SETTING UP A BIBLICAL DINNER

Here we go…!

The Biblical Dinner is a recreation of the Last Supper—*and you're in it*. It's *not* a Passover Seder, but an interactive feast where guests are plunged into an ancient world. The following instructions explain how to create a dramatic environment to enhance the message of this experience. Certain items are necessary—like the unique shape and height of (at least) one of the tables and certain aspects of the food preparation—*they're essential to the message*.

The only *required* food item is bread, preferably pita or other Middle Eastern style. Beyond that you're free to make adjustments according to your budget and facilities. You'll find a list of recommended food items at the end of these instructions.

How Many Can Attend a Biblical Dinner?

There's no limit to how many can attend. There're lots of setup options (many more I haven't thought of—so be as creative as you like). For very large groups the Dinner can be done with a single table on a stage and a dozen 'diners', the audience watching from chairs or pews (no meal necessary for the audience). For groups under 300-400, a full meal for everyone is possible, depending on how you arrange the seating—there's a gallery of photo examples at BiblicalDinners.com. I've even done it for small groups in a living room. Your choice.

A full Dinner presentation usually lasts about 2 hours (including a short break), **but I can adjust the length and content up or down to fit your time frame**. I've done a 25-minute Dinner with 2nd graders and up to 3.5 hours for College classes—there're no rules on the length—you decide—I can easily accommodate your time allotment.

One more thing…

A Biblical Dinner can be done on short notice, but it's best not to rush into it. If possible, give yourself about a month to arrange and delegate responsibilities. Short notice or long, don't be daunted by the instructions—it's far easier to prepare than you think. So pray, gather your helpers and watch God work!

Please read these instructions thoroughly!

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B'tayavon!
—Jay

Setting Up Your Biblical Dinner

If you're doing a presentation *without* a meal…

If I'm speaking from a stage *without* a meal being served to the audience, you only need to set up and decorate a single 'triclinium' table and provide a sampling of the foods (page 10) for the dozen volunteers seated at the table. Remind them that they'll be on the floor for the entire presentation. So, just skip down and read the parts about 'Room Preparation', 'Triclinium Tables' and 'Last, But Not Least…'. Simple.

The meal described in the instructions below simulates an ancient feast—a hands-on dipping meal with many bowls and plates of food from which everyone partakes like big family. Until the recent coronavirus matter, this was rarely an issue. If you feel that serving a meal would cause concern for those who attend, **feel free to do the Biblical Dinner without the meal**.

If you're doing a presentation *with* a meal…

Your Team

Enlisting several helpers makes for a smooth setup and great fellowship. Here's a list of tasks I recommend…

HINT: Most tasks can be consolidated and handled by just a few people

OVERSEER: They're in charge—supervising all aspects of the dinner, including the volunteers and cleanup crew, setting up tables, setting out the food, drinking glasses, etc. They also arrange childcare as needed.

GATHERER: This person collects the non-food items (bowls, baskets, any cookware, decorations, etc.).

DOORKEEPER: This person "guards" the entrance to the dining area, reminds people to silence their phones and lets everyone in at the same time (this makes for a fantastic surprise element). A friendly, organized person who can chat with people makes a great first impression.

Facility Set-up

SETUP LEADER: This person sets up and takes down the tables (see "Setting Up Triclinium Tables" and "Room Preparation"), adjusts lights, etc. I've found that your servers and many of the diners gladly help with cleanup/tear-down after the presentation.

SETUP HELPERS: They assist the setup leader.

Kitchen Help

YOUR CHEF: They buy and prepare the food. Catering or restaurant experience is a big plus.

KITCHEN COORDINATOR: (Often the chef) They oversee their helpers with preparation, presentation, placement and quantities of "cold" food in bowls and baskets (fruit, olives, etc.—everything that needs to be on the tables before the dinner begins—the hot course is served later in the evening). You'll need some worktables or a kitchen for preparations.

FOOD HELPERS: They arrive a couple of hours early to assist the Kitchen Coordinator prepare the "cold" food, cut vegetables and (later) ladle out the stew for the servers to serve.

