

2017

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### Recommended Citation

Crawford, Brian (2017) "Passover and the Lord's Supper," *Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies*: Vol. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jmjs/vol2/iss1/6>

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## Passover and the Lord's Supper

Brian Crawford

Once we leave the Gospel accounts of the Passover and come to 1 Corinthians, we find ourselves in the unusual position of going back to the future. Although the Gospels are the written accounts of Yeshua's life, it is likely that they were not written down until after the Apostle Paul penned the letter of 1 Corinthians in 54 or 55 C.E.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, even though the historical setting of 1 Corinthians is *later* than the Gospels, the letter contains our *earliest* written reports of Yeshua's Passover Seder and the Early Church's celebration of Communion.<sup>2</sup>

1 For the dating of the Gospels, see P. L. Maier, "Chronology," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 187–88. For the dating of 1 Corinthians, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 448; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 32; C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1968), 5; and Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin, rev. ed., New Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1966), 188. Citations of *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* in this chapter refer to the SCM Press edition.

2 However, see Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 186–89, where he



## FIRST CORINTHIANS, THE PASSOVER EPISTLE

Paul refers to or alludes to Passover in three separate sections of 1 Corinthians, each of which we will investigate further below. This recurring Passover theme is striking due to Paul's silence on the matter in his other letters. Why did Paul have Passover on his mind in this letter? The most likely reason is due to the season of his writing.<sup>3</sup> At the end of his letter, Paul tells his readers that he "will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost" (1 Cor. 16:8), the Greek name for the Jewish Feast of Weeks, which occurs fifty days after Passover in May/June (Lev. 23:15–16). Additionally, he tells them that he hopes to come to Corinth "soon" (1 Cor. 4:19). The combination of these time markers makes it very likely that Paul wrote his letter in the spring, before Pentecost, and near the time of Passover.

Other material encourages us to consider the real possibility that Paul and his Corinthian audience were celebrating Passover in a manner that pointed to the Messiah. Early Church sources report that the second-century churches in Paul's region celebrated Passover and Messiah's crucifixion on the fourteenth of Nisan.<sup>4</sup> Some second-century believers even claimed that the Apostles themselves encouraged the celebration of this Messianic Passover.<sup>5</sup>

### PAUL AND THE FEASTS

Some think that if a church celebrates Passover, this contradicts Paul's teachings elsewhere on the Feasts. Paul is the one

identifies Mark as recording the earliest version of Yeshua's eucharistic words, despite Mark being written after 1 Corinthians. According to Jeremias, "Mark with his numerous semitisms stands linguistically nearest to the original tradition" (188).

3 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 407–8.

4 See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.23 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2* 1:241–42). For a discussion of the chronology of Yeshua's final week of life, see chapter 5 in this book, "Passover in the Gospel of John," by Mitch Glaser.

5 See Polycrates' letter to Victor in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.24 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2* 1:242–44). He identifies the Apostles Philip and John as the originators of the Passover observances in Asia Minor, and then identifies six others, including himself, who have retained that practice until Polycrates' own day.



who called the dietary laws, the Feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths “a mere shadow” compared to “the substance,” which belongs to Messiah (Col. 2:16–17). He is the one who chastises the Galatians for observing “days and months and seasons and years” (Gal. 4:10). How can Paul celebrate the old Jewish Feast of Passover when the Messiah has already fulfilled the Feast?

This misconception may be dismissed by a closer look at the intended audience of these passages. In both Colossians and Galatians, Paul's primary audience is Gentile believers. In Colossians, Paul is addressing those who were uncircumcised in their flesh (Col. 2:13). Paul encourages the Gentile Colossians to disregard Jewish critics who *require* them to observe special days, since Gentiles were never obligated by God to follow the Mosaic calendar. In Galatians, Paul is addressing Gentile believers who are choosing to get circumcised in order to be justified before God (Gal. 5:2–6). He tries to dissuade them from undergoing this rite lest they forfeit Christ Himself and the justification He achieved on their behalf (v. 2).

