BREAKING BREAD AT THE MEMORIAL SERVICE

All Scripture citations and quotations are to the King James (Authorised) Version unless indicated otherwise.

Question: At the Last Supper, did Jesus break the bread into eleven pieces (Judas being absent), or into two, each disciple then breaking off a piece for himself? How should we apply this to our own local Memorial service?

Answer: The accounts of the institution of the Memorial supper state that Jesus 'broke' the unleavened bread before passing it to His disciples.

> **Matt. 26: 26:** 'And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.'
> **Mark 14: 22:** 'And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.'
> **Luke 22: 19:** '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.'
> **1 Cor. 11: 23, 24:** 'For I [Paul] have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.'

At the time of the Last Supper Jesus was the only one who *could* break the bread as symbolic of His own body being broken. Of those assembled in the upper room He alone was righteous (actually justified, or just), His sacrifice being then future and the holy spirit of begettal not having yet descended on the disciples. Looked at this way, one might conclude that since only He would or could offer His body as a ransom-sacrifice, we should read this inference back into the original service.

The difficulty with this assumption, however, is that the Last Supper – what we now refer to as the Memorial service – was intended as a perpetual anniversary, or until Christ would appear *again*, in His Second Advent (1 Cor. 11: 26):

> 'For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.'

This meaning, therefore, rises above the temporal. In other words, the ages-long *significance* of the symbol is what is in view. Jesus was setting forth a model remembrance service for subsequent generations of Christian believers. The singular event in the upper room therefore transcends the time in which it occurred, the signification of the emblems – the bread and the wine – enduring through the centuries, especially for the Gospel-Age Church.

'Breaking' Bread

The Jewish Passover which Jesus and His disciples kept immediately before Jesus' inauguration of the Last Supper proceeded along customary lines. We have no evidence that Jesus varied this routine. As a Jew brought up under the Law He observed the statutory Jewish feasts. He also honoured the extra-Biblical winter festival known variously as the 'feast of the dedication', the 'feast of lights' or – today – as Hanukkah, a tradition dating back to the 2nd-century revolt of the Maccabees (John 10: 22, 23).

'Breaking bread together' was likewise a custom of the day. Indeed, the practice of blessing the bread before breaking it is mentioned several times in the Scriptures, the same formulation (*bless-brake-gave*) appearing often. At the feeding of the (more than) 5,000 with the five loaves and two fishes, we read that Jesus 'blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves' to his disciples (Matt. 14: 19). On the later occasion when He fed the (more than) 4,000, this time from a supply of seven loaves and a 'few' fish, the narrative also records that He 'gave thanks, and brake them, and gave' the bread to His disciples to distribute (Matt. 15: 34-36).

The detail that there were 'fragments' left over from these community meals – twelve and seven baskets respectively – suggests that the people did most of the 'breaking'. *See* Matt. 14: 20, 21; 15: 37, 38; Mark 6: 35-44; 8: 1-9; Luke 9: 12-17; John 6: 1-13). Any doubt about there being two separate mass feedings may be settled by reading Matt. 16: 9, 10, in which our Lord refers to those separate events. The Greek word, *klao*, translated 'brake' ('broke') is used also in John 19: 32, 33, with reference to the soldiers breaking the legs of the criminals crucified with Jesus.

The sociable practice of breaking bread together was maintained by the early Church, going 'house to house' (Acts 2: 42-46). On one of Paul's missionary journeys he reached Troas and met on Sunday to 'break bread' with the brethren (Acts 20: 7-11). And shortly before the shipwreck which stranded him and his fellow-passengers on the island of Malta, the Apostle 'took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat' (Acts 27: 35).

What Sort of Bread?

Bread was usually made of wheat or barley; the sort used in the Passover and, therefore, the Memorial supper which superseded it, would have been baked without leaven – that is, with no yeast, without which the bread would not rise. It probably resembled a thick, flat disc, not unlike modern pitta bread in general appearance. In connection with the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 the Scriptures state that the lad of John 6: 9 had barley loaves with him, the staple of the poorer classes. The Greek is *artos,* the same word used in a *generic* sense by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10: 16, 17 (*NIV-UK*):

> 'Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread [*artos*] that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf [*artos*], we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.' [*See Note at end.*]

The Apostle's use here of 'bread' does not mean that the Memorial bread itself was of the leavened variety. Rather, his point is that the suffering of the Gospel-Age Church demonstrates their participation in the 'one loaf'. The *primary* implication is that the elect Body of Christ is 'broken' or sacrificed with Jesus; not as a part of His *ransom*-sacrifice – which *only* Jesus could offer – but as a part of the 'sin offering'. Nonetheless, since the Memorial service is a perpetual commemoration of Jesus' sacrifice, it is reasonable to assume that the privilege of taking part in the service is not confined to the Little Flock. (For information on the sin-offering of the Church, see the articles on our website, 'Dying for the Dead' and 'Consecration of the Priests'.)

How to Proceed?

In light of the evidence, the following approach seems reasonable:

1. The one in charge of the service breaks the bread/matzo in two, representative of the actions of Jesus, but does not eat it just yet.

2. As each member of the congregation receives the plate, he or she breaks off a piece and eats it.

3. After all have eaten, the plate is returned to the one in charge who now, as a recipient, breaks off a piece and eats it.

4. The same procedure may be adopted for the cup.

For a suggested Order of Service, including how to calculate the date for the annual service and an illustration, see the latest information at our website events page to download the relevant .pdf:

<https://www.ukbiblestudents.co.uk/events.htm>

Note: The order of the bread and cup is here reversed. *Compare with* Matt. 26: 26, 27, and Paul's own rehearsal of it in 1 Cor. 11: 23-26, in which the distribution of the bread *precedes* that of the cup.

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