

**The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications**

## **The meaning of...**

# **THE LORD'S SUPPER**

**To the reader:** Keep your Bible beside you. Always read your Bible first, then read these notes. Check the references and read them also. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

The Lord's Supper or the Last Supper is the name given to the last meal Jesus ate with His disciples before His death. It is also called "Communion," or "Passover," or "the Lord's table." It is recorded in three of the gospels: Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-28 and Luke 22:7-20. For this study, we will follow the record given to us by Luke in chapter 22.

Jesus had a very close relationship with the twelve men He had chosen to be with Him. He had chosen each one and each one had followed Him for three and a half years. They had listened to His teaching, seen at first hand how He lived and then heard Him say, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill Him and on the third day He will be raised to life" (Matt 17:22-23).

In chapter 22, Luke tells his readers, "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover Lamb had to be sacrificed" (Luke 22:7). John had called Jesus "the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), but it is doubtful that the disciples understood what he meant.

Passover was a special day celebrated on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Passover looked back many hundreds of years to the time when Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt. They had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. Then God sent Moses and his brother Aaron to negotiate the release of His people from the cruel bondage under which Pharaoh held them.

The Pharaoh was not willing to do this. So God sent plagues on the Egyptians to force the Pharaoh to change his mind. After each plague, the Pharaoh hardened his heart toward God. At last God told Moses, "Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you - so that My wonders may be multiplied in Egypt... (Exodus 11:9). Then the Lord said to Moses, 'This month is to be for you the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of the month each man is to take a lamb for his family; one for each household... the animals you choose must be year-old males without defect. On the fourteenth day of the month all the people of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they will eat the lambs.'" (Exodus 12:1-8).

"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 first born - 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. This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord... For seven days you are to eat bread without yeast..." (Exodus 12:11-14).

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Are the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Passover the same thing?
2. What did Passover celebrate (Exodus 12:1-8)?
3. Who led the people of Israel out of Egypt?
4. What had they been doing there?

## **THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT**

For many years after they left Egypt, the people of Israel obeyed God's command. They kept the Passover Feast on the date set by God in the new calendar. The first day of the first month began for Israel in Egypt. Then they disobeyed God and He caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years until all that generation that disobeyed God had died. God would not let them go into His promised Land. It would seem that they did not keep the Passover during that time.

When Moses died, God chose Joshua to lead the people over the Jordan River and into the Promised Land, Canaan (Deut 31:1-8). After the people crossed over the Jordan and entered the land, Joshua gathered them and celebrated Passover (Joshua 8:30-35). This happened only once or twice (Joshua 24:1-15). Passover was not kept by the Judges. The people turned away from God and worshipped idols. For this God punished them (Judges 2:14-19). Raiding bands came into Israel and ravished the land, so that they had very little left to eat (Judges 6:3-6).

God sent prophets to warn the people. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah told the people that God would let their enemies scatter them into far off countries. Instead of obeying God's word, spoken through the prophets, the people killed God's prophets or mistreated them. The prophets called the people to repent and return to the Lord (Amos 5:4-6).

The prophets warned the people that God would let their enemies destroy their cities and carry them off to foreign lands. Good kings brought revival to Israel; bad kings led them further and further into idolatry. In the reign of David, the country was divided. Jeroboam was the first king of Israel or the Northern Kingdom. The Southern kingdom or Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital city, was ruled by King Rehoboam.

## **A DIVIDED KINGDOM**

Israel remained divided until 722 BC when the armies of Assyria broke down the city of Samaria and took all Israel captive. Jeremiah told the king and the people that God would bring the same judgment on them (Jer 25:8-11). Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem three times, carrying off prisoners. At last in 586 BC his army broke through the walls of Jerusalem and burned the temple and the city. They took the remaining craftsmen and best of the people to Babylon, just as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer 52:27-30). Against his will, the prophet went with a band of Jews to Egypt where he died (Jer 44:24-28).

The Passover and the deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt were signs of a Saviour to come. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God would, by His death, deliver all who believed from the bondage of sin and eternal death (Romans 6:23).

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Who led the people across the Jordan River and into the Promised Land?
2. Were the people of Israel faithful to God? What did they do (Jer 7:1-15)?
3. The Passover Feast was a sign. What did the killing of a lamb look forward to?

## **THE YEARS OF SILENCE**

A remnant of Jews returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. They rebuilt the city and the temple. From that time, history does not record any prophet of God calling the people to repent and turn back to God. In fact, Israel was buffeted by the armies of Egypt and Assyria-Babylon. There was no peace in the land, and only a godly remnant remained true to the Lord (Isaiah 11:11).

