

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Is it for the Church, the one Body?

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Remembering the Lord's death is one of the best loved tenets of the Christian faith and should be continually in the thoughts of every one who has accepted Christ's finished work on the cross. But the question must be asked; it is necessary for believers to literally hold a communion service in this dispensation? We will try to review the background of the Lord's Supper and see if it is necessary to do what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." When Paul wrote that, was he laboring in the Dispensation of the Mystery or was it during the Dispensation when Gentiles were being let into the New Covenant to provoke Israel to jealousy? "So I ask, have they stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles so as to make Israel jealous" (Romans 11:11).

A. The background of the Lord's Supper

1. The Passover in the Old Testament

"The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, this month shall be for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household; and if the household is too small for a lamb, then a man and his neighbor, next to his house shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old; you shall take it from the sheep or from the goats; and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs in the evening. Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat them. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled with water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning, anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it; your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night and I will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. The blood shall be a sign for you upon the houses where you are; and when I see the blood I will pass over you and no plague shall fall upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt. This day shall be for you a memorial day and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as an ordinance for ever" (Exodus 12:1-14). "It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations" (Exodus 12:42).

a. Moses was faithful to the Lord and one year later the Passover was celebrated again: “And the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt saying, ‘Let the people of Israel keep the passover at its appointed time, on the fourteenth day of this month, in the evening, you shall keep it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and all its ordinances you shall keep it.’ So Moses told the people of Israel that they should keep the Passover. And they kept the passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, in the evening, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so the people of Israel did” (Numbers 9:1-5).

b. We find in 2 Kings that Israel was not very good about keeping what God had told them to keep on a yearly basis. “And the king commanded all the people, ‘keep the passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in this book of the covenant.’ For no such passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah; but in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this passover was kept to the Lord in Jerusalem” (2 Kings 23:21-23).

2. The Passover in the New Testament

“When Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said to his disciples, ‘You know that after two days the Passover is coming and the Son of man will be delivered up to be crucified.’ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus saying, ‘where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?’ He said, ‘Go into the city to a certain one and say to him the Teacher says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples’ and the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and they prepared the passover” (Matthew 26:1,17-19). “And on the first day of Unleavened Bread when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to Him, ‘Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?’ And He sent two of his disciples and said to them, ‘go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him and wherever he enters say to the householder, the Teacher says, where is my guest room where I am to eat the Passover with my disciples?’ and he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us” (Mark 14:12-15). “Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John saying, ‘go and prepare the Passover for us that we may eat it’” (Luke 22-7-8).

B. Changes made to the Passover by Christ

The Lord teaches his disciples that the Passover lamb will be replaced by His body on the cross:

1. “Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘take eat; this is my body’ and he took a cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying, ‘drink of it all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom’” (Matthew 26:26-29).

2. “And as they were eating, He took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them and said, ‘take; this is my body’ and He took a cup and when He had given thanks He gave it to them and they all drank of it and He said to them, ‘this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God’” (Mark 14:22-25).

3. “And He took bread and when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘this is my body which is given for your. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And likewise the cup after supper saying, ‘this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood’” (Luke 22:19-20).

The bread typifies the body of Christ and the wine typifies his blood, but He says that it shows that the New Covenant can now be offered to Israel. Without which, no Israelite can be saved because “no human being will be justified in His sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20b).

C. Christ institutes the New Covenant at His last Passover supper with His disciples:

1. “Behold the days are coming says the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband says the Lord” (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

2. “Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. I will establish my covenant with you and you shall know that I am the Lord” (Ezekiel 16:60,62).

3. “But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old, as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second. For He finds fault with them when He says: ‘the days will come, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant that I made with their fathers, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I paid no heed to them says the Lord” (Hebrews 8:6-9).

At the cross, the Lord provided a much better sacrifice than the blood of bulls and goats which could never take away sin. They just provided a covering until Christ could provide the perfect sacrifice on the cross.

D. The Lord’s Supper is set in the context of the New Covenant

1. “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

2. “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘this cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-30).

3. A warning is given to anyone who is unworthy to partake of the Lord’s Supper during the Acts period: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup, for any one who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). There is no such warning given to believers during the Dispensation of the Mystery.

4. Paul says in 2 Corinthians : “Who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:6).

Paul during the Acts period is laboring under the New Covenant. The New Covenant we saw was for the House of Israel and the House of Judah. But, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 5:8 Paul tells them to “keep the feast” and that would be the Passover without animal sacrifice that Christ instituted with His disciples.

E. We live in the Dispensation of the Mystery where the nation of Israel is not being dealt with as a nation.

1. “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you; how that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery. Whereby when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:1-6).

2, “Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands – remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near in the blood of Christ. For He is our peace who has made us both one and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end” (Ephesians 2:11-16).

When God pronounced the final judgment of Israel at Acts 28:26-28, He set Israel aside for a time until He takes up their cause again. His new plan was never revealed before until it was given to Paul after the end of the book of Acts.

F. The communion service is a remembrance of the New Covenant which is for the nation of Israel and God's Kingdom program on earth.

1. Paul told the New Covenant believers in 1 Corinthians 11:26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." But He never came back and then the New Covenant was set aside until this dispensation is over.

2. When will Christ come back to the earth? "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet Him, we beg you brethren not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God" 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5).

3. When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians the temple was still standing in Jerusalem. It is no longer there but must be rebuilt before Christ's coming to earth can take place.

G. The believers in the dispensation of the Mystery are not looking for Christ to come back to earth, but to be revealed with Him in the Heavens.

1. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:1-4).

2. The Covenants and Promises were made to Abraham's seed. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of God's New Covenant with Israel. We are strangers from the Covenants to God's earth people, with Christ as their King.

3. We are members of Christ's Heavenly kingdom where Christ is the Head of the Body. "And He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the Head over all things for the church which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23).
