
 Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist by Dr Brant Pitre

Goal: Look at the Eucharist through 1st Century Jewish eyesBackground

Jews were prohibited from drinking blood (Lev 7-especially Chapter 17: *Sacredness of Blood*) It is clearly stated that ...**Lev 17:11** *"Since the life of a living body is in its blood, I have made you put it on the altar, so that atonement may thereby be made for your own lives because it is the blood, as the seat of life, that makes atonement."*

St Paul (Staunch Pharisee, Jewish Rabbi and persecutor of the church) forbidden by Jewish Law to drink blood, boldly states in **1Cor 10:16-17**: *"The cup of the blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"*

First Key Image of New Testament**1. Why did the Jews in Jesus time believe so quickly in such the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist?**

The Jews knew the Old Testament prophecies which Jesus fulfilled. Only the zealots were looking for a physical, political king; St Paul and others were looking for DIVINE Messiah, one who would bring SPIRITUAL liberation, forgiveness of sins, atonement for sins and spiritual blessings – a new EXODUS, a new COVENANT.

Background**The first Exodus consisted of...**

1. Chosen people enslaved because they broke their covenant with God; God sent a leader to release them from slavery, sin and idolatry in **Exodus 12**
2. The new Exodus was a new journey with a new leader, a new pilgrimage, a new promise, a new Eden, a new *COVENANT between God and His chosen people*.
3. The focus was on the TABERNACLE; center of EXODUS; destination was not the desert or Mount Sinai but Jerusalem, the heart of the PROMISED LAND but the City of David (**Exodus 15** Prophets foretold of something *greater* than the Tabernacle – a new temple, a *permanent* (not a tent or a building) which would be more glorious than Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem – center of the *New Exodus* would be *exodus from sin and death*.

Exodus from Egypt began with PASSOVER – death of firstborn, death of a lamb, unleavened bread, eating *roasted lamb*, etc. God gave very specific instructions to follow in order to be set FREE from Egypt; especially a ritual sacrifice with several steps to follow:

1. Father of each household (acting as priest) take unblemished male lamb (no broken bones), sacrifice and pour blood in a **golden basin**, use a **hyssop branch** to spread blood on doorposts and lintel of home (**seal of the covenant**)
2. Roast the lamb over the fire and **eat its flesh**. Over time, this ritual evolved into Jewish Passover (Seder) Meal **Exodus 30:8**

Two parts of the Passover (Seder) meal are especially important

1. On the night of the Passover, youngest child would ask the father of the household "Why is this night different from any other? Why do we do these things on THIS night? Why do we eat unleavened bread and roasted lamb?" The father responded with these EXACT words
"It is because of what the Lord did for ME when I came out of Egypt".
2. The Passover on the night of last supper was over 1000 year AFTER the event. How could the father say "what the Lord did for ME..?"

47 *First century Jews believe they were somehow **spiritually brought back in time** to*
48 *participate in that first Exodus...Every sacrifice of every lamb all down through centuries*
49 *was seen as an actual participation in the one sacrifice of the Passover lamb on the night of the*
50 *Exodus and Moses – the Misnah states in every generation, a Jewish man must regard himself*
51 *as if he himself came forth out of Egypt – giving thanks because by delivering his ancestors*
52 *from Egypt, so too was he delivered.*

53 **Second Key Image from Old Testament (The Passover and New Covenant)**

54 Second Exodus needs: (for a detailed description of the Last Supper, see *Mark 14, Matt 24 or Luke*
55 *22*) NOTE: Try to look at the passages through eyes of 1st century Jew and ask these questions:

56 1. What is missing from the Last Supper?*

57 *No Leviticus priest present at Passover meal.*

58 **NOTE:** At the time of Jesus, there was not a Leviticus priest present at the Passover Meal; This is
59 significant because for a long time, the father of the household offered sacrifice of lamb.
60 After the Israelites committed idolatry (Exodus 32) – that privilege was taken from them
61 and given to the tribe of Levites, only Levites could sacrifice the Paschal lamb. Jesus was
62 priest at last supper.