From among this remnant, God raised up John the Baptist. John was a voice that prepared the way for Jesus Christ to minister to the people of Judah. Two Old Testament prophets told of John's ministry (Malachi 4:5-6), who calls John "Elijah", because John came in the spirit of that ancient prophet (Matt 11:14).

## **THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD**

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was the name given to the week before the Passover lamb was

killed. In Luke's record, Jesus said to two of His disciples, Peter and John, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover" (Matt 26:8).

Peter and John held a special place in our Lord's heart. They had been closest to Him in the years of His ministry.

"Where do you want us to prepare...?" they asked Jesus. He told them that they would see a man carrying a jar of water. They must follow him. He would be their guide to a house in the city. When they reached the house, they must say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks: 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?' He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." (Luke 22:9-10).

The room was large, the roof high above them and the light dim and smoky from the flickering oil lamps. The table was low and long enough for six men to recline at each side. John and Peter prepared bread made without yeast known as "unleavened bread," and wine in large goblets. Under the Law of Moses, wine was used in worship as part of the daily offering made to the Lord (Exodus 29:40; Numbers 28:7). Many animal sacrifices prescribed under the Old Covenant demanded "a hin of wine" (Num 15:6-7). [*A hin was about a gallon*] Wine was also used with meals as a common drink. It was also used as a medicine (1 Tim 5:23).

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Which disciples did Jesus send to prepare a place for Him to eat the Passover with them?

### **PASSOVER IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

The celebration of the Passover in the New Testament church is called "the Lord's Supper" only in 1 Corinthians 11:20. It is called "Communion" in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and "the Lord's Table" in 1 Corinthians 10:21. Other names have been used as "Eucharist" from the Greek "to give thanks" (1 Corinthians 11:24). And later the Celebration was referred to as "the breaking of bread." This may have been associated with the "love feasts" of the early Church (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 2 Peter 2:13).

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church to correct ignorance concerning the Lord's Supper. He said that unconfessed sin in the believers who joined in the Lord's Supper were causing many to be sick, and that some were actually dying because they misused the bread and wine (1 Cor 11:17-34). This is a very serious matter and we all need to take the Holy Spirit's warning and "examine ourselves" before we take the bread and wine.

### **THE LAST SUPPER**

At the last supper, Jesus showed His disciples how to eat the Passover meal. He rehearsed what God had shown Moses and commanded Israel to do from generation to generation (Exodus 12:14-20).

"When the hour came, Jesus and His apostles (disciples) reclined at the table. And He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God'." (Luke 22:14-16). He desired it because it was to the glory of the Father, and it was in obedience to His Father's will. He desired to eat it "with them," because they had been with Him. Jesus would share His last hours on earth with those He loved. It was a fellowship meal.

The full meaning of this feast would be experienced in heaven. What did Jesus mean? He had told the twelve disciples that His death was near, as near as the death of the thousands of Passover lambs that would be killed in Jerusalem that night.

So Jesus took the bread and broke it and gave it to His disciples. He had broken bread before and fed the multitude (Mark 6:30-34). But this was different. Here, the bread was a symbol of His own body. It pointed to His body which would be broken for them and us on the cross.

When He had given thanks He said, "This is My body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19).

#### **TALK ABOUT**

1. What other names are given to the Lord's Supper?
2. What two things do we set out on the table at the Lord's Supper?
3. What does the bread mean?

4. What did Jesus do with the bread?
5. What did He say when he gave the bread to His disciples to eat (Luke 22:19).

## **THE HOLY SCRIPTURES**

The Holy Scriptures are central to the worship of God. God said so. Jesus showed it to be so, and Paul laid emphasis on the study of God's word when he said to Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

The Protestant Reformation ran head on into the doctrine of the "real presence" of Christ in the elements (bread and wine) used at the Lord's Table or Communion. The Roman church said the bread and wine were transubstantiated or changed into the real body and real blood of Jesus Christ. The Protestant reformers did not agree. The First Helvetic Confession was the result of this disagreement. In Switzerland, Johann Bullinger's personal Confession (1504-1575) played a major role in the Protestant Reformation. It was translated into Latin and became the basis of the Second Helvetic Confession. It was adopted by the French, Scottish, Hungarian and Polish reformed churches.

Bullinger's Confession showed that the Reformed position was consistent with the teaching of the church fathers. Scripture was given primacy [*or first importance*]. Holy Scripture is God's Word, which has precedence over the church fathers, councils and church traditions.

When the Pharisees tested Jesus with a question, He replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matt 22:29). The same Scriptures "Testify of Me," Jesus said (John 5:39).

