

How often should we partake of the Lord's Supper?

By Herbert W Armstrong

The "Lord's supper," like so many essential points of the original true doctrine, has fallen into the mire of erroneous tradition. But Jude exhorts us, "that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." Here is the real truth as to when and how often we should observe the "Lord's supper."

TODAY different church denominations take this sacred ordinance different ways. One church claims the bread and wine literally is transferred into the actual body and blood of Christ. Some churches take this "supper" every Sunday morning. Some take it once a month, in the morning. Others take it four times a year; and at night.

Truly, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6).

There is but one way to get back to the plain truth once delivered to the saints, and that is to shelve our assumptions and traditions, and then with open mind diligently "search the Scriptures," the only true record of what was once delivered. The First "Lord's Supper" Let us examine the passages showing the first institution of this ordinance.

Notice, in Luke 22:14, 19-20: "And when the hour was come, he [Jesus] sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. . . . And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."

Notice, it was "when the hour was come," that Jesus first introduced the bread and the wine. There was a definite time -- a definite hour -- when He held this supper, setting us an example.

Notice, too, He commanded them to observe it -- "THIS DO." And why? "In remembrance of me," Jesus said. It was, then, a MEMORIAL -- in memory of His death. He instituted it on this tragic night, the very eve of His death.

In Matthew's account, we read, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread" (Matthew 26:26). It was "as they were eating" that He took bread and introduced this solemn ordinance we call the Lord's supper. Eating what? Eating the Passover! (Verse 17, and Luke 22:15.)

Now notice Matthew 26:2. "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified."

Jesus knew His time had come. He was our Passover, sacrificed for us (I Corinthians 5:7).

"Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?" (Matthew 26:17.)

After sundown (the days began at sundown) Jesus sat down with His twelve disciples in an upper room (Matthew 26:20; Mark 14:15).

And as they were eating the Passover supper (Matthew 26:26),

"Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

So we see that it was the night of the final and last Passover supper that Jesus introduced the New Testament "Lord's supper." To thoroughly understand the connection between the "Lord's supper" of the New Testament, and the Passover of the Old, let us make a quick examination of the Passover. The Ordinance Under the Old Covenant The original Passover marked the exodus of the children of Israel out of Egypt. God had been pouring out the plagues upon Egypt, to induce Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. You will find the events recorded in the 12th chapter of Exodus.

On the 10th day of the first month (the Hebrew, or sacred year, began with the new moon in the spring, near the equinox, not midwinter), they were told to take a young lamb without spot or blemish, a type of Christ, the Lamb of God. This lamb was to be kept until the 14th day of the first month, Abib, when they were to kill it "in the evening" (verse 6). The literal Hebrew, margin, is "between the two evenings," and from the Jewish Encyclopedia we find this is the twilight period between the time the sun goes down, when the new day has commenced, and the darkness when the stars are out. So the lamb was killed in the very beginning of the 14th of Abib.

As soon as it was killed, the blood was to be sprinkled over the doorposts of their houses. The lamb was to be roasted, and eaten in haste. At midnight that night the angel of the Lord passed through the land, striking dead all the firstborn of the land. But, "when I see the blood, I will pass over you," the Lord told the Israelites.

For seven days they ate only unleavened bread. The 14th of the first month, Abib, was the Passover, and the 15th was a feast day, or annual holy day (verses 15, 16 and Numbers 28:16, 17). The 15th was the first of seven days of unleavened bread, and the seventh of these, or the 21st of Abib, was also a holy feast day, or annual Sabbath, called a "high day" even still today by the Jewish people.

The lamb was killed as the sun was going down (Deuteronomy 16:6), yet it was eaten in the 14th day (Leviticus 23:5, 6), not after it was passed.

Year after year Israel continued to observe the Passover. Instituted an Ordinance Forever Now notice Exodus 12:17, 24. The Passover was instituted an ordinance forever. Some will say circumcision was not done away, but was changed -- today it is in the heart (Romans 2:29). In both cases God meant forever, and so, as we have seen, at the last Passover supper Jesus changed the manner of observance of this ordinance. No longer do we kill a lamb and eat it, since the Lamb of God has been sacrificed once and for all. Instead, we take the bread, symbolizing His broken body, and the wine, symbolizing His shed blood, as a memorial, looking back to His death. How Often Observed? Now notice Exodus 13:10, speaking of the Days of Unleavened Bread: "Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year." The time is once a year, at night, after the sun has set in the beginning of the 14th of Abib. Jesus set us an example (I Peter 2:21), observing it at this set time once a year (Luke 2:42).

Suppose the Israelites in Egypt had observed this ordinance at some other than this set time? They would not have been saved when the death angel passed by that night! God does things ON TIME. He had given us an exact time for this ordinance. Jesus instituted it "when the hour was come." The Ordinance of Humility In giving us the account of the instituting of the "Lord's supper" ordinance, Matthew, Mark and Luke describe the taking of the bread and wine. But John relates another part of this ordinance. It is in the 13th chapter of John. Verse 1 shows the event is the last Passover. And, the supper being ended (verse 2), Jesus took a towel (verse 4) and began washing His disciples' feet (verse 5).

"So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also

ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you" (verses 12-15).

