nation, the most important family in the world. Stay strong. By the power of God, remember God placed you as His High Priest, you are responsible to Him. Conduct yourself with all propriety.

The great court of the palace looked magnificent. The lamps hanging in the colonnades around reflected off the polished marble walls into the center.²¹ No offensive images did not mean that the mosaics on the walls and floors, the paintings and embellishments were as not fine as anywhere. Gold, silver, precious stones gleamed. Every tray, every lamp polished. After sundown, with a full moon, the sky above was dark yet the court was filled with light. Looking it over, tired as he was, Annas was pleased. He almost was looking forward to the evening.

Annas and his sons sat in the alcove, the head of the court, with them were the current High Priest, son in law, Joseph ben Caiaphas, and the steward Malchus. The alcove cushions were covered with the finest fabrics.²² Wives, children, high retainers and more were coming in, filling the great court. Bubbling with excitement, dressed in their finest clothes, their best jewelry, they knew they were the top. Some of the women were dressed in the latest Roman styles with hair done to match. Some others showing old piety, were in Judean style, yet ostentatious in the finest cloth.

The butler knew of the events of the night before. He had to make all the arrangements for everyone's comfort. Still he and the staff had not spent the day leading the worship. They paid their respects to God as much as they could without interfering with their work. Some even got some rest. When Annas mentioned to the butler how tired he was, the butler suggested His holiness, could, if he felt so, have his sons lead parts of the seder. It would even be good practice for them. Annas deeply appreciated his counsel. He had been too tired to think of it. He told the butler to announce the beginning of the seder.²³

¹⁹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triclinium>

²⁰ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annas <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/1554-annas>

²¹ This location is modeled on the Court at Herod's place at Macharius, where Salome danced. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machaerus> <http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/machaerus-beyond-the-beheading-of-john-the-baptist/> The Palace of Annas is the the palace of the Head of State. The palace described in the following, I expect, is more typical of the High Priestly families. <http://www.ritmeyer.com/2012/02/22/discovering-the-jerusalem-from-the-time-of-jesus/> <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justintaylor/2012/08/28/is-this-the-high-priestly-palace-where-jesus-stood-trial/> In browser search bar enter: [https://Jerusalem palatial mansion](https://Jerusalem%20palatial%20mansion). This opens a gallery of images to the grandest house discovered so far. Caiaphas operated in the official position as Head of State and Temple, while Annas was considered the Head. The banquet would have been held in the largest court. Since many there were of Annas' family, he would have been seated as the Head of the Seder.

²² [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divan_\(furniture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divan_(furniture))

²³ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seder> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/11933-passover>

The butler signaled to the musicians in the gallery and waited until they finished their piece, then he called for the attention of all. Every circle had two dark lamps in the middle. The serving staff were at the doors with lights in hand. With full voice the Butler proclaimed, "Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel yom tov." "Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has taught us the way of holiness through the commandments, commanding us to kindle the lights of the Passover festival."

The assembled guests replied. "Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, shehecheyanu v'ki'manu v'higi-anu laz'man hazeh." "Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has sustained us, maintained us and enabled us to reach this moment in life." The staff brought the lights to each group for them to light their lamps.

Annas took a deep breath with his best public voice began. "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Now the heavens and all their host were completed; God finished the work of creation on the seventh day. God then blessed the seventh day, imbuing it with holiness because on that day God ceased creating."

"Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine. Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, Who chose us for a unique relationship, lifting us who know the language of creation above those who speak an ordinary language, enabling us to encounter holiness through Your precepts and commandments, giving us lovingly holidays for joy, festivals and special times for celebration, particularly this Passover, this time of freedom given in love, this sacred gathering, this re-enactment of our going out from Egypt. It is You who has chosen us, You who has shared Your holiness with us in a manner different than with other peoples. For with festive revelations of Your holiness, happiness and joy, You have granted us lovingly and willingly. Praised are you, Adonai, Who imbues with holiness, Israel and the sacred moments of the year."

The cup was raised in every group and all drank the first cup of wine. Then the group observed the second action, the washing of hands. They passed a water pitcher and bowl around, each pouring a few drops of water on the hands of the next, catching the drops in the bowl.

Annas again called out, "Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who creates the fruit of the earth." The guest dipped a piece of parsley in the dish of salt water and ate.

"This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are needy come and celebrate the Passover with us." Annas knew his voice was spent and asked his son Eleazar to continue.

Eleazar took the middle matzoh of the three before him, broke off a piece, wrapped the larger half in a cloth and gave it to the butler. "We break the matzah as we broke the chains of slavery, and as we break chains which bind us today. This is the bread of affliction, which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need, come and celebrate."

The servants refilled the wine cups and Annas' namesake, the youngest son recited the four questions.

"Why is this night of Passover different from all other nights of the year?

On all other nights, we eat either leavened or unleavened bread, why on this night do we eat only matzah?

On all other nights, we eat vegetables of all kinds, why on this night must we eat bitter herbs?

On all other nights, we do not dip vegetables even once, why on this night

do we dip greens into salt water and bitter herbs into sweet haroset?"

Annas motioned to Eleazar to continue. "We were slaves in Egypt and the Lord freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Had not the holy one liberated our people from Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children, would still be enslaved.

