

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

**PayPal**

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Irish Biblical Studies* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_ibs-01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ibs-01.php)

## "This is my body..." (1 Corinthians 11.24)

J.C. O'Neill

---

*For the Very Reverend John McIntyre (\* 20 May 1916) on his 86th birthday*

*This refers to a sacramental meal of bread and wine customarily celebrated by Jesus and his disciples, not to the unleavened bread of Passover. The translation of the short well-attested text as which is for you probably rests on a misunderstanding of scribal habits. The verb is a prophetic present and refers to the future meals which the disciples are implicitly told to celebrate. The true text was which is broken for you, and the clause relates to This [bread] not directly to body: "This, which is broken for you, is [to be] my body."*

Anyone who begins a sentence by saying *This is...* points to something that all present can see, or conceive of, and agree about. One of the great advantages of the theory that Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples was a Passover Meal was that it provided a clear image of what the *This* was: *this* was a piece of unleavened bread broken by the father of the family and distributed to the family and guests gathered for Passover at the beginning of Nisan 15, after sundown. On the previous day, Nisan 14, all leaven had been carefully purged away and the communal Passover Lamb had been ceremonially slaughtered by the priests. That Passover Lamb roasted lay on the table for the approaching meal.

However, it is unlikely that the Last Supper could have been a Passover Meal. The Roman authorities would scarcely run the risk of crucifying Jews on the solemn first day of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 15, when no work was to be done. No prisoner would be released *after* the Passover Meal, when he might have been released one day earlier in order to celebrate the feast of release from captivity.

In addition to the tradition about the release of Barabbas (John 18.39, 40), John's Gospel preserves four traditions that date the

crucifixion on Nisan 14, the day of preparation for the Passover: Judas left the last meal, they thought to prepare for Passover (John 13.29); Jesus' Jewish accusers did not enter the Praetorium lest they be defiled and precluded from eating the Passover (John 18.28); Pilate gave his ruling on the eve of Passover, about the sixth hour (John 19.14); the *preparation* for the great day (John 19.31; cf. 19.42) was probably Nisan 14, since the not breaking of Jesus' legs was said to accord with the not breaking of the bones of the Paschal lamb (John 19.36; Ex 12.10 LXX, 46; Num 9.12).

This is supported by the tradition preserved in 1Cor 5.7 (TR): "Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us." A similar tradition is found in the Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a: "On the preparation of the Passover Jesus was hanged."

Almost the only passage that counts against such testimony that Jesus was crucified on Nisan 14 is the confused statement in the Synoptic Gospels that "on the first day of unleavened bread, when they were sacrificing the Passover lamb, they [the disciples] said to him [Jesus], 'Where will you have us go and prepare that you may eat the Passover?'" (Mark 14.12; cf. Matt 26.17; Luke 22.7, 8). This cannot refer to Nisan 15, the true first day of Unleavened Bread, nor can it refer to Nisan 14. Finding a place to stay so that there was time for personal purification would begin much earlier; Josephus reported an occasion when the people were assembling for the Feast of Unleavened Bread on Nisan 8 (*War* 6.290). I suggest that the elliptical expression in Matthew and Mark, τῆ δὲ πρώτῃ τῶν ἄζύμων, meant on the first day [of the week] of [the start of the Feast of] Unleavened Bread. In Luke 22.7 we should accept the plural reading of one manuscript of the Bohairic: The *days* of Unleavened Bread arrived in which it was necessary to eat the Passover. If Nisan 14 was a Friday, the first day of that week was Nisan 9.

The *This* can hardly refer to the simple breaking of the bread by which the father of the house signalled the meal was to begin (Isa 58.7; Lam 4.4; see *BAGD* s.v. κλάω). Not every meal was afterwards celebrated with an action to recall the Last Supper. There must have existed a practice, probably a practice already followed

by Jesus and his disciples, in which on special occasions token amounts of bread and wine were acknowledged with thankfulness as gifts of God, blessed by the president, and distributed to all there assembled. *This bread* and *this cup* on the lips of Jesus must have been well-known special gifts from God at the hands of the president.

There are abundant traces of such practice long before Jesus was born. In the romance *Joseph and Aseneth* to which G.D. Kilpatrick drew attention in an important article on the Last Supper in *The Expository Times* in 1952, Joseph stands for the Messiah and Aseneth, Dinah's daughter (tall like Sarah, lovely like Rebecca, and beautiful like Rachel), stands for apostate Israel, to be purified so as to eat the blessed *bread of life* and to drink the blessed *cup of immortality* and to be anointed with the *oil of incorruption*.

Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine in blessing Abraham (Gen 14.18-20). David's greater son in Psalm 110 is to be High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

At Qumran the priest is first to stretch out his hands over the first-fruits of bread and wine in the assembly of the Council of the Community (1QS 6.4-5). At the End, when God has begotten the Messiah among them, the Priest is to stretch out his hands over the first-fruits of the bread and wine (1QSa 2.11-22). If we had to choose between saying, "The Messiah slotted into the usual everyday practice of the community" and saying, "The practice when the Council of the Community was assembled looked forward to the coming of the Messiah", we should choose, I think, the second formulation.

Wisdom cried out to her children, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled" (Prov 9.5; cf. Eccles 9.7). Of course bread and wine stand for feasting in general, but what Wisdom offers could easily be taken as an especially solemn feast, just as what Melchizedek, Priest of the Most High God and king of Salem, brought out for Abraham would mark a special point in the relation of Israel to the Lord God.

At the Last Supper the reports give further information about what *This is* pointed to. Jesus first took bread and gave thanks. The use of the verb εὐλογεῖν, to bless, in the context of the feeding of the multitude and in the general statement about the *cup of blessing which we bless* in 1Cor 10.16 suggests that at least some of the accounts say Jesus blessed the bread, like the priest at Qumran (Matt 14.19; Mark 6.41; 8.7; Luke 9.16; Matt 26.26; Mark 14.22). Not too much needs to be made of the distinction between *giving thanks* and *blessing*, for the blessing would be the solemn announcement that God had bestowed a special favour on the company there assembled for which thanks are given, the special favour embodied in bread and wine.

Jesus then broke the bread and gave it to the disciples. Before we come to the really difficult question of what Jesus could have meant by saying "This is my body", we have to ask whether the breaking of the bread (or the pouring out of the wine) had any special significance in itself.

The Textus Receptus of 1Cor 11.24b reads, λάβετε, φάγετε: τοῦτό μου ἐστί τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλάμενον, "Take eat; this is my body which is broken for you." However, p<sup>46</sup> ⲥ\* A B C\* 33 1739\* omit both *Take eat* and the participle *broken*. The Revised Version of 1881 followed this shorter text and translated our passage as "This is my body, which is for you." Moffatt, who in his own translation had rejected the shorter text, got his way in the early printings of the Revised Standard Version: "This is my body which is broken for you" (1946), but by 1952 this had become: "This is my body which is for you."

We must note that the first hand of D (Codex Claromontanus) reads θρυπτόμενον, *broken* in pieces (cf. Isa 58.7 LXX διάθρυπτε... τὸν ἄρτον). The text of p<sup>46</sup> ⲥ A B C at Luke 22.19 and the Coptic here have διδόμενον, *given*.

We have two versions of the short text to consider. In p<sup>46</sup> we read τοῦτό ἐστίν μου τὸ σῶμα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. The text now usually

printed is slightly longer and slightly different in order: τοῦτό μου ἔστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν (κ\* A B C\* 6 33 1739\*).

There are some good parallels to the shortest text of p<sup>46</sup> in the LXX. Compare the ellipse in 2Macc 1.26: πρόσδεξαι τὴν θυσίαν ὑπὲρ παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ σου Ἰσραήλ, which seems to mean, Receive the sacrifice [offered] for all your people Israel. In Isa 43.3 the Lord God says, ἐποίησά σου ἀλλαγμὰ Αἴγυπτου καὶ Αἰθιοπίας καὶ Σοήνην ὑπὲρ σοῦ, I have made Egypt and Ethiopia your ransom and [have given] Soene for you. The ellipses are easily filled out according to the models of Sir 29.15 χαρίτας ἐγγύου μὴ ἐπιλάθῃ: ἔδωκεν γὰρ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ σοῦ, Do not neglect the kindnesses of your guarantor, for he has given his life for you; Isa 43.4 καὶ δώσω ἀνθρώπους πολλοὺς ὑπὲρ σοῦ καὶ ἄρχοντας ὑπὲρ τῆς κεφαλῆς σου, and I will give many men for you and rulers for your head; and 1Macc 7.33 τὴν ὀλοκαύτωσιν τὴν προσφερομένην ὑπὲρ τοῦ βασιλέως, the holocaust being offered for the king.

