

# THE LORD'S SUPPER

BY RON R. RITCHIE



Life Perspectives from Fellowship Bible Church

*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

The Apostle Paul to the Corinthian Christians  
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

## 1. When did the "Lord's Supper" first take place?

It took place in Jerusalem in the last week of Jesus' life on earth (33 AD). It was the week when the Jewish people celebrated what is called *the Feast of Passover, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread*. This feast was and continues to be held every spring (The 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan). *Biblical references:* Ex. 12:1-28; Lev. 23:4-8; Num. 28:16-25; Matt. 26:20-35; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:14-20 and John 13:1-30.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. What is the Jewish History behind the "The Feast of the Passover?"

**A. The Passover:** The Lord sent Moses and Aaron to Egypt (1446 BC) to convince the Pharaoh to let the enslaved Jewish people go from his land into the land He promised Abraham 400 years earlier (Genesis 12-15, 2091 BC). The Pharaoh refused to listen to God's spokesmen. So God instructed the head of each Jewish family to take an unblemished lamb, kill it at twilight, take some of its blood and put it

on the two door posts and the lintels (in the symbol of a cross). Then they were to roast the slain lamb and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

*"This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is **the LORD's Passover**. "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn — both men and animals — and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt."*

(Exodus 12:11-13)

**B. The Spiritual Meaning of the Passover:** First the sacrifice and then the feast. *"Celebrate the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come."*

(Exodus 12:17)

The *Passover* was instituted in memory of Israel's preservation from the last plague: the death of the firstborn. This blessing was a divine consecration and was necessary to show that their *outward* severance from Egypt might be accompanied by an *internal* severance from everything of an Egyptian or heathen nature. This consecration was imparted by the *Passover*, a festival which was to lay the foundation of Israel's birth (Hosea 11:1) into the new life of grace and fellowship with God and to perpetuate it in time to come.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. What is the meaning of the “unleavened bread?”

**A. Leaven is a symbol of sin:** Leaven is a substance added to dough to cause it to rise. The Mosaic law strictly forbade the use of leaven in the priestly ritual (Lev. 2:11-13). Typically, this signified that the offering was to be a type of purity and leaven which causes disintegration and corruption, symbolized evil and the energy of sin. (1 Cor. 5:5-8)

**B. Jesus defined the “unleavened bread:”** Before He broke the bread at his *Passover* meal He said *I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. ...“I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life,...For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.”*

(John 6:47-58)

**C. Jesus broke the “unleavened bread:”** The disciples first prepared the *Passover* meal for the Lord. *And while they were eating Jesus took some bread and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said “Take eat; this is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”* (Luke 22:19) “If we keep partaking of Jesus, believing in Him and trusting Him to act, committing ourselves to Him on a daily, ongoing basis, we will never hunger. That is how to lay hold of the gift of the bread from heaven.

That is how to find life that is real life indeed.”<sup>2</sup>

### 4. What is the meaning of the Wine?

**A. The New Covenant:** Jesus then reached for a cup of wine and said *This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood* (Luke 22:30) *...as often as you drink it, drink it in remembrance of me.* (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

**B. The Meaning of the four cups used in the Passover meal.** In each *Passover* meal there are *four cups of wine* offered.<sup>3</sup>

**(1) The Cup of Kiddush (sanctification or separation).** The head of the family prayed over it and then all drank it. This was followed by the first washing of hands and the breaking of bread. Then the head of the family told the story of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt by the power of God. Then Psalms were read from the *Hallel*.

**(2) The Cup of Haggadah (proclaiming).** The family members washed their hands, a grace was given. This was followed by the eating of bitter herbs and then the unleavened bread dipped into the sop, followed by the eating of the Lamb. They washed their hands again and then the family ate some unleavened bread, followed by a prayer that God would send *the prophet Elijah* (who had been taken to heaven in a chariot, 855 BC) to herald the Messiah.