There is nothing in these passages that speaks against *Jewish* believers celebrating the Feasts, or anything that speaks against Gentiles celebrating them with a heart of faith. In fact, Paul's wording in Colossians 2:17 implies that the “shadows” still have present-day importance because he uses the present-tense verb ἔστιν, *estin*—“Things which *are* a mere shadow of what is to come” (emphasis added). Many commentators ignore the present tense and jump to the conclusion that the Jewish observances *were* shadows that have been made obsolete.<sup>6</sup> But Paul did not believe that the Feasts were a thing of the past, but rather a shadow with present-day anticipatory features.<sup>7</sup> Cele-

6 On the issue of ignoring implications of the present tense verb in Colossians 2:17, Martha King cites Bible commentators F. F. Bruce and Peter T. O'Brien as saying that the shadows “were only temporary.” Similarly, Ralph P. Martin says that “their observance is antiquated.” Also, N. T. Wright says, “Now that the reality is here, there is no point in holding on to things which are only a shadow.” Martha King, *An Exegetical Summary of Colossians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Exegetical Summaries 12 (Dallas: SIL International, 2008), 180.

7 Jeremias remarks, “Rather oddly, the Church took over only two of the great feasts in the Jewish calendar, namely, the Passover and Pentecost, but not Tabernacles.” The omission of Tabernacles need not be surprising if we consider that Paul believed that some of the shadows still pointed forward to unfulfilled “things to come.” Perhaps, in the Early Church's mind, Tabernacles was not emphasized



brating the shadow without the substance of Messiah would be foolish, and celebrating Messiah without the shadow would be adequate for the Gentile Colossians, but Paul's use of the present tense shows that he sees continuing value in the shadows, including the Feasts. This continuing importance of the Feasts will explain other passages, indicating that Paul continued to keep the Feasts.<sup>8</sup> In Paul's mind the Feasts still hold significant relevance to believers. With Paul's positive stance towards the Feasts in mind, let us now return to 1 Corinthians.

### MESSIAH, OUR PASSOVER (1 COR. 5:6–8)

The context for 1 Corinthians 5:6–8, our first of three Passover-themed passages in this epistle of the Apostle Paul, is that the Corinthian church was accepting the presence of an unrepentant sexual deviant in their midst, and accepting him in prideful arrogance (5:1–2). Paul's first response is to exhort the church to take decisive action against the offender, casting him out from the church community (vv. 2–5). However, it is relatively easy to expel an unbeliever from the church; it is much harder to deal with the sin in the hearts of believers. For this reason, Paul pivots to draw a principle from the Passover in 1 Corinthians 5:6.

After calling the Corinthians "arrogant" (5:2), he again warns them, "Your boasting is not good" (v. 6). This remark signals that Paul is no longer addressing the sin of the sexual offender, but rather the pride of the church community that was boasting about retaining him. Paul continues, "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" (v. 6) Paul's reference to leaven may arise from two parallel directions. First, leaven ferments and puffs up bread just as human

because its fulfillment awaits a future era (Zech. 14, Rev. 21:3). Joachim Jeremias, "πάσχα," (*pascha*) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 5:901.

<sup>8</sup> See Acts 20:6, 16; and 27:9. See also Reidar Hvalvik, "Paul as a Jewish Believer: According to the Book of Acts," in *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, ed. Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 143–45.



pride puffs up a person with sin. Both Paul's contemporaries and later Jewish rabbis use leaven as an analogy for pride.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, if Paul is writing near the time of Passover, then the thought of leaven would be at the forefront of his mind as a Jewish believer (Exod. 12:19). Consequently, Paul's use of the leavening theme is a vivid word-picture that speaks to the time and situation of his audience.

In contrast to the greater sin of the sexual offender, the Corinthians' sin of boasting may be just "a little leaven," but it still makes the whole dough unfit for Passover. The analogy is that the sin of pride has infected the whole Corinthian church, which is inconsistent with their justification in Messiah. Paul clearly believes that the Corinthians are saved and justified in Messiah because he calls them "unleavened" (1 Cor. 5:7). Their status as sinless, righteous, and pure in God's eyes through Messiah is a fact in Paul's mind; however, the Corinthians' prideful actions are springing from "the old leaven" of "malice and wickedness" (v. 8), that is, their old sinful nature. The only proper response is to remove the pride from their midst like the Jewish people remove the leaven from their homes at Passover.