For the longer short text τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν three or four rough parallels may help us. In 2Cor 7.12 Paul speaks of τὴν σπουδὴν ὑμῶν τὴν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, your zeal for us. In 2Cor 9.3 he recalls τὸ καύχημα ἡμῶν τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, our boasting about you. In Col 1.24 according to the Textus Receptus he writes νῦν χαίρω ἐν τοῖς παθήμασιν μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you. See also 1Cor 4.17 τὰς ὁδοὺς μου τὰς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (cf. Rom 16.3; Phlm 23; Rom 16.8; 1Cor 9.18; Col 2.1).

Notice that in all these cases the word *my* or *our* always comes between the first noun and the modifying phrase or clause. In 1Cor 11.24 the *my* comes before the word for *body*: τοῦτό μου ἔστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν.

What distinguishes 1Cor 11.24 from all these examples is that the first noun does not express a verbal idea. In the examples just given the Corinthians *show* zeal towards Paul; Paul *boasts* of them, or

*suffers* for the Colossians; the ways *are followed* because of Christ Jesus. In 1Cor 11.24 the word *body* does not obviously carry a verbal idea. Consequently, a verbal idea has to be supplied in order to make sense of the construction. The body must be *broken* for you or *given* for you. It follows that a scribe who left the sentence without a participle would assume that the president of the eucharist would silently or out loud supply the requisite verb according to local usage: κλώμενον or θρυπτόμενον or διδόμενον. 1Cor 11.23-32 is pretty clearly a passage claiming to be from an apostle who was present on the night Jesus was betrayed giving instructions as to how the eucharist was to be celebrated. This section seems to have been inserted into Paul's instructions about unseemly love-feasts. It is a standard liturgical text, not an occasional remark of Paul's.

That suggests that the textual transmission of this passage, which dealt directly with the weekly eucharists of early congregations, may be governed by different norms from the norms governing most of the rest of the epistle.

The short text now printed in our Greek New Testaments may represent a scribal convention to leave blank what had to be provided out of local usage. The blank, however, clearly implied that a verb needed to be supplied. The English translation, "This is my body which is for you" is quite misleading, for the elliptical sentence necessarily required a participle to be understood. As John McIntyre has reminded us, no liturgical text omits a participle at this point and to do so now, at the behest of textual critics who believe p<sup>46</sup> & B to be infallible and who do not understand the assumption of the early scribes that a participle would be implied, is nothing less than "liturgical vandalism".

Of course there was one further reason for omitting the verb κλώμενον. The verb κλάω means *I break* or *I snap off*; often of bread, but also of arrows made of reed &c. Jesus' body, according to the tradition preserved in John 19.31-37 (with an allusion to Ex 12.46; Num 9.12; Psalm 34.20), was left whole, without his legs' being broken. I suppose Jesus may have expected his legs to be broken as the last merciful release at the end of the process of

crucifixion, but that is unlikely, for it was the death and not the possible means of death that was the way to salvation for those who revered the martyr.

If the original text lacked a participle, no one is likely to have added κλώμενον, in view of the tradition that none of his bones was broken. Despite the strong support for the shorter reading, it is not impossible that educated scribes, observing the two or three different participles that were present in their textual tradition, felt justified in suspecting that all additions were early glosses. I have long suspected that the educated scribes who eventually brought order into the chaotic readings available in a host of manuscripts worked by the rules "Prefer the shorter reading" and "Prefer the harder reading." We can detect that they worked by rules because sometimes the rules led them into error. Perhaps we may now surmise that these two rules combined to suggest a third: "When in doubt, leave out." For another example, see Matt 19.3. Matt 19.3 in  $\aleph^*$  B L Γ 579 1424\* reads εἰ ἔξεστιν ἀπολύσαι τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ κατὰ πᾶσαν αἰτίαν; and omits any of the possible words placed between the two verbs by other early texts: ἀνθρώπω  $\aleph^2$  C D W Θ 087 fam 1 fam 13 33 TR; ἀνθρωπον 472; ἀνθρώπω τινί 565; τινί 700; ἀνδρί 4 273 1424<sup>c</sup>. This very hard elliptical sentence must have been understood to mean, "Is it lawful *for a man* to put away his wife for every cause?", the translation given in the Revised Version of 1881, putting in italics the words the Revisers had to supply, since they were following the short text printed by Westcott and Hort (and later, by von Soden).