63 2. How is it similar to the Jewish Passover?

64 *In 1st century, the father was to take the lamb and interpret that this lamb was sacrificed for*
65 *them – the lamb was the center of the Jewish liturgy but it was missing. Jesus' focus was on the*
66 *bread and wine in identifying it as HIS body and blood- the Lamb of God. Jesus was both*
67 *priest and Victim/sacrifice*

68 3. How is it different?

69 *Not an ordinary Passover but NEW Passover of the Messiah foretold by prophets – Jesus*
70 *replacing the sacrifice and elements of old covenant with himself and with apostles in three*
71 *ways:*

72 **A. Have new priests in new Passover – the 12 Apostles (12 Tribes of Israel)**

73 **NOTE:** No longer is priesthood by bloodline (Levites) but through Jesus

74 **B. See New Sacrifice taking place – Jesus replacing the lamb with sacrifice of Himself**
75 *remember in OT had to EAT the lamb; in NT had to eat the lamb – institution of the*
76 *Eucharist*

77 **NOTE:** Any first century Jew would know they had to eat the lamb; "...Passover not complete with
78 death of the lamb but completed by communion where you would receive the life that was given for
79 you and take it into yourself..."** - **if not eat Lamb of God sacrificed for us, then we die**

80 **C. New elements of Sacrifice of Lamb-** *focused on flesh and blood of the Lamb- elements no*
81 *longer real flesh and blood of an imperfect animal but bread and wine*
82 ***transubstantiated*****into flesh and blood of sanctified Lamb of God*

83 **NOTE:** *Just as Jews remembered for over 1000 years the Exodus from Egypt with Seder Meal (as if it*
84 *was happening again on that night), the New Covenant is remembered with Jesus as the sacrificed*
85 *Lamb of God at every Mass – our exodus from Sin and into salvation.*

86 4. Question: If in OT Exodus, God gave food and drink to sustain the Hebrews; what would be the
87 food and drink of the New Testament? **(Exodus 16)**

88 *Body and Blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God*

89 **NOTE:** If in Old Covenant, you had to eat the flesh of the lamb to be saved from death. In the New
90 Covenant, you had to eat the lamb – every first century Jew would have understood this. Passover
91 not completed with death of a victim but completed by the communion where you would receive
92 the life that was given for you and taken into yourself. If Jesus going to inaugurate a new Exodus,
93 what FOOD will He give us for the journey? **(Exodus 15 – 16)**

94

- 95 5. The New Manna
 96 A. What did the manna taste like (**Acts 2**)? *Wafers that tasted like honey; a foretaste of*
 97 *Promised Land (Psalm 78) – not ordinary bread but supernatural bread*
 98 B. Why did they collect a double portion on Fridays? *Could not work on Sabbath so collected*
 99 *food for the Sabbath*
 100 C. What else did they do with the manna they collected? *Placed some into a golden urn and*
 101 *put in the Tabernacle in the **heart of the Ark of the Covenant in Holy of Holies***
 102 D. Why? *To show that this bread was a **gift from heaven, a sign of God's Presence**; His*
 103 *promise of salvation (Exodus 16; Hebrews 9) First century Jews would have known this*
 104 E. Why does this sound familiar? *We place the consecrated Hosts, the bread from heaven, into*
 105 *a ciborium and then into the Tabernacle on the Altar of our churches*
 106 F. What two places in the Bible does Jesus speak of the new manna of the new Exodus? *The*
 107 *Lord's Prayer and John 6*
 108

109 **BACKGROUND:** The Lord's Prayer (the only recorded prayer that Jesus gave to His apostles)
 110 (Mt 6:11; Lk 11:3)

111 Our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth
 112 as it is in Heaven. ***Give us this day our daily bread*** and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive
 113 those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen
 114