"At first our forefathers worshiped idols, but then the Omnipresent brought us near to divine service, as it is written: 'Joshua said to all the people: so says the Lord God of Israel--your fathers have always lived beyond the Euphrates River, Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor; they worshipped other gods. I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river and led him through all the land of Canaan. I multiplied his family and gave him Isaac. To Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau; to Esau I gave Mount Seir to inherit, however Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.

"Praised be He who keeps His promise to Israel; praised be He. The Holy One, blessed be He, predetermined the time for our final deliverance in order to fulfill what He had pledged to our father Abraham in a covenant, as it is written: 'He said to Abram, your descendants will surely sojourn in a land that is not their own, and they will be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years; however, I will punish the nation that enslaved them, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth.

"A wandering Aramean was my father, who went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number. And there we multiplied, becoming a great people, strong and numerous. But the Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us, setting us to hard labour. Finally, when we cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors, Adonai heard our voice, saw our affliction, saw our toil and our oppression. Then Adonai brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm with great awe, marvelous signs and with wonders.

"With seventy souls your ancestors went down to Egypt, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky. The children of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and became mighty, and the land was full of them. They set taskmasters over them in order to oppress them with their burdens; the people of Israel built Pithom and Raamses as store cities for Pharaoh. God heard their groaning; God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

"The Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, with great awe, miraculous signs and wonders. Has God ever attempted to take unto Himself a nation from the midst of another nation by trials, miraculous signs and wonders, by war and with a mighty hand and outstretched arm and by awesome revelations, just as you saw the Lord your God do for you in Egypt, before your eyes?

"These are the Plagues that the holy one, blessed be He, brought upon Egypt." After Eleazar mentioned each one the whole assembly repeated it with one loud voice.

"Blood, Frogs, Lice, Beasts, Cattle, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness, Slaying of First Born."

Eleazar raised the dish with a leg of lamb for the people to see and said:

"Our ancestors ate the Passover because the holy one, Blessed be He, 'passed over' the houses of our ancestors in Egypt, as it is written in the Torah: 'And You shall say, It is the Passover offering for Adonai, who passed over the houses of the Israelites saving us in Egypt but struck the houses of the Egyptians.'"

He then raised the matzah plate and said:

“And they baked the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt into matzah - cakes of unleavened bread - which had not risen, for having been driven out of Egypt they could not tarry, and they had made no provisions for themselves.”

For the maror, he continued:

“And they embittered their lives with servitude, with mortar and bricks without straw, with every form of slavery in the field and with great torment.”

Annas indicated that his son Jonathan should continue. He had been getting very restless. Jonathan introduced the Hallel, saying:

“Therefore we are obligated, to thank, sing the Hallel, praise, glorify, exalt, honor, bless, elevate and raise our voices for joy to the holy one, Blessed be He, Who performed all these miracles for our ancestors and therefore for us! You brought us from human servitude to freedom, from sorrow to joy, for a time of mourning to a festive day, from deep darkness to great light and from slavery to redemption! In Your presence we renew our singing as in ancient days: Hallelujah. Sing Hallel to God.”

The assembly raised their cups of wine and sang:

“When Israel came forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;
Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion.

The sea saw it, and fled; the Jordan turned backward.

The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like young sheep.

What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleest? thou Jordan, that thou turnest backward?

Ye mountains, that ye skip like rams; ye hills, like young sheep?

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters. ²⁴

Jonathan said the blessing for the second cup of wine: “Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has redeemed us and our fathers from Egypt and enabled us to reach this night. Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.” After they drank the second cup, he continued with the blessing for hand washing.

“Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has taught us the way of holiness through commandments, commanding us to wash our hands.” All passed the pitcher and bowl around again.

Jonathan raised the top of the three matzoth high and proclaimed: “Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who provides sustenance from the earth.” Then holding the top and middle matzoth, he continued, “Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has taught us the way of holiness through commandments, commanding us to eat matzah.”

The whole assembly broke a matzah in their group and shared it.

“Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has taught us the way of holiness through commandments, commanding us to eat the bitter herb.” Then all dipped a piece of the bread into the dish of horseradish and ate.

FINALLY. the banquet meal was served and the small dishes taken away.

In the Palace Kitchen

Herod built the palace for the government of the nation. It housed many hundreds, thousands of bureaucrats, the national armory and great storage magazines. The west side of the fortress had barracks and stables sufficient for a legion and alae of cavalry.²⁵ A great palace requires a very large service staff and kitchens that can feed thousands. The palaces were emptied when the Romans took over, most stayed in Caesarea, and the Sanhedrin moved the bureaucrats out. Most of the time there was only half a cohort and a small Roman staff. When the prefect came for the great festivals, the staff trebled and soldiers doubled. Some service staff grumbled but all were happy they had actual useful work to do. Anyone who is an accomplished palace cook, able to present fine banquets, wants to do more than feed housekeeping staff. The housekeepers do not enjoy keeping up empty rooms either.