Many today do not want to humiliate themselves by washing the feet of their church brethren. Some argue that Jesus commanded only the disciples to wash one another's feet. But they will admit it was a command to them. Very well; turn to Matthew 28:19, 20:

"Go ye therefore," Jesus said to these same disciples, "and teach all nations, baptizing them . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." So they were to teach US to observe all things whatsoever He commanded them. Surely God is no respecter of persons. Kept Once a Year in the Apostolic Church Now notice I Corinthians 5:7, 8: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven . . . but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Paul gives directions regarding the Lord's supper in the 11th chapter of I Corinthians. Some have misunderstood verse 26, which says: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup," and interpret it to say "take it as often as you please." But it does not say that!

It says "as often" as we observe it, "ye do show the Lord's death till he come." And Jesus commanded, "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me" (verse 25). We do it in remembrance of THE LORD'S DEATH -- a memorial of His death. And memorials of momentous occasions always are observed annually, once a year, on the anniversary of the event they commemorate. That is the way we observe the 4th of July, Armistice Day, etc.

Jesus instituted this New Testament ordinance on the eve of His death. It was the 14th Abib, Hebrew calendar. He was our Passover, sacrificed for us -- and He was sacrificed on the same exact day of the year that the Passover lambs always had been slain. As the Old Testament Passover commemorated Israel's deliverance from Egypt, a type of sin, so the New Testament Lord's supper -- a continuation of the Passover with different emblems -- commemorates Jesus' death, and our deliverance from sin. Immediately after that last supper, Jesus and His disciples went out to Gethsemane, where, later that night, Judas Iscariot led the bloodthirsty mob who seized Jesus, and led Him away to be crucified during the daylight part of the same 14th day of the month.

Jesus set us an example, and by following His example and observing this sacred ordinance at the same time He did -- the same time the Passover always was observed, commanded to continue FOREVER -- we do continue to remember His death, annually, on the very anniversary of His crucifixion. It is the most solemn and sacred occasion of the year -- especially when observed at this correct scriptural hour.

Notice I Corinthians 11:27, 29. This is not speaking about a Christian being worthy or unworthy to take it. It is speaking of the MANNER in which we do it. To take of it unworthily is to take it in a wrong manner. Had the ancient Israelites in Egypt observed the first Passover at any time except the exact time appointed by God, they would have done it unworthily, and suffered the plague. Surely if we, once we see and know the truth, partake of this most sacred ordinance at any other time than that set apart in the Scripture, we would do it unworthily, and to our damnation. To take the bread and wine while not truly accepting the body and blood of Christ with the whole heart would be taking it unworthily and to one's damnation. Let us observe it worthily. Example of the First Century Church The first century Church of God, under the original apostles, continued to observe this solemn ordinance once a year at the set time. The Days of Unleavened Bread were still being observed. Notice Acts 20:6: "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread." That was about 59 A.D.

Then notice Acts 12:3. The Holy Spirit inspired these words, to tell us the time of year: "Then were the days of unleavened bread." That could not have been written had these days been done away and kept only by Christ-rejecting Jews.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses is a thing established. Notice a third text, Acts 12:4. The word "Easter" is a mistranslation. The Greek word is Pascha meaning "Passover." It is exactly the same word used for "Passover" in Matthew 26:2, 17, 18, 19. Many other translations faithfully render this "Passover"

in this text, as it should be. So this text is, "intending after the Passover to bring him forth to the people." This was more than ten years after the New Testament Church had been established. The Meaning of "Break Bread" Some churches turn to Acts 20:7 -- "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread. . . ." To them this says take the Lord's supper every Sunday morning.

Let us examine this. Notice verse 6. This was just AFTER the Days of Unleavened Bread, when the "Lord's supper" had been taken. Paul was holding a farewell meeting at Troas, ready to depart at sunrise. When was Paul preaching? It was not Sunday morning, but what would now be called Saturday night. It was between sunset, when the first day of the week commenced, and midnight (verse 7) and there were many lights burning (verse 8). But it was after midnight before they broke bread, when they were all getting hungry. Notice carefully in the 11th verse. "And had broken bread and eaten." This bread-breaking was not the Lord's supper, but eating a plain meal.

"Break bread" does not necessarily refer to the "Lord's supper," as some have carelessly assumed. Notice Acts 27:34, 35: "Wherefore I pray you to take some meat . . . he took bread . . . and when he had broken it, he began to eat."

Notice Acts 2:46: ". . . And breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness. . . ." Here they were breaking bread daily, eating meat, and Paul says if we eat to satisfy hunger at the Lord's supper, we do it to our condemnation (I Corinthians 11:34).

Then notice Matthew 26:29. Jesus said He would not again take the New Testament "Lord's supper" until after His second coming in His Kingdom. Yet, later, as He sat "at meat," eating a meal, He broke bread and blessed it (Luke 24:30).

They then used a kind of bread such as is used in many European countries today, and instead of slicing, they broke it. "Break bread" was a common term to indicate eating a meal.

Let us return to the faith once delivered. Let us humbly and obediently observe this solemn, sacred ordinance as we are commanded, and at the time set apart in the Bible, after sundown on the 14th of Abib, or Nisan, sacred Hebrew calendar.

The first day of the new year begins near the spring equinox when the new moon usually is first visible to the naked eye at Jerusalem (not the United States). The Jewish calendar as used by Jews today is correct. But it must be remembered that "in the 14th day of the first month at even is the Passover, and in the 15th day of the same month is the feast." The Jewish people no longer observe the Passover on the 14th. They observe the FEAST -- one night after the Passover, on the eve of 15th Abib. The "Lord's supper" or New Testament Passover should be observed after sunset on the evening before the Jewish people of today celebrate their feast.