

THE LORD'S SUPPER

(Mark 14: 12-26; Matthew 26: 17-30; Luke 22: 7-23)

Purpose of this Lesson: To understand the historical background to the Lord's Supper and what it means today.

It happened 2,000 years ago on the 14 day of a month called Nissan, which is equivalent to our March or April. As many as 100,000 people gathered in Jerusalem to participate in the Passover feast followed by the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, which lasted seven days. Jesus and his disciples also gathered on this night to observe this ancient ritual celebration feast commemorating the night a long time ago in Egypt when the Lord passed over the houses of all who had blood on their door posts. God had said that when he saw the blood he would pass over those houses and not kill their first born sons (Exodus 12: 13). This night, when Jesus observed the Passover with his disciples, would be a different night because no longer would it be about the blood of sheep, but about his very own blood. (Note: The Passover is still celebrated by Jews today at different times each year, but always in March and April. In 2014 it will be March 25-April 2).

For Christians the Passover would become what we know of as the Lord's Supper. The emphasis would no longer be on physical salvation, but on spiritual salvation.

This historic and time-stopping event happened in the middle of the common Passover meal. Mark says, "***When evening came, Jesus arrived with the twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating...***" (Mark 14: 17). One writer describes the meal this way: "*The meal was served on low tables around which those who partook reclined on cushions (Mat. 26: 20), in the manner of a solemn banquet, and all were dressed in festive white. After the blessing the meal opened with a first glass of wine. This was followed by the eating of the lamb with bitter herbs dipped in **harosheth**, a paste of mashed fruits and nuts.¹ [The unleavened bread was also eaten with the bitter herbs (Ex. 12: 8; Num. 9: 11)²] Following a second glass of wine a designated 'son' of the family asked the ceremonial question: 'Why is this night different from all other nights?' This introduced the recital in song and story of the historical redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt. It continued with the story of the subsequent crises and deliverances of Israel's long history and ended with a prayer for the redemption of the land from the occupying power of Rome.*"³

On this special day in the middle of this meal, "***Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom'***" (Mat. 26: 26-29). The very next day Jesus was crucified for the sins of all the world.

Jesus has become for Christians the lamb that was slain and his blood is spread on the door posts of our hearts for the forgiveness of sins. And, as long as Jesus is Lord of our lives and we resist the devil, the devil must pass over us (James 4: 7).

¹ This symbolized the mortar that the Jews used to build the pyramids of Egypt.

² J. C. Rylaarsdam, "Unleavened Bread," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 734.

³ _____, "Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962) 665.

Even though most of the activities of the Last Supper coincide with what was usually done at the normal Jewish Passover like: drinking of the cups of wine, eating the unleavened bread after it was dipped into bitter herbs, washing of hands, the blessing after the meal of a third cup, eating the Passover lamb, and a closing hymn, Jesus had some surprises.

First, he did not say anything about the significance of the Passover lamb as it referred to the first Passover, even though it was the most important part of the meal. He passed over it. Then he did something very shocking and unexpected. He **"took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body'"** (Matthew 26: 26). Instead of speaking of the Passover lamb and the original Passover at the time of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, he spoke of his body, and to speak of eating human flesh was abhorrent to a Jew. But Jesus was speaking symbolically here. Jesus himself would become the new Passover sacrifice and the eating of the bread symbolized this. He would become the Passover lamb that takes away the sin of the world. This Passover feast was also a memorial of the redemption that God provided for the people of Israel at the time of the exodus, but it was only a shadow of the great redemption to come through the death of Jesus on the cross.

Then he did something very different and unusual concerning the wine. Usually before the last (the fourth) cup they would recite the second portion of the Hallel from Psalm 115-118 and then after this cup they would usually sing a song and it was over. But Jesus added some very shocking words. Luke tell us that, *"In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you' "* (Luke 22: 20). As one writer put it, *"He was telling them, in effect: 'I am the true Passover lamb who will be offered up for your redemption. This warm red wine that you drink tonight as a symbol of joy, is to remind you evermore of My Life's blood, which will be poured out as an atonement for you!'"* (Ceil and Moishe Rosen, *Christ in the Passover*, page 70.)

As we consider the meaning of communion or the Lord's Supper, are you open and ready for Jesus to do the unexpected in your heart? He wants to do something new and surprising in your life. He wants to take the old and give it new meaning. He wants to bring redemption through his blood. He wants to give you release from bondage. He wants to give your heart wings and set it free. Jesus no longer wants you to live in the shadows, but in the pure light of the glory that God gave him in the cross and resurrection. **Jesus does not always do what we expect, but we know that we can always trust him to do the right thing and lead us to deeper freedom, understanding and responsibility.**

To accept his blood and receive forgiveness for your sins, you need to understand that you are a sinner because no matter how good you are, you have sinned and cannot save yourself by your goodness. Then you need to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, that he died for you and that he rose from the dead. Then you need to accept him as Lord, repent of your sins and be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins so that you can receive the Holy Spirit in your heart. Then you need to become a dedicated and obedient follower of Jesus (Luke 9: 23-26).

The Bible says in these verses, *"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3: 22-23); *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3: 16). *"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2: 38). *"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10: 9). *"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness"* (Colossians 2: 6). *"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God"* (1 John 4: 14-15).

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain

the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father of the holy angels" (Luke 9: 23-26).

A prayer you can pray to God.

Father in heaven I want to know the truth. Please show me the way. I know that Jesus gave his body and blood for me, but I need you to help me to understand what this means to me personally. I know that I am a sinner and need a Savior. I need the blood of Jesus to be put on the door post of my heart. I have always thought I was a good person, but now I realize that being good is not good enough. I am not perfect and the only way I can be made perfect is through Jesus as I accept his sacrifice for me, repent of my sins, believe and accept that Jesus is Lord, and be baptized into him for the forgiveness of my sins. I know this is not the end and that I must go forward and grow in my faith following the example of Jesus' humility and dying to himself. I ask you to give me courage to make this kind of commitment no matter what the cost may be.

Please let us know if you are interested in a personal private study to know more in detail how to become a Christian.

The Jewish Calendar.

Hebrew	English	Number	Length	Civil Equivalent
ניסן	Nissan	1	30 days	March-April
אייר	Iyar	2	29 days	April-May
סיון	Sivan	3	30 days	May-June
תמוז	Tammuz	4	29 days	June-July
אב	Av	5	30 days	July-August
אלול	Elul	6	29 days	August-September
תשרי	Tishri	7	30 days	September-October
חשון	Cheshvan	8	29 or 30 days	October-November
כסלו	Kislev	9	30 or 29 days	November-December
טבת	Tevet	10	29 days	December-January
שבט	Shevat	11	30 days	January-February
אדר א'	Adar I (leap years only)	12	30 days	February-March
אדר ב' אדר ב'	Adar (called Adar Beit in leap years)	12 (13 in leap years)	29 days	February-March

From this web site: <http://www.jewfaq.org/calendar.htm>