

Communion 201-3

What is communion?

Some studies show that about 2.2 billion people take communion on a consistent basis.

Communion is one of the seven sacraments that the Roman Church recognizes. Most non-Catholics don't use the word sacrament to describe communion.

Evangelical Christians consider communion an ordinance. An ordinance is defined as "a practice or a custom that is established through usage or through some authority."

The Bible teaches that Jesus himself established two ordinances in the church, and those ordinances are baptism and communion.

There are different biblical names for communion.

1. The cup of **blessing** and communion.

1 Corinthians 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? NKJV

2. The cup of the Lord and the Lord's **table** .

1 Corinthians 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. NKJV

3. The Lord's **Supper**.

1 Corinthians 11:20 Therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. NKJV

4. Communion is also referred to as the Eucharist, from the Greek word *Eucharistia*, meaning giving **thanks** in English.

1 Corinthians 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." NKJV

5. The breaking of **bread**.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. NKJV

Read *1 Corinthians 11:23*.

These instructions are from the Lord Jesus himself.

In *1 Corinthians 11:23*, Paul reminded the people that communion is to be done to remind them of what Jesus instituted, as well as remembering His death and resurrection.

Paul was telling the Corinthians how Jesus previously was in a large upstairs room in Jerusalem, with His disciples, eating the Jewish **Passover** meal together.

There were seven annual Jewish feasts, and the most important one was Passover. The night He was betrayed, Jesus and His disciples were in the upper room to celebrate the Passover Feast.

The Passover feast remembered and celebrated the ancient Jewish exodus from Egypt.

Passover celebrates how the Jewish people were freed from Egypt after four centuries of servitude to the Egyptians.

God sent Moses to tell Pharaoh to let the Children of Israel go out of the land of Egypt, but Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let them leave.

The Lord sent nine plagues to inflict Egypt, but Pharaoh still would not relent. This was an overwhelming demonstration of power over these **pagan gods** of Egypt.

The Lord then told Moses that one more plague was coming, and after this one, Pharaoh would let His people go.

Exodus 4:23 So I say to you, "Let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn." NKJV

After the final plague, not only did Pharaoh let them go, but he actually drove them out of the land.

God never hardened Pharaoh's heart **until** he first hardened it against the Lord and His people.

The Lord considered Israel His firstborn child, so He sent this plague of the firstborn death onto Egypt. The Lord gave Pharaoh over to his own debased mind and will.

Passover was instituted as a new beginning for the nation of Israel, meant to bind them together and remember the Lord.

Passover marked the beginning of the religious New Year, with the focus on the Lamb. The celebration of New Year's was to remind them of the **deliverance** out of the hand of Pharaoh.

When the Lord delivers us out of bondage, it is meant to be a new day as well as a new beginning to life.

Read *Mark 14:22-31*

The Passover dinner in our *Mark* passage takes place after over 1,500 years of celebrations, where the symbols of unleavened bread, wine, and a slain, unblemished lamb represented Jesus.

The hour had come for the ultimate Passover Lamb to be slain.

For us today, we celebrate the **real** Passover with the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

1 Corinthians 5:7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. NKJV

I would like to discuss some of the symbolism of Christ, shown through Passover dinners, which the Jews before Jesus' time, as they celebrated, didn't even realize what it truly meant.

The Seder is the traditional dinner Jews eat at Passover, and the word Seder means “**order**.”

Passover has a specific order for food to be eaten, for prayers to be recited, and songs to be sung.

Each item used for the Passover had a specific meaning related to Jesus and the Exodus for the Jews, as they escaped Egypt.

1. The lamb shank is to remind us of God’s salvation.

During the original Passover, God told the Israelites to sacrifice an unblemished lamb and place some of its blood on their door posts of their homes.

If they followed the Lord’s instructions, then the Angel of Death would “pass over” their homes and preserve the firstborn.

This whole thing was a picture to show us how Jesus is the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*”

Jesus’ sacrifice allows us to go from death to life; it delivers us from sin and death into the true Promised Land, our eternal life.

The Lamb's shank was important because we are told the lamb’s bones could not be **broken**, and the same was prophesied about the crucifixion of Jesus.

In one of the many Messianic prophecies, *Psalm 34:20, He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken. NKJV*

John 19:31 Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath

(for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.

John 19:32 Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.

John 19:33 But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

John 19:34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

John 19:35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe.

John 19:36 For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken."

