

Bread: A Symbol of God's Judgment & Grace Genesis 3:17-19

The world has over 50,000 edible plants. Just three of them today, wheat, corn/maize and rice, provide 60 percent of the world's food energy intake. Such plants as important as they are for the world's sustenance as food are first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 1:11-13 on day three of Creation. After which the LORD God took the man he then created and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of the plants, commanding him not to eat from the tree of knowledge of God and evil Genesis 2:15-17. Then man received a helper, woman, so he would not be lonely living and working in the garden. Together they are eventually tempted by the talking serpent in the garden to eat the forbidden fruit. The Lord God then pronounces judgment.

Genesis 3 ¹⁷ *To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.*
¹⁸ *It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*
¹⁹ *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

Here we have in verse 19 the very first mention in the scriptures of a word for *food*, which in Hebrew is *Lechem*. It can mean food in general but specifically refers in the Old Testament to bread or corn bread, and covers any bread or grain type including the likes of wheat and barley. When God spoke these words, "*You will eat your food/bread*" to Adam in this verse they represented both His Judgment and His Grace. Adam along with his wife, who he then names Eve, is separated from the tree of life when banished from the Garden of Eden. Before Adam had sinned, he worked in a beautiful and fruitful garden and now he would have to till and cultivate undeveloped land and struggle with the curse of weeds and thistles.

This was **God's Judgment**. Adam from this moment on will have to work hard and long all his life while all the time knowing that his labour was not going to be able to stave off death. For he is now mortal, living a mortal's life and therefore will one day will return to the ground [Genesis 2:7] from whence he was taken and made.

It is interesting to note that the ground being the source of his food is also the symbol of his eventual death.

Then there is God's **Grace**. For this verse contains the promise that the man Adam will be able to produce his daily bread, all the food that he would need to sustain life. *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food, said the LORD God*, eating the bread that you produce from what you plow, plant and cultivate.

Bread or food as a symbol of God's Judgment and Grace is a theme that flows through Old and New Testament alike.

In the book of Exodus when the Lord God called his people and delivered them from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, bread was the essential food of the ancient Israelites. Indeed, the very word "bread" could still be used generically for any kind of food. Meat was eaten by peasants, but only rarely at festival occasions, and other foods supplemented bread. As the mainstay of life, bread came to be for the nation of Israel a primary metaphor for life and sustenance standing for God's provision for his people, a symbol of God's judgment and grace. Therefore, bread as food was very important to everyday life. Throughout Biblical times for most people in and near Israel, bread was a part of a basic diet that included vegetables, fruit, olives, and cheese. Dates and honey were a real treat. Fish was limited and meat was seldom eaten because herded animals were needed for work and producing milk. Except for special occasion's meat was usually eaten only by the wealthy, including the king and his household.

This staple of life for the average person, bread, was usually composed of the simple ingredients like flour, water, and salt. Olive oil was sometimes added especially if it was to be used in the worship of God. It could have leavening such as yeast in it to make it rise, but it did not have to.

In ancient Israel, bread was made from the grains of wheat and barley. God told the ancient Israelites, just before they entered the Promised Land, that it was blessed with an abundance of these two crops (Deuteronomy 8:8). Since barley was usually cheaper to purchase, the poor usually bought it to make flour even though the loaves it produced were heavier, thicker, and less pleasant tasting than those made from wheat.

Bread as a symbol of God's judgment and grace came to be an important aspect of Israel's worship and ritual. It played a role in the consecration of the Aaronic priests Exodus 29:2-3. Bread was also used as part of an offering of thanksgiving to God (Lev 7:12-13). Of particular importance in Israel's worship is unleavened bread. Bread made without yeast initially reflected the haste with which the Israelites left Egypt after the First Passover. Bread was a sign of judgment on Egypt along with the more important blood of the Passover lamb and Grace to Hebrew households (Exodus 12:8-11). The First Passover gave rise to the Jewish Festival of Unleavened Bread that associated yeast or leaven with the pervasive influence of evil (Exodus 12:14-20). So important was this that the people were directed to remove all yeast from their houses because it was a symbol of sin such as hypocrisy or malice and wickedness. Even today, before celebrating Passover observant Jews conduct a systematic or symbolic search of their house to remove every last crumb of unleavened bread that might be there in order to receive God's grace and not his judgment.