Serving

LEAD SERVER: They recruit servers and make reminder calls the day *before* the Dinner.

SERVERS: You'll need two servers per table. Young adults make great servers. Ask them to to dress in a simple, uniform manner (white shirt/blouse, dark trousers/skirt; Biblical costumes are a big plus). Servers arrive when the kitchen coordinator arrives. I'll brief them a half-hour before the Dinner begins. Tasks include serving the stew, keeping water pitchers full and bread on the tables. They don't need to bus the tables until the Dinner is over, minimizing distractions.

Room Preparation

- **Low room light makes the best visual effect,** accented by LED candles, which I don't provide. If fire regulations allow, **on request** I can bring several historically-accurate olive oil lamps to accent the main *triclinium* table (see below)—but be aware that they produce an open flame. When using my lamps, a fire extinguisher must be available in the room.
- **A stage light** (if available) for the main table and area where I'll be speaking looks fantastic.
- **A Triclinium Table** is the centerpiece and main teaching tool of the Dinner, so we'll need at least one. Check out the next section about Triclinium tables.
- **Good air circulation** is a must.
- Suggestion: Persian-style rugs can add a exotic look to the room, but be aware that food could get spilled on them. I also bring some of my own, but the more the better.

"Triclinium" Table Description

A "Triclinium" is a low, three-sided ancient feasting table, "U" shaped and just inches off the floor and you'll need at least one, though most groups like to fill the room with several.

- **Some groups like everyone to sit on the floor** (very authentic, but physically demanding). If you do this, have everyone bring pillows or cushions (place a few chairs around the room for those who may get uncomfortable on the floor).
- **Some groups like everyone to sit in chairs around lowered tables**. This is fine since most of us are not "built" to sit or recline on the floor for a couple of hours.
- **Some groups use full-height *triclinia***, combined with long straight 'DaVinci-style' tables (like the Last Supper painting) and round tables for less-bendable guests or when space is limited or awkward.
- **Some groups combine** these arrangements.

- **Some groups set up a single triclinium on a stage** and have the audience watch.
- **In other words**, as long as we have one triclinium*, do what you need to do!*

Important: **The power of the Biblical Dinner message hinges on a triclinium table in a *lowered position***.

Triclinium Table Assembly (Easy!)

You can make a triclinium using a variety of table combinations. For a single, historic-proportioned table, use two 8 x 2.5 ft. tables for the right and left wings and one 6 x 2.5 ft. table for the mid-section (photo below). This looks best if you set up multiple triclinium tables in the room, but any combination of 8 and 6 ft. tables work just as well.



With the table legs folded up, arrange three tables into a "U" shape (photo, left). Elevate each table length by resting it on 2 cardboard fruit boxes (very sturdy, from your local grocery store), milk crates or a similar base.

Seating is around 12-15, and more using larger tables.

Arrange the triclinia with the open end of the "U" facing the room's center (like a theater-in-the-round) or, if on a stage, towards the audience.

Setting up your room, step by step

IF YOU'RE CLOSE ENOUGH FOR ME TO DRIVE, **I BRING:** table runners, wooden bowls and lots of flat baskets for 8 triclinium tables, along with oil lamps & bases for the main table.
IF I FLY, I'm limited to bringing my props, tables runners for 3 triclinia, and the oil lamps without bases.

(For a full feast, room set up and food preparation takes about 3 hours)

- **Set up the tables**. Before elevating them, lay your tables flat on the floor in their triclinium shapes to see how everything fits in the room, then elevate them using boxes or crates.
- **Cover the tables with rectangular disposable table clothes** (from Costco or Sam's Club in 6-packs). Linen tablecloths work well but need to be laundered.
- **Place the table runners** (yours or mine) lengthwise down the center of each table.
- **Place the bowls & baskets of food *randomly* on the tables** for a colorful, cluttered look, 1 of each type of food per table length (3 per *triclinium*). Quantities of food per bowl and table are in the next section.
- **Place the fresh fruit directly on the table** for a colorful, edible garnish.
- **Place 3 pitchers** or carafes of water on each table, one on each wing.
- **Place 2 cups and a napkin** at each place setting. Fill one cup with water, the other half full with grape juice ***before*** the guests enter.

