
*ARE YOU
READY TO
TAKE
COMMUNION?*

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO
UNDERSTANDING AND
PARTICIPATING IN THE
LORD'S SUPPER



Bethel Grove Publications

Are You Ready to Take Communion?: A Teen's Guide to Understanding and Participating in the Lord's Supper (Chapter 1 Excerpt)

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Introduction

I remember what it was like when I took communion for the first time. I was thirteen years old and had only been baptized the week before. I had watched my parents, older sister, and other church members take communion for as long as I could remember. I knew they were honoring Jesus and the story of His last meal with His disciples, but even at thirteen, I was still confused. When I finally took it for the first time, I thought the tiny cracker tasted funny and still wasn't completely sure what it meant.

Have you ever watched other people take a quarter of a shot of grape juice and a tenth of a cracker on Sundays but not understood why it was important? I think most teenagers who attend church have felt that way at some point, even if they have already started their walk with Christ. To some, it was something that they were just expected to do every week once they were baptized. To others, it was only offered once a month or once a quarter and it was quite a special occasion. Some of us attend churches that welcome anyone in attendance to participate, even if they are visitors. Others are part of churches that only allow church members to partake. Many of us are at least aware of the story of the Last Supper, while others may have never heard it before. With so many different traditions and beliefs surrounding it, you may even feel overwhelmed trying to wrap your head around why we do it in the first place.

I am so grateful that you are reading this book, because it means that you want to learn more about communion and what it means to the Christian faith. This probably means that you have questions, like what the Bible teaches about it, and when the right time and place is to participate in it. So this book is designed to both tell you the story of how communion came to be and answer your questions about it. By the end, you will hopefully come to appreciate the powerful symbolism of communion, how it can draw you closer to Christ, and how it can draw you closer to everyone who participates in this act, if you do it in a God-honoring way. I am excited to take you on this journey.

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A Few Things to Note

Throughout this book, there will be several underlined verse references, sometimes in parentheses (Genesis 1:1). You should look these up on your own if you want to read more about the stories or truths that are shared. Translations are only marked on exact quotations. Any exact Scripture quotations will be **written in bold italics**.

There are also questions at the end of each section of Chapter 1 that are **written in gray**. All these questions, as well as a few extra questions for Chapters 2 and 3, are included in the study guide on pg 25. Consider writing down these questions and their answers if you want to reflect on them further.

Let's get started!

Chapter 1

Communion and the Gospel

To fully understand how Christians started practicing communion, we need to take a look at the message of the gospel while also taking a deeper look at the events that led to communion becoming a common practice today. Whether you have been raised in the church or you started attending last week, it's good to review these truths so that we can understand and even explain why we do what we do. To start this journey, we need to go back to the book of Genesis.

Everything Started Out Great

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1 NIV)

Just like that, the incredible all-powerful God of the universe created the world in six days. After creating light, the sky, the ocean, the land, and every animal according to their kind, God saved his best creation for last. He created the first man, Adam, from the dust of the earth (Genesis 1:26 and 2:7). Then, He created the first woman, Eve, from one of Adam's ribs (Genesis 1:27 and 2:21-22). When this was done, God saw His creation was “very good” and truly complete (Genesis 1:31).

It's hard for us today to imagine the perfect world that Adam and Eve got to live in. Aside from the beauty of the garden and the harmony they had with the creatures all around them, the best part was that they got to live in complete harmony with God. They walked beside Him in the garden like you would walk with your best friend in a local park.

Question: Can you imagine what it would be like to be so close to God that you could walk right next to Him?

Until We Sinned

Unfortunately, things didn't stay perfect in paradise. When both Adam and Eve broke the one rule God gave them and ate the forbidden fruit, sin entered the world.

Before we continue, we've got to talk about this word called “sin.” Sin is doing something you know to be wrong (Romans 2:23), especially when you disobey God's greatest commandments of loving God or loving your neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39). Sin can also be avoiding something you know to be right (James 4:17). Either way, it means that you missed the mark of what God wants you to do, just like when an archer misses the bullseye on their target.

