

Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: **Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper**

{Major portions of this talk are taken from Dr. Brant Pitre's book,
Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist}



You might be wondering why we should spend time on this topic since the Last Supper tells us all we really need to know about the Eucharist. According to St. Augustine, “The New Testament is concealed in the Old, while the Old is revealed in the New.” The New Testament cannot be fully understood without its Old Testament roots. So, let’s take a look at the past.

Based on Old Testament covenants and prophecies, the Jews anticipated God would send a Messiah. Would He be like Moses? Would He destroy their enemies? One of the central Jewish hopes was the prophecy of a new exodus, when God would once again save his people. This exodus would be more universal and include all the countries of the earth including Israel.

So how do these prophecies play out in the Last Supper? Let’s start with the Passover meal, which was more than symbolic to the Jews of Jesus’ time. There were two major parts of that meal, the Passover seder (the fixed order of service) and the Haggadah (the ritual retelling of the exodus, where the Jews were set free from slavery in Egypt). For the Jews, it was really the re-presenting of the Exodus as if they were active participants not just observers. Sound familiar?

In the first exodus, God identified the Israelites as His son: “*Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me’*” {Exodus 4:22} In the new exodus, God says of Jesus: “*This is my Son, my Chosen, listen to him.*” {Luke 9:35} In other words, Jesus is not just a new Moses. Jesus is also the new Israel, the chosen Son of God, who will undergo the new exodus in his own person, where he will set humanity free from slavery to sin.

During the exodus wanderings, God provided miraculous manna (bread from heaven) to sustain them. Another Jewish reference dealing with bread is the “Bread of the Presence” in the Temple. Twelve loaves were set “before the Lord continually on behalf of the sons of Israel as a covenant forever.” This is why Jesus identified Himself as the “*bread of life.*” {John 6:35} Jesus’ words at the Last Supper would have built on these Old Testament references now being fulfilled in him.

By understanding the Passover, the manna, and Bread of the Presence, we can unlock the original meaning of these Eucharistic words, “*This is my body*” and “*This is my blood*” {Matthew 26:26-28} Viewed through these Jewish lenses, these words gain deeper significance. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, our Savior, and through His exodus we are free from sin!

Did the apostles fully comprehend what Jesus said and did for them at the Last Supper? Probably not. But there was more to come.

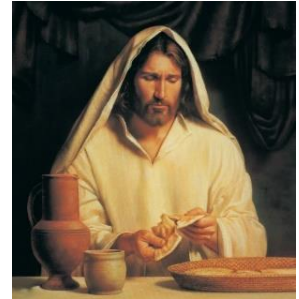
This is where the encounter of two disciples on the road to Emmaus becomes important. That Sunday was the first Eucharist after the Resurrection where Jesus was the principal celebrant. On that day, he ate and drank with his disciples in the joy of his kingdom. On that day, he gave them his crucified and risen body and blood. And while the disciples might not have realized it at the time, Jesus answered their prayer outside the village of Emmaus when they said to him: “*Stay with us.*” {Luke 24:29} In the “breaking of the bread,” in every Eucharist, Jesus answers their prayer, saying to them and to all of us, “*I am with you always, even to the end of time.*” {Matt 28:20} {Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper (catholicprofiles.org) }

Jesus did what the Israelites never accomplished. He journeyed through the wilderness in the new exodus, made right the wrongs of Israel, provided deliverance from the kingdom of sin and evil, and inaugurated the kingdom of God on earth. Are you ready to serve like Jesus did?

Reflective questions:

1. Have you ever felt like you are wandering through the wilderness as the Jews did? As Jesus did? What gives you hope? _____

How can you share this hope with others? _____



2. When you take the body and blood of Jesus in the Eucharist, do you feel like you've been freed from the bondage of evil and sin? If so, why? If not, why not? _____

3. Do you feel a responsibility to take that next step to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth? _____

What are you doing? _____

What else could you do? _____

{Music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjc55SLWz9M> * Bread Of Life}