

## (Part One)

### The Night He Was Betrayed

The Lord's time with his apostles was coming to an end, the fulfilment of his purpose on earth was fast approaching, and he still had much to share with them. Their last evening together would be memorable.

"Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.' 'Where do you want us to prepare for it?' they asked. He replied, 'As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there.' They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover." (Luke 22:7-12)

Jesus had spoken often with his apostles about his death, but during the meal he astonished them with the announcement that he would be betrayed, and by one of them. In unison they declared their innocence.

They asked Jesus to identify the betrayer and he said, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish," and he gave it to Judas with the words, "What you are about to do, do quickly." Judas got up and left their company. The disciples did not understand what Jesus had said to Judas and assumed that since he was the treasurer he was going out to buy some food for the poor. (Luke 22:26-30) Not so.

He was putting the finishing touches to the plan he had been harbouring for some time. In spite of their efforts to destroy Jesus, the religious authorities had not been successful.

The teaching of Jesus had put him on a collision course with them and Jesus' death was the only way of stopping him. We can only imagine their surprise when Judas arrived that night.

The conversation might have gone something like this:

"I'd like to speak to one of the priests. Tell him it is to his advantage that I speak to him immediately." "Who shall I say wishes to speak to him?" "My name is Judas Iscariot; I'm one of Jesus' apostles."

Whatever planning session or discussion they might have been engaged in would have stopped, and their undivided attention would have been given to Judas. As he spoke, they would have realised that his plans to betray Jesus dovetailed perfectly with their own plans and desires.

What he was sharing with them was music to their ears. In fact, Mark tells us: **"They were delighted to hear this and promised him money."** (Mark 14:11)

Such good fortune, they probably surmised, was nothing other than divine intervention. Judas had come in answer to their prayers.

In their eyes, the evidence that this was indeed the hand of God was beyond dispute for who would ever have thought that their big break would come from one of Jesus' own group. Yes, they would have concluded, God works in mysterious ways.

The next few hours would be important for Judas as he sought out the right moment to lead the authorities to Jesus. He must proceed with caution and not arouse suspicion.

After all, it is not every day of the week that one can earn thirty pieces of silver. All this was taking place while Jesus and the eleven apostles were gathered in the upper room, all but Jesus unaware of the treachery being planned.



(Part Two)

### The Setting - The Passover Meal

Many of us look back on our school days and rate history as one of the more boring subjects we had to study. If you happened to be one of those unfortunates, **could I ask you to indulge for a short time in a history lesson about the Passover?**

I think you'll be blessed since the institution of the Lord's Supper takes place within the context of a Passover meal.

The first Passover occurred nearly 1,500 years before Jesus became man and dwelt among us.

Here's the story: The descendants of Abraham, a few dozen people, migrated to Egypt because of the famine in their land. Joseph, the son of Jacob, who was now ruler in Egypt, met their needs. During the next 400 years Abraham's descendants experienced a population explosion and grew in number to about 3 million people, posing a threat to the Egyptians who reduced them to the status of slaves. God was not deaf to their cries, however.

Neither had he forgotten his covenant with Abraham, a covenant that promised them the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey. God raised up Moses to lead his people to the Promised Land, but not before sending ten plagues upon Egypt. God's repeated call to Pharaoh to **"Let my people go"** failed to move his sinful heart. The plagues were designed to show that God is the one, true God and there is no other God except him.

The plagues were the judgement of God "on all the gods of Egypt". (Exodus 12:12) The tenth and final plague would secure freedom for the Hebrew slaves. On that night they would be delivered from the bondage of Egypt and begin their journey to the Promised Land.

In preparation for the final plague Moses gave these instructions to the people:

"Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, 'Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning.

When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down. Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony.'" (Exodus 12:21-25)

They did as God instructed: each family killed a lamb and sprinkled its blood upon the doorpost of their home to protect themselves against the coming judgement of God.

"At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well."

That night, the Bible says "there was a loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead." (Exodus 12:29-30)

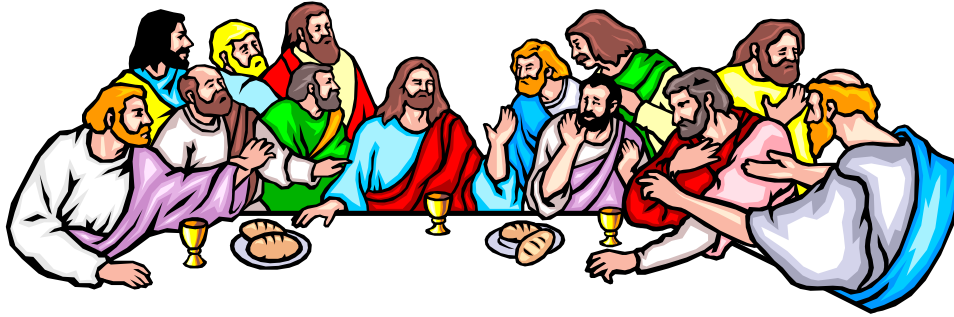
That night Pharaoh summoned Moses with instructions to take the people out of Egypt and "about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children" left Egypt that night. (Exodus 12:37)

This event was not to pass into the annals of history and be forgotten; the children of Israel would always commemorate this event.

