

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 26:1 - 26:13



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides an insightful interpretation of Matthew chapter 26, where Jesus states that after two days, it will be Passover. This statement signifies that it would fall on Thursday and that Jesus had celebrated four Passovers during his ministry, helping to determine the length of his ministry to some extent. Additionally, the Sanhedrin leaders, including the chief priests, scribes, and elders, had assembled to plot against Jesus by devising a plan to capture and try him without drawing public attention. Despite their elaborate counter-sign system, Jesus did not announce in advance that he would be having a meal with his disciples.

### Transcript

Let's look now at Matthew chapter 26, in the opening verses. It says, Now it came to pass when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that he said to his disciples, You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified. Then the chief priests and scribes and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest who was called Caiaphas, and plotted to take Jesus by trickery and to kill him.

But they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people. Now this little paragraph is kind of interesting in its construction because it comes right after Jesus is represented as having given a long discourse, two chapters long. We call it the Olivet Discourse.

It says, When it came to pass when he had finished these sayings, that he said to his disciples, You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified. Now that is like a, you know, sort of a postscript to the Olivet Discourse. After he said all the things that are in the Olivet Discourse, he said this to his disciples.

And perhaps the reason for giving this little bit of information, since Jesus said many things that are not recorded, Matthew apparently gave us this bit of information in order that we would understand, you know, how soon his crucifixion was to be after this time.

Now he was going, he said after two days is the Passover. In verse 17 it says, Now on the first day of the feast of the unleavened bread, the disciples came to Jesus saying, Where do you want to prepare for you to take the Passover? That would have been Thursday, of course, because Jesus was arrested that night after taking the Passover and then crucified on Friday.

At least that is the traditional understanding. There are some who believe Jesus was crucified on Thursday. We'll worry about that some other time when we get to the pertinent material.

Suffice it to say, traditionally we have understood that Jesus was crucified on Friday. And so the day before that is when he, or the night before that, is when he took the Passover meal with his disciples. That would have been Thursday.

And in the beginning of this chapter, Jesus said, After two more days is the Passover. So this must have been two days before Thursday. In other words, it was Tuesday.

So we have some indication of chronology here. And that's about the only thing that these two verses really seem to contribute. Except that they do point out that Jesus did tell his disciples once again, as he had told them before, that he was going to be crucified.

Although on this occasion, he didn't mention, as he had on three previous occasions, that he would be crucified and then that he would rise on the third day. He has just been talking about, in the previous chapter, the ultimate coming with the glory of his angels and so forth in the Olivet Discourse. But first he says, you know, a couple days from now I'm going to be crucified.

The Passover is coming and I'll be crucified. Now the Passover was a festival of the Jews that was required in the law for them to observe every year. It was a commemoration of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt in the days of Moses, when they passed through the Red Sea and God delivered them from slavery and established them as a nation in their own right and gave them the law and made a covenant with them.

That was like their New Year. That was like their Independence Day. And so just as the 4th of July is to Americans when they celebrate Independence, the Jews celebrated Passover because that was the time when God liberated them and made them an independent and free nation.

Now the reason it was called Passover is because part of that deliverance was affected by God breaking Pharaoh's resistance by killing the firstborn son of Pharaoh and indeed the firstborn son of all the Egyptian families. And even the Jewish families in Egypt would have been vulnerable to this, but God told them to slaughter a lamb and take the lamb's blood and put it on the doorposts and the lintels of their houses. And he said the angel

that would pass through Egypt killing all the firstborn would look and he says, when I see the blood on your door, I will pass over you and I will not kill your firstborn.

So it was called the Passover because God had passed over the Israelites' houses and had not entered there to kill their firstborn when he had killed the firstborn of the Egyptians. And this led to the deliverance of the children of Israel, therefore they celebrated the Passover year by year. It was one of three feasts that they had to celebrate by a migration or a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

And this was a week-long festival. Well, that's the time of year that it was. This is either the third or possibly the fourth Passover of which we read in the life of Jesus.