And Luke wrote, "Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, because they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11). It is important that we do the same.

Paul instructed Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to public reading of the Scripture, to preaching and to teaching... Watch your life and doctrine closely..." (1 Tim 4:13, 16). Of the Holy Scriptures Paul said "they are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Tim 3:15).

When tempted by Satan, Jesus used Scripture to defeat him (Luke 4:1-12). And in the synagogue at Nazareth, as He stood up to read, "The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him" and He read from it the prophet's words spoken 700 years before (Luke 4:16-21).

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Some say that the bread and wine actually change into the flesh and blood of Jesus when the priest pronounces them so? Is this in the Bible?
2. Where should we go to learn the truth?
3. What did Paul say the Holy Scriptures would do if you studied them (2 Tim 3:15)?

## **THE CUP OF WINE**

In the same way, after the supper, Jesus took the cup saying, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you" (Luke 22:20). "I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17-18).

We feast on His broken body. We fill our souls with His sufferings and partake of them. We join ourselves to Him in an everlasting covenant sealed by the sinless blood of our Saviour, the blessed Son of God. This bread and wine was given to us

- a) As food for our souls.
- b) To satisfy the guilt of our sins.
- c) To satisfy our desire to fellowship with Him.
- d) To show that the Old Covenant was obsolete and an entirely New Covenant was in place (Hebrews 8:13).

## ENTERING THE NEW COVENANT

We partake of the Lord's Supper to celebrate the atonement – He loved me and He gave Himself for me. We enter in the New Covenant which our Lord offered to us. We enter into the New Covenant “with all our heart” (2 Chron 15:12). We enter with the faith and desire given by the Holy Spirit to love God and Him only. God reveals to each believer the importance of the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus. Without the blood “there is no remission of sins” (Hebrews 9:22). And God gives freely all that we need for constant cleansing (1 John 1:9). This is the only way to have constant fellowship with God.

In God's immediate presence, at the Lord's Table, we can claim the healing, the fullness, the power that He is so willing to bestow on us (Jeremiah 32:40). It is a fellowship meal with our Lord. That is why Paul called on the Corinthian Christians to “ ‘Come out from them and be separate,’ says the Lord. ‘Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you....’ ” (2 Cor 6:19). God will not fellowship with sinners. As the prophet Isaiah said to the wicked Israelites, “Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear” (Isaiah 59:2).

When you see why the New Covenant was given and what it promises, you will offer yourself to God with all your heart and all your strength (Deut 6:5; Rom 12:1-2). You won't hold back. You won't be afraid. As the hymn writer said, “I am His, and He is mine.”

That is the true rest of faith God has promised every believer (Hebrews 4:3).

### TALK ABOUT

1. What did Jesus say about the cup (Luke 22:20)?
2. Tell why the New Covenant is important?
3. How is the Lord's Supper a fellowship meal?
4. How does a person enter the New Covenant?

## HISTORICAL VIEWS OF THE PASSOVER

When Jesus broke the bread and said, “This is My body....” (John 6:35) and when He took the cup and said, “This is My blood”, He did something entirely new:

- Christians were told to “eat” and “drink” of Christ. He had told them this in other teaching (John 6:53-55).
  - They would be remembering His death until He comes again (Luke 22:19).
  - Those who claimed the blood of Jesus as their only hope of cleansing would be blessed.
  - Those who did not regard the bread and wine as holy, and did not examine themselves, would be punished (1 Cor 11:29).
1. Christ spoke these words before His death, so it is generally agreed that these two physical elements were symbols of His death on the cross. The Lord's Supper is a memorial celebration of Christ's finished work. It is also a time to honour our Lord and offer ourselves afresh as His servants (Rom 12:1-2). This is called “the dynamic view” and was held by the Reformers.
  2. Calvin emphasized Christ's presence at the Lord's Supper by His Spirit. When the bread and wine are received, the risen Christ gives spiritual nourishment to the believer (Rom 8:9-11).
  3. Martin Luther taught that Christ was truly present in the bread and wine. He said that just as heat is present in a piece of hot iron, so Christ is present in the elements.
  4. The Roman Catholic church teaches that the bread and wine becomes the actual body and blood of the Lord Jesus. This happens when the priest speaks the words that open the celebration. The bread and wine do not change physically, they change inwardly.

## PAUL'S INSTRUCTIONS

Paul instructed the church at Corinth in how to conduct the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:17; 11:17-34). He did this because word had come to him that the celebration was being spoiled by unholy practices.

He called the breaking of the bread, “the communion of the body of Christ.” And sharing the wine “the communion of the blood of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16-17). The Greek word for ‘communion’ means to participate or share in or to have fellowship with Christ and with other believers.