Of the two short texts, that of p<sup>46</sup> which lacks an article before ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν and that of  $\aleph^*$  B which has an article before ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, which is to be preferred? Both short texts imply a participle, and we have shown that the shorter text is likely to have implied *given* or *offered*, on the model of a number of examples from the LXX. The harder reading is probably the reading with an article before ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, since it does not follow the LXX model. We have seen that educated scribes engaged in the work of constructing a standard text on the basis of a number of varying manuscripts could have decided to omit a participle on the grounds



that omission was the safest course when confronted by three possible participles. Since no scribe is likely to have inserted the difficult participle κλώμενον, the true original text is likely to be τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον. The changing of κλώμενον into θρυπτόμενον or διδόμενον opened the way for clever editors to omit a participle altogether.

Now we must note that κλάω is otherwise always used with *bread* in our literature. Recall, also, that the word *my* stands in the wrong position for providing an easy transition from *my body* to *which is broken for you*.

The solution seems to be that the clause τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν κλώμενον goes with τοῦτό ... ἐστίν not with ... μου ... τὸ σῶμα: "This, which is broken for you, is my body."

Look at two verses in 1John that display this construction. First, 1John 2.22b: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἀντίχριστος, ὁ ἀρνούμενος τὸν πατέρα καὶ τὸν υἱόν, This is the Antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son. There are not many antichrists, one of whom denies the Father and the Son. Then 1John 5.4, where both constructions are present: αὕτη ἐστίν ἡ νίκη ἡ νικήσασα τὸν κόσμον, ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν, This is the victory that is victorious over the world, our faith. The final phrase ἡ πίστις ἡμῶν goes with αὕτη ...

There is another example in the eucharistic texts. Luke 22.20b reads: τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου, τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐκχυννόμενον. This is sometimes translated (on the argument that the participle agrees in sense with *blood*, in grammar with *cup*), "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which will be poured out for you" (Jerusalem Bible), but the RSV footnote keeps to the strict grammar: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." The τό in the final clause agrees in sense and in grammar with τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον, not with τῷ αἵματί μου.

The hardest part of all. What could Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish Rabbi with twelve disciples, presiding at a ritual meal in which he prayed, blessed and broke bread; prayed, blessed and poured out wine for his disciples, have meant by "This is my body"?

He was restricted in what he could say. He obviously held himself to be the Messiah, and his disciples held him to be such. Many of the people held him to be the Messiah, and so did one of the thieves crucified with him. His enemies held him to be a messianic pretender. Nevertheless, he was forbidden to say he was the Messiah or even to hint in words that he was the Messiah; that, according to Jewish Law, would have been blasphemy. John 19.7: "We have a law and according to our law he ought to die because he made himself [i.e. he explicitly claimed to be] the Son of God" (which is a title of the Messiah).

So what could Jesus have meant by solemnly announcing a few days before Passover, on the eve of the day when he was likely to be crucified, "This bread which is broken for you is my body"?

First, we have to modify the translation to bring out the fact that the present tense *is* refers to the future: This bread is to be my body. The original Hebrew or Aramaic sentence would not have had a verb expressed, but we still need to make sense of the present tense of the verb *to be* which the earliest translators of the Hebrew or Aramaic traditional account made in Greek. Jesus is unlikely to have identified the bread which he then blessed, broke, and gave to the disciples on that occasion as his body. The word *body* implies his crucified body, regarded as a sacrifice. The words look ahead to his imminent death and imply that, when Jesus is no longer present to preside, the disciples will have to continue these sacramental meals. Then the bread will be the body of their martyred Lord. The present tense can operate as a prophetic present, as in Matt 27.63; Mark 9.31. The verb *to be* in the present seems to be prophetic in Matt 5.3; 18.4; 19.14; 22.42.

There is no difficulty about things standing for the body and blood of a person. David refused to drink the water that three of his soldiers brought to him in the cave of Adullam. They had risked their lives to draw from the well of Bethlehem that is at the gate

when Bethlehem was garrisoned by the Philistines, simply because David had expressed a longing to drink from it. David would not drink of it but poured it out to the Lord. "Shall I drink the blood of these men that have put their lives in jeopardy?" (2Sam 23.13-17; 1Chron 11.15-19).