2. The unleavened bread

As the Jewish people left Egypt, they were in a hurry and had no time to allow their bread to rise. From then on, Passover was followed by the week-long Feast, using Unleavened Bread.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread spoke of the purity of God since all leaven was a symbol of sin, and **leaven was to be put away** for Passover, to **symbolize** purity.

Leaven in scripture represents sin, which *permeates and contaminates every aspect of our lives; it pollutes our hearts.*

The Apostle Paul used leaven to speak against carnality when he asked a rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 5:6, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”

The unleavened bread represented the **sinless** Bread of Life, Jesus Christ.

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. NKJV

The unleavened bread or *matzoh* was to be placed in a bag called an *echad* (*ehh-cod*), which means “one” in Hebrew. The *echad* was one bag, with **three** chambers.

One piece of *matzah* was placed in each one of the three chambers of the bag.

The first piece of *matzah* was placed into the first chamber and then never touched, never used, and never seen.

The second piece of *matzah* in the bag was broken in half at the beginning of the Seder; half of the *matzah* was placed in the *echad*, and the other half was placed in a linen cloth.

The third piece of *matzah* in the bag was used to eat the elements on the Seder plate.

Though the Israelites never understood this truth: God the Trinity was pictured with the *matzoh*.

- The 1st *matzah* that remains in the bag throughout the Seder represents God the Father, whom no man sees.

- The 2nd *matzah*, the broken one, represents God the Son.
- The 3rd *matzah* pictures the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

The reason the middle *matzah* was **broken** was to picture the broken body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:23 The Lord Jesus, on the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread;

1 Corinthians 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." NKJV

Also, the *matzah* used for the Passover Seder had to be prepared in a certain way, **besides** being made **without a leavening** agent.

The unleavened bread was to be striped with **holes** poked in it, representing Jesus' stripes and His pierced side.

3. Vegetable

The vegetable was dipped in salt water and eaten, to represent the hyssop that was used to apply the blood of the Passover Lamb to the doorposts of their homes.

In the New Testament, **hyssop** was used to give the Lamb of God some sour wine when Jesus said He thirsted in *John 19*.

The salt water represented the tears shed during the bitter years of slavery and the Red Sea that God split during the Exodus.

4. Bitter Herbs

Bitter herbs are used to remind the Jews that they were unable to offer sacrifice and worship to God during the **bitterness** of slavery while in Egypt.

5. **Charoset** (a mixture of apples, nuts, wine, and spices)

Charoset (*kr·ow·set*) represented the mortar the Israelites used in constructing buildings during their slavery in Egypt.

Of all the elements of the Seder, Charoset alone is sweet, which is used as a reminder of the **hope** of redemption.

6. **Hard-boiled or Roasted Egg**

The egg was used to mourn over the loss of their temple, and the fact that the egg is roasted reminds the people of the **roasting** of the sacrifice on the altar of the temple.

7. **Four cups of wine.**

- The first glass was the “cup of **sanctification**.”
- The second was the “cup of judgment.”
- The third was the “cup of **redemption**.”
- The fourth was the “cup of praise.”

The Lord’s Supper

Passover and communion are intimately linked together, because it was during the celebration of the Passover Feast that Jesus offered His disciples the bread and the fruit of the vine.

Jesus clearly taught that communion was a **picture** of His body about to be offered on the cross and His blood soon to be shed, for the remission of sins.

Jesus broke the unleavened bread and told the Disciples to eat it as a representation of His broken body. Then He took the cup and told them the wine represented His shed blood.

Jesus fulfilled the Passover and gave the feast a new meaning.

*Exodus 6:6 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an **outstretched arm** and with great judgments. NKJV*

In the New Testament, the Messiah had both of His arms outstretched as He freed us from sin and brought our salvation.

Like the first Passover, everyone who believes and receives Jesus' sacrifice by faith to cover their sins will be spared the second death, because of the **shed blood** of the Lamb of God.

Notice the term New Covenant. Before we describe the New Covenant, let's discuss the Old one. God established the Old Covenant with Israel and required strict obedience to the Law.

Besides keeping the 10 commandments, the Law also required that Israel perform certain **sacrifices** to atone for sin.

Animal sacrifices could only cover sins; those sacrifices could not remove sin.

Hebrews 10 shows us a contrast between the animal sacrifices and Christ's sacrifice.

Animal sacrifices could **never** remove sin, but when Jesus Christ shed His blood, He removed all sins for those who receive Him.

Another problem for Israel about the Mosaic Law was that they were incapable of keeping it.

