

# **The Lord's Supper – The Meal of the New Covenant**

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## **Introduction**

The Lord's Supper is a covenant meal confirming the New Covenant. Jesus wants to have communion with us during the meal and we can get a deeper revelation that he paid the price for our transgressions and our sickness. I would like to read the biblical scriptures with you and look at the Jewish customs to get a better understanding and a deeper revelation about the Lord's Supper.

There are various other names such as "Last Supper", "Communion", "Holy Sacrament" and "Eucharist" which all refer to the same. Paul wrote about the "Lord's Supper" (1Cor 11:20). He used the Greek word "deipnon" which refers to the main meal of the day, typically taken in the evening.

We can learn by hearing something. If we see it in addition, it will be easier for us to learn and to understand. But it is best to understand and internalize something when we do it. There is not much that Christians should actively do with their bodies (additionally to praising and worshiping God). This makes it even more important to pay attention to these things, namely baptizing new believers (Acts 2:38), laying hands on the sick (Mk 16:18), elders should anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14) and of course taking the Lord's Supper. Celebrating Communion can help us to internalize what Jesus accomplished for us.

Eating together when making a covenant has a very long tradition. For example, Jacob ate with his father-in-law Laban when they made a covenant (Gen 31:44-46; see also Gen 26:26-31; Jos 9:14-15). That's why we begin by reading about the divine covenant meals in the Old Testament, first about the Covenant Meal with Abraham and then about the Covenant Meal at the Old Covenant. We will explain Jewish customs about the Passover meal before looking at how Jesus celebrated it with his disciples for the last time, because that is where the Lord's Supper originated. The meaning of the Lord's Supper will be explained and questions will be addressed as to whether taking Communion with sin in our lives could harm us and how often Communion was celebrated in New Testament times. Practical guidance will also be provided as to how we may celebrate Communion nowadays. We will read scriptures about Jesus' sufferings and provide additional comments before concluding with a short summary.

The biblical citations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless stated otherwise. All notes on the Hebrew and Greek are taken from the Bible Hub: [www.biblehub.com/interlinear](http://www.biblehub.com/interlinear)

## **The Covenant Meal with Abraham**

God made a covenant with the childless Abram which means "high father" (Gen 15) and promised him that his descendants would be uncountable (Gen 15:5). At that time Abram was 70 years old (Jashar<sup>1</sup> 13:17). Abram was 86 years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael (Gen 16:16). When Abram was 99 years old (Gen 17:1), God changed his name to Abraham meaning "father of a multitude" (Gen 17:5) and stipulated the circumcision as the sign of the covenant

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<sup>1</sup> The book of Jashar (or "Jasher" or "Yashar") is an apocryphal history book. The Hebrew adjective "yashar" means straight, right or upright. The Book of Jashar is referred to twice in the Bible, in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18.

(Gen 17:10-14). Then the following happened:

<sup>1</sup> The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby...

<sup>6</sup> So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." <sup>7</sup> Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. <sup>9</sup> "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. <sup>10</sup> Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. (Gen 18:1-10)

The name of God "Yahweh" or "Jehovah" (exact spelling unknown) denotes God, our heavenly Father, and is translated as "Lord". Yahweh appeared to Abraham at a place where he had built an altar for him, namely at the great trees of Mamre in Hebron (Gen 13:18).

Abraham ate with three men who appeared to be high-ranking representatives of Yahweh. The fact that there were exactly three emphasizes their high rank, because the number "three" emphasizes divinity (see for example: The Trinity "Father, Son and Holy Spirit"; Noah had three sons who repopulated the world (Gen 9:19); Abram took three-year-old animals when making his covenant with God (Gen 15:9); three times a year the Israelites had to travel to the temple in Jerusalem for the highest feasts (Ex 23:17; Ex 34:23; Deut 16:16); Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan 6:11+14); Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and Jesus was in the grave for three days (Mt 12:40); God made three important covenants, first with Abram (the covenant was renewed with Isaac and Jacob; these were the three patriarchs of Israel), second the Old Mosaic Covenant and third the New Covenant).

Jesus said:

<sup>56</sup> 'Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.' <sup>57</sup> 'You are not yet fifty years old,' they said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!'

<sup>58</sup> 'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I am!' (Jn 8:56-58)

Abraham had seen Jesus. I think that also happened on that occasion and that Jesus was one of the three men.

The bread was baked in a hurry (verse 6); so there was certainly no time to let it leaven. Also at other times bread baked in a hurry was without leaven and yeast (Ex 12:39; 1Sam 28:24; Gen 19:3; Judges 6:18-20).

Yahweh appeared to Abraham and immediately afterwards the three men appeared, they ate, Abraham accompanied them and then Yahweh spoke directly to Abraham (Gen 18:17-33). So I believe that Yahweh was present all the time as they ate in his presence.

Sarah became pregnant only after there was the sign of the covenant (circumcision) and this meal which I believe was a covenant meal to confirm the covenant.

## The Covenant Meal at the Old Covenant

The Mosaic Covenant was made as follows:

<sup>3</sup> When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the Lord has said we will do."... <sup>5</sup> Then he sent young

Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the Lord... <sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." <sup>8</sup> Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words." <sup>9</sup> Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up <sup>10</sup> and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of lapis lazuli, as bright blue as the sky. <sup>11</sup> But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank. <sup>12</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction." (Ex 24:3-12)

The people made the covenant with Yahweh (verses 3+7) and Mose sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the people (verse 8). Then Moses and several elders had a covenant meal while they saw God (verses 10-11). They saw God (in Hebrew "elohim")<sup>2</sup>; it is not written here that they saw Yahweh. But Yahweh was present, because he spoke to Moses beforehand (verse 1), they sacrificed to him (verse 5) and immediately after the meal, Yahweh spoke to Moses again (verse 12).

It is not possible that Yahweh would have shown them his face, because later Yahweh said to Moses:

... you cannot see my face, for no-one may see me and live. (Ex 33:20)

It is written (verses 10-11) that they saw God and not that they would have seen a part of God; so I do not believe that they saw a part of Yahweh like his back or a part of his front. Further, if they had seen Yahweh (or a part of him), Moses would not have asked Yahweh later "show me your glory" (Ex 33:18); later Moses was greatly honored by Yahweh passing by and allowing him to gaze upon him (Ex 33:19-23). Compared to a meal with food and drink, I imagine looking after Yahweh is shorter and definitely less honorable, so that this would not have been a special honor for Moses. Also Jesus said that no one has ever seen Yahweh (Jn 1:18; see also 1Jn 4:12).