With regards to judgment and grace, **bread** in the Bible also **functions** importantly **as a social bond**. The giving of bread to another is a major element of hospitality and serves in the Old Testament as a sign of respect and concern. On the other hand, to take someone's bread and then turn against that person is to commit a heinous offense of ingratitude and betrayal, as in the case of King David's friend (Psalm 41:9) and the Bible's worst example of Christ's own disciple, Judas Iscariot (John 13:18-30).

In the New Testament Jesus likened himself to bread when he declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry..." John 6:35. Meaning I am the living bread or the bread that brings life. Eat this and you will never be hungry again, you will never suffer want or be needy for anything, but only if your desire is craving for me as the bread of life in the first place.

Jesus also likened his body to bread at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26)... in the Greek *artos* he likened himself to bread composed of flour mixed with water and baked. The Israelites made it in the form of an oblong loaf or round cake, as thick as one's thumb, and as large as a plate or platter. It was made and baked this way, not to be cut or sliced as we do today but in order to be able to be easily broken. Hence, the term "break bread" you may have heard.

Such loaves were consecrated to the Lord as we have for communion this morning. This was also the bread used at the *Agape* love feasts and at the Lord's Table.

The broken bread is a symbol of Christ's body "given" for sinners. As the festival of the Passover was a commemorative meal [Exodus 12:14] so also the Lord's Supper is a memorial supper, recalling and portraying Christ's death for sinners, crucified on the cross, the instrument, and symbol of his death.

In Luke 22:19 Jesus took bread and broke it, and gave it to his disciples saying, "This is my body" meaning the bread represents or signifies my body. Jesus then went on to say "given for you". Meaning he is anticipating his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross, his near approaching death on the cross. So, this bread used during Christ's last Passover represented his willingness to offer his own body as a sacrifice for our sins and to make our healing possible.

Just as the Passover was a constant reminder and proclamation of God's redemption of Israel from bondage in Egypt, so the keeping of Christ's command would be a remembering and proclaiming of the deliverance of believers from the bondage of sin through Christ's atoning work on the cross. Christ's work that serves to make us righteous so that you and I can be at one or right with God. So all Christ's disciples from now on were to, as Jesus commanded and instituted from the moment when he said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

And we do this when we celebrate communion in the breaking of the bread. **The Breaking of the bread** is an important action, a sign of Christ being broken for our salvation where we are saved by grace so that God's judgment will not send us to hell.

The New Testament uses bread as a rich theological metaphor for God's judgment and grace. As God supplies bread, so he will also supply righteousness to his people (2 Corinthians 9:10). Above all, Jesus himself as the bread of life is the sustenance from God that gives eternal life to those who are willing to follow him with their whole heart (John 6:25-29). So it is then for us Christians as we partake of Christ's body in the bread of the Lord's Supper. In this, we remember his sacrificial death and celebrate the eternal life he supplies (Matthew 26:26-29).

I cannot talk about Bread as a symbol of God's judgment and grace without mentioning the scripture that you may have already been saying to yourself from the Lord's Prayer. When Jesus said we are to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," he is talking about far more than just bread. In fact, the Bible tells us that:

Bread represents the necessities of life what we call provision. Such provision spares one from the dangers of both poverty and wealth. Jesus teaches that God feeds his people as a father does his children (Matthew 7:9), and dramatically illustrates this truth in the miraculous feeding of the crowds of 5,000 then 4,000 (Matthew 14:15-21; 15:32-38). The disciples were therefore not to be concerned about where they would obtain bread when they went out to serve God. At the same time, the Christian is not to rely solely on the charity of others for bread but earn it or work for it. This is the economy of God where God says, "I supply it. You gather it." When you pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," it does not mean you sit on the couch and wait for God to throw you money. You have got to work! Even when we are retired, we still may grow food for ourselves. It is springtime and you may be planting right now. You also have to go to the supermarket or elsewhere to buy and then prepare your food. Think about it. Young or old even the Israelites while wandering in the wilderness of Sinai had to go out and pick up the manna. Work is a part of God's purpose for your life that importantly serves to build our character.

Proverbs 14:23 says in the Message paraphrase version, *"Hard work always pays off, mere talk puts no bread on the table"*.

To wrap up this morning I make will make clear the point that **Bread represents salvation.**

Jesus chose bread to represent his sacrifice in communion. Every time we eat the bread and drink the wine or juice, it is a reminder of how much God loves us and the sacrifice he made so that we can go to Heaven!

Whatever your need is — physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual — God will take care of it if you will depend on him. Pray today, "Give us this day our daily bread," and trust God to provide for you in every way. Beginning with the very symbol of the bread that is right here on the communion table to remind us all of God's Judgment and Grace.