



QUESTION:
“Why should the Lord’s
Supper be celebrated every
week?”



The question to be considered this month has been supplied by a brother whom I judge to be fairly new in the Faith, but who – unwisely, I believe – accepted an invitation to the home of a member of the organization whose members call themselves ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’, and there engaged in what he calls ‘a *Bible Study*’. Knowing how the ‘studies’ of these people are organized, I seriously doubt if it really was the *Bible* that was studied. If a book was employed in the ‘study’, it would almost certainly be a ‘Watchtower’ publication, which had questions at the foot of each page, and with the ‘correct’ answers conveniently supplied in the text!

Our brother says that ‘*the Lord’s Supper was mentioned*’, and his ‘J.W.’ friend informed him that the “Watchtower” followers “*have a memorial once a year*”, and wanted to know “*Why the Lord’s Supper should be every week?*” This “J.W.” friend also made several statements, to which our brother would like a response.

1. No Need to mention the Supper!

The ‘Jehovah’s Witness’ pointed out to our brother that, in 1st Corinthians 16:2, ‘*the collection was on the first day of the week, but there is no mention of the Lord’s Supper*’, thus implying that it was *not* the practice of the early Christians to celebrate the Supper each first day of the week.

But, if, instead of seizing on a single verse in 1st Cor.16, his “J.W.” questioner had taken the trouble to read *more* of Paul’s letter – say, from chapter 11 verse 10 onwards, – he would have seen that the apostle had already written, in great detail, about the Lord’s Supper, its origin, the manner in which it should be observed and who should observe it. By the time chapter 16 is reached, the discussion has moved on. Paul is no longer dealing with the conduct of believers in the worship of the Church, but is now concerned with the plight of poverty-stricken Christians in Judea, who are suffering because of the famine predicted in Acts 11:29.

There was a pressing reason for this. During their meeting in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, Paul had been requested by the Elders and his fellow apostles, not to forget the needy as he travelled among the churches, and he tells us, in Gal.2:10, that he had expressed his willingness to act as they have asked.

This is what he is doing in the opening verses of the 16th chapter of his letter to the Corinthians. When he urges them to give, he mentions their coming together on the 1st day of the week. There is no need to tell them *why* they come together on that day. They already know! And because the meeting on the first day of the week was a time for worship, fellowship and thanksgiving, what better time could there be, for them to give!

This is what ‘fellowship’- *koinonia*- means. It means ‘contribution, distribution, sharing, giving, receiving, communion, communication’ – these are all involved in ‘fellowship’. Acts 2:42 tells us that those who had been baptized, ‘**kept going on in the teaching of the apostles, the fellowship, the breaking of the bread and the prayers**’.

2. A 'Jehovah's Witness' Error

Referring to the Lord's Supper, the official history of the "Watchtower" organization, entitled "*Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*", states that because the Lord established the Supper at the time of the Jewish Passover, early students of 'Pastor' Russell's books, collectively known as the "*Millennial Dawn*" series:- "*called this occasion the 'Anniversary Supper', 'implying that it should be celebrated only on an anniversary and once a year. Today Jehovah's Witnesses call this the Memorial, which indicates the same thing*". (pp 24-25)

This is why they celebrate a 'Memorial' only once a year, and why our questioning brother's friend told him that, "*In the 1st and 2nd Centuries, 'this annual Memorial Feast was held in April/May*".

Well! If he really meant to say that *the Jews* continued to celebrate Passover Day and the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed, no-one will argue with him, because the orthodox Jews still observe their feasts at the ancient times! But if this "Jehovah's Witness" is implying that, in those early centuries, *the Christians* held an *annual celebration of the Lord's Supper at Passover time*, he is grossly misinformed and needs to make a serious study of early Christian history.

3. An Early Christian Statement.

Let me offer just one quotation, which I am convinced is sufficient to lay down the truth. "*On the day called Sunday all (believers) who live in the cities, or in the country, gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the apostles and prophets are read for as long as time permits. Then, when the reader has ceased, the president instructs us by word of mouth, exhorting us to put these good things into practice. Then we all rise together and pray and, as we have already said, bread and wine mingled with water are brought, and the president, in like manner, offers prayer and thanksgiving, according to his ability, and the people assent by saying 'Amen'*".