Moses and the elders didn't see Yahweh, but they saw God. So whom did they see? I only know one who comes into question: Jesus is God (Isa 9:5; Ps 45:7-8 with Heb 1:8-9; Isa 40:3 with Mt 3:3; Ps 50:6 or Ps 82:1+8 with Jn 5:22; Lk 17:18; Jn 20:28-29; Rom 9:5; Tit 2:13; 1Jn 5:20; Rev 1:8 with Rev 22:13) and he already existed "before the creation of the world" (Jn 17:24; Jn 8:58; Jn 1:1-3 with 1Jn 1:1 or Rev 19:13). So Moses, Aaron and the other elders had eaten and drunk in God's presence, in the presence of our heavenly Father, and they saw Jesus.

## The Passover Meal

Every year, the Jews celebrate the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread in remembrance of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. It begins on the so-called Seder evening with the Passover meal. For this, in the afternoon a lamb without defect had to be slaughtered and roasted over a fire. Then in the evening it was eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Ex 12:5-8).

According to Jewish custom the Seder evening is regulated in detail. We particularly consider

<sup>2</sup> "elohim" in Hebrew is a plural word, indicating that it may be referring to the Trinity.

the things related to the Lord's Supper. There are three matzos, unleavened flatbreads that symbolize our heavenly Father, his Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Initially, they are stacked on top of each other. The matzo in the middle (Jesus) is pulled out and broken into two pieces; this symbolizes his killing. The larger piece is wrapped and hidden which is the so-called afikoman (Aramaic: "pull out in front of us"); this symbolizes that Jesus was wrapped in linen cloth and placed into the grave (Mt 27: 59-60; Mk 15:46; Lk 23:53; Jn 19:40-42). Then the Passover lamb was eaten with bitter herbs; the bitter herbs symbolize Jesus' suffering. Nowadays the Jews usually eat a different festive meal. As dessert the afikoman is eaten which is unwrapped beforehand; that symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus. The afikoman is the bread that Jesus handed to his disciples with the words "this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me" (1Cor 11:24 KJV).

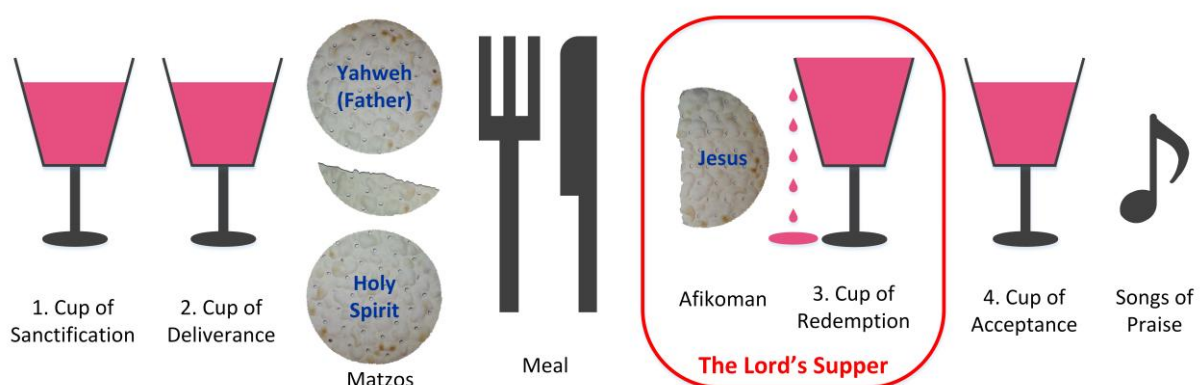
There are several cups with wine during the Seder evening. This custom refers to the following Bible word:

<sup>6</sup> Therefore, say to the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup> I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. (Ex 6:6-7)

At the beginning, the first two cups are emptied, i.e. the Cup of Sanctification (referring to "I will bring you out") and the Cup of Deliverance ("I will free you"). After eating the afikoman, the third cup follows which is the Cup of Redemption ("I will redeem you"). This is filled to the point of overflowing and thus symbolizes excessive redemption. In addition to redeeming, the Hebrew verb "gaal" also means to ransom. Jesus handed this third cup with the words "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:27-28).

At the end of the Seder evening, hymns are sung in praise, namely the Hallel, i.e. Psalms 113 to 118. Jesus did the same with his disciples (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26).

The following diagram illustrates the course of the Seder evening:



The Jewish custom of celebrating the Passover contains various other details that prophetically point to Jesus. So it can be helpful to be inspired by Jewish customs with regard to the occasional particularly festive celebration of the Lord's Supper in order to better understand what Jesus has suffered for us; Passover is of course a good opportunity for this.

## Jesus' last Passover and its Meaning

We read about Jesus' last Passover meal in the Gospel of John:

<sup>2</sup> The evening meal was in progress... <sup>4</sup> so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. <sup>5</sup> After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...

<sup>12</sup> When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. <sup>13</sup> "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. <sup>14</sup> Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, **you also should wash one another's feet.** <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (Jn 13:2-17; instructions here and below are highlighted in purple)

Of course Jesus adhered to the Mosaic law and ate the Passover lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Matthew reported on the further course of the evening:

<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, **"Take and eat; this is my body."** <sup>27</sup> Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, **"Drink from it, all of you."** <sup>28</sup> **This is my blood of the covenant,** which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." <sup>30</sup> When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Mt 26:26-30; here and below, information on the meaning of Communion are highlighted in red)

In addition Paul wrote:

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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."** <sup>25</sup> 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."** <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death** until he comes. (1Cor 11:23-26)

<sup>16</sup> Is not the **cup** of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a **participation in the blood of Christ?** And is not the **bread** that we break a **participation in the body of Christ?** <sup>17</sup> Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. (1Cor 10:16-17)

Let us briefly summarize what we have read:

What happened?	What did Jesus command?	What does it mean?	
Jesus washed his disciples' feet.	Wash one another's feet.	Jesus is a role model.	
Jesus thanked Yahweh for the bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples to eat.	Do it in remembrance of Jesus.	The bread is Jesus' body.	Proclamation of Jesus' death.
Jesus thanked Yahweh for the wine and gave the cup to his disciples to drink.		The wine is Jesus' blood. This is the blood of the New Covenant.	Participation in the body and blood of Jesus.

