

# SETTING UP A BIBLICAL DINNER

## Here you go...!

The Biblical Dinner is a recreation of the Last Supper—especially what happened in John 13—and you’re in it. The Biblical Dinner is not a Passover Seder, but an interactive feast where guests are plunged into an ancient world. These instructions explain how to create the dramatic environment to enhance the message of this experience. Certain details should be adhered to, like the unique shape and height of at least one of the tables, room lighting and aspects of food preparation—they are part of the message.

The only *required* food item is bread, preferably pita or other middle-eastern style. Beyond that you are free to make adjustments according to your budget, facilities and purpose for the presentation. You’ll find a list of recommended food items near the back of this packet.

## How Many Can Attend a Biblical Dinner?

There is no limit to how many can attend, just arrange things to best accommodate the numbers and venue. For large groups—200 or more—there are plenty of options, including a dining arrangement with one “demonstration” *triclinium* table on a stage while everyone else dines at regular tables (round, square, etc.) or is seated without a meal. If it’s an onstage presentation, attendance is limited only by the size of your facility. Presenting dinners over consecutive days is also an option and children may attend, though I strongly recommended childcare for youngsters under 12.

For a Dinner with *triclinium* seating for all, I recommend a maximum 150 people per presentation for pure practicality. An ideal number is 60 to 120, and though there is no minimum, it works best with at least 50.

The Dinner typically lasts 2:15, but can be adjusted up or down, depending on your schedule or need. There is always a 10-minute break in the middle.

- **SUGGESTION:** The Biblical Dinner is an excellent evangelism tool. Whether you take signups or sell tickets (I will talk about this later), some may have invited additional people. This is good, even if it exceeds your capacity. We can always find ways to include last minute people.

## One more thing...

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

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***\*Please read these instructions thoroughly! \****

Blessings!

—Jay

# Setting Up Your Biblical Dinner

## Volunteer Positions

Enlisting several helpers makes a smooth setup and great fellowship. Here is a list of tasks I recommend for a well-executed Biblical Dinner.

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

**OVERSEER:** They oversee all aspects of the dinner, including the volunteers and cleanup crew, setting up tables, setting out the food, drinking glasses, etc. They also arrange for any childcare.

**GATHERER:** This person gathers non-food items (bowls, baskets, any cookware, decorations, etc.) for the dinner.

**NOTE:** If you are close enough for me to drive (local), I bring table runners for 9 *triclinium* tables, olive oil lamps and bases, 150 wooden bowls and lots of flat baskets. This way, your gatherer needs to “gather” fewer items.

## Facility Set-up

**SETUP FOREMAN:** This fellow (usually a man), sets up and takes down the tables (see “Setting Up Triclinium Tables” and “Room Preparation” later in these instructions), adjusts lights, etc. Servants and many diners gladly help with cleanup/tear-down after the presentation.

**FOREMAN’S HELPERS:** They assist the Foreman in set-up and teardown.

## Kitchen Help

**YOUR CHEF:** They buy and prepare the food—catering or restaurant experience is a real plus.

**KITCHEN COORDINATOR:** Often the chef, they oversee the helpers with the preparation, presentation, placement, and quantities of “cold” food in bowls and baskets (fruit, olives, etc.—everything that needs to be out on the tables before the dinner begins—the hot course is served later in the evening). You’ll need a few worktables or a kitchen for preparations. I suggest a table for setting up the bowls for serving the stew and a table for sorting cold food into baskets and bowls (this usually takes the most preparation space).

**KITCHEN HELPERS:** They arrive a couple of hours early to prepare all the “cold” food and help cook, cut up vegetables and ready the hot food for the servers to serve.

**NOTE:** If you are planning to present more than one Dinner prepare the food in advance and store it in containers pre-marked for the appropriate event. The Kitchen coordinator makes sure the correct food is used for the appropriate Dinner.

## Serving Help

**HEAD SERVER:** They recruit the servers. Reminder calls should be made the day *before* the Dinner.

**SERVERS:** You’ll need two servers per *triclinium* table. Young adults make great servers. Ask them to dress in a simple, uniform manner (white shirt/blouse, dark trousers/skirt; Biblical costumes are a huge

plus). Servers should arrive when the kitchen coordinator arrives. I will 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 bus the tables until the Dinner is over, minimizing distractions.

## Other Folks

**DOORKEEPER** “guards” the entrance to the dining area, letting everyone in at the same time (this is important!). He/she also directs parents with small children to your childcare facility. A friendly, organized person who is able to chat with people makes a great first impression.

