

Transformational Communion

Lesson 1: Passover Bread

Vocabulary:

ritual	labor	to expel	justice
descendent	firstborn	to reflect	nature (of something)
tribe	doorframe	practical	temporarily
second-in-command	to spare	to be drawn to	metaphor
to threaten	strict	to administer	dough
to enslave	to possess	to confess	remedy



*Fractio Panis*¹

Introduction to Communion

Dated from the second half of the second century (150 – 200 C.E.), we find a painting in the Christian catacomb (or underground tomb) of St. Priscilla in Rome with the title *Fractio Panis*, an ancient phrase used for the “Last Supper,” also known as “Communion.” In the painting, we see seven men and possibly women seated at a table, while enjoying a meal of two fish and two loaves of bread, a celebration supper to honor Christ.² This practice of eating bread and wine was introduced by Jesus and is celebrated today among modern churches, but in various ways and with various meanings.

¹ *Fractio Panis*. Original image by Leinad-Z-commonswiki. Uploaded by Kim Martins, published on 01 April 2019. Public Domain without restrictions.

² Charles c. Stearns, Review of Joseph Wilpert’s *Fractio Panis*, *The American Journal of Theology* (1897-1920), Vol. 2, Nu. 3, Jul., 1898, The University of Chicago Press Journals, <https://doi.org/10.1086/476915>, 686. See also *Early Symbols of the Eucharist*, Encyclopedic Dictionary of Bible and Theology, Biblia.Work, <https://www.biblia.work/dictionaries/eucharist-early-symbols-of-the/>, accessed June 21, 2022 (686-7);

What do you already know about Communion? How do you celebrate Communion, and how often do you practice Communion?

What does the time of Communion mean (or not mean) to you personally? If you do celebrate Communion, do you experience a true celebration or does the practice feel more like a ritual? Explain.

The concept of Communion began with Jesus in Luke 22. Just before dying on the cross, Jesus, gathers his twelve followers together to celebrate the Jewish Passover meal, which later became known as the Last Supper.

What was Passover and why was it an important celebration for the Jewish people?

Passover: Bread and Yeast

During the time that Joseph, son of Jacob, **descendent** of Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, there was a famine. Jacob and his other eleven sons and their **tribes** moved to Egypt for food. Joseph had become **second-in-command** to Pharaoh, the Egyptian ruler, and was providing food for people throughout Egypt (Genesis 41-50). After Joseph's death, Jacob's descendants became successful over many years, and their numbers increased greatly. A new Pharaoh, who did not know about Joseph, rose in power over Egypt. He felt politically **threatened** by the growing number of Jewish people, so he **enslaved** them and forced them to do hard **labor** (c. 1950-1750 B.C.E.). God raised up a leader among the Jews named Moses (c. 1500-1300 B.C.E.), who would rescue his people from 400 years of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 1-3).

In Exodus 3, God tells Moses that he will use him to rescue his people, and in Exodus 12, he tells Moses *how* he will rescue them. God shares with Moses his plan to punish the Egyptians by killing their **firstborn** sons the night before the Jews were to depart from Egypt. God told his Jewish children to sacrifice a lamb that night and to place the blood of that lamb on the **doorframes** of their homes. That same night, God sent an angel of death to destroy the firstborn of every Egyptian family as punishment for enslaving his people. When the angel saw the blood of the lamb on a doorframe, he would "pass over" the house and **spare** the children of God. Since the Jewish people had to leave Egypt so quickly, they didn't have time to make proper bread that would require hours to rise. So, God instructed his people to make unleavened bread, or bread without yeast. After bringing his children out of slavery, God led them to a land of their own, a place called Canaan, now modern-day Israel.