Jesus washed his disciples' feet during the meal (Jn 13:2+4); this was not the usual cleaning of the feet when a guest arrived with dusty feet from the street. The command of Jesus to wash each other's feet seems to have been neglected in recent times. However, the Adventists wash each other's feet during each church service when they celebrate Communion. Note that washing each other's feet implies a blessing (Jn 13:17).

We should celebrate Communion in remembrance of Jesus (Greek "anámñēsis"). That means we should remind ourselves of what Jesus has accomplished for us, i.e. we should let the events come to life again. We should be "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb 12:2 ESV). We look to him in a similar way that the Israelites looked to the snake of metal that Moses had fastened high on a pole; for by it they remained alive after being bitten by snakes because of their sins (Num 21:7-9). Jesus also had to be lifted up like that snake in the wilderness (Jn 3:14).

When the Mosaic Covenant was made, the Israelites were sprinkled with the "blood of the covenant" of animals (Ex 24:8) and the elders ate looking at Jesus, as explained above. At the Lord's Supper we eat Jesus' body and we are not only sprinkled with blood, but we are even allowed to drink Jesus' blood, the blood of the New Covenant. Through this we proclaim Jesus' death and participate in his body and blood.

### The Meaning of Bread and Wine

The offering of the Passover lamb had a very special meaning. According to the law of Moses, sin and guilt offerings, like all other sacrifices, were only allowed to be offered by the priests and generally only eaten by them (Lev 7:6-7). The Passover lamb, however, was slaughtered within the families and eaten by all family members (Ex 12:3-6). In Egypt the blood was put on the doorposts (Ex 12:7+22), as also with the sin offering in the vision of Ezekiel (Ezk 45:19). The Passover lamb was also a sin and guilt offering, even though it was not explicitly named as such in the Old Testament.

At the Lord's Supper we eat our Passover lamb Jesus, our sin and guilt offering (Isa 53:10; 1Pet 2:24). That the Passover lamb should be eaten by the families and not only by the Levites is a sign in view of our New Covenant. Because Jesus made us believers into priests (Rev 1:6; Rev 5:10; 1Pet 2:9) who are generally allowed to eat offerings.

Regarding the blood, it is written:

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. (Lev 17:11)

In the blood there is life, in Hebrew "nephesh" also means soul (see also Gen 9:4). That is why blood was not allowed to be eaten or drunk by anyone (Deut 12:16; Deut 15:23) and even today it is still forbidden (Acts 15:28-29; Acts 21:25). But we should drink Jesus' blood. In doing so, we take in his soul and his eternal life. Jesus explained:

<sup>48</sup> "I am the bread of life." <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. **This bread is my flesh**, which I will give for the life of the world." <sup>52</sup> Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" <sup>53</sup> Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.** <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. <sup>56</sup> **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.** <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." (Jn 6:48-58)

The Passover lambs were slaughtered for the first time shortly before escaping out of Egypt. Their blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses caused God to spare the Israelites from the plague of death. The doorposts were vertical and the tops of the doorframes were horizontal; the cross of Jesus also consisted of a vertical and a horizontal beam.

The slaughtered and sacrificed animals were not mistreated. On the contrary, they were slaughtered as gently as possible with a very sharp knife so that they did not have to suffer unnecessarily. Very unusually for a Passover lamb, Jesus was beaten, flogged and mistreated. Why did Jesus let himself be tortured so terribly? This would have been unnecessary for the forgiveness of our sins, because the blood causes atonement, as we read earlier (Lev 17:11). We find the answer in the book of Isaiah:

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (Isa 53:4-5)

By his wounds and "with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5 KJV). In doing so, he also took our pain and bore our suffering (1Pet 2:24). This is how he has obtained healing for us.

In Psalm 105, God is praised for his miracles before the exodus from Egypt. There we read:

He brought them forth also with silver and gold: and there was not one feeble person among their tribes. (Ps 105:37 KJV)

Everyone was healthy when they left Egypt, despite the hardest slave labor before. I believe that eating the Passover lamb was related to their physical wellbeing. In one of the following sections we look at the fact that they were also healed later when they ate the Passover lamb (2Chr 30:18-20). And I will also show from the New Testament that the Lord's Supper brings a blessing of strength and health.

Jesus called healing the “children’s bread” (Mt 15:26; Mk 7:27). For our healing he was offering his body, the bread. He endured so much pain for our healing and offered his body. By eating the Passover lamb, the people were healed. Our Passover lamb is Jesus and his body is the bread. The bread stands for our healing.

According to the Law of Moses, it does not matter what you drink at the Passover meal. The blood of the lamb was poured out on the ground like water (Deut 12:16+24; Deut 15:23; it was only used the first time before the exodus from Egypt). Only Jesus gave the wine a biblical meaning. The wine is Jesus’ blood and stands for our sanctification, the forgiveness of our sins and is a sign of our new covenant (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25).

At the Lord’s Supper we first eat the bread and then drink the wine. Jesus first bore our sickness through his stripes. Then he died on the cross for our sins. He became the curse of the law for us (Gal 3:13; see also Deut 21:23).

### Is there a Transubstantiation of Bread and Wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus?

Jesus spoke when he handed the bread and wine to his disciples:

This is my body. (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24) *and*

This is my blood of the covenant. (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24) *or*

This cup is the new covenant in my blood. (Lk 22:20; 1Cor 11:25)

The Greek verb “eimí” was translated here as “is”. The English infinitive is “to be”. The same word is also found in the following verses, where it is translated as “am”, “are” or “is” according to the conjugation.

Jesus also said about himself:

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (Jn 6:35)

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. (Jn 8:12)

I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. (Jn 10:9)

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Jn 10:11)

I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die... (Jn 11:25-26)

I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn 14:6)

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. (Jn 15:1)

Jesus explained to his disciples:

You are the salt of the earth... (Mt 5:13)

You are the light of the world... (Mt 5:14)

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (Mt 18:20)

... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:20)

Jesus interpreted the parable of the weeds in the field as follows:

<sup>37</sup>... The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup>The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. (Mt 13:37-39 ESV)

And in the Revelation of John it says this:

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty. (Rev 1:8)

And there we also find the following explanation of a vision:

... the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. (Rev 1:20)

All of the above verses contain the verb “eimi” in the same grammatical form (present indicative active).