**PHOTOGRAPHY:** I welcome photos, audio and video of the event, but the 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 may be necessary. Let me know if you don't have one and I will bring mine.

## And the rest...

**COVERING THE COST: Donations or Tickets?** It's hard to estimate the cost of a Biblical Dinner as 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 (before you ask, in the past I have received from \$0-\$2500, so as the Lord leads...).

**SIGN-UPS:** Even if you're not selling tickets for the Dinner, I 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, minimizing cancellations, wasted food and effort.

**BOOK TABLE:** I have books on the Biblical Dinner and more, so a resource table is helpful—it's self-service (unless a volunteer can assist) and all books are \$10 or free to anyone without funds.

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## “Triclinium” Tables

A “Triclinium” is a short, three-sided ancient banquet table. It was “U” shaped and just inches off the floor. To simulate this ancient table, assemble triclinium table(s) using 3 rectangular tables with folding or removable legs. Plywood sheets, doors, etc. have also been used.

- **Some groups like everyone to sit in chairs** around the lowered tables. This is fine, as most of us are no longer “built” to sit or recline on the floor for up to three hours.
- **Some groups like everyone to sit on the floor** (more authentic, but physically demanding). If you do this, have everyone bring pillows or cushions (have a few chairs around the room for people to use if they get uncomfortable on the floor).
- **Some groups include** full-height triclinia or long, straight DaVinci-style tables for handicapped, less-bendable guests or if you need to make more usable space. Our Ecuadorian presenter likes a single, huge triclinium around the perimeter of the room.
- **Some groups combine these arrangements..**

- Some groups like to set up one triclinium on a stage and have the audience watch.
- In other words, *you have many options!*

**This is important:** the impact of the evening is affected by the height and shape of the tables. At least one triclinium should be in a *lowered position*.

If you need extra seating but don't have room for more triclinea, set up straight full-height tables in vacant areas of the room (like the Last Supper painting). These can serve as a fun example of the incorrect Renaissance idea of an ancient banquet.

## Making a Triclinium

You can use a variety of table size combinations to achieve a good effect. Using two 8 x 2.5 ft. tables for the right and left wings and one 6 x 2.5 ft. table for the middle section (like the photo below) looks best. Others have used three 8 ft. tables to seat more people, or three 6 ft. tables, which works well for smaller groups or rooms.



With the table legs folded up, arrange three tables into a “U” shape (photo, left). Elevate each table length by placing it on 2 cardboard fruit boxes (very sturdy, from your local grocery store) or a similar base. The lowered table will furnish an ancient look.

**You can seat 12-15 at a smaller table, and up to 22 at a larger one.** If more folks than expected show up, they can sit at the ends and corners of a table and inside the “U”.

**Arrange the triclinia** with the open end of the “U”, preferably facing the room’s center (a theater-in-the-round)

or, if on a stage, towards the audience.

## Room Preparation

- **For the best effect low room light is recommended**, accented by my olive oil lamps. If available, shine a small overhead spotlight into the area where I will be speaking.
- **To avoid fire hazards, servers should carefully watch the oil lamps.** A fire extinguisher should be in the room at all times, along with a container with water and a wet towel.
- **Good air circulation** is a must.

**Suggestion:** If you have any Persian rugs, they add to the exotic look of the room, and be aware that food may get spilled on them. I also bring my own, but the more the better.

## Setting up your room, step by step

- **Room set up and food preparation takes about 3 hours.** For multiple dinners, daily preparation takes less time, usually under 2 hours. Clean up takes less than an hour.

- **If possible, dim the room lighting.**
- **Set up the tables.** Before elevating them, lay them flat on the floor in their triclinium shapes to see how everything will fit in the room.
- **Cover the tables with white, 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 and baskets of food *randomly* on the tables,** for a colorful, cluttered effect.
- **Place the fresh fruit right on the table,** as a beautiful and edible garnish.
- **Place bowls/baskets of each food item on each each wing of a table**—3 of each type of food per triclinium. Quantities of food per bowl and table are in the next section.
- **Place three pitchers** or carafes of water on each table, one on each wing.
- **Place two cups and a napkin** at each place setting, along the dining edge of the table. Fill one cup with water, the other with grape juice prior to the guests entering (see photo above).
- **I bring oil lamps** for the tables, to be lit only moments before guests enter.
- **I need to brief the table servers** 30 minutes before the guests enter about serving protocols
- **Check ventilation/air conditioners/fans** to make sure air is circulating.