- **Place your battery-powered candles** on the tables
- **Lighting:** dim the room lighting and accent the area where I'll be speaking (if possible)
- which will be lit just moments before guests enter.
- **Check ventilation, air conditioners, fans, etc.,** to make sure air is circulating.
- **I need to brief the servers** 30 min. before starting time, about serving protocols and safety,

Making it Happen…

Your room is ready, tables are set, the people have arrived, the doorkeeper is about to let them in and the pastor/leader has informed me you're ready to start. *Here's what happens next:*

1. **Before everyone enters** the Pastor/leader tells the guests:
    a. Have everyone switch their phones to "Airplane" mode
    b. Photography, audio and video recording **is encouraged**
    c. No texting please
    d. Pray with everyone for a fantastic evening and for the food
2. **The doorkeeper opens the door** and everyone enters at the same time
3. **Fifteen minutes before the break**, I cue the servants to leave the room to begin ladling the stew into bowls and get it ready to serve. At the break, I invite the servants enter and serve the stew. 2 servants attend to each table—one with a tray or cart with the bowls, the other handing the them to the guests. All serving is done from the inside of the "U" of the table.
4. **The servers don't bus the tables**—but refill empty water pitchers and replenish bread.
5. **At the end of the Dinner** the Pastor/leader is welcome to pray and make any concluding remarks.
6. **After the Dinner** the clean-up crews go to work.

Last, but not least…

PHOTOGRAPHY: Photos, audio and video is encouraged, but low light is a challenge.

SOUND TECH: If you have a large group (>80 people), a sound system with a wireless over-the-ear or lapel mic will be necessary. Let me know if you don't have one and I'll bring mine.

COVERING THE COST: Donations or Tickets? It's hard to estimate the cost of a Biblical Dinner since food prices and supplies differ from place to place. Many churches do the Dinner on a donation basis, others sell tickets between $5 and $35 dollars per person, while others underwrite it completely. If you ask for donations to offset the cost, consider putting out an offering basket or box—your pastor/leader can announce it at the end.

HONORARIUM: I present the Biblical Dinner on a love gift basis, without obligation. (I have received from $0-$2500, *so however the Spirit leads*…)

SIGN-UPS: Even if you're not selling tickets for the Dinner, I strongly suggest having the people sign up so you buy the right amount food. Remind everyone to sign up only if they're serious about attending—this can minimize cancellations and wasted food and effort.

BOOK TABLE: I usually bring books about the Biblical Dinner and more, so a self-service resource table is helpful. Books & videos are for donation only or *free* to anyone without funds.

Biblical Dinner FAQ's

Is the Biblical Dinner a Passover Seder?

No. The Biblical Dinner incorporates elements of many different ancient feasts including the Passover, focusing on the historical Last Supper.

How can my church or organization have a Biblical Dinner?

Email me (Jay@BiblicalDinners.org) and request a calendar date. You can check my speaking schedule BiblicalDinners.com. The Easter/Passover Holidays are most in demand, so be assured—the Biblical Dinner is available year-round.

How much does it cost to present a Biblical Dinner or Galilean Wedding?

All my ministries are offered on a love-gift basis. Anyone wishing to experience this ministry won't miss out due to a financial burden, and any financial assistance goes toward travel expenses and equipment upkeep, and is hugely appreciated.

How does my church/organization prepare for a Biblical Dinner?

Typically, your church or organization provides all the food and supplies. The cost can run $10-20 per person, depending on local prices and your food choices.

If your church is driving distance for me (about six hours or less from Sacramento, CA), I can bring all the bit and pieces you need to put on a Dinner (except food) for around 80 people or less. If I need to fly in, I'm limited to bringing only certain necessary props.

How far will I travel to present a Biblical Dinner?

I will *gladly* travel to your location—locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. If you can't afford travel costs, I come anyway, without obligation—just ask.