In the second half of verse 7, Paul gives the reason *why* the Corinthians are "unleavened" and righteous believers: "For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed." The Passover sacrifice of Yeshua is the only reason why the Corinthians have clean hearts. Yeshua's sacrifice is greater than any previous Passover lamb, providing complete atonement for all-time to all who believe (John 1:29; 1 Peter 2:24). The Corinthians have already been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, but their boasting is taking them back to Egypt. Paul commands the Corinthians to turn back from that treacherous road and to instead clean out

9 The Jewish philosopher Philo, Paul's contemporary, makes the connection in at least two places: *On the Special Laws* 1.293 and Fragments from an Unpublished Manuscript in the Library of the French King. According to Ronald L. Eisenberg, *JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions*, "The Rabbis regarded *hametz* [leaven] as the symbol of the evil inclination. The 'yeast in the dough' (the evil impulse that causes a ferment in the heart) prevents human beings from carrying out the will of God (Ber. 17a). *Hametz* also represents human haughtiness and conceit. Just as leaven puffs up dough, so human arrogance cause[s] us to believe that we, not God, control our destiny." Ronald L. Eisenberg, *The JPS Guide to Jewish Traditions* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 269.



the leaven of pride and thereby celebrate the Festival of Passover correctly.

Many interpreters see the figurative language in this passage and assume that the reference to “the feast” (1 Cor. 5:8) must be figurative as well. “Celebrate the feast,” or “keeping the festival,” means holy living or consecrated lifestyles or some other universalized notion that removes the context of actual Passover observance.<sup>10</sup> But we need not jump to an exclusively spiritual meaning here. We have previously argued that believers did celebrate a Messiah-focused Passover in the Early Church and that Paul was writing in the spring, during Passover season. Both points should lead us to consider that Paul has an actual Passover festival in mind here. We must remember that Paul was still *Shā’ul*,<sup>11</sup> and that he continued to identify himself as a Pharisee from the Diaspora (Acts 23:6). The Apostle viewed himself as still Jewish (Acts 22:3) and as part of the Messianic remnant (Rom. 11:5). In such a case, Paul is exhorting the church to enter the Passover season with as much zeal to remove sin from their midst as his fellow Jews are zealous to remove leaven from their homes. Believers in Yeshua, made unleavened through His sacrifice, should not approach the fourteenth of Nisan, the yearly reminder of their redemption, without living in accordance with their new nature.

## FELLOWSHIP WITH THE LORD THROUGH COMMUNION (1 COR. 10:14–22)

The second Passover passage we will consider, 1 Corinthians 10:14–22, does not derive its Passover themes from Old Testament observance, but rather from Yeshua’s use of the Pass-

10 Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 1–9* (Dallas: SIL International, 2008), 211. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 406.

11 Many believe that *Saul* (Hebrew, שָׁאֵל, *Shā’ul*; Greek, Σαῦλος, *Saulos*) was Paul’s Jewish name, which he left behind once he “converted” to Christianity. This narrative, although popular, is not correct. As late as Acts 13:9, Paul is still called “Saul.” The simple solution is that *Saul* was his Hebrew name, and *Paul* (Greek, Παῦλος, *Paulos*; Latin, *Paulus*) was his Greek/Latin name. The Apostle was known by both names in different contexts.



over to institute the celebration of Communion.<sup>12</sup> This is the earliest written reference to believers participating in “the cup of the Lord” (v. 21; cf. v. 16) and “the bread that we break” (v. 16).<sup>13</sup> Paul does not explain the Passover origin of these practices here since they are already so integrated into the Corinthians’ rhythms. Paul assumes that his audience knows what he is referring to.

“The cup of blessing” has a blessing spoken over it (v. 16a), which may have been the same blessing as recorded in the Mishnah: “Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, the Creator of the fruit of the vine” (m. Ber. 6:1). In this passage, Paul emphasizes that the Corinthians are united together in fellowship, “a sharing” (κοινωνία, *koinōnia*), when they participate in the Lord’s Supper. Κοινωνία, *Koinōnia*, refers to a “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.”<sup>14</sup> Just as the Jewish people who sacrifice at the Temple are made participants or “sharers” (κοινωνοί, *koinōnoi*) with the God of “the altar” (v. 18),<sup>15</sup> so too the Corinthians are united together in fellowship or “a sharing” (κοινωνία, *koinōnia*) in the blood of Messiah (v. 16a) and in the body of Messiah (v. 16b). The practice of Communion is meant to foster an attitude of brotherhood and unity within the community of believers, reminding all that they are spiritual brothers and sisters who have been united with God and each other through the sacrifice of Yeshua.