**(3) The Cup of Thanksgiving.** The Jews were thankful for the promise by God to Israel that *“I will also redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment.”* (Ex.6:6-7) This cup became symbolic of the shedding of Jesus’ blood for redemption (Matt. 26:28). This was

followed by the reading of Psalms 115-118. **Jesus however, changed the meaning of the third cup:** He picked it and said, ***This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.*** (Luke 22:20, See Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12) ***The New (not brand new, but renewed) Covenant*** was a relationship God wanted to have with humanity which was not dependent on Law but love. *“The new covenant was a restatement of the basic eternal arrangement for maintaining a living, loving relationship between God and man. As we cast our lot with him and lay hold of his life, he will increasingly bestow on us his power for obedience and his forgiveness for weakness and failure.”*<sup>6</sup>

**(4) The Cup of Praise** was drunk and then Jesus said ***“Truly I say to you, I shall never drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God”*** (Mark 14:25). Psalms 136 was sung and the Passover Feast was ended. (This promise refers to the Restoration of Israel after Jesus establishes His earthly Kingdom.)<sup>4</sup>

### **5. Why do we continue to celebrate the “Lord’s Supper?”**

Our Lord told his disciples on the night before his death on the cross: ***“...do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He come again.”*** (1 Cor. 11:25-26). In the celebration of the Lord’s Supper we remember and are thankful that He died on our behalf so that we could live with him now on earth and into eternity. The Episcopal church has always recognized the value of this remembrance. *“To the end that we shall always remember the exceeding great love our Master and only Savior Jesus Christ, thus dying for us, and the innumerable benefits which by his precious blood-shedding he has obtained to us, he*

*has instituted and ordained holy mysteries, as pledges of his love, and for a continued remembrance of his death to our great and endless comfort.”* (Written in 1662 AD.)<sup>5</sup>

The Lord’s Supper is called a *Holy Communion* because it requires that all of us who love the Lord participate in taking the Supper together. We are to celebrate this memorial feast whenever we come together until He comes again at the end of the “Age of the Spirit,” or the “Age of the Church” (From the Day of Pentecost [33 AD] until His Second Coming.)

### **6. How should we prepare our hearts to take part in this “Holy Communion?”**

The Christians in the city of Corinth, Greece had some problems with divisions, selfishness and drunkenness when they came together to participate in the supper. Their spiritual father, the apostle Paul, tried to correct that abuse. (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

*“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgement to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”*

(1 Cor. 11:27-30)

### **7. Where and when should we participate in the Lord’s Supper?**

The early church took time at their daily meals to remember the Lord’s death and His promise to return once again in power and glory (Acts 2:42). At other times His disciples celebrated the Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). The key statement of our Lord can be found in His word ***“as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup...”***

## 8. How do other branches of Christianity view the “Lord’s Supper?”

**A. Some Protestants Churches** teach that when we take “*communion*,” we participate in the *life* of Christ. But Jesus said that we participate in His *death* — His broken body and his shed blood. Thus “*the body and blood of Christ*” is a figure of speech for the benefit of His death, not for the power of life.

**B. The Catholic Church** believes in what they call “*transubstantiation*.” This means that when the believer takes the “host” (a small thin waffle) in their mouth it *changes* into the flesh and blood of Christ and thus one partake of our Lord. However, there is no scripture to support that view.

**C. The Lutheran Church** teaches “*consubstantiation*” in which they believe the flesh and blood are present and combined with the elements. Again, there is no scripture support for that view.

**D. The Anglican church** teaches that “The real presence of Christ’s most blessed body and blood is not to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament.”<sup>5</sup>

**E. The clearest view** is found when we stay within the Word of God. We partake of Christ in the communion by faith, which by taking the physical bread and wine as symbols of his flesh and blood, we spiritually feed on Jesus crucified in our hearts and make him our own (John 6). We rejoice in the spiritual reality that he was willing to die for our sins.

## Reference Books

1. Unger, M.; *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*; Moody Press, Chicago, IL (pages 352-353, 651-652)
2. Stedman, Ray C.; *God’s Loving Word*; Discovery House, Grand Rapids, MI (page 187)
3. Barclay, Wm.; *The Gospel of Mark*; Westminster Press, Phila, PA (Pages 353-357)
4. Thomas, R. L.; *A Harmony of the Gospels*; Moody Press, Chicago, IL (page 213)
5. Stott, J. R. W.; *Christian Basics*; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI (pages 130-135)
6. Ritchie, Ron R.; *Free at Last*; Sentinel Press, Mt. View, CA (pages 58, 59)