Items for Your Tables When Doing a Full Meal

Tabletop items & quantities of food based on a maximum of 20 people per triclinium (freely adjust all quantities to your specific needs):

Item per Triclinium table	Quantity
Table Clothes (disposable are best)	3
Paper napkins/serviettes	(1) per person
Stew bowls (paper/plastic bowls, festive colors; NO Styrofoam, please—flammable! For local presentations I can bring 150+ wooden bowls)	(1) per person
Serving trays or carts	1
Serving bowls (per food item, 1 per table length for each item)	(As needed)
Water cups (short, clear plastic tumbler-style are best)	(1) per person
Grape Juice cups (same as above)	(1) per person
Flat baskets or wicker paper plate holders for bread, veggies, etc. (I bring to local Dinners)	6 or more
Carafes or pitchers (water only)	3
Table Runners (yours or mine)	3
Ceramic Saucers or salad plates (for oil lamp bases)	5

Supplies you'll want on hand:

- ☐ Matches or click-flame lighters for oil lamps
- ☐ Plastic wrap
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Ziploc bags
- ☐ Stirring paddles
- ☐ Ladle (for stew, soup, whatever)
- ☐ Vegetable peelers (all carrots served raw MUST be peeled)
- ☐ Knives & cutting boards
- ☐ Storage containers for leftovers
- ☐ 20 lb/10kg bag ice (to quick-cool/shock boiled eggs)
- ☐ Coffee, soda, snacks, pizza, etc. for the servants

Food Preparation

- ☐ **Your helpers need around 2 hours to prepare the food before the dinner**.
- ☐ **If you use my recipe, the stew cooks in 3 hours or less**. If you prepare it the day before, keep it refrigerated.
- ☐ **If you serve homemade hummus and charoset**, prepare and refrigerate it in advance.
- ☐ **Organize the baskets**, bowls and plates to make sure you have all you need.
- ☐ **Slice the fresh vegetables** to be used like spoons for the stew. Cut the cucumbers into oval slices instead of round disks or sticks. Slice the peppers in half around the middle, then cut the halves into eights from the "buttons" to create a simple "spoon."
- ☐ **Portion everything into bowls**, baskets, etc., 1 item of each per table length/3 per triclinium
- ☐ **Use lettuce leaves to line baskets**.

And PLEASE… (this is vital to the presentation!)

- **DON'T CUT the bread**
- **DON'T peel or slice the eggs**
- **DON'T slice up the fresh fruit**

Helpful ideas:

- Someone with restaurant or catering experience can be a *huge* help organizing the servers and food preparation.
- Take good notes on how you prepared for this event—you may want them for next time.
- Consider giving the unused food to your volunteers or to a local food ministry.

Food Quantities and Servings per Table

Quantities of food listed here are **for 60 people** (3 tables of 20 people each). You can adjust these amounts according to your group size and budget.

Food Item	Quantity	Served in…	Dishes per Triclinium
Pita style bread, uncut	8 doz.	Baskets or plates	3
Pickles	46 oz./1.3L. jar, small dill	Soup bowl	3
Eggs: hard boiled, unpeeled, shocked	4 doz.	Soup bowl	3
Olives	48 oz./1.4L. jar, Mediterranean style	Soup bowl	3
Charoset (optional)	From recipe, ½ - 1 cup/.6 -.12L. per bowl	Soup bowl	3
Hummus (optional)	From recipe, ½ - 1 cup/.6 -.12L. per bowl	Soup bowl	3
Honey	2 lb/1kg	Soup bowl	3
Salt	1 cup/12L.	Small bowl or saucer	3
Grape Juice, purple	1-2 gal/4-8L.	Plastic glasses	20
Water in cups	6-8 gal/12-16L.	Plastic glasses	20
Water in pitchers			3
Olive Oil (used for OIL LAMP FUEL and accenting the hummus)	1-2 liter		
Shelled Nuts (usually served together in same basket/bowl)	3 lb/1.3kg Almonds 3 lb/1.3kg Walnuts	Baskets or bowls	3
Fresh fruit (un-sliced, scattered about each table)	10 lb/4.5kg Apples 7-8 lb/3-3.5kg Grapes 5 lb/2.25kg Pears	None (set randomly on the tables—an edible garnish)	
Dried fruit (all dried fruit except raisins can go into same basket, 3 per triclinium)	3 lb/1.3kg Apricots 3 lb/1.3kg Prunes 3 lb/1.3kg Dates	Baskets or bowls	3
Raisins	3 lb/1.3kg	Soup bowl or saucer	3
Fresh Vegetables (served together in lettuce-lined baskets, 3 per triclinium)	5 lb/2.25kg Cucumbers 5 lb/2.25kg Carrots Bell Peppers: 20 peppers (all 3 colors if available) Lettuce (For lining all baskets; Romaine, Red or Boston is best—stays fresh longer)	Baskets	3