Paul draws out the practical implications for the Corinthians in verses 19–22. If participating in “the table of the Lord” means that believers are united with the Lord, then why are they practicing things that make them participants or “sharers” (κοινωνοὺς, *koinonous*) with demons (v. 20)? Believers should run from such

12 See in the next section the discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and the Lord Yeshua’s use of the Passover to institute the celebration of Communion, also witnessed in the Gospels (Matt. 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23; cf. John 13:21–30).

13 See note 1 above for the dating of 1 Corinthians and the Gospels.

14 “κοινωνία,” in Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 552.

15 “The altar” is Paul’s Jewish substitute for the name of God. Many Jews used the name of God sparingly due to the commandment to not use his name in vain (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11). The technical term for this is *circumlocution*.



practices because being united with the Lord excludes any other kind of religious participation. Believers cannot adopt the worship of foreign religions and anti-Yeshua worldviews without provoking the Lord to jealousy (v. 22), which has serious consequences as shown in the narrative of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings in the Torah (1 Cor. 10:1–13).

Although Paul does not refer to the idea of the New Covenant here, it surely influences his exhortations. It is by means of the New Covenant in Messiah's blood that believers are brought into fellowship with the Lord and are betrothed to Messiah, and we await a great marriage supper in the last days (Rev. 19:6–9). Marriages are exclusive, admitting no foreign lovers. So too with the New Covenant. Messiah Yeshua owns the hearts and deserves the total affections of His people, and the cup and the bread are His reminders to us that we are united with Him and no other.

### THE TRADITION AND APPLICATION OF COMMUNION (1 COR. 11:17–34)

The third Passover-themed passage we will consider is 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. After a brief aside from the previous discussion, Paul returns to the subject of Communion and Passover in verse 17. In this section, he expands upon his exhortation to unity in 1:10 by addressing a particularly shameful expression of factionalism in the Corinthians' practice of Communion. Paul acknowledges that there will always be factions whereby true believers may be distinguished from believers in name only (11:19), but that is not the factionalism that grieves him. Paul has heard that the Corinthians' practice of Communion has turned into a frenzy where some overeat, some go hungry, and some get drunk (v. 21). This frantic and factionalized atmosphere is not at all reflective of a supper named after the Lord Yeshua (v. 20). Instead of Communion being an opportunity for fellowship and worship, the church is sinning by disrespecting itself and humiliating the poor among them (v. 22). The Lord's Supper is not the appropriate place for partying and drinking.



*THE EARLY TRADITION OF COMMUNION*  
(1 COR. 11:23–26)

After establishing the grounds for his rebuke, Paul transitions to remind the Corinthians in verses 23–26 of the solemn origins of Communion and why their practice of it was so inconsistent with the Lord Yeshua. “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,” says Paul, the Pharisee (11:23; cf. Acts 23:6). Before we continue to the content of the message Paul received from the Lord, we must first recognize the particularly Jewish pairing of “received” with “delivered,” which is reflective of Paul’s Pharisaic background.<sup>16</sup> In ancient Jewish understanding, the authority of the teacher came not from his charisma or his success, but from his office as a conduit for official tradition.<sup>17</sup> With this introduction, Paul is preparing to remind the Corinthians of the tradition that he did not invent himself, but which he received “from the Lord.”<sup>18</sup>

The tradition begins by referring to the night when the Lord Yeshua “was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23). Most English translations use the word “betrayed” here, which is certainly appropriate, but the Greek word (παράδιδωμι, *paradidomi*) is the same as the one just used for the tradition Paul “delivered.” Just as tradition is “handed over,” so too Yeshua was “handed over.” However, the use of this word probably harkens back to the Greek version of Isaiah 53, where the same word is used to describe the Messiah being “given over” for our sins (Isa. 53:12 LXX).<sup>19</sup> Consequently,

16 On this verse Thielton (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 867) says, “‘Received’ and ‘handed on’ in 11:23 (cf. 15:1–3) were virtually technical terms in Jewish culture for the transmission of important traditions . . . (cf. m. Abot 1:1).”

17 Gerhard Delling, “παράλαμβάνω,” (*paralambáno*) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:12–13.

18 This is probably a reference to Paul receiving the tradition about the Last Supper from other believers or from disciples who were present at the Last Supper. This is strengthened by the nearly verbatim wording in 1 Corinthians 11:24 and Luke 22:19. He probably does not mean that he received the tradition about the Last Supper through direct revelation.

