

The Lord's Supper

The Passover is an event and celebration that is significant for both Jews and Christians. For Christians, the Passover is the backdrop for the death of Jesus. The name "Passover" "does not come from Jewish quarters but from the great English translator of the Bible, William Tyndale."¹ Tyndale coined the term Passover from the Hebrew *pesah*. Passover began as family/household ritual, which spawned into a national ritual. In the NT, **the Passover and the Lord's Supper** can be said to be a ceremony of *koinonia*, of active participation or sharing something in common with others, this is not usually the case with rituals, which are performed by one party for another (Witherington). The phrase the "**Lord's Supper**" is only used once in scripture (1 Cor 11:20). The phrases **Lord's table** and the **breaking of bread** seem to allude to the Lord's Supper. The institution of the Lord's Supper is referenced four times in scripture (Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:15–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25). On the night before the crucifixion, *Jesus adopted the head of a household and ate the Passover meal with his disciples in a room within the city limits of Jerusalem*. Theologically speaking, the Lord's Supper, particularly celebrated on the Passover, constitutes Jesus and his Disciples as the "true Israel, the people of the renewed covenant, and doing so in a setting which formed a strange but deliberate alternative to the Temple" (Wright, *Jesus*, 437). The first celebration of the Lord Supper within the church is recorded after the coming of the Holy Spirit in Act 2:42.

As mentioned earlier, the Lord's Supper represents the acts of worship and fellowship. The fusion of these two components, however, are found throughout the ministry of Jesus:

- Feeding the 5000
- Fellowship with Jesus in eating
- The Table fellowship with the Risen Lord
- The Disciples came together on the Day of Pentecost and broke bread

"While the Lord's Supper is the memorial of a sacrifice, and is a sacrifice of praise offered to God, it is neither a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ made at Calvary nor a participation in the self-offering that Christ is perpetually making to the Father in heaven as the heavenly Priest. It is a proclamation of the Lord's death sacramentally until he returns to earth." (*ZIBD*, 860)

The Passover

Read Exodus 12:1–13, 21–26

The watershed of Israel's salvation is rooted in the deliverance and subsequent exodus from oppressive Egypt. The Passover is related closely with the salvific deliverance of the people. The purpose of the Passover is to offer sacrifice to Yahweh,

¹ Ben Witherington III, *Making a Meal of It*, 3.

though the story is not about an atoning sacrifice. Additionally, the Passover narrative in Exod 12 introduces Moses as Israel's intermediary who will lead the people out of bondage.² The narrator introduces the Passover as a celebration and commemoration in which the people become a covenant community of Yahweh.³ However, the blood ritual of smearing blood on the door lintel is what protected the people from the angel of death. Thus, the ritual of putting blood on the lintel was *apotropaic*—an avoidance ritual. Subsequently, the Passover also represents an “expression of holiness” by the people who Yahweh liberates from Egypt,⁴ and it functions as the ritual model for the future generations of the Israelites.⁵

- I. The Passover altered the calendar for the ancient Israelites (vv. 1–3)
- II. The Passover was familial and, possibly, corporate (v. 4)
- III. The lamb was to be a perfect gift to God (vv. 5–6)
- IV. The blood of the lamb efficaciously protected the people (vv. 7–13, 21–26)

Following the deliverance from Egyptian bondage, the Passover became a national commemoration (Deut 16; Josh 5; 2 Kgs 23). Due to the importance of the Old Testament in the life Jesus, we can conclude, at least circumstantially, that the Last Supper was a Passover *seder*. There are 8 points of reference that support such a claim:

- 1) All the Gospels identify the Last Supper as the meal on the evening when the Passover begins, except John. The Apostle John, on the other hand, refers to Jesus as “the true Passover sacrifice,” which coincides with his patently theological purpose of identifying Jesus as the Christ.
- 2) The Apostle Luke mentions the Passover lamb being served at the meal (Luke 22:15–16)
- 3) The appearance of wine at the meal (2 cups before and 2 cups afterward at a *seder*).
- 4) Jesus recited blessings over the bread and wine (Luke 22:17–19) as the practice of Pharisaic early rabbinic fellowship (*havurot*). The act of blessing the bread and wine separated the Passover *seder* from the biblical observance of Passover in Exod 12).
- 5) Mark's Gospel records how the bread was dipped into the condiments, which is a practice recorded in the Jewish writings concerning the Passover *seder*.
- 6) Both Mark and Matthew record how the Last Supper concludes with the singing of a “hymn,” which could be a reference to the *Hallel* sung after the *seder* meal.
- 7) Table talk is a significant component in both.
- 8) Reclining was the appropriate eating posture for each meal.

