

# The Significance of the *Lord's Supper*

by Jim Rector

Surely every believer has heard of the *Lord's Supper*. That term has to be one of the most familiar for Christians everywhere. For some, it is known perhaps by the even more common words *communion*, or *Holy communion*. In the Roman Catholic Church, there is the *Mass*, both High and Low, which celebrates the *Eucharist*. In one form or another, the so-called *Lord's Supper* has found its way into virtually every sect of professing Christianity.

For those whose religious foundation is well grounded in the Old Testament, the *Lord's Supper* is either viewed or conducted in a

somewhat different context than one might otherwise find in typical Protestantism or Catholicism. For those who come from such a background, this final meal shared by the Savior and His twelve chosen apostles, and especially the emphasis placed by the synoptic gospels on the bread and wine, is strongly associated with the annual Passover in the spring.

To those of us who have been taught in the ways of the weekly Sabbath and the annual holydays inaugurated in the Old Testament, the Passover is the one sacred occasion most closely connected with the Messiah's

death. Nearly 3500 years ago, God determined to intervene in the affairs of the descendants of Jacob and deliver this people from bondage in Egypt, thus fulfilling a prophecy made in the days of Abraham, some 430 years earlier.

God accomplished this auspicious event through the slaying of a lamb, whose blood was placed on the Israelites' houses as a mark of protection against the ensuing plague that was to come upon the Egyptians. This sacrifice was the most ancient and sacred type of the Messiah. The events of that first Passover followed set a particular pattern.

On this auspicious occasion, God worked through the man Moses, instructing the people to take a lamb of the first year, without blemish, and offer it as a sacrifice on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. It was to be offered at a specific time on that day, the period known as *between the evenings*. This phrase is used 11 times in the Torah, six of those instances pertaining to the timing of the Passover sacrifice. Upon first reading, this phrase might seem strange to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears. After all, we generally speak of only one evening, not two. That, however, is not the case in Hebrew.

The words *ben ha arbayim* or *between the evenings* have a very specific meaning with respect to the time of day in reference. When God told the Israelites in Exodus 12:6 to slay the lambs on the 14<sup>th</sup> day, He specified by this particular saying, at what time on that day He wanted the sacrifice to transpire. Just by reading the account itself in the King James Version of the Bible, it is impossible to determine which part of the day is being addressed. That however, is not the case, when considering the Biblical passage regarding the daily evening sacrifice in Numbers 28, where the same Hebrew phrase is used to denote the time of day. Notice the following instruction:

**“And you shall say unto them, This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer unto the Lord; two lambs of the first year without a spot day by day (Heb.**

**IN A DAY), for a continual burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning (Heb. *between the mornings*), and the other lamb you shall offer BETWEEN THE TWO EVENINGS” (Num. 28:3-4).**

Even though the same Hebrew phrase *between the evenings* is used in the description of the daily evening sacrifice and the passage in Ex. 12:6 for the Passover offering, the account in Numbers 28 that we just read is easier to understand with respect to the time of day that is indicated. First of all, the daily sacrifice was divided into 2 offerings. There was an order to these sacrifices. They both had to be offered in the same day, and the morning sacrifice preceded the one in the evening (or *between the evenings*).

How does this help us better understand the meaning of this phrase? Simply this. Since the evening sacrifice was the second of the daily offerings and had to follow the one in the morning, we know of a certainty that the sacrifice offered *between the evenings* had to occur before sunset on the particular day in question. To go beyond that time would automatically put one into the next day, since the Israelites reckoned their days to commence at sunset. In other words, the phrase *between the two evenings* denotes a time of day in the afternoon before sunset.

Granted, the passage in Numbers 28 does not specify a precise hour of the day, but that is

not really necessary for us to see clearly to what general time period the Scriptures are referring. When you take this important information and apply it to God’s command in Ex. 12:6 with regard to the slaying of the Passover lambs, here’s what you find. Leading into this passage, we read:

**“This month shall be unto you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year unto you. Speak you unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the 10<sup>th</sup> day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house...Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year...You shall keep it up until the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the same month: and whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it BETWEEN THE EVENINGS” (Ex. 12:1-6).**

Now the timing of the Passover sacrifice becomes much more obvious. Since the 14<sup>th</sup> day is specifically indicated, we know that the time stated for the offering refers to that date. And since we also know that *between the evenings* must fall on the afternoon, before sunset, of the day in question, we can easily determine that the Passover lambs were slain toward the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month.

The Israelites therefore selected their lambs on the 10<sup>th</sup> day, kept them till the 14<sup>th</sup> day, and slew them in the latter portion of the day, before the onset of the

15<sup>th</sup>. After the animals were killed, their blood was thrown against the altar, and they were roasted over fire. After dark, beginning the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, the Feast of the Passover commenced, the lamb being eaten with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. The command to eat this meal with unleavened bread fit perfectly into the pattern of things, for God ordained that the 15<sup>th</sup> day should begin the Days of Unleavened Bread, a seven-day Festival that concluded at the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> day, and during which no leaven could be consumed or found in any dwelling.

This format was followed by Israel during all the time in which they remained obedient to the Law. We know, of course, that there were many occasions when they departed from the commandments, but, upon their repentance and return unto God, they resumed the proper observance of the annual holydays, beginning with the Passover and Unleavened Bread season in the spring.