Today the prefect was giving the finest banquet, so they were showing off what great cooks they were. Each dainty for the gathering in the plaza was a little work of art. In addition to the prefect's affair upstairs, the palace steward lead a Seder for the palace staff in the kitchens. The feast downstairs would not quite be as great as the one upstairs. It would still be the greatest feast the staff would enjoy for the year. There were so many crowding into the kitchens that it was difficult for the cooks. Happy grumbling. There was hope, speculation. Would the wife of the prefect attend this year? She came before. She was so high and lofty a person. Roman nobility here in the kitchens. Most had only seen her in the distance. Few had tasks that brought them near her. She was always polite, gracious, beautiful. She smiled when she tried to talk with them. She was not very good at Aramaic and few of them were good at Latin and Greek. They were thrilled, honored she treated them as people, not lowly servants beneath her notice.

Claudia Procula²⁶ was lonely in Jerusalem. There were no Roman women. No Roman man except her husband was wise or safe to talk with. She had their maid, her books and the new man servant. In Caesarea there were more Romans, some women of high enough rank she could associate with. There it was much more relaxed, even a theater, games. In Jerusalem, her husband was bombarded with issues, trials, challenges, busy, distracted, on edge. She felt so much better when she was around people. It was funny how awed the servants were with her. They made her feel like the queen of the world. She spent most of her days reading. She didn't enjoy hand work. She had started reading their holy books, Pilate didn't know. She couldn't read Hebrew, but they all had Greek versions. In Caesarea, she had been able to cultivate some Judean women and learned much of their religion.

She came. As she approached the rooms hushed with whispers. As she entered the great kitchen, the steward and chief of the kitchen,²⁷ greeted her, bowing low almost to the ground. The steward brought the chair for her to sit on. Chairs were exclusively for high officials. She knew no one would be comfortable if she did not take the chair. They were all so obviously thrilled. She felt so loved and all she did was be herself, unworthy of

²⁵ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Palace_\(Jerusalem\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Palace_(Jerusalem)) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ala_\(Roman_cavalry_unit\)#Alae](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ala_(Roman_cavalry_unit)#Alae) The documented information is sparse, I have added features that would be normal from Herod's other palaces and from the central fortress palace of a nation's king.

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Claudia_Procula

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brigade_de_cuisine This is more modern but gives an idea of a palace kitchen.

such adoration. Indeed, they had been waiting for her. The steward had her watched to see if she was preparing to come and a runner brought the news. He had been waiting to begin the Seder until she arrived.

The Triclinium

The Triclinium overlooked the plaza on one side and the other opened in to a hall where the entertainment would be. The prefect was in the center, Titus on his right and his assistant on the left, the two tribunes were on the side couches closest to the head, then secretary, treasurer, steward, with Lucian at the far left furthest from the head. All in their proper position of rank. Before them on the stands were the necessary dishes for the Seder.

Pilate announced to the group that Lucian would lead them this night in the Jewish ceremonies. Lucian explained, he did know some of the way the locals in Galilee celebrated. The great leaders in Jerusalem would conduct their Passover, with great style and formality. It was considered a good thing if a non Jew joined them. He encouraged them to accept, if they were invited.

The first thing to do was to light two lamps. This was the high honor and the right of the materfamilias.²⁸ Lucian asked the prefect who best would have that honor? Pilate indicated his steward, of course. As the steward lit the lamps, Lucian said, "The materfamilia would say something like this: 'Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who have commanded us to light the festival lamps.' The family, guests, would reply, 'Praised are You, King of the universe who has brought us to this moment in life'."

Titus laughed, "They call their god, 'king of the universe'. They have high opinion of themselves."

Lucian smiled, "Yes, they do, their God is the greatest, makes them the greatest." He picked up the wine cup and said, "They call this making holy the Name of God. One thing you have to relearn if you have any hope of understanding them, is that what they mean by holy is nothing like what we mean by holy. Holiness to them is absolute perfection, righteousness, pure as light. Their God makes them holy by His holiness. 'Praised are You, Lord of the Universe, who created the fruit of the vine. Praised are You, Adonai our God, Who chose us to be Your people, teaching us holiness through Your commandments, giving us festivals for celebration, commanding this re-enactment of our going out from Egypt. You have chosen us, You have given Your holiness to us. Praised are You, Adonai, Who fills Israel and the year with holiness."

Titus, laughed and challenged Lucian. "You must have become one of them. How come you know all the words?"

Lucian explained. "Many of the words are standard phrases used over and over in different contexts. It all fits in a set order. If you keep the order the words fall into place." He asked them, "Do you know what happened, what event passover commemorates?"

Some did somewhat, some really did not understand. Lucian explained "The events around Passover were the defining memories for the people, a little like their Moses is our Romulus, the founder of the nation."

²⁸ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mater_familias

He raised the cup and said: "Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine," and indicated that all were to drink.

"Next is washing hands. I do not remember that they say anything for this. They take a pitcher and pour water over the hands of the person next to them, catching it in a bowl that is passed around." So they did that. "In front of us is some parsley and a little dish of salted water. They dip the parsley in the water and eat it. It is to remind them of the salt tears they cried when they were slaves in Egypt. 'Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the earth'.

"This next doesn't make sense to me, you see the napkin here." He picked it up. "It has three matzot. For seven days, their week, they only eat unleavened bread. They take the middle matzah, break it and hide the larger piece until after the banquet meal. The children find it and it is eaten as the last bit of food. They call unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, they ate in Egypt. Let all who are hungry come and eat. Let all who are in need, come and celebrate Passover.