Passover became a yearly festival when the Jews remembered how the Lord had "passed over" their homes when he punished the Egyptians and rescued them from slavery. The Passover meal was the first of several meals celebrated during the Passover Festival, also known as the Festival of Unleavened Bread. The Jewish people were to eat the Passover lamb along with the unleavened bread, a command of the Lord that was so **strict** that anyone who **possessed** even a small amount of yeast in his home during the Festival would be **expelled** from the community (Exodus 12:15). For seven days, God's children were to eat bread without yeast as a reminder of what God had done for them. This kind of bread was

"Fractio Panis," Catholic Online, Catholic Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia Vol, 2022, <https://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/>, accessed May 11, 2023.

called the bread of “affliction,” “poverty,” and even “misery”³ (Deuteronomy 16:3). The term “affliction” can mean a sickness or condition. “Poverty” and “misery” can **reflect** financial, physical, and even emotional suffering.

What was the purpose of yeast during the Passover? Why do you think God was so strict about the Festival and yeast in the home?

In a **practical** way, the Jewish families did not have time to bake bread with yeast. Yet, for God to make the practice of baking bread without yeast such a strong command, our minds **are drawn to** search for a deeper meaning within the Scriptures. After the Jewish people escaped Egypt, God sent them into a long journey through the desert before arriving in Canaan. During this journey, Moses presented the people with the commands they were to follow, laws that provided a way for the people to receive the Lord’s covering and forgiveness for their sins (Leviticus 6:7). Under these laws, bread made without yeast became a gift to the Lord and was considered one of the “most holy” sacrifices to God (Leviticus 10:12). In fact, anyone who touched this sacrifice also became holy (6:17). Such sacrifices were brought to the priest of the temple. The priest then presented the gifts to the Lord and **administered** the forgiveness of sins for the people (6:7).

If bread *without yeast* was the “most holy” sacrifice, what else do you think the yeast represented among God’s people?

In the Old Testament, we see yeast representing sickness, poverty, and misery, but also the opposite of holiness: sin. Throughout the Old Testament, all sin had to be **confessed** by people and **justice** paid for the sins through the sacrificing of animals. Under Jewish Law, certain sins of the most serious **nature** were punished by death outside of the camp of God’s children (Leviticus 24:14), while other people who had sinned were placed outside the camp **temporarily** (Numbers 12:14, 31:19). People with certain diseases were also placed outside of the camp for a period of time, and some sacrifices for sin were also performed **outside the camp** (Leviticus 10:4, 13:46, 16:27).

Knowing this, why do you think the Lord commanded his people not to put yeast in their sacrifices? What did this yeast represent? Hint: Think about the nature and purpose of yeast.

When you consider yeast as a representation of sickness, poverty, misery, as well as sin, how do you think God sees sin in us? How is this different from how we see our sin or sin in others?

When we consider all the **metaphors** for yeast in the Old Testament, we can begin to see how God sees sin as a sickness in us, a sickness that can become serious and even spread to other people. We might think that sin is freedom, fun, or a way to express ourselves. But to God, sin is a condition that causes us suffering. It only leads us to poverty and misery – physical, emotional, and spiritual poverty and misery. Just as yeast spreads throughout **dough** to make bread, sin like sickness can also spread to others and

³ “6040. oniy,” Brown-Driver-Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, unabridged, electronic database (Biblesoft, 2006), <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6040.htm>. See also reference from Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance.

cause them to sin and suffer as well. They might join with us in our sin, or they can be hurt by our sin. This too can cause them to hurt others because of the pain they felt from us. God hates sin, but he hates it because it hurts us and others. He wants to remove sin in our lives in the same way he wants to heal all our diseases and keep them from spreading. As we learn more about Communion in the New Testament, we begin to see the beauty of God's love for us and his **remedy** for our condition.

This Week:

Write in your journal:

1. Take some time to read Exodus 1-3.
2. Consider the ways that God has rescued you from physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering, danger, sickness, sin, poverty, and misery. Take time to thank God for this.
3. Consider this week how your sin may have hurt God or someone else. Perhaps you caused someone else to sin. Is there anyone you need to apologize to? Is there a conflict to resolve? Take time to do that this week.