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity were led at first by Zerubbabel and Joshua the High Priest. The Temple was rebuilt under their direction, accompanied by encouragement from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. In the next generation, Ezra and Nehemiah assumed leadership of the post-exilic Jews. The freedom from Babylon, the return to their homeland, the rebuilding of the Temple and later the city of Jerusalem, all combined to produce

a remarkable revival among the people of Israel. It was also during this important time that the Old Testament Scriptures were canonized. Under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah there was a powerful return to the Torah, and an almost fanatical devotion to the technicalities of the Law eventually developed. The re-institution of the annual Holydays was one of the first items on the agenda. From the time of their release from Babylon, the returning Jews were diligent in their reckoning of the Festivals. This is vitally important to realize, because we can rest assured that they were observing the holydays according to the divine instructions during the first century time of our Savior, and this becomes an important fact to understand when considering the gospel accounts of the *Last Supper* and the slaying of the Passover lambs in the year of the Messiah's death.

The fact that Yahshua was a Torah-observant Jew stands unchallenged. He clearly was diligent in all matters of the Law, and was recognized by the Jewish leadership as a man who both knew the Torah and faithfully kept it.

What we must understand is that the Messiah was a Jew, a Jew of His time, a Jew alongside His fellow countrymen. He was not in opposition to the method or manner in which the holydays were calculated or conducted. He was, in fact, a willing participant. Indeed, we read the very telling account of Luke 2, in which both

He and His family are shown keeping the Passover; but not just keeping it. Notice how precise the description actually is:

**“Now His parents went to Jerusalem EVERY YEAR at the Feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the CUSTOM OF THE FEAST. And when they had FULFILLED THE DAYS, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and His mother knew not of it” (Luke 2:41-43).**

What is distinctly significant about this passage is the admission that both Christ and His family not only observed the Feast of the Passover, but did so *according to the custom*. Certain aspects of that custom will become very critical to our understanding of how events unfolded with respect to the *Last Supper* and other events connected to the Passover of that year.

As early as the age of 12, Yahshua is seen in the Temple discussing the Scriptures with the rabbis. On occasion, He was even referred to as *Rabboni* or Teacher. Everyone knew that in the essentials of the Law, He was perfect. Admittedly, we are privy to the fact that He did not always adhere to the traditions of the Jews, especially when they were of no consequence and were being used by the leadership to either maintain their control of the people or advance their own righteousness in the eyes of others. For instance,

He was quick to point out that it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath, which He re-enforced by healing the sick on that day. On another occasion, He refused to observe the custom of ceremonial washing that was imposed upon the adherents of first-century Judaism. And in yet another instance, He and His disciples plucked grain to eat on the Sabbath, an act that was against the sensitivities of the rabbinic leadership.

Those cases were, however, not issues of God's Law, but rather man's, and Christ knew that He was not bound by such strictures, most of which were based on misunderstanding or misguided zeal, and all of which were simply a product of the human approach to the things of God, and that kind of program never really works, no matter how religious or pious it may sound or appear to be. There is, however, absolutely no doubt whatsoever that when it came to the Torah, the Messiah was faithfully obedient. In being so, He was critical of a number of attitudes, approaches, and actions on the part of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, although such criticism does not by any means indicate that all of these Jewish leaders came under the same condemnation. This would have been particularly true among the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders of first-century Judaism. While they come in for the lion's share of Christ's critical commentary, we must always remember that this would only be natural and normal, since they completely dominated the religious

scene in Israel.

What many have not understood is that the Sadducees, though they claimed an honorable pedigree, were really a small sect, centered in and around Jerusalem, and composed almost entirely of rich and unethical men. They were far more politicians than religious leaders, and rather crooked politicians at that.

You will notice that, aside from their inclusion with the Pharisees, there is little mention of them in the New Testament. Take a look and see how many times the Sadducees are addressed personally by Yahshua. I can recall only one specific time, and that was not a very pleasant occasion. It was the instance when they tried to trick Him by asking the convoluted question concerning the man who died, leaving his wife, who then was married by his brother, who also subsequently died, only for the process to be repeated by the next brother, and so on. I'm sure you recall the story. Christ's reply to these men was to tell them in no uncertain terms:

**“You do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.”**

This stinging rebuke cut to the heart of this quasi-religious group of men. The Sadducees were not only men of low character, they were illegitimate as true teachers of the Law. They had no claim, no Scripturally-based position among the people. They

were really known for two things, namely opposing the Pharisees, and using their money and station to bribe the Herodian officials for favors and offices, including even buying the High Priesthood.

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus gives us a pretty good idea of the Sadducees' low status in Israel when it came to religious matters. He states:

**“But this doctrine (of the Sadducees) is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity; but they are able to do ALMOST NOTHING of themselves; for when they become magistrates, as they are unwillingly obliged to be, they addict themselves to the notions of the PHARISEES, because the multitude would not otherwise bear them” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18. 1. 4).**

Josephus goes on to establish the supremacy of the Pharisees in all Jewish religious matters, even when the High Priest was a Sadducee. What is perhaps most intriguing and most critical in this regard is that the Messiah was not confused or ignorant of the Pharisees' authority in these matters. Although there are some today who simply will not accept the straightforward statement of Christ on this issue, it nevertheless is in the Bible, and attempts to re-interpret or downplay it simply will not wash. As a preface to His caustic remarks on the spiritual problems of some of the Pharisees, He tells His disciples:

**“The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: ALL therefore whatsoever THEY BID YOU observe, that OBSERVE AND DO; but do not you after their works: for they say and do not” (Matt. 23:2-3).**

This obviously is not intended to absolve those leaders who were guilty of sin, but it still constitutes a statement of inordinate importance. Clearly, Christ did not recognize Sadducean authority in Jewish religious life. This should not be surprising, since only a mere handful in the entire nation were supportive of this faction. And, although there was justifiably criticism of the Pharisees in their personal conduct and otherwise, there is not a single instance where the Messiah considered them to be in error regarding the timing and conduct of the annual Festivals. He never once corrects them on their understanding of the correct calculations involved. On the contrary, it is blatantly obvious that He Himself was in total agreement in this matter and is clearly observed joining His fellow brethren in keeping the entire litany of holydays.