The Law was perfect, but all people are born sinners, so **no** one can be perfect or keep the Law perfectly.

Paul said in ***Galatians 3:23*** ***But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.***

Galatians 3:24 ***Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.***

Galatians 3:25 ***But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. NKJV***

The New Covenant is God's promise that He will forgive sin and restore fellowship to those who will turn their **hearts** to Him.

Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant, and His death on the cross is our guarantee of the promise.

The New Covenant was predicted in the Old Testament through Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, promising that someday God would restore His people through **faith** in the Messiah.

The New Covenant involves a total change of heart through the Holy Spirit, so that God's people are naturally pleasing to Him.

Jesus took the cup of **redemption** and used it as a symbol of the New Covenant in His blood, revealing He is the Promised One, who would give us a new heart and save us from our sin.

Jesus broke nearly 1,500 years' worth of tradition of the Passover to institute Communion, as He radically repurposed this holy feast into a memorial of His upcoming sacrifice.

Jesus instructed His followers to eat the bread representing His broken body and drink the cup representing His blood poured out, in remembrance of Him!

Jesus said in *Mark 14:25*, "***I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.***" *NKJV*

In the *Book of Revelation*, we read of the Lamb's supper and His bride, the Church, who was made ready for the feast.

Jesus was promising, with the statement of not drinking the fruit of the vine, that the kingdom would be a fulfilled **reality** when the Church is gathered at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

The Last Supper was also a picture of the Church's future supper with the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ.

When we partake of Communion, it reminds us not only of Jesus' death and **resurrection**, but it also reminds us of our future hope of glory with Jesus for eternity.

Jesus did drink from the cup of God's wrath at the cross, for the remission of sins, and then He instituted Communion for us to partake in remembrance of what He did and what He will do.

Then Jesus got up from the table and washed the Disciples' feet. Jesus even washed the feet of Judas, who would walk out of the upper room to betray Him!

The Passover meal was followed by the singing of the last half of the Hallel Psalms found within ***Psalms 115-118***.

Imagine being the all-knowing God the Son, knowing full well what was about to happen to you, and yet you still take time to praise the Lord in Hymns.

Jesus Christ was singing **worship** songs to the Father with His Disciples on His way to the Garden of Gethsemane before His brutal beatings and crucifixion! ***Psalms 115-118***

When we can make melodies in our hearts in the face of adversity, it proves that our trust is in the Lord God Almighty.

Being able to praise the LORD during trials demonstrates trust.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

1 Peter 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, NKJV

Billy Graham said, “*Comfort and prosperity have never enriched the world as much as adversity has.*”

After Jesus sang a hymn, they left the dinner and went out to the Mount of Olives, where they were accustomed to gathering.

Jesus told all of His Disciples they would all stumble and fail.

This passage shows the determination of Jesus to take the cross to save lost humanity.

The prophet Zechariah prophesied this event in 520 B.C.

Zechariah 13:7 "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, Against the Man who is My Companion," says the LORD of hosts.

"Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; Then I will turn My hand against the little ones." NKJV

Jesus was not condemning the Disciples; He was letting them know He was in charge, and the cross was necessary.

Prophecy was **fulfilled**, even as Jesus realized that every one of His Disciples would fail, but Jesus would not fail.

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;

1 Corinthians 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same manner, He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." NKJV

When we partake of communion, we are replicating what Jesus did with His disciples and **remembering** His supreme sacrifice on the Cross.

Jesus held up a piece of broken bread and said, "This is my body." And then He held up the cup and said to His disciples, "This is my blood."

Some people believe in transubstantiation, where they believe the communion elements miraculously become the actual body and blood of Christ when taken by one of Jesus' followers.

Jesus was not saying that the bread was His actual flesh. Instead, He meant the bread represented His human flesh that would be crucified.

Jesus did not mean that this wine was His actual blood. He meant that this wine or juice represented His human blood that would be sacrificed.

We do not believe communion was designed to bring salvation to someone because communion is a symbol to remember what Jesus **accomplished** for us.

In *John 19:30*, Jesus said, "*It is finished.*" In ancient societies, the words *it is finished* (*telestai* GK) was stamped onto tax receipts to indicate that the taxes had been paid in **full**.

Jesus said *it is finished*, and that meant the sacrifice Jesus made on the Cross was **completed**; it never needed to be continued.

There was nothing more to be done, nothing more to add to it. It was finished.

So, we take communion to celebrate and remember the finished work of Christ on the Cross.