Paul wrote about the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt:

<sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. (1Cor 10:2-4)

Here we find the verb “eimi” again, this time in the past tense.

Furthermore, John the Baptist said about Jesus:

Look, the Lamb of God... (Jn 1:29+36)

Jesus is not an animal (lamb) or a gate with a handle that you could open or close. Jesus is neither a way that you could walk on with your feet, nor a plant (vine). And God is not a Greek letter either (Alpha or Omega). These are metaphors, i.e. images to make things clearer to us. We do not believe that Jesus turned or will turn into a lamb, a gate or a vine. So why should there be a transubstantiation of bread or wine? That would be absurd.

Nevertheless, we should eat the bread as Jesus’ precious body and drink the wine as Jesus’ priceless blood.

### **Can it be harmful to receive Communion?**

First we look at the Corinthians and then what happened to Judas at the Passover meal, before concluding that God rewards the right attitude of heart.

#### The Lord’s Supper with the Corinthians

Among the Corinthians, celebrating the Lord’s Supper caused many to become weak and ill and some even died (1Cor 11:30). Let us look at how this happened; Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

<sup>17</sup> In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good... <sup>20</sup> So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you **despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?** What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

...

<sup>27</sup> So then, whoever **eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner** will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> **Everyone ought to examine themselves** before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup> For those who **eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ** eat and drink judgment on themselves. <sup>30</sup> That is why many among you are weak and ill, and a number of you have fallen asleep. <sup>31</sup> But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. <sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. <sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, **you should all eat together.** <sup>34</sup> **Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home,** so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further instructions. (1Cor 11:17-34; information on what the Corinthians did are highlighted in **brown**)

Among the Corinthians, everyone ate their own food, some ate to excess and others remained hungry (verse 21). The wealthy despised and humiliated their poor brothers and sisters in Christ (verse 22). They took Communion unworthily (verse 27). They themselves were worthy by believing in Jesus Christ, but they took it in an unworthy manner. They acted unworthily in the way that they did not discern the body of Jesus (verse 29). The Greek word “diakrínō”, translated here as “discerning”, is the same word used at the beginning of verse 31 which is sometimes translated as “For if we would judge ourselves” (KJV). What does it mean that they did not discern the body of Jesus?

Some people might think that the Corinthians did not differentiate the bread of the Lord’s Supper, i.e. Jesus’ body, from normal food. There are two strong arguments against this interpretation: First, Paul criticized the behavior of the brothers and sisters in Christ among themselves and, second, he advised as an immediate measure that they should eat all together (verse 33). Others translate the end of verse 33 with “when you come together to eat, wait for one another” (ESV). The Greek word “ekdémomai” translated as “wait for one another” implies a positive expectation and could also be paraphrased with “welcome from the heart”.

In the New Testament it is common to also call the church the body of Jesus, i.e. the brothers and sisters in Christ (1Cor 12:13+27; Eph 1:23; Eph 4:12+16; Eph 5:23+30; Col 1:18+24; Rom 12:5; 1Cor 10:17; Eph 2:16; Col 2:19; Col 3:15). The Corinthians treated their brothers and sisters in Christ like unbelievers; so they did not discern them from unbelievers. Remember what Jesus told his disciples on the night they celebrated the Passover meal together for the last time:

<sup>34</sup> A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (Jn 13:34-35)

There was a lack of love among the Corinthians. Their problem was that they despised and humiliated their brothers and sisters in Christ during their church meetings in which they took the Lord’s Supper.

We do not need to be afraid that we could be unworthy, because by believing in Jesus we are always worthy. However, we should examine ourselves (verse 28) and make sure that we consider and treat our brothers and sisters in Christ as such, particularly when celebrating Communion.

Why did the Corinthians’ behavior cause many to become weak and ill and some even to die (1Cor 11:30)? Why did they not become poor, starve or have to flee from their enemies? If you follow God and keep his instructions, you will be blessed. For example, the Israelites were

promised that God would make them the head and not the tail if they kept his commandments (Deut 28:13). But if not, just the opposite: others become the head and they become the tail (Deut 28:44). The sinful celebration of the Lord's Supper resulted in a curse of weakness, sickness and death. This is the opposite of what God wants to give us through the Lord's Supper, namely a blessing of strength, health and life.

### Judas at the Passover meal

One was only allowed to participate in the Passover meal if he was clean (Num 9:6-13; Jn 18:28). I recommend reconciling oneself with one's brothers and sisters before the Lord's Supper (Mt 5:23-24) and asking God for the forgiveness of sins, for example in the context of the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4).

Judas had decided to betray Jesus (Mt 26:14-16; Mk 14:10-11; Lk 22:3-6; Jn 13:2). When he ate the Passover meal, he was therefore not clean (Jn 13:10-11) and the following happened:

<sup>26</sup> Jesus... dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup> As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him... (Jn 13:26-27)

In a certain sense, a door was opened for Satan by the fact that Judas took part in the meal even though he intended to sin. His heart was not clean. Satan then entered into him and Judas carried out his plan and betrayed Jesus.

It is also worth noting that Jesus washed his disciples' feet beforehand (Jn 13:2-10), thus cleansing them in a special way. Jesus cleansed us through the "washing with water through the word" (Eph 5:26).

### God rewards the right Attitude of Heart

Finally, let's look at a story from the Old Testament. When Hezekiah became king of Judah, there was no service in the temple (2Chr 29:6-7). Hezekiah had the temple cleansed and he ordered to sacrifice offerings and to praise the Lord. Then he invited all of Israel and Judah to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover; for it had not been celebrated according to the Mosaic law for a long time (2Chr 30:5). A very large crowd of people assembled in Jerusalem, but many had not consecrated and purified themselves and did not eat the Passover lamb according to the law (2Chr 30:17-18). Hereupon Hezekiah prayed:

<sup>18</sup> ... 'May the Lord, who is good, pardon everyone <sup>19</sup> who sets their heart on seeking God – the Lord, the God of their ancestors – even if they are not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary.'

<sup>20</sup> And the Lord heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (2Chr 30:18-20)

God not only forgave them for not acting according to the rules, but he even healed them. For he rewarded them for seeking and serving God with their hearts after a long time. The close connection between the Passover meal and physical healing is also worth noting.