² Harold H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 47.

³ Craigie, 24.

⁴ James Gordon McConville, “Deuteronomy's Unification of Passover and Maṣṣôt: A Response to Bernard M. Levinson,” *JBL* 119 (2000): 55–56.

⁵ Haran, 318.

The Lord's Supper: A Rite of Inclusion into the Early Church

Martin Luther noted, *“What is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and drink. How can bodily eating and drinking do such a great thing? Answer: Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, “forgiveness of sins.” Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily? Answer: Fasting and bodily preparation are in fact a fine external discipline, but a person who has faith in these words, “given for you” and “shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” is really worthy and well prepared. However, a person who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, because the words “for you” require truly believing hearts.”*

Robert J. Daly defined the Lord's Supper as “the high point of both the expression of and the inchoative realization of the Church's marital covenant relationship with God.”⁶ This ritual or corporate sacrament facilitates a communal act that St. Augustine described as becoming “what you are”—which we know to be the Body of Christ.

“While baptism enables the individual to be initiated within the community, the ritual of the Lord's Supper integrates the member into the community time and time again.”⁷ In both 1 Cor 10:14-22 and 1 Cor 11:17-34 the Lord's Supper is the “locus for the articulation of beliefs” in the early church. In short, the Lord's Supper maintained the purification boundaries within the early church. The comparison of 1 Cor 10:14-22 with idolatrous pagan rituals underscored this element. According to Gerd Theissen, verses 16-17 made a synonymous parallel between the bread and the wine and the community's identification to the Lord's Supper and the unifying presence of the apostles around Jesus.⁸ The association by the early church between the Lord's Supper and the unity in Christ also reiterated the unifying component of baptism (Gal 3:26-28).⁹

Read 1 Cor 11:17–34

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 described the division of the Corinthian church over the Lord's Supper. Paul quoted the Eucharistic tradition to dispel the conflict within the Corinth church. The relationship between the various members of the church was deteriorating due to social divisions within the church—rich and poor. The crux of the

⁶ Robert J. Daly, “Eucharistic Origins,” *JBL*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁸ Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (trans. J. H. Schütz; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982).

⁹ W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 159.

problem centered on the “private meal” in the Christian community. When the church met at a wealthy family’s home the individuals with a higher status were given greater portions and better quality of food than the less fortunate members.¹⁰ Paul contended the church should be unified (Gal 3:26-28) and it should destroy the social stratifications that was severing the relationship between the rich and poor in the Corinthian church. The inclusive nature of the church destroyed social barriers and formed a new stratification—the Christian community: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13).

- I. **The Lord’s Supper should be unifying not divisive (vv. 17–22)**
- II. **The Lord’s Supper symbolically unifies all believers by corporately celebrating the atoning sacrifice of Jesus (v. 23–25).**
 - A. *Bread* — “Jesus’ taking the bread, breaking it, and giving it to his disciples with the words, “This is my body/myself,” should also be interpreted as an efficacious symbolic act. By Jesus dividing the bread and distributing the bread, he was participating in a common feast practice; however, the remarkable new twist to that which was customary and common was his emphasis on **this is my body**. This phrase distances the Lord’s Supper from the Passover. Additionally, there is at least some connection between the breaking of bread and his life. The breaking of the bread makes Jesus a symbolic and, yet active, participant in causing his own destruction. “This act definitely brought the reality of his death one step closer to realization.” Additionally, by breaking of the bread and dispersing it to the disciples, Jesus constituted the church as the new Israel.
 - B. *Wine* — The wine, though, does not contain the same symbolic thrust as the bread. One might suggest that the wine represents the blood of the sacrificial oxen that was sprinkled over the people to demonstrate the blessings of God’s covenant (Exod 24:8).
- III. **The Lord’s Supper should not be taken haphazardly (v. 27)**
- IV. **We must examine ourselves, seeking forgiveness and spiritual renewal, before taking the Lord’s Supper (vv. 28–29)**

Conclusion

Story of Ben, Kim, and Chloe

At this time, I am going to ask that you take some time to pray. First, ask Jesus to forgive you of the sins you have committed this week, especially those that have hindered your walk with him. Second, I was you to ask Jesus to renew your relationship with him.

¹⁰ Gerd Theissen, “Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor 11:17-34,” in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (ed. David G. Horrell; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 258-61.

Third, after you have done these things, go and get the elements of the Lord's Supper. Once everyone has returned to their seats, I will lead us in partaking of the elements.

Bread (vv. 23–24)

Wine (vv. 23, 25)

Now, we are not only forgiven and renewed, but we are corporately aligned with Jesus. The best way to celebrate our forgiveness and renewal is through the worship of Jesus.