19 The Greek version of Isaiah 53:12 is καὶ διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν παρεδόθη, *kai dia tas hamartias autōn paredothē*, which means “and because of their sins he was given over” (author’s translation). Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta: With Morphology*, electronic ed. (1935; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1996), ad loc.



the early believers probably understood Judas' act of betrayal as a fulfillment of the prophecies in Isaiah 53.

On the night that Yeshua is handed over, he takes bread, gives thanks, and breaks it (11:23–24). It is possible, but not certain, that this bread is the *afikoman* bread that figures so prominently in later Jewish Passover tradition. Whether or not this is the *afikoman*, Yeshua gives a radical new meaning to the bread: “This is My body, which is for you” (1 Cor. 11:24). These very few words are overflowing with meaning. We must note that Yeshua says these words about His own human body of flesh and blood. He also says these words in the context of a Passover Seder in which food and other elements have memorial and symbolic meanings. The unleavened *matzah*, called “the Bread of Affliction,” is not literally affliction and not literally sinless, but representative and symbolic of affliction and sinless purity.

When we consider Yeshua's actual body and the memorial nature of Passover, this should lead us to view the bread of Communion in a similarly symbolic way. The bread is Yeshua's body in symbolic form, not in nature. We should also note in verse 24 that Yeshua's body is “for you [all]” (plural pronoun). This is a beautiful reminder once again of Isaiah 53, but with the audience and speaker reversed. In Isaiah 53, the Prophet Isaiah speaks on behalf of believing Israel about the Messiah who was “pierced through for our transgressions” and “crushed for our iniquities” (v. 5), but now it is the Messiah who is speaking to Jewish believers—His disciples. Yeshua confirms what Isaiah has declared previously: the Messiah's death will be “for us.”

Yeshua continues, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor. 11:24).<sup>20</sup> Just like the celebration of the original Passover was meant to be a memorial (Exod. 12:14), so too is the fulfilled Passover of Communion. The Lord wants his followers to see the bread of Communion as a reminder of Him, just as the lamb and bitter herbs were reminders of the Exodus. By partaking of the broken bread, we are to remind ourselves of the broken Messiah who gave Himself for our sins. Any partaking of the Communion bread without remembering the sacrifice of Yeshua

20 These words τὸ τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν, *touto poieite eis ten emen anamnēsin*, are identical to the Greek of Luke 22:19, showing that Luke and Paul are drawing on common tradition.



is an affront to Yeshua Himself, as Paul explains in the verses that follow.

The tradition continues by saying that Yeshua gave a new meaning to the cup of the Passover Seder (1 Cor. 11:25), just as he did with the bread (v. 24). The tradition only mentions the cup “after supper,” which most likely refers to the third of four Passover cups, the cup of redemption. This cup is the only one mentioned because of its supreme importance in the life of a believer. Yeshua says, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (v. 25). Here, the symbolic nature of the Communion is made most apparent. The cup in a Passover Seder is filled with wine—not blood—and yet it is given symbolic meaning. The origin of wine at the Passover Seder is shrouded in mystery,<sup>21</sup> but in Jewish culture, wine symbolizes “the essence of goodness” when used appropriately.<sup>22</sup> Here, Yeshua is saying that this cup of wine symbolizes His own blood, which inaugurates the New Covenant that had been foretold by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31–34). What had been prophecy to Jeremiah is now reality through Yeshua’s blood.

The tradition concludes, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). We learn several things from this remark. First, Paul and the early believers expect congregations to celebrate Communion often. We cannot tell *how often*—that decision is left up to the congregation itself—but it needs to be part of the life of the congregation. Secondly, the practice of Communion is an act of proclamation—a visible, tangible exclamation of the work of Yeshua in the lives and hearts of believers. Why? The bread and the wine have embedded within them the message of the Gospel! Although unbelievers should not be admitted to Communion, they should be able to see the practice of Communion in the life of a congregation and thereby be exposed to the proclamation of the Gospel. Thirdly, the practice of Com-

21 The earliest reference to wine used at Passover is in a pre-Yeshua pseudepigraphal book, Jubilees 49:6.

22 Judah David Eisenstein and Emil G. Hirsch, “Wine,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1906), 12:533,

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14941-wine>.



munion encourages a forward-thinking hope in the return of our Lord Yeshua. Practicing Communion is not merely about remembering the Lord's death, but also being eagerly expectant about celebrating Communion "until he comes."