Therefore, if we celebrate the Lord's Supper with the right attitude of heart, we need not be afraid of doing anything wrong. For God looks into our heart and knows how we mean it.

### **How often was the Lord's Supper taken in New Testament times?**

The following is written about the first Christians who were converted at the Festival of Weeks

(Pentecost) due to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, (Acts 2:46)

Does the breaking of bread refer to the celebration of the Lord's Supper? In verse 42 we find "breaking of bread" in the midst of spiritual things, i.e. apostles' teaching, fellowship and prayer; this would support this assumption. Then, when reading in verse 46 that they broke bread every day, someone could conclude that they celebrated Communion every day. But in this verse the breaking of bread is mentioned in the context of eating food; in the Greek there is in addition to "bread" (Greek "ártos") the word "trophé" mentioned which stands for food and nourishment.

There are several other scriptures in the New Testament where the breaking of bread clearly refers to a normal meal (Mt 14:19; Mt 15:36; Mk 6:41; Mk 8:6+19; Lk 9:16). So we may not conclude from the report in the book of Acts that they celebrated the Lord's Supper every day.

Let's read again the above-mentioned section in the first letter to the Corinthians:

<sup>17</sup> In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your **meetings** do more harm than good. <sup>18</sup> In the first place, I hear that when you **come together** as a **church**... <sup>20</sup> So then, when you **come together**, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, <sup>21</sup> for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the **church** of God...

<sup>27</sup> So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord... <sup>29</sup> For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves...

<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers and sisters, when you **gather** to eat, you should all eat together.

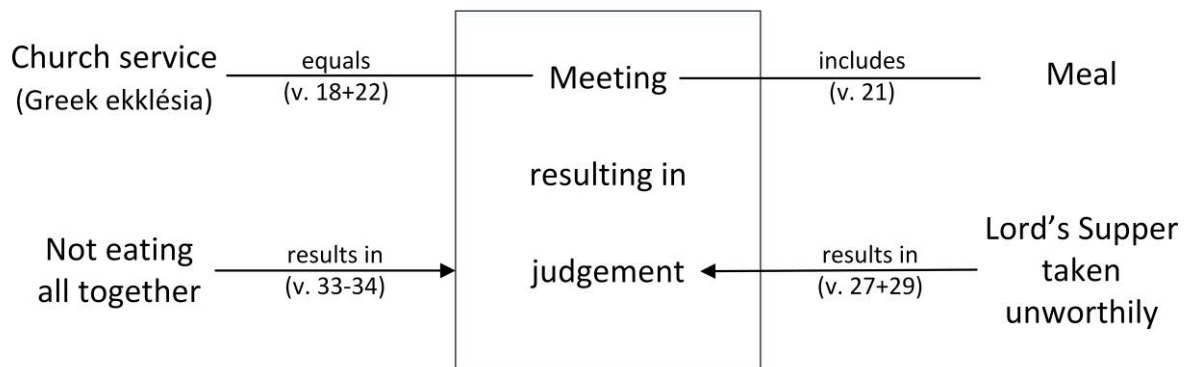
<sup>34</sup> Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you **meet together** it may not result in judgment... (1Cor 11:17-34)

First, Paul wrote about their meetings in general (verses 17-18). He wrote about their coming together as a congregation or church (Greek "**ekklesía**", verses 18+22). So he wrote about what is nowadays often called church service. For coming together, gathering or meeting there is in Greek always the same verb "**sunerchomai**" used and I highlighted its translations in green (verses 17-18+20+33-34).

Paul wrote that they would not take the Lord's Supper during their meetings (verse 20). Note that Paul did not write "when you gather for the Lord's Supper...", but he meant "during your church service you do not take the Lord's Supper according to Jesus' will". He did not write here about special services or meetings which would include the Lord's Supper, but in general.

At their meetings it was customary to eat a meal (verse 21). Paul warned that if they do not eat all together, their meeting would result in judgement (verses 33-34). So their meetings also included the (unworthily) taking of the Lord's Supper, because otherwise they would not "eat and drink judgment on themselves" (verse 27+29). In other words, the fact that they did not eat all together became a judgment for them, because they also took the Lord's Supper.

These interrelations are illustrated in the following diagram:



We can therefore conclude that the Corinthians generally celebrated the Lord's Supper at their church services.

Paul wrote "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup..." (1Cor 11:26; "whenever" is also translated as "as often as" ESV). This implies that we should take it several times. I think it's good to get inspired by the early Christians to also celebrate it often.

### With whom may we celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Jesus handed it to his disciples and not to pagans. The body of each Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19); this makes us worthy to eat Jesus' body and to drink his blood. An uncircumcised person was not allowed to participate in the Passover meal (Ex 12:48). Thus I recommend to every non-Christian not to take part in the Lord's Supper – especially in view of what happened to the Corinthians.

But all believing children should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper, even if they have not taken part in the Protestant confirmation or the Catholic sacrament or communion. Children also become Christians by faith alone and not by a ritual. Formal acceptance into a congregation is completely unnecessary. See also the section on church membership in my article "The Church of Jesus – Offices, Duties and Organization".

And what about young children who do not yet have any understanding of this? Consider that the Passover meal was eaten in families and that all family members participated in it, including infants. So we should not withhold the Lord's Supper from our infants.

Like the Passover meal, you may celebrate the Lord's Supper in your own believing family, and of course also with Christians of other denominations.

Communion is celebrated in Jesus' presence, i.e. in God's presence. Jesus said:

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. (Mt 18:20)

That's why I prefer to celebrate it together with someone else. However, in the Bible it is written nowhere that we should only celebrate it with others. So if you would like to take it and have nobody else, then feel free to celebrate with Jesus alone.

This also answers the question whether only pastors or elders may serve the Lord's Supper, because Jesus made all believers priests (Rev 1:6; Rev 5:10; 1Pet 2:9).

### Which Bread, Beverage and Cup should we use?

The Passover is the feast of unleavened bread (Lk 22:1); leaven was not allowed at all (Ex 12:15). So Jesus and his disciples ate unleavened bread at the Passover meal. Paul wrote:

<sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? <sup>7</sup> Get rid of the old yeast, so that you may be a new unleavened batch—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old bread leavened with malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1Cor 5:6-8)

Paul encouraged to celebrate the Passover (verse 8). Jesus spoke of the “leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Mt 16:6+12; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1). So leaven stands for something sinful (see also Gal 5:9). Leaven was generally not permitted as an offering (Lev 2:11).

