

# Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist

## Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper

How is it that the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews came to believe in Jesus?, the Eucharist? and the Real Presence? How could a Jew like Paul, or any of the apostles go from believing that drinking any blood, much less human blood was an abomination BEFORE God, to believing that drinking the blood of Jesus was necessary from Christians?

“For the life of every creature is the blood of it; therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off. Leviticus 17:14

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” 1Corinthians 10:16

Ancient Jewish practices/beliefs laid the foundation for belief in Jesus Christ and the Eucharist

3 Key Images from Judaism:

1. Passover
2. Beliefs about Manna
3. Bread of the Presence

## 1. Passover and the New Exodus

What were the Jewish people waiting for?

- some were waiting for an earthly, political Messiah to free them from Roman bondage
- Most were waiting for the restoration of Israel - a new Exodus – for a Messiah who would save the people like Moses had.

Parallels:

THE OLD EXODUS	THE NEW EXODUS
Moses as deliverer	Messiah as deliverer
12 tribes were released from slavery	Israelites and Gentiles saved from sin
Journey for 40 years to Promised Land	Journey to the new Eden
Worship in the Tabernacle	Worship centred in the New Temple
Ultimate destination - Jerusalem	Ultimate destination – the New Jerusalem

\* Need a New Passover to have a New Exodus

The Old Testament Passover: see Exodus chapter 12

“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 forever.” Exodus 12:14

There were required rituals:

Step 1: choose a male, year old unblemished lamb and observe it for 10 days

Step 2: sacrifice the lamb

Step 3: "Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning." Exodus 12:22

"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." Exodus 12:13

\* Deliverance from death was thru the blood of the lamb.

Step 4: "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." Exodus 12:8-10

**\* The climax of the Passover Sacrifice was the eating of the flesh of the lamb.**

Passover Traditions at the time of Jesus:

- certain steps were taken away such as spreading the blood on the door posts of the home
- eating of the Passover meal included an explanation of what the dishes represented
- new rituals were added, such as drinking of cups of wine (4 in total)
- the lambs at the time of Jesus had to be sacrificed in the Temple and eaten in Jerusalem
- only the priests (of the tribe of Levi) could pour out the blood of the lambs on the altar
- the Passover became not **just a sacrifice but a remembrance** by which the Jewish people *made present* the deliverance that had been won for their ancestors in the exodus from Egypt

Questions would be asked by a child:

"Why is this night different from other nights?"

"Why do we eat unleavened bread and lamb?"

"In every generation a man is obligated to regard himself as though he personally had gone forth from Egypt, because it is said, "And you shall tell your son on that day, saying: '**It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came forth out of Egypt**'" Exodus 13:8. Therefore it is our duty to thank, praise, laud, glorify, raise up, beautify, bless, extol, and adore Him who made all these miracles for our fathers and ourselves; He brought us forth from slavery into freedom, from sorrow into joy, from mourning into festivity, from darkness into great light, and from servitude into redemption. Let us say before him, Hallelujah!" Mishna Pesachim 10

In some mysterious way, the ancient Jewish celebrants saw each Passover as a way of sharing in the original act of redemption... as if they themselves experienced it. They did not just remember the exodus, but actively **participated** in it.

The first Exodus ends in the crossing of the Jordan River by Joshua to the Promised Land. It is in this very location that Jesus starts his public ministry. When Jesus appears, His actions point to a new Moses. "When viewed from ancient Jewish eyes, in the light of their common hopes for the future, Jesus' public ministry was literally brimming with signs of the long-awaited exodus."

- When Jesus steps out of the waters of the Jordan, the heavens part because the New Exodus will end in the heavenly promised land
- Jesus chooses 12 apostles to represent the 12 tribes
- Jesus feeds the 5000 people in the desert with miraculous bread recalling Moses feeding the Israelites with manna in the desert
- These actions point to the coming of the New Exodus

The Last Supper is a Passover Meal – but it is a new Passover with differences:

- The Lamb is not the focus
- Jesus does not speak about the past exodus but of his future suffering and death; says His blood will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins
- Only a valid priest could pour out the blood of the sacrifice.

“And the priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense before the LORD which is in the tent of meeting, and the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering which is at the door of the tent of meeting.” Leviticus 4:7

There are three new elements here:

- New priests – Jesus and the apostles
- New lamb – Jesus replaces the lamb as the sacrifice
- New sacrifice of bread and wine; the blood of redemption is the blood of the Messiah

This New Passover inaugurates the New Exodus.

The Eucharist is the New Passover –

- The Eucharist is a participation of the One sacrifice  
CCC 1330 – The *memorial* of the Lord’s Passion and Resurrection, The *Holy Sacrifice*, because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the saviour and includes the Church offering...it completes and surpasses all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.
- If the Eucharist is the New Passover, then you must eat the lamb to complete the Passover  
“So Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you;**” John 6:53
- Christ is our Paschal Lamb  
“Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, 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

If Jesus is the Messiah what food will He give us on our journey to the new Promised Land?

## 2. Beliefs about Manna

Right after the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea, the Israelites complained.

"And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness," Exodus 16:2

The miracle of the manna is a two-fold miracle:

- Morning – bread from heaven
- Evening – flesh (quail) from heaven

Manna was a white substance that tasted like wafers made with honey. It was a foretaste of the promised land and a foretaste of the Eucharist.

God's way of saying "Trust me to provide for you"

"Yet he commanded the skies above,  
and opened the doors of heaven;  
and he rained down upon them manna to eat,  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance." Psalm 78:23-25

Manna means "what is it?"

