

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 1500 years after the very first Passover, a small group of men (13 in number) met in a large upper room overlooking the cobblestone streets of Jerusalem to partake of what would be their final Passover. But why would this be the final celebration of the oldest Jewish feast, which God Himself had instituted? Because God Himself had provided a Lamb, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world (Gen. 22:8; Jhn. 1:29). "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Those sacrifices offered in the Old Testament were merely shadows and symbols of the True Sacrifice. They merely served as a "down payment" until Christ Himself would pay the full-and-complete price for man's redemption through His death at Calvary.

As we shall see, Jesus took the ancient Passover meal and transformed it into a meal with new meaning. Let's listen in on their conversation that particular evening. Let's also consider their questions and the answers Jesus gave them.

Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples."'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve. Now as they were eating, He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." And they were exceedingly sorrowful, and each of them began to say to Him, "Lord, is it I?" He answered and said, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the dish will betray Me. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." Then Judas, who was betraying Him, answered and said, "Rabbi, is it I?" He said to him, "You have said it." And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matt. 26:17-29)

So far we have heard what could possibly have been a typical conversation between a Jewish father and his firstborn son on that very first Passover. And like most children, he was so inquisitive, and his questions so thorough. We have also listened to the conversation and questions of the disciples and Christ's response, as they celebrated the last Passover meal and the first Lord's Supper.

Now, here we are approximately 2,000 years later. Aren't there some questions we, too, should not be afraid to ask concerning the Lord's Supper? Before we even eat of the Lord's Supper, shouldn't we be just as thorough in considering its meaning and also our motives? Let's now look at 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and find what questions *we* should be asking.

WHY IS COMMUNION SO IMPORTANT?

IT IS COMMANDED BY THE MASTER (v. 23a)

Again, Jesus took the oldest Jewish feast and transformed it into the Lord's Supper. The Lord Himself has instituted and commanded this most solemn and significant ordinance. And just like baptism, communion is not optional for the believer. It should not be something we dread, but something very dear to us.

WHAT IS ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE?

As we partake of the Lord's Supper there should always be a . . .

CLARITY OF ITS MEANING (vv. 23b-26)

- The Bread

Just as in Passover, the type of bread we use for the Lord's Supper is unleavened. Throughout the Scriptures, leaven (yeast) is symbolic of sin and its influence. The unleavened bread (without yeast) symbolizes Christ's purity and perfection; He "who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than [i.e., exalted above] the heavens." (Heb. 7:26)

Jews today, as well as many Christian Jews, use unleavened bread (*matzah*), which has been pierced and striped. Of course, only those who know Christ can understand the full significance of the piercing and striping.

- ❖ Zechariah 12:10: "...They will look upon Me whom they pierced."
- ❖ Psalm 22:16b: "...They pierced my hands and my feet."
- ❖ Isaiah 53:5: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed." It was His wounds, but our transgressions. It was His bruises, but our iniquities. It was His chastisement, but our peace. It was His stripes, but our spiritual healing.

As Jesus blessed and broke the bread, He said, "This is My body." (v. 24) The bread represents the body of our Lord Jesus. John MacArthur writes, "As the body to the Jewish mind represented the whole person, so the reference to Christ's body here symbolized His entire incarnation from His birth to His resurrection" (John MacArthur, *The Lord's Supper*, Moody Press, 61).

Jesus also said it was “for you.” (v. 24)

- ❖ The Substitute for the sinner.
- ❖ The Sinless One for the sinful.
- ❖ The Holy One for the unholy.
- ❖ The Pure for the defiled.
- ❖ The Innocent dying for the guilty.

- The Cup

He said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” (v. 25) It represents the blood which Jesus shed for the cleansing and forgiveness of our sins. “Without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).

Through Christ’s death at Calvary and His shed blood, we have entered into a New Covenant (Testament) relationship with God. Through faith in Christ we become heirs to His Last Will and Testament. And what are some of its benefits?

- ❖ Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Old Covenant was written on tables of stone and were external; but under the New Covenant God said He would write His law on our hearts (cf. 2 Cor. 5:4-18). He said, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people;” (v. 33). “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (v. 34b). “As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). Through repentance of sin and faith in Jesus Christ, He has “Cast all our sins into the depths of the sea” (Mic. 7:19b). He has “Cast all [our] sins behind [His] back” (Isa. 38:17c). Please remember: God cannot forgive sin by just forgiving it. Some people think He can, and therefore never see the need for the Lord Jesus Christ. But God is altogether holy, righteous, and just, and therefore requires sacrifice and payment be made for sin. That’s why Jesus came. He paid the supreme sacrifice when He gave His life at Calvary.
- ❖ Ezekiel 11:19-20. Under the New Covenant He would give us a new heart and a new spirit; take out the stony heart and give us a heart of flesh. Through faith in Christ the old heart that is hardened and calloused towards the things of God is replaced by a new heart that is tender, sensitive, and receptive to the things of God.
- ❖ Hebrews 8:10-12; 10:16-17.

CONCLUSION

The whole purpose of the Book of Hebrews is to remind us that Christ is better than the Old Testament prophets, because He is the very Word of God incarnate. He is better than the angels; He is their Creator. He is better than Moses. He is better than Joshua; Joshua could not give them that ultimate rest. He is better than Aaron and the Levitical priesthood; they had to first offer sacrifice for their own sins (day in, and day out) before they could offer sacrifice for the people (cf. Heb. 7:26, 27). He is better than Abraham. He is entirely better than the Old Testament sacrificial system. Its system was but a shadow; Jesus is its Substance.

The Old Testament law served its purpose: to cause us to see our utter sinfulness and to cause us to cry out for a Savior. Only through faith in Christ can sin be forgiven and its guilt erased. Only as we come to Christ in faith do we have full-and-complete access to Holy God. Only as we trust Christ and Christ alone as Savior and Lord of our lives do we have the promise of a brand-new heart. Only through faith in Christ can the guilty and condemned sinner stand before God pardoned and his record cleared. Only through Christ's death at Calvary can we be rescued from an eternal hell and have the promise of heaven.