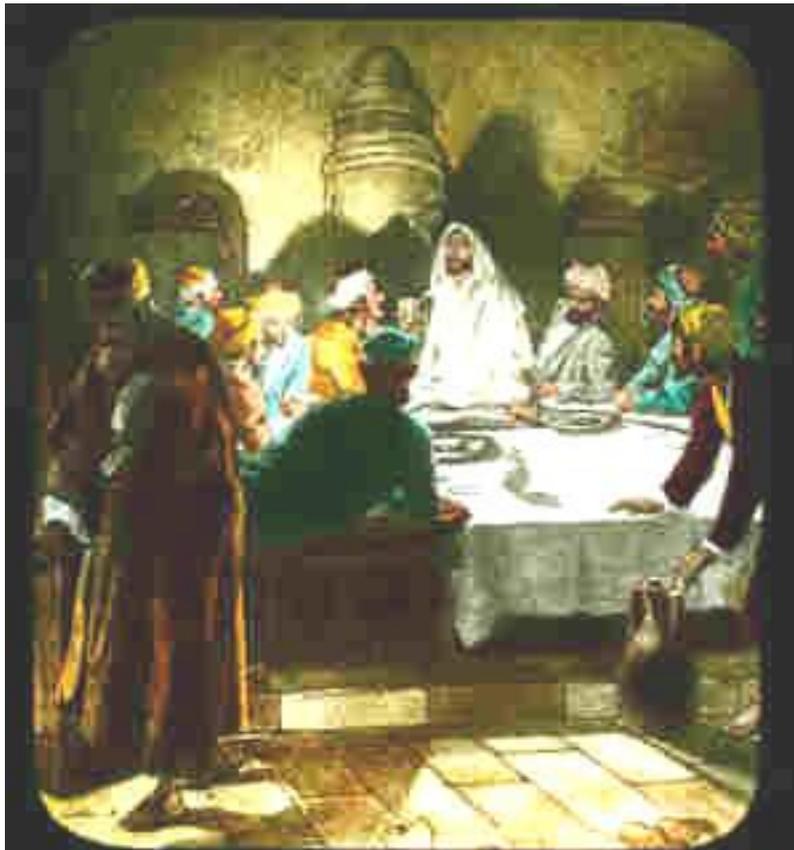


## Communion



**The Lord's Last Supper**

There are denominations in the Christian world which rely heavily on ceremony. Jesus, however, instituted only two ceremonies which he requested that his disciples observe. One was baptism; the other was communion. In a sense these two are closely related. Baptism is a one-time symbol of the Christian's immersing himself into the will of God to be dead with Christ. (Romans 6:3) The "last supper" (communion) observance is a repeated symbol of our reliance on Jesus' sacrifice as the basis of our baptism vows and the hopes we have attached to them. (I Corinthians 15:29, 30) These hopes are attached inseparably to the Jewish Passover picture. Therefore, to understand communion, it is helpful to understand some

### HISTORY

When Jesus instituted the communion observance, it is clear that he was careful to do so in conjunction with the Jewish Passover celebration. (Matthew 26:17-29) This was done because Jesus knew that he was the fulfillment of the Jewish Passover picture. He was the antitypical lamb that was to be sacrificed to accomplish two prophetic works: (1) His death would deliver the "firstborn" (his

church) during the night of the Gospel Age. (2) Then, in the Millennial morning, the whole world of mankind would be delivered from its slavery to sin and death as Israel was delivered from Egypt. (I Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 12:23) It is this connection with the Passover celebration that convinces many Christians that an annual observance of communion is most appropriate.

Some have interpreted Jesus' words in I Corinthians 11:25 as implying a more frequent observance: "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." But it seems likely here that Jesus' point was not that we would do it often, but that as often as we do it (i.e., every Passover season), we should do it for the very purpose of MEMORIALIZING HIM and what he accomplished as the antitype of the Passover Lamb. It is the habit of humanity to observe great events on the anniversaries of their occurrences. We believe this is why Jesus tied the last supper celebration to the Passover. That date ESPECIALLY forces to our attention what in particular we should "remember" about Jesus and our personal connection to him and his work.