"This second cup of wine is the cup of the telling of the story. They say, 'We were slaves in Egypt and the Lord freed us from Egypt with a mighty hand. Had not the Holy One freed our people from Egypt, then we, our children, and our children's children would still be slaves'." He lifted the cup. "Their God made a covenant with them and saved them from all who tried to destroy them throughout history. Rome, we, are temporary. They are confident their God will remove us."

"They repeat this saying: 'A wandering Aramean was my father, who went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number. And there we multiplied, becoming a great people, strong and numerous. But the Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us, setting us to hard labour. Finally, when we cried out to Adonai, the God of our ancestors, Adonai heard our voice, saw our affliction, saw our toil and our oppression. Then Adonai brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; with great awe, marvelous signs and with wonders.'"

Titus asked, "What is this Adonai?"

Lucian smiled, "They think it is blasphemy to misuse the actual name of their God, so they won't say it at anytime. So instead of saying His name, they say Lord, in their language, Adonai."

"I am sure you noticed they never give up, unbelievably stubborn. They were slaves in Egypt for 400 years before their God finally saved them. They were exiles in Babylon for 70 years before they were delivered. They are confident their God will save them sometime, somehow. If they do not lose faith.

"The Egyptians, the Pharaoh, did not want to lose their slaves, so their God forced them. He sent Moses who commanded Pharaoh to let the people go or God would send plagues. It took ten plagues before Pharaoh surrendered. The last was the killing of all the first born in Egypt, including the Pharaoh's son. The leader mentions each plague, the guests repeat them. Follow me, pretend you are Judean.

"Blood. Blood

Frogs. Frogs

Lice. Lice

Beasts. Beasts

Cattle plague. Cattle plague

Boils. Boils

Hail. Hail

Locusts. Locusts

Darkness. Darkness

Slaying the First Born. Slaying the first born.

“The night of the last plague, Moses told the people to kill a lamb and put its blood on the door posts and lintel. They were to dress for travel, make unleavened bread, eat the bread and lamb as the angel of death passed over, killing all the first born of Egypt. The maror, bitter herbs, remind them of the bitterness of the slaves’ life. At dawn they left, taking the plunder of the Egyptians. So they remember and know they will be delivered forever.”

Pilate commented, “There is nothing like absolute confidence to make people absolutely unreasonable.” Lucian nodded in agreement.

“Being delivered by their God also makes them obligated to serve and obey. Actually they consider that they would be obligated even if He had done much less. In Galilee they sing: ‘It would have been enough’.

Had He given Sabbath to us --this day’s for rest, not for commerce, but not brought us to Mount Sinai,
it would have been enough.

Had He brought us to Mount Sinai through the desert, it was so dry and not given us instruction,
it would have been enough.

Had He given us the Torah where we sang and danced the Hora and not led us into Israel,
it would have been enough.

Had He led us into Israel and not built for us the Temple,
it would have been enough.

Had He built for us the Temple so to pray we do assemble, but had not made wine,
it would have been enough.

“Therefore they are obligated, to thank, sing praise, glorify, exalt, honor, bless the Holy One, Who performed all these miracles for their ancestors and for them! He brought us from slavery to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to festival, from darkness to light! In Your presence we renew our singing as in ancient days: Sing praise to God.

“They also sing:

When Israel came forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language;
Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His dominion.

The sea saw it, and fled; the Jordan turned backward.

The mountains skipped like rams, the hills like young sheep.

What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleest? thou Jordan, that thou turnest backward?

Ye mountains, that ye skip like rams; ye hills, like young sheep?

Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob;

Who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

“The crossing of the Red Sea and covenant at Sinai aren’t mentioned in tonight’s dinner, but they are part of the whole. They left Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. They say God gave it to their ancestor Abraham.

They are the children of Abraham. Think of Aeneas leaving Troy long before we came to Rome. Pharaoh changed his mind and sent the army to bring them back. At the Red Sea, God made a path for them on dry ground, when the Egyptians followed, the sea covered them. Then they went to Mount Sinai and God made a covenant with them. He gave them His commandments and they promised to serve and obey.

“Now we get to drink that second cup of wine sitting in front of us. ‘Praised are You, Adonai, Lord of the Universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.’ Again we wash our hands before the meal. This time there is a saying: ‘Blessed are You, O Lord God, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with Your commandments, and commanded us the washing of hands.’” They passed the pitcher and bowl.

Lucian picked up the matzah and said, “Praised are You, Adonai, Lord of the Universe, Who brings forth sustenance from the earth. Take a piece of the matzah and dip it in the dish of horseradish and eat. Remember the harshness of slavery. Praised are You, Adonai, Lord of the Universe, Who sanctified us with His commandment to eat the bitter herb.

“Now after all this, we are to eat the festival meal. Command the butler to begin the banquet. By the way there is still more to come after we eat. It is shorter and then comes the entertainment. What they have is nothing like what has been prepared for us.”

At the Palace of the High Priest

The butler announced that after the banquet, the children were to follow him to the courtyard. There they could find a piece of afikomen for each group. The children were also invited to join in the Red Sea dance afterward, dancing with the Children of Abraham as they passed through the waters. Then he announced the festival banquet was served. The servants waiting at the doors began bringing in the first course. The musicians took up their station, the lead singer, a woman with a glorious voice began the first song. There were even some who stopped eating, talking and listened. She was the best vocalist in the nation, backed by the best musicians. Everything was magnificent, as appropriate, for the greatest state dinner of the year.