115 9. How does the phrase ***Give us this day our bread*** relate to the manna from the Old Testament?
 116 *Translated by St Jerome from Greek "epi-ousios: bread (epi- ="on, upon, above"; - ouisios =*
 117 *"substance, being, nature" thus "Give us this day our super-substantial bread." (Douay-Rheims*
 118 *bible); both are understood to be daily and supernatural; just like the Manna*
 119 *"Taken literally, (**epiousious – "super-essential"**)...refers directly to the Bread of Life, the*
 120 *Body of Christ" (CCC2837)*

121 10. What does the super-substantial sound like?
 122 ***Transubstantiation*** – *the supernatural bread of the Eucharist (that feeds our souls/spirits)*
 123 *Praying for God to feed us and bless us with the New Manna of the New Covenant, the manna*
 124 *of the New Exodus; Manna of Old Testament both daily and supernatural*

125 11. John 6 – What is significant about this passage as it relates to the Eucharist?
 126 *Jesus uses manna to teach about the real Presence.*

127 12. The first Jewish Christians understood the new manna could not be ordinary bread – if the Old
 128 Testament manna from heaven was *supernatural* than can the New Testament manna
 129 simply be a symbol? *No. A basic rule of Bible is that Old Testament prototypes can never be*
 130 *greater than New Testament fulfillment – David not greater than Jesus; Solomon cannot be*
 131 *greater than Jesus, Adam not greater than Jesus; Eve not greater than Mary*

132 13. Jesus said if you eat this *New Manna* from heaven, you will have eternal life – Eucharist is the
 133 *supernatural* bread from heaven. What clue does Jesus' give us that the Eucharist is NOT
 134 simply His crucified Body and Blood?
 135 *When He asked them "Do you take offense of this? (When telling them they must eat HIS body*
 136 *and drink His blood – cannibalism) then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to*
 137 *where He was before?" The clue here was that He was going to give them His crucified AND*
 138 *risen flesh and blood in the Eucharist; (**Luke 24**) as risen body not bound by time or space and*
 139 *can appear as He wills whenever He wants; He took that **sanctified body and blood into***
 140 ***heaven and OFFERED as the TOTAL sacrifice and made present on every altar at every***
 141 ***Mass until the end of time***