The reason it's uncertain whether it's the third or the fourth is because in the Gospel of John in chapter 5, there is a mention of a feast of the Jews for which Jesus went to Jerusalem. If that was a Passover, then there were altogether four Passovers in the ministry of Jesus. And if that was not a Passover, there might be only three Passovers.

And that would determine whether his ministry was two-and-a-half or three-and-a-half years long. No one knows for sure. In any case, when Jesus died, it was at the Passover festival.

And Jesus tells his disciples that that is coming very soon. Now, there had been three times previously that Jesus had warned his disciples to anticipate his arrest and his crucifixion. He had first told them this back in chapter 16 of Matthew when he was at Caesarea Philippi with them.

And he told them about this, and their reaction was negative, of course. Peter, in fact, rebuked Jesus for suggesting that he would die. And Jesus then had to rebuke Peter for having rebuked Jesus.

And he said, Get behind me, Satan. You're an offense to me because you savor not the things of God but the things of man. On two other occasions, he predicted again that he would be crucified and that he would rise from the dead.

Here he mentions to them how soon this event is going to take place, within a couple of days. Now, having recorded this prediction of Jesus, Matthew then gives us a parenthesis, sort of a change of scene, into the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas. And Caiaphas was not only the highest religious figure, but the high priest also had some political clout in Israel because he was the president of the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was the supreme court of Israel. And even though the Israelites were under the Roman dominion, the Romans had permitted them to set up and maintain to a certain extent their own internal religious government up to a point. There were limits to what they could do.

But to a very large extent, the Sanhedrin exercised political power over the lives of the people of Israel. And therefore, the chief priest, who was president of that council, was one of the most powerful men politically in the land of Israel. And it says in verse 3 here, Then the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders of the people assembled at the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas.

And it says they plotted to take Jesus by trickery and to kill him. But they said, Not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people. Now, the feast was within a couple of days.

And they didn't want to capture Jesus during the feast. Because there would be such a crowd there, it would seem that the people might riot or something, and that would bring down the Romans on them and kind of destroy the whole festivities of the feast. Now, if it was not going to be during the feast, they would have to do it either before or after the feast.

The feast was one week long. So they either had to capture Jesus within the next couple of days, or they had to wait until a week later, ten days later or so, when the feast was over. Now, as it turned out, they plotted to capture Jesus before the feast and hopefully get him taken care of and out of the way before the feast, since Jesus was a trouble to them.

And the feast was a time when Jesus might make some trouble for them, because he came frequently to these feasts. And when he was at these feasts, he would teach daily in the temple. Many times this teaching of Jesus in the temple was attended by great audiences.

And sometimes the things that Jesus said to these audiences were very unflattering things about the religious establishment. And so, rather than wait until the feast is over, which would perhaps allow Jesus to do some more damage to them, they decided to try to act hastily, swiftly, to get a hold of him. But they had to do it by trickery, it says.

They plotted to take Jesus by trickery and kill him. Now, they had already tried to trick him before. Back in some of the earlier chapters, we find that the Pharisees and the Sadducees and a lawyer all came to Jesus separately, trying to trap him in his words.

But that had backfired on them. And so, I think what it means when it says trickery, it must actually mean just secrecy or deception, because they wanted to, without much attention being given to it, they wanted to arrest Jesus at a time when he could not be captured, I should say where he couldn't be protected by the crowds. They wanted to capture him and take him off and give him a trial and be rid of him without drawing too much public attention.

Now, that was difficult for them to do at this particular time, because Jesus knew that

they were after him. And he was not going to deliver himself into their hands prematurely. And, in fact, they didn't know that he was ever going to deliver himself into their hands.

So, as far as they knew, like any other man, he'd want to avoid being captured. They didn't realize that Jesus had come to lay his life down deliberately. He said, no man takes my life from me.

I lay it down on my own accord. He says, I can lay my life down and I can raise it up again. So, Jesus, when he finally was captured and killed, it was not an accident.