According to Jewish tradition, the Messiah is supposed to arrive on the night of Passover.<sup>23</sup> This understanding was retained by the early believers, since we learn from extrabiblical Christian sources that there was an annual tradition of fasting until midnight on Passover, staying up late in case Yeshua returned!<sup>24</sup> As to be expected, this Messianic anticipation about the yearly Passover also made its way into Communion. According to the first-century Messianic Jewish work the *Didache*, or the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," the Early Church ended their Communion prayers with the Aramaic phrase, "Maranatha!" (Did. 10.6), which means, "O Lord, Come!" Paul also uses this word at the end of this Passover epistle (1 Cor. 16:22). This early remnant of Jewish-Christian liturgy depicts how Communion was intended to be an eager expectation of the Lord Yeshua's return.

The modern Jewish Passover Seder shares in this eager expectation for the future. A Seder does not merely look backward to the Exodus event, but rather, every Jewish family hopefully proclaims at the end of the Seder, "Next year in Jerusalem!" The season of Passover is the season of redemption, yesterday and tomorrow, as both Paul and the modern Seder remind us.

### THE TRADITION APPLIED (1 COR. 11:27–34)

Now that Paul has reminded the Corinthians of the solemn origin of Communion, he turns in 1 Corinthians 11:27–34 toward the factionalized congregation to apply its meaning to their situation. He concludes that partaking of Communion

23 Commenting on Exodus 12:42, the Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha school of *midrash* says, "In that night were they redeemed and in that night will they be redeemed in the future." Jacob Z. Lauterbach, trans., *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 1:79. See also *Targum Neofiti* to Exodus 12:42, and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Exodus 12:42.

24 Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 123.



“in an unworthy manner” makes the participant “guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord” (11:27). This is a severe accusation that no believers should want to be true about themselves. Yeshua is our Lord and our Messiah and our Bridegroom—we should do all we can to avoid participating in Communion “in an unworthy manner.” What does this mean?

This phrase cannot mean “celebrating Communion with sin in your life.” Likewise, it cannot mean “celebrating Communion when you are unworthy of it.” Not a single believer is worthy of the grace of God—that’s why it’s freely given grace—and all believers continue to struggle with sin. Our sins do not disqualify us from taking Communion; rather, our acknowledgment of our sin is what leads us *to* take Communion! We need to be reminded of our Savior who redeemed us from the power of sin and who gave us the Spirit to progressively sanctify us from our sinful nature. If we think that we need to be sinless to partake of Communion, then not only do we have a works-based view of God and salvation, but we also have disqualified everyone from ever partaking of Communion themselves.

Instead, Paul uses an adverb in the Greek to say that we should not partake of Communion “unworthily,” that is, in a way that dishonors or shames the noble meaning of Communion itself.<sup>25</sup> The bread and the wine receive their symbolic meaning from the Lord Yeshua himself, so dishonoring Communion is a personal attack on the Lord himself. Because of this, “let a person examine himself” (1 Cor. 11:28 *ESV*), says Paul, to ensure that each of us is properly honoring the Lord of the Communion in the practice of Communion. Anyone who does not properly “judge the body rightly” only brings judgment upon oneself (v. 29). Judging the body rightly or “discerning the body” (*ESV*) can refer to acknowledging the body of Yeshua in

25 The word for “unworthily” (ἀναξίως, *anaxiōs*) is used only here in the entire New Testament. However, other Greek sources use the word. The Jewish apocryphal work 2 Maccabees talks about a man of noble birth who is abused “in a way unworthy of his own nobility” (2 Macc. 14:42). Rick Brannan, Ken M. Penner, Israel Loken, Michael Aubrey, and Isaiah Hoogendyk, eds., *The Lexham English Septuagint* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), ad loc. Plato uses the word in *Apology of Socrates* 38, and Herodotus uses it in *Histories* 7.10.5. In all these cases, the word is used to describe actions that dishonor or shame the nobility of someone or something that deserves better.



the memorial bread, or it can refer to recognizing the unity of the congregation as the body of Messiah (cf. 10:16–17). Either way, the Corinthians’ lack of self-reflection and self-judgment has led God to bring weakness, illness, and even death upon some members of the congregation (11:30). According to Paul, just as God judged Israel for neglecting him (10:1–13), so too God will bring earthly consequences upon a congregation that dishonors the Lord in Communion. This might sound unbelievable and superstitious to many people today, but “[s]uch an attitude reflects the extent to which the modern world has lost the biblical understanding of God’s transcendence and fearsome holiness.”<sup>26</sup> God takes His holiness and the actions of His Son seriously; therefore the misuse of Communion can bring with it severe divine consequences.