When sin entered the picture, everything changed. God is holy and perfect, but our sin makes us unholy and imperfect. God's holiness means that He cannot allow sinful people to be close to Him. So Adam and Eve could no longer walk with God because of their sin. They had to be banished from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23). So just like Adam and Eve, your sin puts a

distance between you and God. Something has to be done about your sin for you to get back to Him.

Question: What is sin? What does it do to our relationship with God?

God Doesn't Want Us to Be Separated from Him

Some people think that because hell exists, God is angry, hateful, and unloving. But nothing could be further from the truth! The Lord is compassionate, gracious, and slow to anger (Exodus 34:6). However, He is also holy and cannot just ignore the problem of our sin. God didn't want us to stay lost in our sin and knew that if He didn't find a way to help us, we would be lost forever. So God started working on the plan, even before Adam and Eve first sinned, to make sure we could find our way back to Him.

Question: What did God do when we became separated from Him by our sins?

God Established a Nation

Even while humanity continued to struggle with their sins, God was working on His plan. Several generations after Adam and Eve, God called a man named Abram, later changed to Abraham, to leave his family behind and travel to an unknown land (Genesis 12:1). God promised to turn him into a great nation that would bless all the people of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3), even though he had no children at 75 years old. If you think this sounds crazy, you are not the only one to think that. But he trusted God and followed His directions to the land of Canaan (AKA modern-day Israel).

Eventually, Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac became the father of Jacob. Jacob, also called Israel, would have twelve sons, one of which was named Joseph. Joseph was Jacob's favorite and came to be despised by his brothers. So when they had the chance, they sold him as a slave and he was taken down to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). Although things were not looking good for Joseph, God was using all of this to someday save Joseph's family.

Question: Why do you think God started His plan by asking Abram to do things that didn't make sense?

God Saved His People

Over several years, Joseph went from being a slave to being a slave in prison. Then after several years in prison, Joseph gained favor in the eyes of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who named Joseph his second in command. This appointment was just in time for Joseph to prepare Egypt to survive a 7-year famine by storing food beforehand. When the famine came, it became so widespread that it even hit Joseph's family back in Canaan, 500 miles away. With no other way to feed their family, Jacob sent 10 of Joseph's brothers to Egypt to buy some food (Genesis 42:1-3).

When they arrived, Joseph pretended not to know them and insisted that they bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, back to Egypt (who was Joseph's only whole brother). When they returned, after he tested them, Joseph chose to reveal who he was to his brothers. He forgave

them and asked them to bring their entire family down to Egypt so they would survive the last 5 years of the famine (Genesis 45:1-12). So Joseph was reunited with his father and family. They settled in an area of Egypt called Goshen, and their people would end up staying for over 400 years.

Question: Can you think of a time in your life when God used something difficult to bring about something good?

God's People Were Enslaved

Many years later, a new Pharaoh was made king over Egypt who did not know Joseph or why his family, who was growing large as a nation, was in Egypt. Becoming concerned that they would rise up and take over the country, this new Pharaoh made the Israelites slaves, forcing them into hard labor (Exodus 1:11-14). Despite their oppression, the Israelites continued to multiply. Pharaoh tried to instruct the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys, but they did not obey (Exodus 1:15-21). Then, Pharaoh decreed that any Egyptian that found a newborn Hebrew boy was allowed to throw them into the Nile River but should allow the baby girls to live (Exodus 1:22).

Fortunately, there was one mother that chose to hide her baby boy for the first few months. When she could no longer do so, she put him in a floating basket on the Nile River (Exodus 2:1-3). The baby was found by Pharaoh's daughter, who not only saved the baby's life but also chose to raise the child as her own. She named him Moses, and he would essentially be raised as the grandson of the Pharaoh. When Moses grew up, he murdered an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew, so he had to run away into the wilderness. He fled to the land of Midian, where he eventually became a shepherd, got married, and settled down for many years.