IDEA #1: Figs, pomegranates, radishes, hazelnuts, shelled pistachios, peanuts, sesame, peaches, strawberries, citrons, filberts, pine nuts, hyssop (zatar), olive oil and vinegar are very authentic to ancient feasts and may be served if available—but beware the cost!

IDEA #2: If you can find it, try your own hot food recipe (kababs, lamb, chicken) using DATE HONEY. You will thank me.

REMEMBER: Bananas, kiwis, cantaloupe, mangoes, papaya, cashews, pineapple and Diet Coke were not available at ancient Middle Eastern meals…

RECIPES

(**NOTE**: If you have your own preferred recipes, enjoy!)

An Awesome Lamb Stew

This stew adds a Moroccan flavor to your feast, connecting you to Jews of different countries. A Sri Lankan friend, formerly employed as a chef in a Middle Eastern five-star hotel, served this at an Australian presentation—definitely the best I ever tasted.

(This recipe is just as I received it and **serves 12**. Please adjust for your numbers)

Ingredients:

¼ cup/60ml olive oil

1 large sweet onion, chopped

4 garlic cloves, minced

1 tsp/5ml cinnamon

1 tsp/5ml cumin

½ tsp/.25ml ginger

½ tsp/.25ml coarsely ground pepper

3 lbs lamb stew meat, cubed

3 cups/.7L. beef broth

2 cinnamon sticks

1 tbsp/15ml grated lemon peel

1 cup/240ml pitted prunes

1 cup/240ml whole blanched almonds

Preparation:

Mix together olive oil, onion, garlic, cinnamon, cumin, ginger and pepper in a large Dutch oven.

Add meat and stir to coat.

Add broth, cinnamon sticks and lemon peel.

Bring to a boil and simmer, partially covered, for ½ hour.

Stir in prunes and almonds and simmer for another 1 ½ hours.

Charoset ["HAR-ō-set"]

A Paschal favorite, Charoset is a marvelous Middle Eastern chutney for dipping bread.

6 Apples (Golden Delicious or Granny Smith), cored, peeled, diced

3 Cups/720ml finely chopped walnuts

1 ½/360ml Cups chopped dates (cut with scissors is much easier)

¾ Cup/180ml honey (add more if you need it)

½ Cup/120ml white grape juice

1 tbsp/15ml cinnamon

Mix all together, but it is best to add apples last because of discoloration.

Keep refrigerated until ready for use in each dinner.

(Serves 60)

Hummus ["HOO-mus"]

Hummus, an Middle Eastern staple, is a garbanzo bean dip for bread and vegetables. You will need (3) bowls per triclinium table. (Serves 60)

1 large can of garbanzo beans/chickpeas, blended smooth

1 cup/240ml olive oil

Sesame paste (add to taste)

½ cup/120ml or more, to taste of garlic

Salt if needed.

Mix all together in blender till smooth and creamy, place in airtight container

Keep refrigerated until ready for use

Serving suggestion: make a depression in the middle of the hummus and pour in a tablespoon of olive oil (do not stir in). Sprinkle with a little paprika, basil or hyssop (also known as "zatar", a Middle Eastern spice with a marvelous flavor. Available at Arab or Jewish grocery stores.)