Remember that the bread is Jesus' body, completely without sin. So we should only eat unleavened bread baked without yeast, for example matzo which can be bought in a well-stocked supermarket throughout the year. You can also bake it quickly by yourself: Simply mix flour with water and a little salt, knead the dough and bake. I always roll out the dough very flat so that the bread only needs to be baked for a few minutes. And then you can still eat it months later when it has become dry and hard.

Jesus and his disciples drank from the “fruit of the vine” (Mt 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18). They certainly didn't drink grape juice, because grape juice would have been spoiled from the harvest in autumn to the Passover in spring. It was also customary to drink wine. So I prefer wine at the Lord's Supper, but I also drink grape juice with children.

According to the Mosaic law only unleavened bread is allowed during Passover; but there is not any constraint on what to drink. So from this perspective Jesus and his disciples would have been allowed to drink water or something else. Nazirites were not allowed to drink wine or grape juice at all (Num 6:2-3) and there was no exception to the Passover. There could be a Nazirite during the Passover; Samson should even be a Nazirite for life (Judges 13:7). Also the Rekabites (Jer 35) and John the Baptist (Lk 1:15; Lk 7:33) did not drink wine all their lives. So, at least occasionally, something other than wine was drunk at the Passover.

Considering all these facts I would rather drink Coca-Cola instead of wine than eating leavened bread or bread baked with yeast at the Lord's Supper.

The disciples all drank from the same cup (Mt 26:27; Lk 22:17). I also prefer this in a very small group, for example when celebrating with the spouse. However, at the Passover meal it is also common that everyone has their own cup. Also consider that the Passover lamb was eaten in the family setting and not in a large gathering (Ex 12:3). That's why in larger groups I prefer having my own cup for hygienic reasons.

The Bible does not contain instructions on the beverage or the cup. Do it as God shows you personally; if you are unsure about God's will, drink in accordance with the way in which you have peace and trust that God will guide your thoughts.

### **How about Words of Institution or Consecration?**

Traditionally, at the beginning of the Lord's Supper, Words of Institution are read from the Gospels or the Epistle to the Corinthians: Words that remind us of how Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a covenant meal. Jesus instructed us to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him (Lk 22:19; 1Cor 11:24-26). There is no requirement in the Bible to speak any particular words. So when we eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of Jesus, that is communion. Words of Institution or Consecration or other rituals are not necessary.

We celebrate the Lord's Supper particularly in remembrance of Jesus' death on the cross, because we proclaim the death of Jesus, as Paul stated (1Cor 11:26). Therefore, it is more important to remember Jesus' sufferings than how he instituted the Lord's Supper. In the following section there are scriptures that are telling about Jesus' sufferings. These are also appropriate to be read for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, instead of always passing the bread with the same words like "The Body of Christ, given for you", you can also say something more varied:

The Body of Christ...

afflicted (Isa 53:4+7),  
beaten (Lk 22:63),  
crucified (Lk 23:33),  
crushed (Isa 53:5),  
despised (Isa 53:3; Ps 22:6),  
flogged (Mk 15:15),  
forsaken (Mk 15:34),  
hit (Mt 27:30),  
insulted (Mk 15:29+32),  
maltreated,  
mocked (Mt 27:29; Mk 15:30; Lk 22:63; Lk 23:11; Isa 50:6),  
nailed to the cross (Jn 19:37; Jn 20:25; Isa 53:5; Ps 22:17),  
oppressed (Isa 53:7),  
pierced (Jn 19:34+37; Isa 53:5; Zech 12:10; Ps 22:16),  
rejected (Isa 53:3),  
ridiculed (Lk 23:11),  
sacrificed,  
scorned (Ps 22:6),  
smitten (Lk 22:63),  
spat upon (Mt 27:30; Isa 50:6),  
struck / stricken (Mt 27:30; Lk 22:64; Isa 53:4),  
suffered (Isa 53:4),  
tormented,  
tortured,  
that had worn a crown of thorns (Mt 27:29),  
that bore your suffering (Isa 53:4),  
that took up your pain (Isa 53:4)

for you.

But you should not say broken, because Jesus' bones were not broken (Jn 19:36).

As an introduction to the Lord's Supper, it is also good to read Jesus' explanations from the Gospel of John, where he said that one must eat his flesh and drink his blood (Jn 6:48-58).

## Jesus' Sufferings

We begin with scriptures from the Gospels and continue with prophetic ones from the Old Testament.

After the Passover meal, Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane before being betrayed:

And being in **agony** he prayed more earnestly; and his **sweat became like great drops of blood** falling down to the ground. (Lk 22:44 ESV)

The following happened in the high priest's house:

<sup>63</sup> And the men that held Jesus **mocked** him, and **smote** him. <sup>64</sup> And when they had blindfolded him, they **struck him on the face**, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? <sup>65</sup> And many other things **blasphemously** spake they against him. (Lk 22:63-65 KJV)

At daybreak Jesus was led before the council, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law who interrogated Jesus. Then he was led to Pilate who sent him to Herod:

Then Herod and his soldiers **ridiculed** and **mocked** him. **Dressing him in an elegant robe**, they sent him back to Pilate. (Lk 23:11)

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus **flogged**, and handed him over to be crucified. (Mk 15:15)

<sup>27</sup> Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. <sup>28</sup> They **stripped him** and **put a scarlet robe on him**, <sup>29</sup> and then **twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head**. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and **mocked** him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. <sup>30</sup> They **spit on him**, and took the staff and **struck him on the head again and again**. (Mt 27:27-30)

Jesus' crucifixion:

When they came to the place called the Skull, they **crucified** him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. (Lk 23:33)

<sup>29</sup> Those who passed by **hurled insults** at him, shaking their heads and saying, "So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, <sup>30</sup> come down from the cross and save yourself!" <sup>31</sup> In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law **mocked** him among themselves. "He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! <sup>32</sup> Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Those crucified with him also **heaped insults** on him. <sup>33</sup> At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. <sup>34</sup> And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"**). <sup>35</sup> When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." <sup>36</sup> Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. "Now leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down," he said. <sup>37</sup> With a **loud cry**, Jesus breathed his last. (Mk 15:29-37)

...one of the soldiers **pierced Jesus' side with a spear**, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. (Jn 19:34)

Adam's side was opened during his deep sleep and God gave him his wife Eve (Gen 2:21-22). Jesus' side was opened during his death and the saints "whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life" will be his bride (2Cor 11:2; Rev 19:7-8; Rev 21:2-3+9-27).