Why push this point? Why is this so important? Simply because there is no evidence, either implied or stated, in the Scriptures or in history, that the Jews of the first century had somehow strangely gotten a day off in their observation of Passover. Yet this has been an assumption made by a number of people from our background, and it is in total error,

the utter fabrication of certain teachers whose faulty understanding has been simply taken for granted.

In the year of His death, Yahshua was still the same Torah-observant Jew that He had always been. Nothing had changed. He was in perfect step with the other pious Jews of His day when it came to observing the Festivals. The gospel account of John shows Him in attendance at three separate Passovers in Jerusalem during His ministry.

As the time of Passover approached that year, the entire city of Jerusalem was in a state of expectancy and preparation. After the 14<sup>th</sup> day had arrived, the day on which the Passover was to be killed, the disciples asked Christ where He intends that they keep the Festival. Remember that by the first century, and even centuries before for that matter, the terms Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were used interchangeably. When the Jews came up to Jerusalem in the spring, it was to keep the entire period encompassing the slaying of the lambs on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> day, the actual Feast that centered around eating the prepared lamb on the evening portion of the 15<sup>th</sup> day, and the seven days of unleavened bread, which commenced on that very same night of the 15<sup>th</sup> and ran through the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the month.

It is more than of passing interest that we should take note of this occasion when the disciples

questioned Christ about the approaching Passover. We must remember that it occurred after the 14<sup>th</sup> had already come. We read this in Matthew 26:17, Mark 14:12, and Luke 22:7. We know it was the 14<sup>th</sup> day, because it is stated that it was the day the lambs were to be slain.

Now consider the situation for just a moment. Christ and the disciples are not even yet in the city of Jerusalem. The 14<sup>th</sup> day has already begun. That evening, the rest of the city is busily searching out the leaven in the houses and buildings, and getting ready for the host of events that will transpire on the morrow. As the group is walking along together, the disciples inquire of the Savior as to where He wants them to go and prepare for them to keep the Passover.

Does this sound in any way strange to you? It shouldn't, because the 14<sup>th</sup> day had always been known or considered as the day of **PREPARATION**. In fact, preparing for the Passover is precisely what every other religious Jew in the country was doing at that very moment in time! Christ and His disciples were absolutely no different, just as they had never been out of step with the rest of their countrymen in such matters.

But wait a minute! This passage really does involve a problem for a lot of people. Why? Simply because they assume, assume mind you, that the meal which took place later that

evening, that gathering which was to become known as the *Lord's Supper*, was indeed the actual eating of the Passover meal. The main reason for this assumption has to do with certain words of Christ. Here they are. The first are in response to the disciples' question that we have been discussing:

**“And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, the Master says, My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples” (Matt. 26:17).**

**“And He sends forth two of His disciples, and says unto them, Go you into the city, and there you shall meet a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say you to the goodman of the house, The Master says, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples” (Mark 14:13-14).**

**“And He said to Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the Passover, that we may eat...and he shall show you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as He has said unto them: and they made ready the Passover” (Luke 22:8, 12-13).**

In each of these passages, the same essential reply is covered, so, in effect, these three really represent one issue in the discussion at hand. The fact that Christ made the statement he did concerning the Passover has led

many people to assume that indeed the Passover Feast was that very evening. And, since this clearly doesn't jibe with the account in John, a reason has to be invented to cover the apparent discrepancy. What is that discrepancy? Just this.

John clearly describes the so-called *Last Supper* as occurring **BEFORE THE FEAST OF THE PASSOVER** (John 13:11-2). But that's not the only problem. Notice that when he relates the events of Christ's trial later in that night and into the early morning hours, he states the following with respect to the Jews and Passover:

**“Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might EAT THE PASSOVER” (John 18:28).**

The testimony of John is clearly in keeping with the custom of the Feast of Passover. As we have already seen, the lambs were slain on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> day, and eaten at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> day. Not only does the Old Testament prove that to be true, the New Testament record of John supports the very same thing. And remember that the Bible states that Christ and His family kept the Passover according to the custom of the Feast. Here in John's account, we clearly observe what the custom was. The Passover, both in terms of slaying the lambs and eating the meal, was still

future on the earlier portion of the 14<sup>th</sup> day. The historian Josephus also affirms that the first century practice of the Passover was precisely as John relates, and as the Old Testament commands dictate.

For those who believe that Christ and His disciples actually ate the Passover at what later came to be called the *Lord's Supper*, they also have to assume that the entire Jewish nation was somehow in error, because they were keeping the Passover precisely one day too late, according to that theory. But such a series of assumptions is so totally unnecessary.

The doctrine of the Passover is established in the Old Testament, and is as we have previously discussed. The New Testament must agree with this, and indeed it does. The account in John clearly supports the Old Testament timing of the events of Passover. Mark, Luke, and John all three confirm that the 14<sup>th</sup> day was the preparation of the Passover, John making that statement **AFTER** the last supper had ended, after Christ had been arrested, and after He had been tried before the Sanhedrin, Herod, and Pilate. Both the Passover sacrifice, as well as the Passover meal was clearly still future when Christ and the disciples came together on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day, and was still future the next morning when the Messiah was condemned to death.