"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD--a lasting ordinance... When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he promised, observe this ceremony. And when your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.' Then the people bowed down and worshiped." (Exodus 12:14,25-27)

The food eaten by the Israelites at the Passover is significant: The slain lamb recalled how God's judgement was diverted by the blood of a slain lamb which was sprinkled upon their doorposts, the bitter herbs spoke of their slavery in Egypt and the unleavened bread was called the bread of affliction. (Deuteronomy 16:3)

From the food that was already there commemorating Israel's deliverance; the Lord takes the bread and wine and speaks of a new deliverance - from the bondage of sin.



(Part Three)

Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt provides the backdrop against which the Lord's Supper was instituted:

"While they were eating [the Passover meal], Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom. When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives." (Matthew 26:26-30)

How are we to understand what Jesus said?

His words have been a source of contention over the centuries. Roman Catholics see in his words the institution of the Mass, while evangelicals see in them the pattern for a memorial of his death.

The conversation in the upper room that night would have centred on the Passover and Israel's deliverance from slavery.

Throughout his ministry Jesus had spoken of liberation. "You will know the truth," he said, "and the truth will set you free... if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:32,36)

With his atoning death shortly to take place Jesus picks up the themes of freedom, deliverance, redemption, forgiveness. Pardon would be free, but not cheap. He uses sacrificial language when talking about forgiveness.

The sacrifice of his body and blood is the grounds upon which the justice of a holy God is satisfied thereby making possible the gift of forgiveness.

With the food of the Passover meal before them, Jesus takes the bread that they had been eating and says, "Take and eat; this is my body." And he does the same with the wine they had been drinking, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for man for the forgiveness of sin."

The death of Jesus will bring about a new Exodus for the people of God. And just as Israel commemorated their deliverance through the Passover, so the new "Israel of God" – the church – would, through the Lord's Supper, commemorate our freedom from the bondage of sin.

Once the Spirit came on Pentecost the apostles understood what Jesus meant. When Jesus gave them the bread and said it was his body, they didn't take him literally, nor did they when he said the cup contained his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins.

How could this be his atoning blood when he had not yet died upon the cross?

Furthermore, the Apostles held to strict dietary laws, one of which prohibited eating anything that contained blood. They would never have drunk the blood of Jesus without raising objections.

Let's refresh our minds on just how strict the apostles were on this matter of eating blood or eating anything that was classed as unclean. After Jesus' resurrection, the kingdom of God was being extended to the Gentiles and God gave Peter a vision, a vision that meant all people, irrespective of race, were acceptable to him on the basis of the death of Jesus.

Peter saw a vision in which many different animals were before him. The Lord said, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Immediately Peter objected, "Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth."

The account goes on to tell us, "A voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God had made clean.' This happened three times..." (Acts 11:7-10)

As more Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ and being baptised, some guidelines needed to be put in place. After the church met in Jerusalem it was decided that the following instructions be given to the Gentiles: "You are to abstain from... blood, from the meat of strangled animals... You will do well to avoid these things." (Acts 15:29)

The apostles could not make such statements pertaining to blood if they believed that in eating the bread in the Lord's Supper they were actually eating the body of the Saviour and in drinking the wine they were actually drinking his literal blood.

When we listen to the words of the Lord himself we know that we cannot be wrong. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19)

The Lord's Supper is therefore a memorial of what he did for us in his death upon the cross. It's a past event that we commemorate each time we share in the Supper.

Finally, our Lord's concluding words, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" are a reference to that time when we will be together with the Lord in the kingdom of heaven.

This unbroken fellowship with him for eternity will have been made possible by his atoning death upon the cross. Those who have received the blessing issuing from his death commemorate this when they partake of the bread and the wine.

We look back to what he did and forward in certain hope of what is to come. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me". (Luke 22:19) And that is what we should do.

In remembrance of Me



(Part Four)

### The Lord Is Present

According to the apostle Paul, the Sunday service in the first century church in Corinth was chaotic. Before we see why, let's be reminded about the origin of this particular church of God.

This community came into existence through the ministry of the Apostle Paul. "One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: 'Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city.' So Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God." Through his ministry "many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptised." (See Acts 18:8-11)

Though they were God's people, this was a church awash with problems; their carnal behaviour displayed itself when the saints assembled on the first day of the week to partake of the Lord's Supper.

What should have been an occasion for holy communion, in every sense of that word, was anything but holy. One of the problems had to do with their previous practice of idolatry.