Let's turn to the Old Testament prophets. Isaiah prophesied:

**From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with olive oil. (Isa 1:6)**

**I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;**

I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. (Isa 50:6)

Just as there were many who were appalled at him – his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness (Isa 52:14)

<sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. (Isa 53:2-7)

Zechariah prophesied:

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (Zech 12:10)

David wrote:

<sup>1</sup> My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? ...

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. <sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. <sup>8</sup> “He trusts in the Lord,” they say, “let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.” ...

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. <sup>15</sup> My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. <sup>16</sup> Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. <sup>17</sup> All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. <sup>18</sup> They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment. (Ps 22:1-18)

Jesus was nailed to the cross on his hands and feet (see also Jn 20:25; Rev 1:7).

## Additional Comments

Some additional comments related to the Lord's Supper:

### The first Scripture with Bread and Wine

Let's read the scripture where bread and wine are mentioned for the very first time in the Bible:

<sup>18</sup> Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup> and he blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. (Gen 14:18-19)

Melchizedek brought bread and wine to Abram. Melchizedek was king and priest of God. Jesus is king (Mt 27:11; Jn 18:37; Rev 19:16) and high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:10; Heb 6:20). (The Levitical priests were not kings and the kings of Israel were not priests; this separation was abolished by Jesus, cf. Zech 6:13). Jesus is compared to Melchizedek, both are without father, without mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days or end of life, and Melchizedek also remains a priest forever (Heb 7:3). – I believe that Melchizedek might be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus and that the meal Melchizedek brought to Abram is a shadow of the Lord's Supper.

### Jesus' first Miracle

The first miracle of Jesus took place during a wedding in Cana. Here Jesus turned water into wine (Jn 2:1-11). So it was at a banquet at which a marriage covenant was celebrated. – With the Lord's Supper we celebrate the New Covenant.

### The Betrothal with Jesus

According to Jewish tradition, the marriage covenant is made at the engagement. As a sign of confirmation, the couple drink wine from a cup, similar to the way we take communion. The actual wedding takes place afterwards, often several months later in biblical times, but nowadays often on the same day. – At the Lord's Supper we celebrate our betrothal to Jesus, because we are his bride (2Cor 11:2; Eph 5:31-32). Just as a bride longs for fellowship with her bridegroom, we as Christians long for fellowship with Jesus and look forward to being with him for eternity. The wedding will take place when he returns (Rev 19:7-9).

In a brief digression, we look at further parallels between Jewish traditions and Christianity:

- According to Jewish tradition, the bridegroom or his father chooses the bride. – We did not choose God, but he chose us (Jn 15:16; Eph 1:4-5; 2Thess 2:13; 1Pet 1:2).
- The man has to pay a bride-price to acquire the woman (Ex 22:15-16; Deut 22:28-29). The family of Isaac's wife Rebekah received costly gifts on their engagement (Gen 24:53). Jacob served his uncle and father-in-law Laban for his two wives Leah and Rachel for seven years each (Gen 29:15-30). And David paid 100 foreskins of the Philistines for his wife Michal (1Sam 18:25-27; 2Sam 3:14). This may seem strange to us today, but compared to the pagan cultures of the time, it is an appreciation of the woman. – On Golgotha, Jesus bought us, the church of God, with his own blood (Acts 20:28), he did not buy us "with things that can pass away, like silver or gold," instead he bought us with his "priceless blood" from a "perfect lamb" without "any flaws at all" (1Pet 1:18-19 NIRV). Jesus paid the bride-price, the price for our redemption (Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; 1Cor 6:20; Gal 3:13; Gal 4:5; 1Tim 2:5-6). We no longer belong to ourselves, but to God (1Cor 6:19-20). And as a sign of this, he has sealed us with the Holy Spirit as his own (Eph 1:13; Eph 4:30; 2Cor 1:22). The Greek verb for sealing "sphragizó" conveys the idea of ownership, security, authentication and approval.
- For the engagement, the groom gives the bride a valuable gift. Isaac's wife Rebekah was given gold and silver jewelry and articles of clothing for her betrothal (Gen 24:53). – God anointed us and gave us his Holy Spirit as a gift, namely as a "deposit" (NIV), down payment, "guarantee" (ESV) or "earnest" (2Cor 1:21-22 KJV; see also 2Cor 5:5; Eph 1:14).
- The groom commits himself to a marriage contract already at the time of the engagement. This contract outlines only his obligations towards the bride, for example

to provide for her. It does not contain any obligations on the part of the bride. It is an unconditional offer. The man makes a promise to the woman. The woman does not need to say or promise anything. She expresses her consent to the covenant in particular by coming to him and accepting his gift. – God does not want lip service that does not come from the heart (Isa 29:13; Mt 21:28-31; Lk 6:46), but that we do his will and follow him (Mt 7:21-23). When we follow God, he takes care of our welfare (Mt 6:33). By our faith in Jesus and accepting his gift, i.e. the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are betrothed to him and this makes us his covenant partners (Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16). We do not need to promise God anything in order to obtain forgiveness for our sins.

- After the engagement, the bridegroom leaves the bride and prepares their shared home. – Jesus has ascended to heaven and makes everything ready for us there (Jn 14:2-3). Jesus created the world in only six days (Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:10; Jn 1:1-3 with Rev 19:13) and now he has already had 2000 years to prepare the homes for us. I am sure that they will be exceptionally beautiful.
- Before the wedding, the bride cleanses herself in a mikvah, i.e. she washes herself in "living" water, and prepares herself beautifully for her husband. – We are cleansed "by the washing with water through the word," that is, by the living, spoken word (Greek "rhēma"), so that we are "without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (Eph 5:26-27). And at the wedding we are clothed in "fine linen, clean and white," and this is the "righteousness of saints" (Rev 19:8 KJV). So our righteousness by our faith in Jesus makes us beautiful.
- The father of the bridegroom sets the wedding date. – Only our Father in heaven knows the wedding day, i.e. the day of Jesus' return (Mt 24:36; Mk 13:32).