Sometime later, Pharaoh (Moses' "grandfather") died and a new Pharaoh would take his place but continued to oppress the Israelites. Still, God heard the cries of His people and remembered the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them a land of their own. Fortunately, He had just the man for the job.

Question: Do you think that having His people enslaved was part of God's big plan? Why or why not?

God Sent Moses to Deliver His People

After 40 years in the wilderness, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush, telling him that He had chosen Moses to deliver His people from their oppression in Egypt to the land that God promised Abraham (Exodus 3:2-10). God revealed signs and wonders that He would enable Moses to perform before Pharaoh. God would even send his brother Aaron to help him out. Even with all the signs and God's assurances, Moses was resistant and came up with every excuse. But God reminded Moses that He would be with him. So Moses packed up his wife and sons and began the trip down to Egypt.

Question: Have you ever made excuses to avoid doing what God wanted you to do? What would have been a better response?

Pharaoh Refused, So God Sent Plagues

After being reunited, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him that God had instructed Pharaoh to let His people go to celebrate a festival in the wilderness. But Pharaoh, unwilling to part with his slaves for a short time and unfamiliar with their God, refused (Exodus 5:1-5). Because Pharaoh repeatedly refused to listen, God sent many plagues that terrorized him and the people of Egypt:

- The water in the Nile River turned into blood (Exodus 7:14-23).
- A hoard of frogs covered the land (Exodus 8:1-15).
- A hoard of gnats covered the land (Exodus 8:16-19).
- A hoard of flies covered the land (Exodus 8:20-32).
- The death of all the livestock of the Egyptians (Exodus 9:1-7).
- A plague of painful boils on the skin of the Egyptians (Exodus 9:8-12).
- A terrible storm of hail, thunder, and lightning (Exodus 9:13-35).
- A hoard of locusts covered the land (Exodus 10:1-20).
- A plague of darkness covered the land (Exodus 10:21-29).

Despite these plagues and how much his people were suffering, Pharaoh refused to let the Israelites go. To finally convince him, the Lord would have to send His worst plague of all.

Question: Name some of the plagues that God sent on the Egyptians.

The Passover

God explained to Moses that the last plague would be the death of every firstborn Egyptian, both man and animal (Exodus 11:1-10). The day before the plague would come, the Israelites would have two goals: 1) protect themselves from the plague and 2) be prepared to leave Egypt as quickly as possible the next day. To accomplish both objectives, God gave them several pieces of instruction in Exodus 12:

- Take a lamb for each household. Kill the lamb as part of their meal that night. Cook the meat with bitter herbs and make sure there were no leftovers.
- Make bread without yeast (unleavened bread) as part of their meal, since they would not have time to let the bread rise before they had to leave.
- Eat fully dressed, as if they were ready to leave at any moment.
- Take the blood of the lamb and paint the blood around the doorframe of the main entrance of their homes. This blood would be the sign that would allow God to “pass over” their home.
- Celebrate the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” every year so that future generations will remember the Lord’s Passover.

The people obeyed the Lord’s instructions to the letter after seeing all the previous plagues that had hit the land of Egypt. And the Lord did what He said that night, killing the firstborn of every single home that did not have blood over the door. Pharaoh, grieving over losing his son

and heir, let the Israelites leave (Exodus 12:31-32). Pharaoh and his army eventually tried to chase them down for revenge, but God drowned Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, after allowing His people to cross on dry land (Exodus 14:5-29).

Question: List some of the instructions that God gave His people for the Passover.

God Asked His People to Remember the Passover and Repent of Their Sins

After God delivered His people, He would establish laws and regulations that would help them remember how they should worship Him properly, live righteously, and treat others well. While we can't go into every law or regulation here (since it takes up 3 and 1/2 books of the Bible), there are two things worth mentioning.