The Manna was placed in a golden bowl in the tabernacle.

"And Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations." Exodus 16:33

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant;"

Hebrews 9: 1-4

The Jewish expectation was that **the Messiah would bring back the manna from heaven.** They believed that those that lived during the days of the Messiah would see miracles every day.

"And it will happen that...the Messiah will begin to be revealed...and those who are hungry will enjoy themselves and they will moreover see marvels every day..."

And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time."

2 Baruch 29:3-8

Jesus mentions the hope for the new manna from heaven 2 times:

1. In the Our Father – "Give us this day our daily bread." (our supernatural bread)

"Daily" (*epiousios*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament.

"Taken literally (*epi-ousios*: "super-essential"), it refers directly to the Bread of Life, the Body of Christ..." CCC 2837

2. During the Bread of Life Discourse in John 6, the most important chapter in the Bible on the Eucharist:

"I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh."

"The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink..."

This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever." John 6:48-58

Reaction:

"Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, "This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?" But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples murmured at it, said to them, "Do you take offense at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?"

John 6:60-62

So we ask the question again. Why did the first century Jewish Christians believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist? It was through faith and the Holy Spirit that they saw the eucharist not just as the New Passover, but the new manna from heaven.

- If the eucharist is the New Manna, must be supernatural bread from heaven for how can it be lesser than the Old Manna?
- If the Eucharist is the New Manna from heaven – it is not just the crucified body of Christ, but **the crucified AND supernatural, resurrected** body of Christ! Full of the Spirit of life under the form of bread and wine.
- It is from heaven that Christ pours out the eucharist onto the altars of the world.

### 3. The Mysterious Bread of the Presence

After God gives the 10 commandments to Moses, He tells the Israelites how He wants to be worshipped. God commands Moses to place three key symbols of His presence in the Tabernacle. See Exodus 25:10-40

1. Ark of the Covenant
2. The Golden Lampstand (Menorah)
3. Golden Table with the Bread of the Presence

The mystery of the Trinity was hidden in the Tabernacle waiting to be revealed.  
 The Ark points to the invisible God the Father  
 The Lampstand – the Holy Spirit  
 The Bread of the Presence – the Son

The Bread of the Presence is described in Leviticus 24:5-9

1. There were 12 unleavened cakes
2. Offered every Saturday (Sabbath) as a sacrifice, the most holy sacrifice; eaten by priests
3. Sign of a Perpetual Covenant between God and the twelve tribes
4. Menorah was continually lit
5. When the bread was taken out of the Tabernacle, it was veiled
6. Sacrifice of bread and wine "And you shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour libations; of pure gold you shall make them. And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always." Exodus 25:29-30 (Incense was also kept on the table. It always accompanied a sacrifice to symbolize the rising to heaven.)
7. Bread of the Face (Face of God) – a kind of memorial of the heavenly banquet in which Moses and the elders "saw" the God of Israel while they "ate and drank". Exodus 24: 9-11

During the time of Jesus it was a custom during Passover (also Pentecost and the Festival of Booths) for the priest to take out the bread of the Presence from the tabernacle and lift it up before the people, stating, "**Behold God's love for you.**"

"They used to lift it up and exhibit the Bread of the Presence to those who came up for the festivals, saying to them, 'Behold God's love for you'." Babylonian Talmud, Menahoth 29a

## The New Bread of the Presence:

Plucking Grain on the Sabbath:

"At that time Jesus went through the grain fields on the sabbath; his disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck ears of grain and to eat.

But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the sabbath." He said to them, "**Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?**

Or have you not read in the law how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless?

(Priests worked on the sabbath preparing and offering the Bread of the Presence – the sabbath day sacrifice.)

I tell you, **something greater than the temple is here.**" Matthew 12:1-8

What can be greater than the Temple in which God resides? Only God Himself!

Jesus is proclaiming in a very Jewish way the Real Presence of God. **Jesus is the Temple and his disciples are the new priests.**

So we have:

- The New Passover
- The New Manna
- The New Bread of the Presence

BREAD OF THE PRESENCE	THE LAST SUPPER
1. Twelve cakes for the 12 tribes	1. Twelve apostles for the 12 tribes
2. bread and wine of God's presence	2. bread and wine of Jesus' presence
3. An 'Everlasting covenant'	3. a new 'covenant'
4. As a 'remembrance'	4. in 'remembrance'
5. Offered by the high priest and eaten by priests	5. Offered by Jesus and eaten by the apostles
6. Eaten at the Golden 'Table' in the Jerusalem Temple (Exodus 25:23-30; Leviticus 24:5-9)	6. Jesus' 'Table' in the Kingdom of the Father (Luke 22:19-20)

## In Summary:

- Elements of the Jewish faith enabled the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jews to come to believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.
- When we go to Liturgy, we go back to Jesus' passion on the cross where "the lamb of God gave Himself for me". (and saved me from physical and spiritual death)
- The Eucharist is a miracle that points to Calvary and to the Resurrection.
- We believe in the immortality of not just the soul but of the body as well.
- The Eucharist is a pledge and a foretaste of heaven and the Resurrection of the dead.
- The Eucharist is the New Bread of the Presence. God is present on all the altars of the world. God with us!

One day, when we reach that new promised land of heaven, Jesus will no longer be hidden under the veil, under the appearance of bread and wine. On that day we shall know and see Him as He is, face to face!