He didn't just blow his security system or something. He actually walked into a trap deliberately so that he could be captured. But they didn't anticipate him doing that.

They figured that Jesus, like any other normal person, would try to avoid being caught. And, therefore, they had to find some subterfuge to betray him to them in a secret setting, because that's the places where Jesus was. In the broad daylight, Jesus was in the temple teaching to the crowds.

But he knew, and the leaders knew, that they couldn't capture him while he was surrounded by sympathetic crowds. However, at night, when the crowds were home eating dinner or in bed, if the religious leaders could find out where he would be at night, then they could perhaps find him and take him privately, and that's what they hoped to do. But how would they do so? Jesus wasn't exactly broadcasting to them where he was spending the night.

He would move about in the shadows and go to people's houses without announcing in advance where he was going to be and so forth. We find this to be true in a story that comes up a little later in this chapter, where even his disciples don't know which house he's going to be in to take the Passover, and he gives them instructions. Well, you go into this town, and you'll see someone carrying a water pitcher on his head, and you follow him and see where he goes.

And when he goes there, you ask about who the master of the house is, and find him and say the master wants to prepare the Passover here. All of this had to do with an elaborate system of, you know, counter signs and so forth. And it seems clear that Jesus did not even announce to his disciples in advance where he was going to be, where he was going to have his meal.

I mean, they went with him, but they didn't know until they got there, usually, where they would go. And the reason for that would be it would be impossible for anyone to anticipate where they might find him at night. If they were looking to arrest him.

So, Jesus acted with great secrecy at this particular period of time. And the only way that the chief priest could hope to capture him in such a place would be to discover from a

close confidant of his where he might be likely to be. You see, Judas, who later betrayed him, didn't himself even know for sure where Jesus might be from time to time.

However, he knew some of the places that Jesus frequented. And it was because Jesus frequented the Garden of Gethsemane, and Judas anticipated that it was likely that he'd be found there, that he was able to lead those people there. But that's, we're getting ahead of ourselves.

The point is that the chief priest began to plot and try to find some way to discover Jesus' whereabouts before the crowds could intervene to save him. And later on in the story, we'll read that Judas was the man who brought them to it. In fact, one would expect that, we've just read the first five verses, one would expect that the verse 14 would follow next.

Because it says, then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priest and said, what will you give me if I deliver him to you? And they counted out to him 30 pieces of silver. So from that time, he sought an opportunity to betray him. I see in verses 3 through 5, we have the chief priest plotting and hoping for an opportunity to capture Jesus.

In verses 14 through 16, we find Judas going and giving them their opportunity and working with them. However, between those two things, we have a parenthetical story sandwiched in. It's in verses 6 through 13.

And it says, when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to him having an alabaster flask of very costly, fragrant oil. And she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. But when his disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, to what purpose is this waste? For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor.

But when Jesus was aware of it, he said to them, why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for me. For you have the poor with you always, but me you do not have always. For in pouring this fragrant oil on my body, she did it for my burial.

Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her. And then we have the story of Judas betraying Jesus. Now, what's interesting about this position of this story, about the woman anointing Jesus for burial, is that John's gospel tells us that this anointing took place much earlier in the week than this.

That it happened before the triumphal entry, the day before. And that would be Saturday night, in all likelihood. Now, in the story as we read it, we've got Tuesday, two days before the Passover.

So, we have a bit of a difficulty here, that Matthew, and also Mark does this, places this

anointing of Jesus at Bethany in this particular context, which appears to be Tuesday of that week. But John places the same event, the same story, probably on Saturday night before the triumphal entry, several days earlier. Now, this does not necessarily constitute a contradiction, because the gospel writers do not always endeavor to give us a chronological account.

They often group things topically. And in my opinion, Matthew and Mark have placed it here, rather than in its chronological place, for a simple reason. And that is that we have a contrast between Mary, who is this woman, and Judas.

Mary, there's a memorial of her, she'll be remembered wherever the gospel is preached, Jesus said. But then so will Judas, won't he? Everywhere the gospel is preached, Judas is remembered as well. Judas and Mary, both are remembered for their acts, with reference to Jesus.