This record continues to describe the '*contribution*' in words which remind us of 1st Cor. 16:2. "*And those who are well-off and are willing to do so, give as much as each desires, and the money is deposited with the president who takes care of the widows and orphans and those who are in straits through sickness or any other cause, and those in prison, and our visitors from other parts - in short, he looks after all who are in need*".

Can you not see the early Church in this statement? When was this written? It is taken from the first '*Apologia*' of Justin, who is usually called 'Justin Martyr' who was born in 100 AD, and was put to death in 165 AD. Just a few years before his martyrdom, in the period between 150 and 160 AD, Justin wrote two '*Apologies*'. These are not '*apologies*' in the modern sense of the word. They are '*defences* or '*explanations* of the faith and practices of the early Church, and anyone who knows the New Testament scriptures will recognize in them a great deal that is familiar.

You will notice *when*, according to Justin, the Christians came together to break the bread and drink the cup. It was not an Annual Memorial. It was a Weekly celebration, held on what the Roman world called '*Sunday*', which we know as '*the Lord's Day, or, 'the first day of the week*'. Of course, there were no "Jehovah's Witnesses" around in those days, because the "Watchtower" disciples only gave themselves this name in 1931!

4. A Pagan's View of the Church.

We also have a pagan's view of the worship of the Christians, written even earlier. It

is found in one of the 121 letters written by Pliny, the Governor of Bithynia, to the Emperor Trajan.

Pliny was born in 63AD, and was first given political office by the Emperor Domitian, in 96AD. This means that he was alive at the same time as the apostle John, whom Domitian banished to Patmos. In his letter numbered '96', sent to Trajan, he describes his attempts to learn about the Christians and tells the Emperor that he has learned that they: "*met regularly before dawn on a fixed day.*" Notice the words '*regularly on a fixed day*'.

And do not be surprised that it was '*before dawn*'. We must remember that the first day of the week was a working day for these early Christians, the overwhelming majority of whom were slaves. Consequently, if they were to worship on the Lord's Day, it was necessarily in their own time - '*before dawn*'.

These two historical accounts, one provided by a believer and the other by a pagan, both witness to the fact that the early Christians did *not* hold the Lord's Supper as an annual 'Memorial', but as the regular weekly celebration of a risen and living Saviour.

5. A "Watchtower" mistranslation.

The 'Jehovah's Witness' friend also referred to Acts 20:7, which records Paul's visit and stay in Troas. He accepted that the verse mentions '*the breaking of bread*,' but claimed that this was an ordinary meal, which Paul shared with his brethren. And he also thought it significant that there is no mention of 'wine'!

No doubt he holds this view of the passage because Acts 20:7, in "*The New World Translation*", produced by 'The Watchtower', reads: "*On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to have a meal...*"

But this is an erroneous translation which reveals that the unnamed and unidentified translators of their version apparently did not understand the idiom of New Testament Greek. Acts 20:7 tells us that the first day of the week was the day on which '**the disciples came together to break the bread**'. But this was not a meeting for an ordinary meal. Notice the phraseology. When *ordinary meal* is indicated, a present participle is used - '*breaking bread*', as in Acts 2:46. But when the expression '*break the bread*' or '*the breaking of the bread*' is used, as in v.7, and Luke 24:35, it relates to the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Referring to Paul's stay in Troas, the N.T. commentator, E.H. Plumtre, pointedly states, "*It is on the surface that the motive for this stay was to keep the Lord's Day*". No reputable commentator will dispute this. It was after worshipping with the church in Troas, that Paul set sail to Assos, about 24 miles away.

Conclusion.

So, why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? Because, in obedience to the Lord's personal request/command, '**Do this in remembrance of Me**', and the Spirit-inspired words of Paul, His apostle, "**As often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death, until He comes**", the early Church faithfully met each 'first day of the week' - '*the Lordian Day*' as John calls it in Rev.1:10, both to remember Him, to proclaim Him, and to wait for His return. And we wish, like them, to be obedient to His word.

Frank Worgan, 11, Stanier Road, Corby, Northants. NN17 1XP.
Email: Frank@fworgan0.talktalk.net