Why then did Yahshua make the statement He did

concerning Peter and John's preparing that they might eat the Passover? Simply this. The Passover was a term that by the first century had come to cover the entire spring festival season. It is not necessary that we assume the words of Christ on this occasion have to mean that He intended to eat the actual Passover meal, the sacrificed lamb, on that evening. Considering what we know, it is a certainty that He was referring to the entire Festival period in general. He knew for a fact that the lambs had not yet been slain, that the 14<sup>th</sup> day was the preparation of the Passover, and that the Jews clearly would be observing the events pertaining to Passover on the morrow. He was not ignorant of this practice, since it had been His own all of His life. This is obviously why the disciples register no surprise with respect to His instructions. They would have never been thinking that He was telling them that they were going to eat the Passover that very night! Such a thing would have been as far as possible from their minds.

Let's consider the theory that the Passover lambs were always to be slain early on the 14<sup>th</sup> day, even though this flies in the face of Scripture and history. If that were the case, then at the very moment Jesus's disciples brought up the issue of Passover to Him, the rest of Israel would have had to be right then at the Temple in Jerusalem slaying their lambs. In fact, there would have been only a very small window of time, perhaps 45 minutes between sunset and dark, when this could

theoretically be done. Can you imagine such a thing? Now, of course, we know from the New Testament that this was not so. The Jews were slated to kill the Passover lambs on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> day. But, assuming that the Jews had somehow gotten off a day, then at the very moment when the disciples first bring up the subject of Passover, they and Christ should have been at the Temple in Jerusalem killing their lamb! If this were true, it boggles the mind to begin to imagine that the disciples didn't even know where they were going to keep the Passover, and no preparations had yet been made! This is utterly untenable and cannot be accepted as accurate.

Let's face it. Yahshua and the disciples all knew the facts. They were keenly aware of when the Passover was slain and when it was eaten. They would never have thought that they were actually eating the official Passover on the night of the last supper. They knew that that event was still future at that time. Instead, however, it makes perfect sense for the disciples to ask about the location early on the 14<sup>th</sup> day, when you consider that they clearly understood the Passover was approaching and would be celebrated late on the 14<sup>th</sup> and early on the 15<sup>th</sup> day. And it makes sense for Christ to state that He would eat the Passover or keep the Passover with His disciples, because He was referring to the entire upcoming Festival. And He did do just that. After He was resurrected, He rejoined the

apostles and kept the rest of the Feast with them as planned, almost certainly in the very same upper room that they had prepared.

We also know, from John's account, yet an additional fact that really nails the coffin shut on this case. At the meal that evening, Yahshua makes mention of His betrayal, and points out Judas as the traitor. He tells him personally to leave the gathering and carry through quickly with the murderous plot. Although the disciples heard Christ speak to Judas, they did not clearly understand what He said. Notice what John reports:

**“Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spoke this unto him (Judas). For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, BUY THOSE THINGS that we have need of AGAINST THE FEAST” (John 13:28-29).**

This statement is very telling. Had Christ and the apostles been eating the actual, official Passover meal that night, then there would not be a single man present who would have even begun to think or assume what is recorded in John's account. It would be unimaginable! The things that they would have needed for the Feast would have already been purchased. They would not slay the lambs, eat the Passover, and then go out and buy provisions. Not at all. This is some of the strongest evidence that Christ and the disciples clearly knew they were not eating the

official Passover that night, that it was still future, and that indeed had the Messiah actually told Judas to buy things they needed, he would have had ample time to do so, since the Feast would not commence until the next night!

Why was it impossible that the last supper was the official Passover meal? Simply because God had perfectly designed the entire procedure to unfold on a certain schedule that would set the pattern to which the Messiah Himself would conform in fulfilling His role as the ultimate Passover Lamb.

It is paramount that we never forget the most important aspect of this entire discussion—that Yahshua was **THE PASSOVER**. He had to fulfil the symbolic sacrificial lamb. It is not the eating of a meal that is critical in this matter, but the death of the Messiah! In other words, He had to die precisely on schedule—according God’s divine timetable of events. The slaying of the Passover lambs had, from the very inception, been carefully timed to occur on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> day. There was great significance in this fact. Every year, as long as the Israelites obeyed God, they performed this rite at the same ordained time of the day. Why? Simply because it prefigured Yahshua, the Son of God, who would become the ultimate Passover Lamb. And when did He die? It is powerfully impacting that the God took the pains to inspire that Mark write down the exact hour that He

expired—at the 9<sup>th</sup> hour or 3 o’clock on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> day! Nothing in the unfolding of this entire saga was left to chance. God perfectly orchestrated all events so that the sacrifice of His Son would coordinate with every aspect of the ancient Passover instructions.

When Christ approached the season of Passover in the year of His death, He did so with the full realization that, unlike any other time, He would not be eating the Passover Feast that year. Why? Because He was **THE PASSOVER!** He did, however, gather with the 12 apostles for a final meal, during which He spoke some very significant words, especially with respect to two items of food, namely the bread and wine. This situation developed into what later became known as the *Lord’s Supper*. It took place on the evening before the Feast of the Passover (John 13:1), some 20 hours before the Messiah would be officially slain as the ultimate Passover Lamb of all time.