142 **Third Key Image from Old Testament (Eucharist as Bread of Presence)**

- 143 1. In Old Testament after the Exodus, where was worship centered?
144 *The Tabernacle; the portable temple where Israelites would go and Levite priests would offer*
145 *sacrifice*
- 146 2. What was at the heart of the portable temple?
147 *The Tabernacle, the Holy of Holies and was called the **Bread of the Presence** (Exodus 25)*
- 148 3. What three pieces of sacred furniture did God instruct Moses to place into the Holy of Holies?
149 *1. Ark of the Covenant – the Throne of God behind a veil (center of the room)*
150 *2. The Golden Lamp Stand – what is known as the Menorah with seven candles (7 tongues of*
151 *fire) never allowed to go out*
152 *3. The Bread of the Presence – placed on a golden table and put inside a holy place*
- 153 4. How many holy symbols are hidden in the Tabernacle of the Old Testament and their
154 significance?
155 *Three symbols representing: The throne of the Invisible God (The Father); the Bread of the*
156 *Presence (the Son) and the Tongues of Fire (the Holy Spirit) - The Trinity – the central mystery*
157 *of our faith and hidden from the beginning of time; one of the signs God gave us in the Old*
158 *Testament*
- 159 5. In the Book of the Jewish Laws, what does Leviticus 24:5-9 tells us about The Presence?
160 *1. Make 12 cakes – represents 12 tribes (cakes were flat, unleavened round bread) set out fresh*
161 *every Sabbath day as a sacrifice on behalf of Israel. 2. This would be a “perpetual “requirement*
162 *offered as an “every lasting agreement” – lamps never to be allowed to go out as long as the*
163 *Bread of the Presence was in the tabernacle*
- 164 6. What ritual is required when the Bread of the Presence was removed from the Tabernacle?
165 *Covered with a veil (reminds us of Benediction?) Why? We veil what is holy/sacred – the*
166 *recognized the Bread of the Presence as sacred.*
- 167 7. In the Hebrew Old Testament, *Lachem Ha-Chaim* (the Bread of the Presence expression) and the
168 Hebrew word *Panim* have a double meaning. What do they mean and how is that significant
169 to understanding The Presence?
170 *The Bread of the Presence is not just the Bread of the presence of God but also **the Face of***
171 ***God** – described as an “un-bloody sacrifice” – no animal blood being spilled AND wine*
172 *(Exodus 25)*
- 173 8. Read Exodus 25:29-30. What can be determined by this passage?
174 ***Exodus 25:29** “Of pure gold you shall make its plates and cups, as well as its pitchers and*
175 *bowls for pouring libations. On the table you shall always keep showbread set before me.” On*
176 *the table in the Holy of Holies, the 12 cakes and bowls/pitchers for **libations** (for drink/wine)*
177 *– think about the altar at Mass and the Presence of Bread and Wine*
- 178 9. What other similarities can we find in Samuel 21 between the food and drink in the Holy of
179 Holies?
180 *David and his men running from King Saul, come to the tabernacle and meet the priest; they*
181 *are hungry but only the Bread of the Presence is available (remember it is replaced every week*
182 *and only the priests consumes) but to receive, the men had to be celibate (no sexual relations)*
183 *for a period of time just as priests were required. That was not a problem since the men were*
184 *on a military expedition and they had abstained from sexual relations.*
- 185 10. In Samuel 21, what do we know about the **Levitical** priesthood?
186 *In order to be able to perform the ritual sacrifices in the Temple, the priests had to practice a*
187 *temporary celibacy. They only spent part of the year at the temple as priests and then*
188 *returned to their families*
- 189 11. What is the one time Jesus mentions the Bread of the Presence? *Matt 12:1-8 “...at that time Jesus*
190 *went through the grain fields on the Sabbath, his disciples were hungry and they began to*

191 *pluck ears of grain and eat.” The Pharisees and brought to Jesus attention that they were*
192 *working on the Sabbath. Jesus reminded them of David in Samuel 21 and the priests in the*
193 *temple work on the Sabbath and they are guilty.*

194 12. What did Jesus mean when he said “I tell you, something greater than the Temple is here”?
195 *My apostles are like David’s followers and He is like David and they can also eat the **Bread of***
196 ***the Presence.***

197 13. What is Jesus implying?
198 *The Bread of the Presence had to be fresh on the Sabbath – someone had to prepare it and*
199 *offer sacrifice – they were exempt as priests. Jesus and His disciples were the new priests of the*
200 *New Covenant and offer the new Bread of the Presence*

201
202 14. How was it that the first Jewish Christians came to believe in the real Presence?
203 *1. They understood that the Eucharist was the Bread of the Presence; if old Presence*
204 *communicated the presence of God, the new Bread of the Presence is going to do so in an even*
205 *greater way as the TRUE real presence of God. 2. They would have also known that Jesus was*
206 *laying claim for himself and his followers to the priesthood; that He was acting like a priest*
207 *and he was giving His disciples the authority to act like priests – not by inheritance but*
208 *through their relationship with Him. 3. They would have understood that Jesus is the New*
209 *Temple that the disciples would offer the Bread of the Presence in the new Temple (John 2-*
210 *when overturned the money changers table and was asked how He had that authority – He*
211 *stated He would destroy and rebuild the Temple in 3 days. They did not understand the Temple*
212 *was His body – the dwelling place of God on earth – His body was God made flesh- the*
213 *Eucharist is the new Temple of the new Exodus and our destination).*