Annas, those at the head of the court, talked of the great events of the week and the week to come. The major concern was the attitudes and support from the great houses of the priestly families. To maintain their position, they had to manage their friends and control their enemies. “Such a disappointment, Barabbas had finally been caught and we had to let him go.” “We will just have to catch him again.” “It was worth it.” “They had taken care of that laborer from Galilee.” “He wouldn’t bother them any more.”

Annas’ son Theophilus²⁹ said, “False prophets should be expected. What was worse was members of the Sanhedrin taking their side against the House of God. Something had to be done with Joseph and Nicodemus.”

His brother Jonathan suggested, “They should be removed from the council.” They all agreed. It would be done. “It was a pity they could not be punished more than that.”

Joseph ben Caiaphas added, “There was another to deal with, Lazarus. He was the key in the attack on God’s House and he is master of the sacred oil. We have to take action.”

“He was supposed to be killed.”³⁰ “Is this necessary now that the leader is dead?”

²⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theophilus_ben_Ananus

³⁰ John 12:10

Annas said, "It is enough to remove him from his position. Immediately!" Again they all agreed.

Joseph replied, "As soon as the Sabbath was over, I will have Lazarus removed from the house of the master of the oil. The leaders of that rabble stayed there. With Lazarus gone, the rest will be evicted from the oil press as well."

"Good, the Lord of the storm winds has scattered them." "Blown away." "Our gracious God has blessed our Passover with success." "We have served Him with honor."

"Didn't some men warn that magician said he would come back from the dead in three days?" "Do you think his followers might steal his body?" "The end could be worse than the beginning." "Magician and magician helpers." "The tomb has to be sealed and a guard set." "A Roman guard."

Annas ordered, "It is late. Ask Pilate in the morning. The guard must look at the face, be certain the magician is still there, before they seal the tomb."³¹

Annas felt so tired and there were tomorrow's celebrations to come. He told Joseph, he would not go with them to cut the first sheaf of barley. He would rest and wait for them for the ceremonies at the Temple. Joseph said he expected there would be others doing the same. Last night had been exhausting and they had no time today to rest.

The Triclinium

The butler announced to the kitchen that the banquet was to begin. The serving man and maid carried the trays and set the first course, poached mullet with tiny oysters, expensive garum, asparagus and pears.³² He also told the entertainers to begin. They began with quiet songs and instrumental pieces. Later they would show their abilities. The best, of course, would be after the eating was over. They sang, played music and danced, very well. Their owner had bought them from the finest establishments in other lands. It was hard to find good stock in Judea - purists. There was a red haired girl with spots on her face and body, many found fascinating. The most striking was tall, black as obsidian, angular, her oiled body glistened. She looked like a Nubian queen, fierce. It had not good for her to be on the losing side in a royal conflict. Some men were not brave enough to claim her services. Others were fascinated with her female circumcision.³³ The yellow haired boy had been costly. Like the red haired girl, they were rare in the markets. He had been so frightened at first, he had been hard to train. Only the threat of being castrated, sold to a low class shop, the toy of brutes, got him to comply. Their owner brought his seven finest. His inn across from the palace was the best in the city. The sophisticated clientele from distant lands told him it was as fine as any. His staff had the finest clothing, jewelry, excellent coiffeur and cosmetics, skilled in all erotic acts. As Passover neared, the end of the week, business slowed to nothing. If he had not had this affair, he would have had no business for the day.

From the delights continually being served, they never would have guessed that another banquet was being served in the kitchen. The foods barely distracted them from their conversation. Titus was comparing this

³¹ Matthew 27:62ff.

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Roman_cuisine <http://pass-the-garum.blogspot.co.uk> http://resourcesforhistory.com/Roman_Food_in_Britain.htm <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/petronius-satyricon-feast.asp>

³³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_circumcision

with the great banquets he attended in Rome. It was presentable, a little lower than ordinary. But this was a distant province. Pilate was of the same opinion. There were limits to what he could get.

The men went back to the conversation at the baths, intending to challenge Lucian. They were watching the entertainers move, anticipating the excitement, the delights, to follow. "Lucian look, how can anyone think there can be anything wrong with what we see?" "They are the best there is." "They know how to really please a man." "Praise the great god Priapus." Lucian looked and remembered whores of long ago. He had only heard tales of what was available for those with large purses. He knew, he could have his choice, actually could have what no one else claimed. He did have the lowest rank. They were all magnificent. How would they be divided up?

"Well, Lucian, what do you have to say, now?" He shook his head. He would rather face three men at the same time with swords. They were right. This was good, very good.

"Remember what I said. The Hebrew God is perfect. His will is absolute perfection, always. Very good is not the same as perfect." He paused, prayed? "Their God is righteous and His will is that all of us are always perfect, righteous in everything."

They laughed. "Lucian, it doesn't get any better than this, anywhere. They know how to totally, perfectly, please you."

Lucian said, "That's it. You will be perfectly pleased. Is that what it means to be a real man? You get all you want for yourself? What makes a man fight to the death in battle? What does he get out of it? He is killed. He knows it and if so, that will be good enough for him. They fight and die for respect. They would rather die as a real man than live as less than a man."