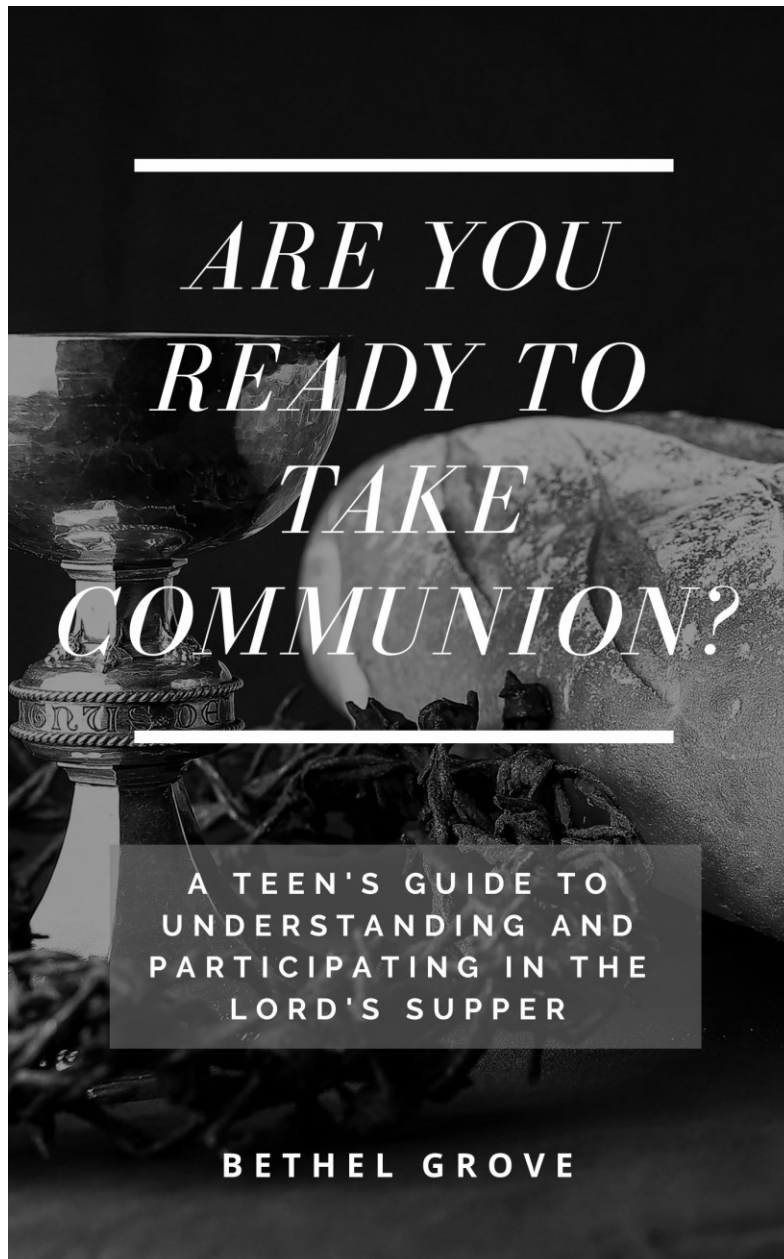
First, the Lord asked His people to keep the Passover, as well as two other festivals: the Feast of Weeks (or Pentecost) and the Feast of Booths (or Tabernacles) (Deuteronomy 16:1-17). While Passover reminded them about a specific act of deliverance, Pentecost was meant to be a celebration of the harvest God gave them, and the Feast of Booths would be a reminder of the years they spent living in tents in the desert with the Lord's provision. They were instructed to keep these festivals every year.

Second, to deal with the problem of sin, God established a system of seeking forgiveness through the sacrifice of animals. Sheep, rams, goats, certain types of birds, and bulls were used in various types of offerings performed by priests to help God's people find forgiveness from their sins, as long as they were without blemish or defect. One of the most detailed parts of the books of the Law (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) is God giving the specifications for His Tabernacle, a tent-version of the temple, and the sacrifices that the priests would perform there to atone for the people's sins (Exodus 25-31).

Question: What were the three Israelite festivals meant to celebrate?

To Be Continued

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