The converted Corinthians came from a pagan background in which idolatry was the norm. Even after their conversion Paul had to warn them, "Flee from idolatry." He taught them that engaging in idolatry while also partaking of the Lord's Supper was wrong because partaking in the Lord's Supper is "a participation in the blood of Christ... [and] the bread we break [is] a participation in the body of Christ." (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Paul provided an explanation of what he meant by way of two illustrations.

**First**, he referred to the religious practice in Israel: when a sacrifice was offered to God a portion of the meat offered was given to the worshipper who ate it and, in this way, he was participating in the proceedings – namely, having fellowship/communion with God.

Their eating of the meat linked them to God to whom the sacrifice was offered. Hence Paul's words, "Consider the people of Israel: do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?" (1 Corinthians 10:18) The answer is yes they do; they have fellowship in the proceedings.

The **second** illustration was more illuminating to the Corinthians.

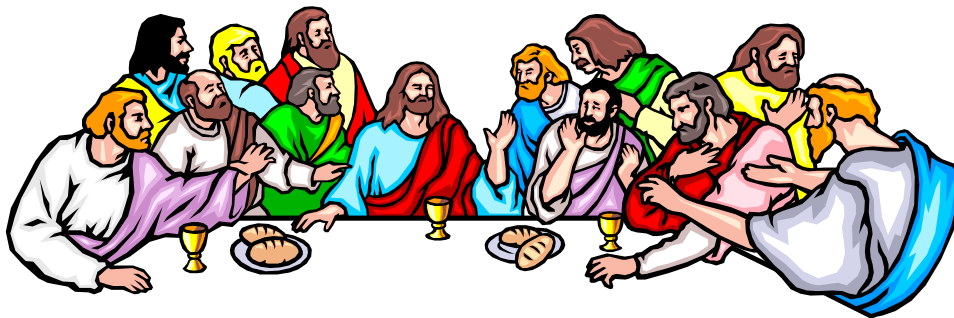
Paul showed that by offering sacrifices to an idol, the worshipper was having fellowship/communion with demons. He explained that an idol is nothing – it's a piece of carved wood, stone or metal. It is not real.

But in another sense it is very real because the idol owes its origin to demons. Paul instructs them that when you offer a sacrifice to an idol, you are **"participants with demons."** (1 Corinthians 10:21)

Paul's point is that demons are present in idolatrous worship; the idol brings the worshipper into contact with the demons. The demons don't enter into the idol, neither do they enter into the sacrifice being offered, but they are nevertheless present.

In the same way, God did not enter into the sacrifices Israel offered to him, but nevertheless he was present. The application Paul makes is this: the Lord Jesus Christ is present in the Lord's Supper, not in the sense that he enters into the bread and wine, but he is the unseen guest at the proceedings he instituted.

He is the one with whom the partakers of the Lord's Supper are having fellowship. And for that reason Paul reminded these new Christians, **"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons."** (1 Corinthians 10:21)



(Part Five)

The behaviour of the believers in Corinth when they gathered on Sunday to worship the Lord was deplorable.

Their **"love feast"** was anything but loving and their holy communion was anything but holy – so much so that Paul said, **"your meetings do more harm than good."** (1 Corinthians 11:17)

There was division among the believers, the **"love feast"** (a shared meal) was not shared with everyone and, as a result, those who were poor were neglected.

To make things worse, there were some who even got drunk! And these were the very people who had come to remember the most loving act the world had ever witnessed – the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners.

Against this background, Paul gives his teaching on the Eucharist:

**"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, 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.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."** (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

I have already written in detail about the words of the Lord at the Last Supper so I'll not repeat myself. However, Paul's words in I Corinthians referring back to that event provide some additional instruction. He says that when we eat and drink the Supper we are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes.

The church is making a statement that we believe Jesus died for us, that he returned to the Father and will return one day for his church. Partaking of the bread and wine **"in an unworthy manner"** is a reference to the ungodly behaviour that was on display within the church.

They were to honour the Lord for what he did for them, symbolised in the bread and wine. Instead, they were dishonouring him. Jesus who gave his body and blood for their redemption and who is the unseen host was being insulted by their behaviour.

It showed that they had failed to appreciate that their salvation was purchased at a very high price – the death of God's Son. The consequence, Paul makes clear, was to be **"guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ."** (1 Corinthians 11:27)

The way to avoid God's judgement is for each Christian to **"examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks the cup."** (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Furthermore, Paul says, **"For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of Christ eats and drinks judgement to himself."** (1 Corinthians 11:29)

When Paul speaks here about **"the body of Christ"**, he is referring to the church. (Ephesians 1:22)

However tempting it might be to conclude that Paul is teaching that the body of Christ is literally there in the Mass, it is to take the phrase out of context and to misconstrue its meaning.

We must not lose sight of the problem Paul was correcting in Corinth. He is not referring to the Catholic teaching of **"the real presence"** or transubstantiation, but to the unholy behaviour within the body of Christ – the church.

If the believers in Corinth had gathered each Lord's days in a spirit of love, unity and caring then their partaking of the bread and wine would indeed have been holy communion.