The servants brought lamb with apricots and pine nuts beautifully arranged on the platters. The dry white wine made the perfect contrast, as did the spiced quail eggs.

Titus pointed at the tables and challenged Lucian, "Lucian, we delight in all kinds of erotic delights this night. What does your god have to say about food?"

"The Judean prophets say their God will invite all nations, all tribes to a feast without end on His holy mountain, where their Temple stands. They expect it will be perfect, far above everything we have here."

"Perfect food."

"And perfect wine. I do not suppose it will make men drunk."

"How can wine like that be called good?"

"Peace. They say their God loves all He created with everlasting perfect love. He is perfect love and all He wants is His creation to perfectly love Him forever. When you are drunk you cannot enjoy perfect love."

More laughter, "What does that have to do with this?" "Look at that one as she unwinds another veil." "She looks perfect enough for me." They had been gradually discarding items of clothing, moving more freely. Gazing into their eyes as they sang, danced, inviting, enticing.

Lucian closed his eyes, opened them, looked toward the men at the tables, away from the distractions. Ulysses was lashed to the mast passing the sirens.³⁴ "Ulysses heard better than these, when he sailed past the

³⁴ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siren_\(mythology\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siren_(mythology))

sirens. Somehow the very best for a man is not good at all. How many great men were undone by their greatness? We do not need to mention names. Did Ulysses reach the Elysian fields or just the shades of Hades? What will become of us?"³⁵

"Lucian, what does that have to do with this?"

"What I know is that I have a wife. I am her husband. She takes care of me as best she can. Perhaps not as well as these. They are performers, trained, skilled to please, to entertain. We do not mean anything to them. Just tonight's work. They mean nothing to us. Will you really care which one you get tonight?"

"So an old wife is better than this? You have been here too long."

"There is nothing better than enjoying your wife as she desires her husband."

The servers were putting the final course before them. Wonderful delicacies: fattened dormice with pungent cheeses. Temptations and delights, delicious food, good friends, voluptuous women.

Lucian motioned toward the singers. "They will please you. You can not please them. They would not be interested. It is good to please a wife, who cares for you. It is virile, being a real man to a real woman. It is not performing on a bed."

"Lucian, you have a wife." "You and Pilate are the only ones here with wives." "I have a wife in Regium." "Mine is in Corinth." "Your god asks for everything as gives nothing." "Antonio has a wife here too." "Their god commands perfection. Anything less is unholy, sin, falls short of the mark." "Impossible!"

"Their God offers to give His perfection, make them holy."

"How does that happen? Do they ask for it? What do they have to do to be perfect like Him?"

"We say only the very best earn the Elysian fields. Their God invites all His worshippers to live in His heavenly courts. He knows them, remembers them. If they will be His people, He will be their God, He is merciful, forgiving."

"Who would want to live with gods?" Laughter.

The last course was cleared away. Lucian could continue the ceremony. The butler told the servants, it was time for them to strip. The entertainers had stripped their outer costumes. They needed to match. The man servant realized there were only seven entertainers, nine guests. They were it, also.

In the Palace Kitchen

Taking care of the banquet upstairs barely interfered with the celebration below. Pilate's man servant and maid served the guests. In addition to the prefect's wife, there were a few Romans from the cohort. The steward took them aside and sharply charged them. They must keep silent about the prefect's wife. No one was to know. It was up to her to tell her husband. They understood and agreed. They did not want the cohort to know they were there either. Palace staff considered keeping secrets an important part of their responsibility. The oldest remembered the wild intrigues of Herod's time. The Romans were sedate in comparison.

³⁵

Heaven and Hell http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elysian_Field <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hades>

When the banquet upstairs was finished, Claudia Procula got up and told everyone how much she appreciated being part of their celebration. It was a highlight in her life. She so appreciated them all. They were so much more to her than just housekeepers and gardeners, servants. She counted them as her friends in Jerusalem. They applauded so long and loud, those upstairs wondered what was going on.

At the Palace of the High Priest

The banquet was over. Too much food, too delicious. Annas fought to stay awake for the rest of the Seder. The butler called for the children to come with him. They ran. He led them out. They heard shouts, laughter, yells and one by one running, they came back to their circles, holding pieces of the afikoman high.³⁶ They were rewarded with hugs and kisses and everyone ate a piece of the matzoth they found.

Annas told Eleazer to continue. "Friends, let us say grace."

"Praised be the name of the Lord now and forever," all replied.

"Let us now bless our God whose food we have eaten."

"Blessed be our God whose food we have eaten and through whose goodness we live."

"Praised are you, Adonai our God, King of the universe, who nourishes the whole world with grace, kindness and mercy. You provide food to all creatures, for your kindness endures forever. Through this great goodness we have never been in want; may we never be in want of sustenance. God sustains us all, doing good to all, and providing food for all creation. Praised are you, Adonai, who sustains all. We thank you, Adonai, our God, for having given a beautiful, good, and spacious land to our ancestors as a heritage; for having taken us out from the land of Egypt and redeemed us from the house of slavery; your covenant which you sealed in our flesh; for your Torah which you taught us; for your laws which you have given to us; for the life, grace and kindness you have granted us; and for the food with which you always sustain us. For everything, Adonai, our God, we thank and praise you. May your name be blessed by all forever, as it is written: "After you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless Adonai, our God for the good land he has given you." Praised are you, Adonai, for the land and the food. Have mercy, Adonai our God, on Israel your people, on Jerusalem your city, on Zion the abode of your glory, on the kingdom of the house of David your anointed one, and on the great and holy Temple that bears your name. Our God, our Father, tend and feed us; sustained and support us and relieve us. Speedily, Adonai our God, grant us relief from all our troubles. Lord our God, O make us not rely on the gifts and loans of men but rather on your full, open and generous hand, that we may never be put to shame and disgrace.