## THE EMBLEMS

Innumerable theories have been advanced as to the meanings and purposes of the bread and wine which form the basis of the communion service. (I Corinthians 11:23-26) The Roman Church has gone so far as to take it beyond symbol and to make the partaking of communion ESSENTIAL to gaining eternal salvation. Even beyond this, they believe the emblems not to be symbolic at all, but rather the ACTUAL BODY AND BLOOD of Jesus. This is called the doctrine of Transubstantiation. That church believes that Jesus' sacrifice was insufficient and that, therefore, Christ is crucified afresh at each offering of the Mass to cover subsequent sins. We believe this not only to be unscriptural (Hebrews 6:6), but that the concept is an abomination which makes desolate the whole purpose of Jesus' sacrifice at his first advent. (Hebrews 10:26; Matthew 24:15)

Jesus and Paul give us the essential meanings of these symbols. Jesus said that the bread is a representation of his body. (Matthew 26:26) Thus he elsewhere calls himself "bread." (John 6:32-35, 48, 50-58) He clearly states that the bread is his flesh which he gives "for the life of the world." (John 6:51) This is the doctrine of the RANSOM (please see Doctrinal Kernel—Ransom). Thus one thing which we memorialize in communion is that the world will have life because Jesus died as the real Passover lamb which takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

When Jesus presents the cup of wine to his disciples (Matthew 26:27-29), he connects its significance to the New Covenant. The New Covenant will be the legal promise through which God will restore the nation of Israel and all of mankind to a perfect relationship with Himself resulting in the blessings of everlasting life. (Jeremiah 31:31-34) Jesus makes two points about this symbol:

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(1) It represents his life poured out — blood spilled. This is because a sin-canceling covenant must be sealed by blood. (Hebrews 9:18, 22, 23)

(2) Jesus also mentions an additional significance of the wine. (Matthew 26:29) He subtly shows that IN THE FUTURE he and his disciples would partake of it together with a new meaning. When Jesus and his disciples are all glorified together and the kingdom has begun, the JOYS of the covenant which the blood has sealed will begin, and much celebration will be in order.

The Apostle Paul amplifies some of the thoughts which Jesus presented. In I Corinthians 10:16 and 17, Paul introduces more clearly a thought which was obscure when Jesus instituted the ceremony of communion. Paul uses the word "communion" which Jesus had not used. It means common-union — in other words, many brought together for one purpose. This is what Paul elsewhere refers to as a mystery — that Christ IS NOT ONE, BUT MANY! (I Corinthians 12:12-14, 20; Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:3-9; Colossians 1:24-27) This is a very blessed and sobering thought. It is saying (and it is buttressed by innumerable other texts) that THE CHRIST, the "anointed," the Messiah for the world is Jesus AND his faithful disciples. This is the doctrine of the sin-offering. While Jesus' disciples have no personal merit to offer to God, God has arranged that they will, with their Lord, be allowed to offer themselves for the purpose of ultimately doing away with sin. And then they will be the administrators of the New Covenant. Thus, (Galatians 3:29), they will be the Seed of Abraham who will bless all of the families of the earth. Thus Paul also shows (I Corinthians 10:17) that our participation in communion not only memorializes what Jesus did, but also memorializes that we are part of that "one body" — THE CHRIST. Again, this connects us with I Corinthians 15:29, 30, showing that the very purpose of our baptism and suffering with Christ is to be part of raising the dead!

Jesus knew that as we partake of and consider these things on the observance of the anniversaries of his death, we would be strengthened by seeing their meanings more clearly each year, and we also would be able to re-assess our own parts in sacrificing with him. Thus we have an annual opportunity to renew our vows. The ceremony is not the thing; living its significance throughout the year is the objective. As Paul said, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast"! (I Corinthians 5:7, 8)