The metaphor of a marital relationship between God and his people already exists in the Old Testament. Hosea prophesied that the Lord God, Yahweh, our Father in heaven, would betroth himself to his people (Hos 2:19-20). Isaiah and Jeremiah wrote that the Lord has married his people (Isa 54:5; Jer 3:14; Jer 31:32). In Hebrew, this is the verb "baal", which usually means to marry, but can also mean to rule over. In English it is often translated in the way that the Lord is the husband. When the Israelites sacrificed to other gods, this accordingly was prostitution, whoring or adultery (in Hebrew "zanah": Ex 34:16; Lev 17:7; Lev 20:5; Deut 31:16; Judg 2:17; Judg 8:27+33; 1Chr 5:25; Ps 73:27 KJV; Jer 2:20; Jer 3:1-9; Ezk 6:9; Ezk 16:15-38; Ezk 20:30-32 ESV; Ezk 23:1-49; Hos 1:2). Further, he has chosen the people of Israel (Deut 7:6; Deut 14:2; Isa 41:8; Isa 43:20) and made them his possession (Ex 19:5; Ex 34:9; Deut 7:6; Deut 14:2; Deut 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17). According to this, a Jew living in the old covenant has our Heavenly Father as his bridegroom, but we Christians his Son Jesus. This may seem strange to us, especially since it is particularly shameful when father and son have the same wife (Lev 18:8; Lev 20:11; Am 2:7; 1Cor 5:1). But remember that our Father in heaven and his Son Jesus are one (Jn 10:30). Furthermore, a Jew becomes a new creation through his faith in Jesus (2Cor 5:17; Jn 3:3-7; Rom 6:4; Gal 6:15).

### Psalm 23

Let's read the twenty-third psalm:

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no

evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Jesus prepared a table for us, the Lord's Supper with a cup overflowing with his blood; remember that at the Passover meal the cup of redemption is filled to the point of overflowing. God also anointed us (2Cor 1:21) like Jesus with the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:38); the anointing with oil represents the Holy Spirit (1Sam 16:13; Isa 61:1). – When sitting at the table of Jesus the enemy cannot harm us.

### Taste that the Lord is good!

David wrote in another psalm:

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.  
(Ps 34:8)

David invites us to taste with our mouths that the Lord is good. – This is what we do at the Lord's Supper, when we eat Jesus' body and drink his blood.

### Eat with Jesus

On the day when Jesus resurrected, the two disciples who were going to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus initially, but then:

<sup>30</sup> When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. <sup>31</sup> Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. (Lk 24:30-31)

Jesus also wants to reveal himself to us when breaking bread, i.e. when eating his body.

Later, Jesus ate and drank with his disciples (Lk 24:36-43; Acts 10:41) and in the Book of Revelation he said:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. (Rev 3:20)

Eating with the resurrected Jesus is important.

### Spiritual Food

Paul wrote about the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt:

<sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. (1Cor 10:3-4)

After the Israelites had left Egypt, their spiritual food was manna and they drank water from a rock, which was Jesus. – Jesus' body and blood are our spiritual food, which we take in the Lord's Supper.

### Powerful food

Elijah had water poured over his burnt offering on Mount Carmel and God consumed it by fire from heaven to show the people that he is the only true God (1Kgs 18:17-39). Then Elijah killed the prophets of Baal (1Kgs 18:40) and fled because Jezebel wanted to kill him (1Kgs 19:2-3). After a long flight, Elijah was exhausted and wanted to die (1Kgs 19:4). Then the angel of the

Lord came to Elijah and gave him food and drink, and “strengthened by that food, he travelled for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God” (1Kgs 19:5-8). On Mount Horeb, the Lord met him with the “gentle whisper” (1Kgs 19:9-18).

The angel of the Lord is Jesus; I have shown this clearly in my article “Who is the Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament?” The food of Jesus was so powerful that Elijah could travel for 40 days. The Lord’s Supper is the supernatural food that Jesus gives us today, and it is also full of power and it strengthens us. Through Jesus, Elijah came to the Lord, that is, to the Father. Jesus said:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me. (Jn 14:6)

Jesus is the way to the Father; Elijah had already experienced this. Our heavenly Father also wants to meet us at communion.

### Suffer with Jesus

Paul wrote:

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (Rom 8:17)

What does it mean to suffer with Jesus as others translate (KJV and ESV)? The Greek word “sumpaschó” which is translated as “suffer” is to be understood in the sense of “to sympathize”. It occurs only twice in the entire Bible; the other place is:

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1Cor 12:26)

We suffer with Jesus by remembering his sufferings. This is what we also do when taking the Lord’s Supper.

### Know Jesus

Paul and Timothy wrote:

<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:10-11)

This is about knowing Jesus, the power of His resurrection and also about the “participation in his sufferings”. The Greek word “koinōnía”, here translated as “participation”, is the same as used in 1Cor 10:16 where it refers to the participation in the body and blood of Jesus. So this is again about remembering what Jesus suffered for us.

“becoming like him in his death” may refer to the baptism which represents that we were buried with Jesus (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). However, in this context it may also be understood in such a way that we are becoming like him in his death by remembering his sufferings at the cross.

With the Lord’s Supper we get to know Jesus better, along with that also the power of His resurrection and we internalize what he suffered for us. Verse 11 can be understood to mean that one must eat Jesus’ flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life (Jn 6:54).

## **Summary**

The Lord's Supper is the covenant meal with which the New Covenant is confirmed. We eat Jesus' body and drink his blood; in this way we take in more of his life and soul.

We celebrate Communion in Jesus' presence, i.e. in God's presence; similar to how Abraham and Moses and the elders ate in God's presence.

We proclaim the death of Jesus. We should remember what Jesus accomplished and what he suffered for us. The bread stands for our healing and the wine for our redemption from sin. Communion can also strengthen and heal us physically, because "by his wounds we are healed" (Isa 53:5 NIV) or "with his stripes we are healed" (Isa 53:5 KJV).

The Lord's Supper can be supplemented by washing each other's feet and singing songs of praise afterwards.

Leaven stands for something sinful; that's why at the Lord's Supper we should only eat unleavened bread and bread baked without yeast.

We are not harmed by the Lord's Supper if we examine ourselves and ask for forgiveness of sins and consider and treat our brothers and sisters in Christ as such particularly at our meetings when celebrating Communion.

The Corinthians took the Lord's Supper at each of their church services. We should be inspired by the early Christians to also take it often.

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