"Our God and God of our fathers, may the remembrance of us, of our fathers, of the anointed son of David your servant, of Jerusalem your holy city, and of all your people the house of Israel, ascend, come, appear, be heard, and be accepted before you for deliverance and good, for grace, kindness and mercy, for life and peace, on this day of the Festival of Matzot. Remember us this day, Lord our God, for goodness; consider us for blessing; save us for life. With a word of salvation and mercy spare us and favor us; have pity on us and save us, for we look to you, for you art a gracious and merciful God and King. Praised are you, Adonai our God, king of the universe. Adonai, you are our father, our king and sovereign, our creator, our redeemer, our maker, the holy one of Jacob, the shepherd of Israel, the good king who does good to all and has done good, is doing good, and

³⁶ http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1704/jewish/Afikoman-Customs.htm

will do good. You bestow favors on us constantly. You lavish on us kindness and mercy, relief and deliverance, success, blessing, salvation, comfort, sustenance, support mercy, life and peace and all goodness. May you never deprive us of any good thing.

“May the Merciful One reign over us forever and ever. May the Merciful One be blessed in heaven and on earth. May the Merciful One be praised for all generations; may He be glorified in us forever and ever; may He be honored in us to all eternity. May the Merciful One send ample blessing into this house and upon this table at which we have eaten. May the Merciful One send us Elijah the prophet of blessed memory who will bring us good tidings of consolation and comfort.

“May the Merciful One bless Annas, my father, the mistress of this house, my brothers and sister, Caiaphas, who stands for us before God, all those who are participating in this meal. May He bless us all together and all our possessions just as He blessed our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with every blessing. May He bless us all together with a perfect blessing, and let us say, Amen.”

“Amen.”

“May heaven find merit in us that we may enjoy a lasting peace. May we receive blessings from the Lord, justice from the God of our salvation, and may we find favor and good sense in the eyes of God and men. May the Merciful One enable us to live in the days of the Messiah and in the world to come. and we can say, Amen.”

“Amen.”

“Praised are you, Adonai, Lord of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.”

The cups were filled with wine again and all drank, the third cup, the cup of blessing. Then immediately the cups were refilled, the cup of Elijah.

Annas son of Annas arose from the cushion and escorted by the butler, walked to the door, opened it and looked out.

The whole assembly arose with all the musicians and singers and sang three times:

“Elijah, the prophet; Elijah, the Tishbite; Elijah, the Gileadite!

Come quickly in our days with the Messiah, son of David, the Messiah, son of David.”

Annas son of Annas turned to the assembly, shook his head and announced Elijah had not arrived, yet.

Theophilus, son of Annas said, “God has taught all men to love their neighbors as themselves. As we open our doors and our hearts to Elijah, we pray that soon he will come and announce the coming of the Messiah, son of David. Praised are you, Adonai, Lord of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine.” They drank the wine with shouts of Elijah and Messiah.

Annas indicated to Joseph ben Caiaphas, that he should conclude the Passover celebration. His turn. He had to remember perfectly the words to say. He took a deep breath and spoke with full voice. “Praised are you,

Adonai, King of the universe, for the vine and its fruit, and for the produce of the field, for the beautiful and spacious land which you gave to our ancestors as a heritage to eat of its fruit and to enjoy its goodness. Have mercy, Adonai our God, on your people, on Jerusalem your city. For you, Adonai are good and beneficent to all, and we thank you for the land and the fruit of the vine. The Passover is concluded, with all its laws and customs. all Your works shall praise You, our Creator; the righteous will praise You in joyous song. We will thank, exalt, revere and sanctify You. It is good to give thanks to You, and fitting to sing praises to Your name, for You are Eternal from everlasting to everlasting."

The musicians and singers began the singing and dancing. The people closed up their eating circles and made a open space in the center. The dancers entered, portraying the Psalm. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the mountain of the LORD? and who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not taken My name in vain, and hath not sworn deceitfully. He shall receive a blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of them that seek after Him, that seek Thy face, even Jacob. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory?' 'The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.' Lift up your heads, O ye gates, yea, lift them up, ye everlasting doors; that the King of glory may come in. Who then is the King of glory?' 'The LORD of hosts; He is the King of glory."

They danced the wedding song, with all the women joining in. The children danced the crossing through the Red Sea. They sang and danced many other Psalms and songs. Annas, many of the others who had been awake all last night, long before had excused themselves, headed to bed. The men danced, the women danced, the dancing continued for a long time. Those who had tasks at the Temple in the morning had to leave. There were many pilgrims bedding down by the Temple gates. They wanted to be at the morning service. Less than two hundred thousand of the two million pilgrims would be able to fit inside the Temple courts.