The benefits of sharing in the Lord’s Supper are it causes the partaker: —

- a) to confess any known sin.
- b) to review what Christ did for him or her on the cross.
- c) to accept again, with thanks, the forgiveness of all sin.
- d) to experience a fresh portion of power from the Holy Spirit.

Because of their pride and greed in eating the meal, Paul called on the believers at Corinth to eat “in a worthy manner.” Many of them, who had not been examining themselves nor eating in a worthy manner, had fallen sick and some had died because of God’s judgment (1 Cor 11:27-34). They were not recognizing that all social distinctions between members of Christ’s body had been taken away (Gal 3:28). At the Lord’s Supper all came to the foot of the cross and worshipped their Lord Jesus Christ.

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for you and in your place?
2. What benefits do Christians gain by eating the Lord’s Supper?
3. Which benefit is the greatest (see a-d above)?

## **A TRAITOR AMONG THEM**

In the upper room, Jesus changed the subject so abruptly, that it almost takes our breath away. “The hand of him who is going to betray Me,” He said, “is with My hand on the table” (Luke 22:21). Matthew and Mark in their gospels place our Lord’s words before they had eaten the Supper. Luke places our Lord’s words after the passing of the wine.

Jesus said, “The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays Him” (Luke 22:22). He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, delivered up by the counsel and foreknowledge of God. Our Lord submitted to the Father’s will, cheerfully, but not without unimaginable suffering.

All the disciples were afraid of Jesus leaving them. When Jesus had told them that “He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Matt 16:21-23), Peter rebuked Him. It was not Peter speaking, but Satan using Peter to express Peter’s hope that His Master would not suffer so. And Jesus rebuked that great enemy with the words, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt 16:23).

When Jesus said one who was even then “among them” would betray Him, the disciples began to question who it could be. John, in his gospel, quotes from the Psalm 41:9: “He who shares My bread has lifted up his heel against Me” (John 13:18; Psalm 41:9). When Jesus had said there was a betrayer among them, “His disciples stared at one another, wondering which one of them He meant... Jesus had told them earlier, “You are clean, though not every one of you” (John 13:10).

“The disciple whom Jesus loved (most people believe this was John) was reclining next to Him. Simon Peter (who may have been on the opposite side of the table) motioned to this disciple and said, ‘Ask Him which one He means’.” (John 13:18-30).

Leaning back against Jesus, he (probably John, see John’s Gospel chapter 21:20,24) asked Jesus, “Lord, who is it?”

Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish” (John 13:25). Then, dipping the piece of bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon.

“As soon as Judas took the bread (from Jesus), Satan entered into him” (John 13:27). Now Satan completely possessed Judas and caused him to hate Jesus and desire to get gain by telling the rulers and chief priests where to find Him and how to arrest Him. When a person willingly gives himself or herself up to sin, Satan is ready and quick to take control of that person.

Now Jesus spoke to Judas: “What you are about to do, do quickly.” The other disciples did not know what Jesus meant. Judas had charge of the purse and money, “some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the Feast, or to give something to the poor” (John 13:28-29).

“As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night” (John 13:30).

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. What did Jesus say that shocked the disciples (Luke 22:21)?
2. Did they know Jesus would soon leave them?
3. Did they know where He was going (Matt 16:21)?
4. What did Peter do to try and find out who would betray Jesus (John 13:18-30)?

### **WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?**

Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Matt 26:36-46). Luke says He went to the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:39-46). Judas went back to the Chief Priests and told them where Jesus was. Then they sent the temple guards with Judas to arrest Him (Matt 26:47-52).

The Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish court in the land, condemned Jesus to die (Matt 27:1). When Judas saw this, he was overcome with guilt and went back to the temple to return the 30 pieces of silver they had paid him. The chief priests refused it, so Judas threw the money into the temple. Judas ran away and hanged himself.

Jesus died for our sins and in our place. All over the world men and women of faith celebrate the Lord's Supper. Some use wine, others use grape juice, others use whatever is at hand. Does it matter? No, not if the partaker understands the meaning of the symbols and the reason we celebrate Christ's death and resurrection.

Some Christians share in the Lord's Supper every Sunday; others once a month, and some not at all. It does matter that we obey our Lord's command "to do this in remembrance of Me." And we feast on Him, until He returns to take us to be with Him forever (John 14:1-4).

### **TALK ABOUT**

1. Do you feel God near to you?
2. Does the Lord's Supper help you realize how much God loves you?
3. Do you find it difficult to understand how the Almighty, the Creator of everything, would want to fellowship with us mere human beings – as Abraham confessed, "I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27)?

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