If, therefore, the *Lord’s Supper*, was not the official Passover meal, which, according to the New Testament, was clearly still a future event, and Christ actually didn’t come along and change His Father’s Law regarding the timing of Passover, what can we make of this famous scene on the night of Christ’s betrayal? Is it important? What does it mean? What does it portend for us as believers today?

To begin with, the answer is emphatically **YES**, the event of the *Lord’s Supper* is exceedingly important. It does have immense meaning for all Christians. At this final gathering with His disciples, Christ took the opportunity to expound the deep symbolism and significance of the bread and wine.

Remember that this was not the eating of the official Passover meal. It was simply the last meal that He would have with the apostles before He Himself died, thus becoming the Passover. Bread and wine were very familiar ingredients to Jewish social gatherings. There was nothing strange or unusual about these items being a part of this meal. Normally, nothing would have been said with respect to the bread and wine, but on this night that was not to be so, for Christ began to speak of the bread they were eating as representing His body, and the wine as His blood that would be shed for them. This was powerful new teaching that had never been directly connected by the disciples to the Messiah Himself. He tells them that when they eat the bread and drink the wine, they are to do it in remembrance of Him.

Once again, I remind you that no one present thought that what they were doing that night was partaking of the official Passover meal. That was clearly still future, in the minds of both the disciples and the rest of the Jews, as amply demonstrated from the New Testament itself. Christ and the apostles had eaten together



many times throughout their association together. They had eaten bread and drank wine on numerous previous occasions. This was therefore nothing new or out of the ordinary. What was extraordinary, however, was that Yahshua suddenly starts talking about the bread and wine and turning them into emblems of great symbolic spiritual meaning. He changed forever their understanding and thinking with respect to the eating of bread and drinking of wine. He attached significance to these otherwise standard items of food and beverage that was unprecedented. Never again would the disciples take these things for granted. And never should we!

In speaking these words concerning the bread and wine at that final fellowship meal, there was no instruction or intent on Christ's part to set aside that particular date on the calendar as a special time to eat bread and drink wine in honor of Him. He was simply giving revelation as to the meaning of these items with respect to Himself and His coming sacrifice.

He was also doing something else—something that should have profound meaning for all of us. He was setting the stage for the re-enactment of this ceremony not specifically on the early part of the 14<sup>th</sup> day, but on any occasion when His followers desired to come together and so show forth His death. The apostle Paul makes this abundantly clear in I Corinthians 11. Notice what he

said:

**“Next on my list of items to write you about is something else I cannot agree with. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together for your communion services. Everyone keeps telling me about the arguing that goes on in these meetings, and the divisions developing among you...When you come together to eat, isn't the LORD'S SUPPER you are eating, but YOUR OWN. For I am told that everyone hastily gobbles down all the food he can without waiting to share with the others, so that one doesn't get enough and goes hungry, while another has too much to drink and gets drunk. What? Is this really true?...Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly do not! For this is what the Lord Himself has said about His Table, and I have passed it on to you before. That on the night when Judas betrayed Him, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks to God for it, He broke it and gave it to His disciples and said, Take this and eat it. This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way, He took the cup of wine after supper, saying, This cup is the new agreement between God and you that has been established and set in motion by My blood. Do this in r e m e m b r a n c e o f M e WHENEVER YOU DRINK IT. For EVERY TIME you eat this bread or drink this cup, you are re-telling the message of the**

**Lord's death, that He has died for you. Do this until He comes again...If you carefully examine yourselves before eating, you will not need to be judged and punished. Yet, when we are judged and punished by the Lord, it is so that we will not be condemned with the rest of the world. So, dear brothers, when you gather for the Lord's Supper...wait for each other; if anyone is really hungry he should eat at home so that he won't bring punishment upon himself when you meet together” (I Cor. 11:17-34).**

The wording of this passage is really powerful and revealing. First of all, Paul nowhere calls this the Passover. He does not even frame this occasion as something that is to be done only once a year. In fact, he clearly supports the observance of the *Lord's Supper* at various times throughout a given year.

He speaks to the Corinthians about this issue in terms of their *meetings*-plural. In terms of correction, he tells them that, when they come together to eat the *Lord's Supper*, they are displaying the wrong attitude. Some are eating too much, forcing others to do without, some are getting drunk. He basically tells them that they are really just doing their own thing and are guilty of not giving the proper seriousness and honor to each other or to Christ in this matter, and that they are bringing judgment upon themselves.

To counter this wretched attitude and practice, He goes back to the special words of the Messiah with regard to the bread and wine, reminding them of the sacred significance of what they are supposed to be doing, and encourages them to keep this in mind every time they gather for this occasion. He tells them that **AS OFTEN AS THEY DO THIS**, they are showing forth Christ's death until He comes.

This instruction from Paul was not directed at the Corinthians with respect to Passover, but to the practice of the *Lord's Supper*, and especially pertaining to the emblems of the bread and wine as representative of the body and blood of the Messiah. This was, in fact, something that the early Christians were accustomed to celebrating frequently, not just once a year, and not specifically on the early part of the 14<sup>th</sup> day. It was done often. The Scriptures do not tell us how often, but they clearly indicate that it would be more than once a year.

The common practice of taking *communion* derives from this early Christian custom. It became an accepted part of the early Church, and involved a fellowship meal, at which the bread and wine were given special recognition in the manner set down by Christ and taught by Paul.