Triclinium

Pilate told Lucian to finish the ceremony. Lucian picked up the broken piece of matzoth. "Remember I said they would hide this piece and the children would search for it now. The one who found it would get a gift, some figs, then they all share it." He passed the piece around the tables. "After this it is forbidden to eat or drink anything except the cup of blessing and cup of Elijah.

"Friends, let us say grace. The family, guests, respond repeat after me, Praised be the name of the Lord now and forever."

Grumbling. "He's trying to turn us into Jews." "I'm never going to praise their god."

Lucian assured them he was not trying to turn them into Jews, just trying to let them know what they did. "They then say, 'Blessed be our God whose food we have eaten and through whose goodness we live.' They continue saying, 'Praised are you, Adonai, our God, sovereign of the universe, who nourishes the whole world with grace, kindness and mercy. You provide food to all creatures, for your kindness endures forever. Through this great goodness we have never been in want; may we never be in want of sustenance. God sustains us all, doing good to all, and providing food for all creation. Praised are you, Adonai, who sustains all.

“Then they drink the cup of blessing, Praised are you, Adonai, Lord of the universe, who has created the fruit of the vine. Then they drink the cup of blessing. Some people continue with a lot of words, prayers about the blessings they have been given.

“Then they fill the cup of Elijah. You know they are looking for the Messiah. Well before he comes, they expect a prophet from long ago to come back, Elijah. When he returns from the dead, they know the Messiah will soon appear. They think Elijah will appear either in the sky or at the door, somehow, at the end of this feast. So they send someone to the door to look out. They sing a song welcoming Elijah. ‘Elijah, the prophet; Elijah, the Tishbite; Elijah, the Gileadite! Come quickly in our days with the Messiah, son of David, the Messiah, son of David.’

“Blessed are you, Adonai, Breath of Life, creator of the fruit of the vine. Then they drink the fourth cup. All Your works shall praise You, our Creator; the righteous will praise You in joyous song. We will thank, exalt, revere and sanctify You. It is good to give thanks to You, and fitting to sing praises to Your name, for You are Eternal from everlasting to everlasting. In Galilee, they spend the rest of the evening with singing and dancing. Sometime the dances act out stories like the crossing through the Red Sea.”

“Thought you would never finish.” “Now we get to the real reason for coming.” Pilate thanked Lucian. He had found this very interesting. Helped him understand. The servers, wearing only loin cloths, brought more wine and set dishes of dainties before them. The entertainers had not come close to the couches while Lucian was telling the story. Now they came closer and began to out do each other with their sensuality, but never really too vulgar. Lucian could not stay after what he had said before. He apologized and asked for their understanding for leaving. They laughed and bade him farewell. Some even thanked him for being with them.

Pilate leaned over to his assistant and said he did not feel well and was leaving. Take care of the rest of the evening. He said goodbye to Titus and left. The men on the couches looked at each other, smiled. “Won’t Claudia be surprised.” “That Lucian fellow got to him.” “Claudia is the most beautiful woman in the Empire.” “If I had a wife that looked like her, I think I’d pass up on these playthings too.” Pilate enjoyed the rest of the evening with Claudia. She wondered if there wasn’t something to that Hebrew God, who was supposed to answer prayers.

The servers kept the wine and dainties coming. Watching the entertainers, erotic, sensuality. Watching the men watching. “Wonder who is going to take who?” “Wonder who we are going to get?” “Now they are evenly matched. No one will take us.” “Unless some want a second.”

The men divided the entertainers up. Titus chose the red hair with spots. He had too much to drink and was rough with her. The others noticed and did not like what they saw. The servers brought scented oils and arranged pillows, moving among the couples. They sang erotic songs. The manservant said he had never watched men with women. The girl said she felt the master came to her more because it was expected than because he really wanted her. The man said he had never had a woman. His old master would have castrated him and sent him to the barracks. Wide eyed she replied, “I’ve never had a virgin.”

The Gospels record the events of Jesus life. They do not include the background information everyone knew at the time they were written. This is one of a series of stories that includes that background faithful to what is known about the history and culture. I hope this provokes-in a good way-the reader to think deeply about the Scriptural account. Go to my web site for more. <http://thesignofconcord.com> . These are in the section titled "King of Kings". There is also a section titled "King of Kings Supplements" with additional information.

If you do not think this reflects the culture and historic situation, how would you tell the story?

Many thanks to my patient wife Lynne for repeatedly proofreading.

This is meant for non technical readers. The footnotes are links to the documentation.

Scriptures are from Jewish Publication Society of America 1917 Version. The New Testament quotes are ESV.

Questions

The Scriptures record that a Roman Centurion built the synagog in Capernaum. How could that happen?

We normally think of Annas and Caiaphas as religious leaders. They need to be seen as king and prime minister for a nation of millions of people. Pilate has real power, he can replace them. His power however is to a restricted area of Roman concern.

A central consideration in this chapter is the portrayal of the contrast between Roman and Judean culture, world view, religion.

Having the centurion to present the Seder permits an explanation of what was understood in seders and allowed a "popular" and a "refined" seder. All the other High Priestly family houses would have been having great formal seders as well. There would have been a wide variation in the number of participants and formality of the seders among the three million residents and pilgrims.