

## When was the Lord's Supper observed?

One might expect that if the Lord's Supper grew out of a Passover meal, it would be celebrated only once a year, on the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> of Nisan. A study of Early Church history seems to support this speculation. Epiphanius, for example, observed that the Ebionites, an early Jewish-Christian sect, celebrated the Eucharist as an annual feast, like the Passover, in memory of Christ's death (*Haereses* 30.16.1). And Christians in Asia Minor in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century held a special Eucharist as a parallel to the Passover and at the same time as the Jewish Passover (see *Higgins*, p. 56, n. 1).

The statement of the early chapters of Acts about the disciples 'breaking bread' every day (Acts 2:42, 46), need not refute this idea. For it has been pointed out that the meals in Acts are very much like religious meals found elsewhere in Judaism (K. Stendahl, ed., *The Scrolls and the NT* [1957], pp. 84-86), and their emphasis is quite different from that of the Last Supper as recorded in the gospels.

Whereas that Supper was a remembrance of Christ's death, these daily meals were joyful fellowships which celebrated His resurrection and continued presence in the Church, and which also anticipated the eschatological kingdom. They, thus, may not have originated in or been connected with the Last Supper, but may have had their source and meaning in the post-resurrection meals that Jesus had with His disciples (Luke 24:30-43; John 21:1-14; Acts 1:4; 10:41. See O. Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* [1953], pp. 14-16).

Hence, in the early Jerusalem Church it is probable that there were originally two kinds of fellowship meals:

- 1) the 'Breaking of Bread' which occurred daily, and
- 2) the Passover which occurred annually, each with its own peculiar emphasis.

Only the latter 'was directly related to the Last Supper, and only in it was the *meal* a specific remembrance of Messiah's death' (E. E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke* [1966], p. 250).

Eventually, however, these two meals were combined into one new feast when the Church moved outside of Jerusalem and the Jewish influence ceased to play a dominant role in the development of Christian worship.

The joyful fellowship meal of Acts 2 became the **agape**-element of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-21), and the annual Passover meal became the **Eucharist**-element (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; *Ellis, ibid.*).

By this time the new Supper was celebrated neither daily nor annually, but weekly—on the first day of the week\*, the day of resurrection, possibly at night‡, pointing back to the Passover meal which was partaken of in the evening (Acts 20:7; cf. 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:10; Did. 14.1).

*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol 3, pp. 982-983. Referred to by Roger Price in his study on 'The Communion Service'.

\* **Note** Students of Biblical Chronology will know that 'the first day of the **week**' is actually 'the first (*day*) of the (*feast of*) **weeks**' [*plural*] in the Greek, meaning the Feast of Firstfruits, which was on the first of the 49 days (seven **weeks**) to Pentecost. They will also know that the Resurrection did **not** take place early on Sunday morning but at **midnight** as Sunday became Monday in Gentile time. The Church has erroneously celebrated 'Sunday' for the Resurrection ever since!

God changed the start of the day from 6pm (*Jewish time*) to midnight (*Gentile time*) from this point—see John 20:19.

‡ The comment about it being 'possibly at night' is interesting as the early Church **also** celebrated the anniversary of the Resurrection at midnight—see the account of Paul doing this in Acts 20:7-12 and pp 388-390 of *The Restored Vision* by AE Ware.

However, this would be **separate** to the Lord's Supper, which was celebrated four evenings before this and which replaced the Feast of Passover for the Church as an annual memorial, remembering Jesus.