*The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia* makes the following statement with regard to the *Lord's Supper*:

**"The Lord's Supper was the central point in the life and worship of the early Church. Ignatius (35-107 A.D.), Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.), and Irenaeus (130-200 A.D.) referred to it in phrases deriving from a realistic interpretation of the language of John 6" (vol. 3, p. 166).**

From *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, we learn that:

**"In the earliest notices of the Lord's Supper, a simple and almost literal imitation of the meal as instituted by Christ is prevalent. In the *Teaching of the Twelve*, the instructions for celebrating it are as simple and archaic as those representing baptism. In Justin Martyr's account of the Lord's Supper is noticed an almost like simplicity as in the *Teaching...Do this as often as you drink it* (I Cor. 1:25) suggest a more frequent observance. It would appear that the celebration of the Lord's Supper by the first disciples may have occurred daily in private houses, in connection with the agape, or love feast, to indicate that its purpose was the expression of brotherly love...It was something of a festive character, judging from the excesses that Paul reprov'd ( I Cor. 11:20), and was associated with an ordinary meal, at the close of which the bread and wine were distributed as a memorial of Christ's similar distribution to the disciples...There was not a proper waiting for the**

**distribution of the elements by a church official, and there seems to be no evidence that a priestly consecration and distribution were regarded as necessary to the validity of the sacrament. It is true that a blessing was spoken over the cup (I Cor. 10:16), but every Christian would probably offer this blessing at that time" (Lord's Supper, p. 783).**

There is clearly very early testimony that the tradition of the *Lord's Supper* was well-entrenched, almost certainly during the first century, and perhaps from the very inception of the New Testament Church. The book of Acts speaks of the brethren coming together often and *breaking bread*. It was surely from these early gatherings that the practice of the *Lord's Supper* became integrated into the worship of the early Church.

When Jude wrote his epistle, much of it was directed against those charlatans who had crept into the Body, who were perverting the true gospel, turning the grace of God into a license to do evil. Amid his long discourse on these ungodly men, he makes the following statement:

**"Woe unto them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your FEASTS OF CHARITY, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried**

about of winds; trees whose fruit withers, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 11-12).

The apostle Peter makes a very similar reference in his second letter, saying:

**“Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they FEAST with you” (II Pet. 2:13).**

Most of the Biblical scholars agree that both Peter and Jude are referring to the tradition of Christian gatherings for the purpose of celebrating what came to be known as the *Lord’s Supper*.

The *Jamison, Fausset & Brown Commentary* has some very interesting information regarding the institution of the *Lord’s Supper*. In reviewing Paul’s instructions in I Corinthians 11, we read:

**“It is not possible to eat a true Lord’s Supper where unity exists not, where each is greedily intent on his own supper, and some are excluded altogether, not having been waited for, where some are drunken, others hungry. The love-feast preceded the Lord’s Supper...He shows the unworthiness of such conduct from the dignity of the holy supper...The renewal of the institution, by special revelation to St. Paul, enhances its solemnity. The similarity between St. Luke’s and St. Paul’s account of it implies that the former drew his information**

**from the apostle, whose companion in travel he was...the time of the Lord’s Supper is not fixed...as oft as (as many times soever); for it is an ordinance OFTEN to be partaken of” (Vol. III, I Cor. 11, p. 316).**

In contrast, the Feast of the Passover is **FIXED**. It was specifically commanded to be observed on the night following the slaying of the lambs, which took place on the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> day. We know this because Christ was slain at that very precise time on the very same day, thus perfectly fulfilling the deep significance of the ancient Passover.

The earliest records of the fledgling New Testament Church reveal that coming together often became a custom among the brethren. We read in Acts 2:

**“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in BREAKING OF BREAD, and in prayers...and they continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:42, 46-47).**

During the ministry of the apostle Paul, we also read of this custom in practice. Notice the account in Acts 20:

**“And we sailed away from Philippi after the Days of**

**Unleavened Bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days, where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples CAME TOGETHER TO BREAK BREAD, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:6-7).**

The custom of having a fellowship meal in a local assembly, followed by the bread and wine ceremony, was an activity that took root very early in the early New Testament Church. During the first several hundreds years, in fact, we have records of the *Lord’s Supper* being observed on a fairly regular basis. That practice, however, eventually was curtailed by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Laodicea in 364 A.D. Notice the testimony of Adam Clarke in his *Commentary on the Bible*:

**“The feasts of charity, or love feasts, of which the apostle speaks, were in use in the primitive Church until the fourth century, when, by the Council of Laodicea, they were prohibited to be held in the churches; and, having been abused, fell into disuse.”**

Eventually, with the ascendancy of the Roman Church, the God-given right of local congregations to independently keep the *Lord’s Supper* gave way to the institutionalized Mass, which was only permitted under the authority of a priest, who, in a

manner of speaking, played the role of Christ, administering the emblems of the Eucharist to the common members. What was once a beautiful custom in the early Church—the coming together often for a fellowship meal, followed by the observance of the bread and wine in remembrance of the Savior and His sacrifice—was abandoned, and in its place was substituted a pagan ritual that dishonors both God, Christ, and the participants.

Brethren, the return to the tradition of the early Church with respect to keeping the *Lord's Supper* is something that is, quite frankly, long overdue. I seriously doubt that any of us can even imagine what a positive and powerful impact the resumption of this practice would provide to the Body of Christ today.

We all ought to realize that our remembrance of the priceless sacrifice of our Savior is something that simply is not and cannot be limited to only once a year. It is our privilege and responsibility to do this often, but to do so seriously, not in the manner of the Corinthians, but with deep reflection upon the significance of the observance, coupled with an examination of ourselves before God in the matter of sin in our lives.