“But,” Paul says, “if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:31). Believers need not come under the temporal judgment of God, if only they would self-judge themselves before coming to the Communion Table. Are we properly honoring the work of Yeshua? Are we remembering the sacrifice of His body and blood? Are we acting in fundamental unity with the other believers around us? These are the kinds of questions that every believer should ask himself or herself upon coming to the Lord’s Table. God wants us to judge ourselves so He does not have to do it against our will. Even so, Paul says, God’s judgment of believers serves a redemptive purpose (v. 32). God disciplines His people to keep them from being condemned along with the world. Like a loving Father, He brings temporal punishments upon His children so they can learn wisdom and properly inherit their eternal destiny with Him.

With all of this tradition and admonition complete, Paul now gives some concluding applications that remind the Corinthians of where they started. They are not practicing the *Lord’s* Supper but rather a corruption of it. This is inconsistent with the reality of Communion and the reasons for it. “So then, my brethren,” Paul concludes, “when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that

26 Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2010), 557.



you will not come together for judgment” (11:33–34). Communion is meant to foster an atmosphere of unity and community. Instead of judgment, Communion is supposed to bring blessing.

The Corinthians were failing at this because they had forgotten the origin, purpose, and symbolism of Communion itself. They were using Communion to fulfill their own personal appetites rather than to remember the Lord and thank Him for His sacrifice on their behalf. Congregations today need to be wary of making the same mistakes. Instead, they should give Communion the solemnity and reverence it deserves, as well as foster an attitude of unity in Messiah among the participants.

## CONCLUSION

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians contains rich Passover and Communion imagery that is intended to deepen the Corinthians' understanding of the Gospel (1 Cor. 5:6–8), to inspire them to spiritual unity in one body (10:14–22), and to remind them of the Passover-sacrifice basis of their unity (11:17–34). These three passages serve as a rebuke of the Corinthians' congregational life, but they can serve as precious encouragements to us. By learning from the Corinthians' failures, we can strive for a more intimate relationship with the Messiah, our Passover, who gave His body and blood for our sins, uniting us into one body for His eternal glory and praise.

Based upon these passages we should be reminded why it is important to see the Bible—especially the New Testament—through Jewish eyes and why understanding the Passover enriches our celebration of the Lord's Supper. The following five lessons are important for us to recall and for you to share with your home group or church—whether you are a pastor or a member of a congregation:

Nearly all of the books of the New Testament (except, perhaps, Luke's Gospel and Acts) were written by Jewish believers, who presumably continued to identify as Jews



and live like Jews. This is implied throughout the New Testament. A key example of this is how greatly the Early Church struggled with the enormous changes created by the influx of believing Gentiles described in the book of Acts. This resulted in a major decision made in concert with the Holy Spirit not to require non-Jews to be circumcised or to observe the Law of Moses, aside from a few “essentials” (Acts 15:28–29). Overlooking the Jewishness of the New Testament and most of its writers can lead to misunderstanding its message to us.

Paul continued to see relevance in celebrating the Feasts found in Leviticus 23, since they point to the Messiah.

The tradition concerning Communion in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 is based upon ideas and events found in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition. Therefore, understanding the Jewish backgrounds regarding Passover will deepen our thankfulness for what Yeshua accomplished on our behalf.

The practice of Communion is meant to be a visual and experiential reminder of the unity of believers with each other and with their Lord. As believers we should do everything possible to make that unity a meaningful reality by forgiving and asking forgiveness of each other and rebuking the spirit of factionalism within our own hearts.

On a personal level, the practice of Communion should not only look backward to the Cross in thankfulness, but should also look forward to the day that Messiah returns. Our Lord is not dead—He is risen!—and He will come to take us to His side. Communion should lead our hearts to exclaim, “Next year with Yeshua in the New Jerusalem!”