There was a tradition that the Rock that gave water to the desert generation during the Exodus was Christ (1Cor 10.4;cf. John 4.14). The stone in Dan 2 that crushed God's enemies was interpreted as the Messiah. (Matt 21.44 & B; Luke 20.18; Josephus *Antiquities* 10.210; 2Esdras (4Ezra) 13.6-11, 36-38).

Wisdom can say, "Those who eat me will hunger for more, and those who drink me will thirst for more" (Sir 24.21), and some such tradition lies behind the words given to Jesus in John's Gospel: "I am the bread of life" (John 6.35, 48, 51; cf. 6.33).

In saying the words "This is to be my body" Jesus must have said something any righteous martyr in Israel could have said (although of course he could not *deny* he was Messiah, and he was free to do things like feeding crowds in the desert and riding into Jerusalem on a donkey that fitted the role of the expected Messiah).

We have a report of Eleazar's prayer as he was martyred under Antiochus Epiphanes in 4Macc 7.27-29: "You know, O God, that though I might have saved myself, I am dying in burning torments for the sake of the law. Be merciful to your people, and let our punishment suffice for them. Make my blood their purification, and take my life in exchange for theirs." Eleazar wanted Israel to repent and to plead his blood before God for their purification.

It seems that Jesus' words to his disciples on the night on which he was betrayed were doing two things.

First, they were announcing that their master was about to be crucified. Secondly, they were instructing the disciples to continue the practice of gathering together, with one of them presiding, in order to tell others that Jesus' crucified body brought benefits that could be received by worthily eating the ritually broken bread.

This reading of the words is preserved in the dogmatic sentence found in 1Cor 10.16b: τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; The bread which we break, is it not participation in the body of Christ? Note that this verse helps confirm our reading of 1Cor 11.24b: This bread which we break... The same verb is used: τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν.

Although Jesus never claimed to be the heavenly Son of Man, he was not forbidden to act in a way which fitted the traditions about the Son of Man. Such an ancient tradition was recalled by Jesus in John 1.51: ἀμήν ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν, ὄψεσθε τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀνεωγῶτα καὶ τοὺς ἀγγέλους τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναβαίνοντας καὶ καταβαίνοντας ἐπὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, Amen, amen I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending [on the ladder resting on] the Son of Man. The reference is to Jacob's dream. He made a stone his pillow and dreamt he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder reaching to heaven. Next morning he set up the stone and anointed it. The stone was Christ (Justin Dialogue 86; cf. 58; 126).

The stone of Bethel was also the holy stone God made before he made the world (Yalqut Gen 120 [on Gen 28.22] &c.). Bethel was also taken as the site of the Temple in Jerusalem in the Targums, and this is confirmed by 11QTemple Scroll 29.8-11 (cf. TLevi 9.3).

The rock at Bethel was then the place of sacrifice. From there prayers went up to heaven, borne by angels, and the angels returned with beneficent answers (Origen, *contra Celsum* 5.4).

If Jesus had this tradition in his mind at the Last Supper, we may surmise that he was instructing his disciples to pray over and break bread, his body, so that that bread would be taken to heaven and brought back as manna, the bread of angels, to feed his people (Neh 9.15; Ps 105.40; LXX 2Esdras 19.15 for *bread of heaven*; and Ps 78.25 (cf. 103.20) for *bread of angels*).

The Lord Jesus on the night on which he was betrayed took bread and having given thanks [of course with eyes open and looking up] broke [the bread] and said, This which is broken for you is to be my

body. Do this that God may remember [my death as a sacrifice offered to him that you and others who gather in worship may receive at the hands of angels the bread of heaven].

### Works Referred To

Kilpatrick, G. D. "The Last Supper." *ExpT* 64 (1952-53), 4-8.

*The Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy: The Moorhouse Lectures 1975.* Cambridge: CUP. 1983.

McIntyre, John. *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark. 1992.

O'Neill, J.C. "The Rules Followed by the Editors of the Text Found in the Codex Vaticanus." *NTS* 35 (1989), 219-228.

"What is *Joseph and Aseneth* about?" *Henoch* 16 (1994), 189-198.

"Bread and Wine." *SJT* (48 (1995), 169-184.

J. C. O'Neill  
9 Lonsdale Terrace  
Edinburgh EH3 9HN  
United Kingdom  
e-mail: joneill@ed.Acts.uk.