214 15. What does the Eucharist and the New Passover reveal to us?
215 *Eucharist transcends time and just as Jews step back into time to Exodus and remembers in*
216 *Passover meal, so we are taken back to the Last Supper, to His passion and Crucifixion; even*
217 *though none of us were there, He died for every single one of us out of divine love that welled*
218 *up in His heart as the eternal Son of God made flesh; the new Passover takes us back in time to*
219 *the crucifixion and makes the reality of the cross a present reality for us so that we might be*
220 *saved so we can say what St Paul said “that Christ loved me and gave himself of me.”*

221
222 16. Why is it important not to only look back to the cross but also forward to the resurrection of the
223 body when we look at Eucharist as the new manna?

224 *The Eucharist is not only deliverance from sin or a release from Egypt but a promise, a*
225 *foretaste of what is to come every Sunday in The Creed when we say *Í believe in the**
226 *resurrection of the body, the resurrection of the dead and the light of the world to come.”*

227 17. In John 6, Jesus said “he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise
228 him up on the last day”. What is the pledge of our bodily resurrection?

229 *Jesus did not come to just save our souls but to save our bodies and raise them up. Pope John*
230 *Paul II said in encyclical on the Eucharist “(with the Eucharist)... **we digest the secret of***
231 ***resurrection.**” Jesus body and blood are the power that will raise us with Him to the new*
232 *creation.*

233 **FINAL NOTE** (Brant Pitre): “(Eucharist) takes us back to the cross and forward to the resurrection
234 and provides the Bread of the Presence for Him to dwell with us now so that we may be sustained
235 and draw on His presence and got to Him in the Tabernacle, in Eucharistic Adoration, in the Mass,
236 and we can look upon the Bread of the Face of God – it is veiled now but will not always be so...”
237 Remember when the Israelites reached the promised land, the manna stopped – so to the veil of
238 bread and wine that now covers the face will be lifted and we will no longer look upon him but will
239 see Him face to face.

240

241 **Closing Prayer**

242 Jesus, we thank you for the new manna from heaven, our foretaste of the Promised Land, our
243 pledge of the resurrection and we thank you for the gift of yourself and the new Bread of the
244 Presence, the new bread of the face of God.

245 O Lord Jesus, draw us to your face, draw us to yourself and help us to love you more and more every
246 day in the most Blessed Sacrament of the holy Eucharist and be with us and lead us all into the glory
247 of Your Kingdom as we say:

248 Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning is now and
249 ever shall be world without end. Amen

250

251 **References**

252 *Dead Sea Scrolls* (CD) FORMED.org

253 Mish-nah – an authoritative collection of exegetical materials embodying the oral tradition of Jewish
254 law and forming the first part of the Talmud

255 Exegetical – critical explanation or interpretation of a text, especially of scripture;
256 interpretation, explanation, exposition

257 Talmud - the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend comprising the Mishnah and
258 the Gemara. There are two versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian Talmud (which dates
259 from the 5th century AD but includes earlier material) and the earlier Palestinian or
260 Jerusalem Talmud.

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263 **Definitions**

264 ***Tran·sub·stan·ti·a·tion*** - especially in the Roman Catholic Church) the conversion of the substance
265 of the Eucharistic elements into (literally) the body and blood of Christ at consecration, only the
266 appearances of bread and wine still remaining.

267 ***Consubstantiation*** - The **difference** is in how that idea is understood. **Consubstantiation** is the
268 idea that, at the same time, it is both bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ.

269 **Transubstantiation** is the idea that though it looks like bread and wine, it is not.

270 **Consubstantial** (adjective) - as used in The Creed- of the same substance or essence (used especially
271 of the three persons of the Trinity in Christian theology). "Christ is **consubstantial with** the Father"

272 Exegetical – synonyms elucidative, explanative, explanatory, explicative, expository, illuminative,
273 interpretive