**If you are presenting *multiple Dinners* on consecutive days, you will also need:**

- Volunteers to wash dishes and table runners, change the tablecloths and reset the tables
- Volunteers to vacuum the floor
- Your chef, kitchen helpers and servants to work longer hours, perhaps in shifts

## Making it Happen...

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

1. **When everyone has arrived**—*before they enter* the Pastor/leader addresses the guests:
  - a. Have everyone switch their phones to “Airplane” mode
  - b. Photography and video recording is OK
  - c. Pray for the evening and give God thanks for the food
2. **The doorkeeper opens the door** and everyone enters at the same time. I will instruct them as they come in.
3. **Five minutes before the break,** I ask the servants to leave the room to begin ladling the stew/soup into bowls and place them on trays, ready to serve. At the break, the servants enter and serve the stew. Two servants attend to each table, one with the tray and the other handing bowls to the guests. All serving happens 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** I will ask the Pastor/leader to pray and make any concluding remarks, after which I lead the guests in a short, familiar song or blessing.
6. **When the Dinner concludes,** clean-up crews go to work.

## Items for Your Tables

Tabletop items and quantities of food PER TRICLINIUM based on 20 people at each (please adjust these numbers according to your own seating arrangements):

Item	Quantity
Table Clothes (disposable are best.)	3
Paper napkins/serviettes	20
Soup bowls (paper/plastic bowls, festive colors; <b>NO Styrofoam—flammable!</b> ) (I can bring 150 wooden bowls to local presentations)	40
Serving trays	1
Water cups (short, clear plastic tumbler-style are best)	20
Grape Juice cups (same as above)	20
Flat baskets or wicker paper plate holders (I bring to local Dinners)	12
Carafes or pitchers (water only)	3
Table Runners (yours or mine)	3
Oil lamps (I bring)	5
Ceramic Saucers or salad plates (fireproof, for oil lamp bases—local Dinners only)	5

## Supplies you'll want on hand:

- Matches
- Plastic wrap
- Paper towels
- Zip-loc bags freezer bags
- Stir paddles
- Ladle (for stew, soup, whatever)
- Vegetable peelers (all carrots served raw MUST be peeled)
- Knives and cutting board
- ½ gal./2L. plastic refrigerator storage containers for leftover stew/soup—larger sizes will not allow the stew to cool thoroughly or quickly enough and it will begin to spoil.
- 20 lb/10kg bag ice (to quick-cool/shock boiled eggs)
- Coffee, soda, snacks, pizza, etc. for the servants

## Food Preparation

- **Your servants need about 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 well refrigerated.
- **If you serve homemade hummus and charoet,** prepare it in advance and keep refrigerated.
- **Organize the baskets,** bowls and plates to make sure you have all you need.
- **Slice the fresh vegetables** so they can be used as 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., 3 of each item per triclinium.
- Use lettuce leaves to line all baskets (**DO NOT line baskets with paper napkins/serviettes—flammable**)

**And PLEASE...**

DO NOT CUT the bread (this is vital to the presentation!)

DO NOT peel or slice the eggs

DO NOT slice up the fresh fruit

## Helpful ideas:

- Before purchasing food, add up the quantities to determine the right amounts.
- 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 will 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/table
Pita style bread, <u>uncut</u>	10 doz.	Flat baskets	3
Pickles	46 oz./1.3L. jar, small dill	Soup bowl	3
Eggs, unpeeled, hard boiled & 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	Flat 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 (placed randomly on 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	Flat baskets	3
Raisins	3 lb/1.3kg	Soup bowl	3
Fresh Vegetables (served together in a 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 ( <u>For lining all baskets</u> ; Romaine, Red or Boston is best—it stays fresh longer)	Flat basket	3

**IDEA:** Figs, pomegranates, radishes, hazelnuts, shelled pistachios, peanuts, sesame, peaches, black 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.

**PLEASE NOTE:** 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	3 lbs lamb stew meat, cubed
1 large sweet onion, chopped	3 cups/.7L. beef broth
4 garlic cloves, minced	2 cinnamon sticks
1 tsp/5ml cinnamon	1 tbsp/15ml grated lemon peel
1 tsp/5ml cumin	1 cup/240ml pitted prunes
½ tsp/.25ml ginger	1 cup/240ml whole blanched almonds
½ tsp/.25ml coarsely ground pepper	

### 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)

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## Hummus [“HOO-mus”]

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

1 large can of garbanzo beans/chick peas, 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.

(Serves 60)

**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.)