

A Survey of the First Century Churches

The purpose, structure and activities
A Biblical and a historical perspective
The Lord's Supper

One of the things we want to keep in mind as we study these acts of the 1st century Christians, is we want to be able to explain to the non-believer or unconverted why we do what we do? For various reasons, as they observe us partaking of the Lord's supper as a congregation they may be surprised for various reasons depending on what their religious background is. To help us gain perspective on where they are coming from, we will take a few minutes to discuss some of the practices of the various religious groups with regards to the Lord's Supper.

1. In relation to the Lord's supper, are you familiar with what some of the many religious groups out there do?

Lakeside_ the first Sunday of each month

Bayside-Since they try to appeal to many from many different faiths, they just take it on special occasions

Baptists- The Baptist practice is best stated as follows: "As to the time, place, and frequency of the ordinance, no Scriptural directions are given. These are left optional with the churches. They are usually observed on Sundays, but not necessarily. As to the Supper, our churches have very generally come to observe it on *the first Sunday of each month*" (Edward T. Hiscox, *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, p. 20).

Presbyterians- In most Reformed and Presbyterian churches, the typical Sunday morning worship service is a preaching service in which the sermon is regarded as the centerpiece. The Lord's Supper, or communion, is celebrated infrequently—perhaps four to six times a year—and is viewed by the congregation as something of a special occasion. Such occasional celebration is so much a part of the life of Calvinistic churches that it is probably not widely known that Calvin himself favored weekly celebration of communion.

Catholics- Transubstantiation What happened when Our Lord said: "This is My body . . . this is My blood"? When Our Lord said, "This is My body," the entire substance of the bread was changed into His body; and when He said, "This is My blood," the entire substance of the wine was changed into His blood.

Mormons weekly-bread and water

The Jehovah's Witnesses celebrate the communion supper only once a year, (Watchtower CD, Watchtower 4/1/65, p. 199.) In their annual communion service, the congregations gather in their various kingdom halls. This is done on the 14th of Nissan, the Passover date on the Jewish calendar, which usually falls in March or April of each year in the Gregorian calendar. During the service, the cup is passed from Jehovah's Witness to Jehovah's Witness. None of them partake -- except the very few who are of the 144,000.

As we examine the Biblical examples of the Lord's Supper, we want to constantly be reminded that we are to carry out this act of Worship in "spirit and in Truth"

Read the following passages:

Matt. 26:20 - 29; Mark 14:17 - 25; Luke 22:14 - 38; John 13:1 - 17:26; 1 Cor. 11:17-34

1. Christ himself instituted the memorial known as the "Lord's Supper". Of the acts of worship we observe, this is the one where we receive direct instruction from Jesus. Is this significant? If so why?
2. Describe what was happening during the time that Christ instituted the "Lord's supper"? What was the scene? Is this significant? Why?
3. Is our participation a result of direct command or example?
4. Describe the elements of the Lord's supper and their significance?
5. As we continue our thoughts of worshiping in "spirit and truth", describe how we participate in "truth" and how do we participate in "spirit"?
6. Who participated in the "Lord's supper" in the New Testament?
7. Prior to Acts 20:7, how often did the Christians partake of the Lord's Supper?

- 8 What problems did first century Christians have with regards to the Lord's Supper? What had the Corinthian church turned the Lord's Supper into? Why did this happen? What did Paul say to correct them?

Some of the Historians and Scholars say:

The earliest historical evidence outside the Bible confirms the day and frequency

- a. The Didache (ca. 95 A.D.) indicates Christians were to come together on the first day of the week to break bread
- **Didache 14:1**
- b. Justin Martyr (ca. 150 A.D.) records how Christians assembled on Sunday and partook of the Supper - **Apology I, 67**
- c. "...the early church writers from Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, to Clement of Alexandria, Origen and Cyprian, all with one consent, declare that the church observed the first day of the week. They are equally agreed that the Lord's Supper was observed weekly, on the first day of the week."
- **B. W. Johnson, People's New Testament**
3. **Religious scholars** confirm this was the practice
 - a. "As we have already remarked, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was still held to constitute an essential part of divine worship every Sunday, as appears from Justin Martyr (A.D. 150)..." - **Augustus Neander (Lutheran), History Of Christian Religion And Church, Vol. I, p. 332**
 - b. "This ordinance (the Lord's Supper) seems to have been administered every Lord's day; and probably no professed Christian absented themselves..." - **Thomas Scott (Presbyterian), Commentary On Acts 20:7**
 - c. This also is an important example of weekly communion as the practice of the first Christians." - **A. C. Hervey (Episcopalian), Commentary On Acts 20:7**
 - d. "It is well known that the primitive Christians administered the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) every Lord's day."
- **P. Doddridge (Congregationalist), Notes On Acts 20:7**