The apostle Paul says that to eat and drink of this special ordinance in an unworthy manner is to eat and drink condemnation to ourselves. This is not a call for believers to somehow try and

become worthy of what has been freely given to them by God, but to remember the worthiness of the One who gave His life for the sins of all mankind. We are not worthy, nor will our attempts to be so make us that way. We are worthy only in and through the Messiah. If we seriously judge ourselves, therefore, Paul teaches that we will not fall under the punishment of God.

Paul further adds that violating the ordinance of the *Lord's Supper* was at least partially responsible for the sickness and even death of some believers in the Corinthian Church. This is a very serious statement, and probably ought to give us pause to reflect upon our own lives in a personal sense, and also perhaps our general neglect of properly observing this special occasion as it was truly intended. It is something that all of us should ponder at this time.

A question often arises concerning whether or not Yahshua and the apostles ate unleavened bread at the original last supper—their final meal together before the crucifixion. It is a fact that the Scriptural accounts never speak specifically of unleavened bread. The simple Greek word *artos* is used, and is generally understood to be a *raised loaf of bread*.

That, in itself, is not final proof on this issue, however, but we should recall that in first century Judea, it was against the law of the land for unleavened

bread to be consumed on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. The reason for this is easy to grasp. It was imposed upon all Jews so that the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which commenced on the evening portion of the 15<sup>th</sup> day could be entered into in the proper fashion, not having desecrated the occasion by partaking of unleavened bread prior to the onset of the Feast. To do otherwise would have diminished the impact of the Days of Unleavened Bread.

In his discussion with the Corinthians, Paul, interestingly enough, does not mention unleavened bread in connection with either what Christ did at His last supper or with what the brethren there were doing as well. For Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul to have described the same event and not to have specified the use of unleavened bread can be seen as significant, and should be a clue for us to eat regular leavened bread in our observances, with the exception of the Passover meal itself.

Since what the Messiah and His disciples ate that last night was not the official Passover meal, combined with these previously mentioned factors, it seems unlikely that unleavened bread was eaten at the original *Lord's Supper*. Certainly, the later observances of this ordinance were never done with unleavened bread, except on the evening of the Passover meal (15<sup>th</sup>). Indeed it is on that occasion that it finds its ultimate fulfillment. Then, of course, it would be eaten with unleavened bread, because the Festival would have begun. At

other times, regular bread was and still should be utilized.

Some might assume that raised bread would not be proper for the observance of the *Lord's Supper*, but this need not be the case. When Christ spoke of Himself as the *bread of life*, He was clearly making reference to the bread that was regularly consumed at mealtime. Leavened bread is, after all, the real physical *bread or staff of life*, and so it can be so representative in the spiritual sense as well.

We read Christ's words to this effect in John 6:

**“I am the bread (Gk. *artos*) of life: he that comes to Me shall never hunger; and he that believes on Me shall never thirst...I am the bread of which came down from heaven...This is the bread...that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread (Gk. *artos*) is MY FLESH, which I will give for the life of the world...Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:35, 41, 50-51).**

The Feast of the Passover is something commanded by God to be kept as an ordinance forever (Ex. 12:14). This is always done once a year at the appropriate time. The *Lord's Supper*, on the other hand, is a special *remembrance* that all believers are free to partake

in whenever they come together for such a purpose.

Should the *bread and wine* then be a part of the Passover Feast? Surely the answer is unquestionably **YES!** For true spiritually-minded believers, there can be no true Passover celebration without partaking of the bread and wine. The Lamb has been slain. When we consume the bread and wine on the night of Passover, we, in essence, continue to fulfil the ancient command to eat of the lamb, but we feast spiritually in participating in the emblems of the true Passover Lamb. In fact, the most significant occasion of these emblems is always to be found in their observance as a part of the Passover Feast, but it is emphatically not limited to only an annual ceremony.

The Passover Feast comes only once a year. The *Lord's Supper* is not a replacement for something God commanded anciently to be celebrated forever. In fact, the term *Lord's Supper* is used only once in the Scriptures. Christ did not call it by that name at all. The occasion was His last social gathering with the apostles before His death. There is nothing in the gospel accounts that gives any details or places any emphasis on the meal itself that night.

The bread and wine obviously were singled out by the Messiah. Why? The disciples, just like all other religious Israelites of the time, slew the Passover lambs each year. Then they roasted the meat, and ate it at

the Passover Feast which followed. This was done once a year. When Christ took this opportunity to point out that the bread and wine they were enjoying with their meal that night was intended to now take on special significance to them, He did so to show them and us something very important.

Under the Old Covenant, God's people could partake of the Lamb only once a year. Under the New Covenant, that would change. God intended that His Son, the ultimate Passover Lamb, be accessible to all human beings, and not just once a year, but any day or every day! When the Savior gave deep meaning to the bread and wine that evening, they became emblems of a service that developed into a custom in the early Church, designed specifically to honor and remember His sacrifice. It spoke to the fact that the Son of God was always available, and His blood covered them continually.

We continue the bread and wine ordinance as a part of the Passover Feast, because it is the spiritual representation of the physical lamb that was eaten anciently at that time. In partaking of the *Lord's Supper* on other occasions, we use the symbols to remember the death of Christ and His love for us.