Mary made a greatly sacrificial act, sacrificing great possessions, perhaps her life savings, for Jesus. Judas, on the other hand, sacrificed Jesus for a tawdry sum. And here we have a tremendous contrast between the act of Mary and the act of Judas.

And although Mary did this on an occasion several days earlier than that which we're reading of, Matthew and Mark place it here, instead of having mentioned it earlier, so that we might see the difference between Mary and Judas, I think. But there's another reason for placing it here, and that is that although Matthew doesn't tell us so, John's gospel tells us that the complaint about Mary pouring out this oil was made by Judas. Apparently all the disciples got indignant about it, but Judas is the one who really was indignant, and who really stirred up the problem.

And Jesus rebuked Judas in this situation, and it says that Satan entered into Judas' heart. Let me read you this, as it is in John chapter 12. It says, Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had been dead, whom he had raised from the dead.

There they made him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray him, said, Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box, and he used to take what was put in it.

Then Jesus said, Let her alone, she has kept this for the day of my burial. For the poor you have with you always, but me you do not have always. Now, you see, what happens here is Judas gets rebuked by Jesus on this occasion in public.

And it would appear that because of this, Judas perhaps got bitter toward Jesus. He didn't like being humiliated in public. And for that reason, he went out, perhaps, and that was the last straw as far as he was concerned.

He went out and decided to betray Jesus. Now, of course, he wouldn't have betrayed Jesus for that one event alone. It must have been in Judas' heart for some time to do this, but that seems to have been the last straw.

And therefore, by placing this story of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany where Matthew places it, he gives us the occasion that caused Judas later, a few days later, to go and betray Jesus, and also, of course, places the contrast between Mary and Judas in a striking way by this topical arrangement. And that is what I understand to be Matthew and Mark's reason for doing this. Now, let me just quickly say this woman had no doubt an inheritance in this oil.

This oil, we are told in Mark and in John, that this oil was worth 300 denarii. A denarius was like a day's wage for a worker. Three hundred denarii would be a year's wages for a working man.

And so she had what would be equivalent to us, what would it be, \$20,000, \$30,000 worth of oil. And she poured it over Jesus' head. And the disciples, instigated by Judas, said, that seems so wasteful.

Think of how many poor people could have been helped with this. But we're told that Judas, who raised this complaint, didn't care about the poor. He just wished that the money had gone into the treasury where he'd have access to it, because he tended to pilfer from there.

And Jesus said, among other things, you have the poor with you always, but me you do not have always. And in Mark's version it says, you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish, you may do them good. Jesus was not saying there would never be a time where there's no poor, and therefore, don't worry about the poor.

He was just saying you'll have other opportunities to help the poor. This is one of the last opportunities you'll have to honor me, and this woman has chosen to use that opportunity. And she poured out this oil.

She may or may not have understood the meaning of it. He interpreted it as an anointing for his own burial. And if she understood it that way, then she had tremendous insight, more than the disciples, because they still didn't understand that he was going to die, even though he had told them.

But remember, this same Mary had sat at Jesus' feet when Martha was serving, and Mary had listened to Jesus very carefully. She was probably more sensitive than the disciples, and she may well have understood what he was saying when he talked about his own



death. And so she, wishing to honor him before his death, came and anointed him.

And Jesus indicated that that was what she had done. Now, whether he simply interpreted her action that way, and she didn't understand it that way, or whether he knew that she knew, we cannot say for sure. But Jesus certainly said she was worthy of honor and remembrance wherever the gospel is preached, because she was honoring him in the light of his impending death.

And the disciples at this time were still pretty dull, and they were, I think, taken by surprise when Jesus was arrested and killed. But we'll talk more about this, especially about Judah's betrayal of Jesus, when we come back next time. We're just about out of time today.

I hope you'll join us as we come back to our studies in the gospel of Matthew next time, which will be, no doubt, tomorrow. And we will continue until we're done with the book of Matthew and through the New Testament.