The bread and wine were connected to the body and blood of the Messiah. In essence, since He was the true Lamb, this became a way of both explaining the meaning and essence of the

sacrifice, as well as giving believers an opportunity to ceremonially partake of the Lamb. Since no physical lambs were slain after the fall of the Temple, the eating of the ancient sacrifice was no longer done. The institution of the bread and wine, although not directly commanded to be consumed at the Passover Feast, clearly fits in that setting. In the old days, those gathering on that night would be eating the sacrificed lamb. For Christians, partaking of the bread and wine at the Passover Feast is symbolic of our eating the spiritual Lamb of God. The bread and wine, however, is not the whole of the Passover Feast. It forms a portion of it, a very significant portion, but still only a part.

The evening of Passover is a time not only to partake of the sacrificial Lamb in terms of the bread and wine, but also to recall the entire saga of Passover, from its inception onward. It is a time to teach and reinforce the meaning of what God is working out among His people. It is a time to reflect not only upon the sacrifice, but also what that sacrifice has achieved. It is a night for sober reflection, and it is a night for great celebration. There is no occasion quite like the annual Passover Feast, especially when we realize that it commences the Days of Unleavened Bread. Adding the meaning of that Festival gives the Passover celebration a rich, deep, and full significance like no other holy occasion.

The partaking of the bread

and wine clearly relates to Christ as the sacrificial Lamb. But since the Scriptures do not limit its consumption to just the Passover Feast, it retains its deep spiritual meaning for believers as often as they wish to reflect upon it and participate in the memorial. It serves as a reminder throughout the year of what God and His Son have done for us. This was precisely the way the early Church viewed this ceremony, and it became part of the very glue that helped hold them together. In essence, doing it this way is demonstrating that Christ is available to every believer all the time, and, although it is not to be a repeat of the annual Passover Feast itself, it does serve as a perpetual connection to that auspicious event, and helps to keep our minds and hearts in the right place throughout the year.

And we must not forget that the opportunity to share the bread and wine with one another is a way of honoring our Savior and identifying with Him. In certain respects, the *Lord's Supper* is about our relating to Christ in terms of His suffering and death. Paul wrote:

**“Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the**

**righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil. 3:8-11).**

The fellowship of His sufferings brings to mind the words of the Savior when He speaks of His body that is broken, and His blood that is shed. Paul, writing this time to the Corinthians, says:

**“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread...You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons: you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of demons. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we strong than He?” (I Cor. 10:16-17, 21).**

When we partake of the *Lord's Supper*, it is indeed a communion with the body and blood of the Messiah. To be in communion means to participate, to be in partnership with, and to fellowship. In part, it is through the frequent observance of the *Lord's Supper* that we are brought into that deeper remembrance of Christ, of His sufferings, and of our relationship to what He did for us.

We are called upon by God to offer ourselves as **LIVING SACRIFICES** unto Him (Rom. 12:1). When we correctly observe the *Lord's Supper*, we are consciously identifying with our Savior, with the New Covenant that He came to institute, with His sacrifice He gave for us, and with our sacrifice to Him. The custom of the *Lord's Supper* is something that, if done regularly and with the proper respect, would serve an immeasurably good purpose among God's people today. It would draw us closer to God and to one another. Sharing the time, the focus, the memorial together would be a rich, unifying experience for all of us.

In discussing the proper observance of the *Lord's Supper* with the Corinthians, the apostle Paul speaks to them of their attitude, first toward God and the sanctity of Christ's sacrifice for them, and also toward each other, for they were so obviously acting out of selfishness and total inconsideration. In the course of his letter to these brethren, he mentions something that is quite profound and that ought to be paramount in our own minds as believers today. In I Corinthians 11:27:

**“Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Messiah. But let a man EXAMINE HIMSELF, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup” (I Cor. 11:27-28).**

We have all read this passage before, and the idea of examining ourselves is, in itself, not new to us. The thing is, however, that we have always tended to think of such an examination in terms of the annual observance of Passover only, and yet the situation that is being addressed in I Corinthians 11 is so clearly not the once-a-year Passover celebration itself, but rather something that was, even by that early date, customarily done often throughout the year.

It should come as no surprise that the issue of examining oneself is certainly not restricted to the annual Passover. In a later letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes the following statement:

**“EXAMINE YOURSELVES, and prove whether you are truly in the faith or not. Test yourselves, unless, of course, you are afraid that you will fail the test. Are you not aware that if Jesus Christ isn't in you, you are reprobates?” (II Cor. 13:5).**

The serious examination of ourselves before God is something that each of us should do often. When we habitually think of this only in terms of the Passover, we tend to simply not do it at other times during the year. Relating this process to the keeping of the *Lord's Supper* is the key method God has designed to insure that we incorporate this act into our lives on a regular basis.

Re-instituting the *Lord's Supper* on a more frequent basis,

entered into with the deepest sincerity, reflection, and seriousness, is a practice whose time has surely come for the modern-day Church. Doing so would result in an extraordinary increase of the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. It is part of what has been missing from the Body of Christ for a long time, and a resumption of this ancient, honored ordinance could well produce some of the most positive fruit possible among believers today. Indeed, it could even make a marked difference in the very health and welfare of God's people.

It is quite possible that some will find this discussion uncomfortable or unseemly. This is due primarily to the teaching of men whose words we have clung to in the past as though they came directly from God. All I wish to do is share with you information from this side of the issue, in hopes that you will give it prayerful consideration, and that it will eventually bear much good fruit in your spiritual lives. May God be with us all as we approach this Passover season, and let us do all that we do in loving memory and honor of what our Father and His Son have done for us.