



Picture: Tony Benson

Remains of the wall built by Hezekiah to extend Jerusalem, probably the “broad wall” of Nehemiah 3:8 (see [map](#) opposite).

Solomon’s time. His reasons for this are, interestingly, Scriptural ones:

1 The detailed record of Nehemiah 3 clearly speaks of various groups of people repairing the wall, not building a new wall. If they repaired an existing broken down

wall it must have been the extended wall of Hezekiah’s time.

2 Nehemiah 3 also records the repairing of various gates, ten in all being named, far more than would be required for a city of the limited extent of Solomon’s day. It also re-

fers to the “broad wall” (v. 8), thought to be the extended wall built by Hezekiah.

3 Nehemiah himself says after the completion of the repairs: “Now the city was large and great: but the people were few therein, and the houses were not builded” (7:4). This would only have been true had the walls of the city enclosed the much larger city of Hezekiah’s time, not the smaller city of David and Solomon’s reign.

Ussishkin refers to other archaeologists who are coming round to the same way of thinking, but if only proper account had been taken of the Scriptural record in the first place there would have been no cause for debate on the issue.

Source: “Big city, few people: Jerusalem in the Persian period”, David Ussishkin, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Jul./Aug. 2005.

Tony Benson

Two-part article

Bread and wine as symbols of the old and new covenants (1)

Sam Alexander

One Sunday morning I passed through Hamilton, New Zealand, on my way down to Palmerston North. That day the exhorting brother, since fallen asleep in Christ, made a passing comment that the emblem of the bread can be taken as a symbol of life under the old covenant. I barely knew the brother; nonetheless, I guess this little study is his legacy to me.

WEEK BY WEEK we read the following words from 1 Corinthians 11: “and when he had given thanks, he brake

it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (vv. 24,25).

Possibly so obvious as to escape our attention entirely is the fact that we remember Christ in not one, not three, not ten, but *two* emblems. Why is this? Why did God decide that we should remember both the body and blood of our Lord? What exactly do bread and wine represent, and why are there two emblems?

As a partial answer to these questions, this two-part article will investigate the significance of the emblems of bread and wine. I hope to show that bread can be taken as a symbol of life under the old covenant, "the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2), as wine is a symbol of life under the new covenant. I also hope to show that breaking bread can be seen as symbolic of doing away with our former way of life under the old covenant, so that in taking wine we can dedicate ourselves to our new life in Christ under the new covenant.

Preliminary point

The Bible is an amazing book; its symbols often lead to several valid interpretations. All that matters about these interpretations is whether or not they have Scriptural support, not whether other lessons have already been drawn from the same symbol. Therefore, for example, it is not contradictory to say that the bread represents:

- "the communion [fellowship] of the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16)
- Jesus, "the true bread from heaven" (Jno. 6:32)
- an "unleavened" life of "sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8)
- the Word of God (Mt. 4:4)

and the old covenant.

The aim of these articles is not to question existing—and valid—ideas about the emblems of bread and wine, but simply to flesh out another interesting idea that has perhaps seldom been heard.

Rationale from 1 Corinthians 11

The main rationale for the idea that bread and wine represent the old and new covenants comes from the verses quoted above from 1 Corinthians 11. As we have already noted, these verses make it plain that there are precisely two emblems. Of the second, it is specifically said by Christ: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (v. 25, RV). That the emblem of wine relates to the new covenant is thus beyond all doubt.

Now if there are two emblems, and the second of these is to do with the *new* covenant, then what does that imply about the significance of the first emblem, the bread? There would be a very neat pattern if the first emblem related to the *old* covenant. This would also go some way towards explaining why there are two emblems at all; there are two covenants, and thus there are two emblems.

By eating the bread and drinking the wine, we consider both the old and new covenants. Yet Jesus *broke* the bread at the last supper (v. 24). If it is true that bread is a symbol of life under the old covenant, then the act of breaking bread would represent breaking our old life under the old covenant. The old life that we put to death is replaced by our new life under the new covenant symbolised by the emblem of wine. These ideas will be explored in the following sections.

'Breaking' the old man

Whether the bread represents the old covenant or not, and whatever exactly the 'old covenant' is, we definitely have to put to death our old way of life when we are baptized into Jesus. For instance, Paul says: "our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. 6:6). This sentiment is expressed just as clearly in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians: "put off concerning the former conversation [way of life] the old man, which is corrupt . . . and . . . put on the new man" (Eph. 4:22-24). A baptized believer must put to death the old man to put on the new man; the casting off of our former way of life and the embracing of our new life in Christ are two sides of the same coin.

In the context of bread, the important thing about putting off our former way of life is the fact that our "old man" is symbolised by *flesh*. Paul says in Romans: "For if ye live after the *flesh*, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of *the body*, ye shall live." (8:13). Our Father has called each one of us to "mortify the deeds of the body", our flesh, to walk after the Spirit; again, the death of our flesh and following Jesus are two sides of the same coin. Paul also tells the Galatians: "they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:24,25). The old way of life that we crucify at baptism is spoken of as flesh.

Yet Jesus says: "Except ye eat the *flesh* of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" (John 6:53). And at the Last Supper Jesus said: "Take, eat: this is my body [his flesh], which is broken for you" (1 Cor. 11:24). Why is it that flesh, a symbol of sin and life without Christ, is the first of the emblems that we share each week? The answer may be in the fact that we do not just eat bread on Sunday, we break it.

Bread represents flesh, as seems clear from John 6. We know for certain from Paul's writings

that we have to put to death our flesh, which is a symbol of our old way of life before we are baptized. Therefore the act of *breaking* bread is a perfect symbol of this *breaking* of our old way of life. Thus breaking bread goes perfectly hand in hand with remembering our new way of life under the new covenant in the wine. The bread represents the old way of life that we have broken, and the wine represents our new life in Christ. Breaking bread and drinking wine are two sides of exactly the same coin.

Life under the old covenant: for Jews

The old way of life that Jews had to break was that of following of the Law of Moses, which was called the old covenant (Heb. 8:13). This fits perfectly with the contrast between bread and wine in 1 Corinthians 11; as beyond question wine represents the new covenant and our new life in Christ, so bread is associated with the old covenant.

In Romans 7:1-6 Paul describes the way that Jews were to break from following the Law in terms of an analogy taken from marriage. Before baptism, Jews were like a woman that was married to her first husband, the 'old man'. So long as her first husband lived, it would have been adultery to marry another; this was like the old covenant, the Law, having dominion over Jews so long as the 'old man' lived. However, when the old man died in baptism, the woman was free to marry another, the 'new man' that we become in Christ. It was because "the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth" (v. 1) that they had to put their old man to death to escape the dominion of the Law. This was the same point that Paul had made in the previous chapter: "he that is dead is freed from sin" (6:7). Jews were to die to the old covenant by turning aside from the Law of Moses; in "newness of life" (v. 4) they were free to marry again.

Life under the old covenant: for Gentiles

But what of us Gentiles? We might rightly say that we have never been under the Law of Moses like the Jews were, so how can we relate to the idea of breaking from the old covenant to turn to Christ?

Clearly, it is true that those of us who are not Jews have never been under the Law of Moses. However, there is another law, the "law of sin and death", that is much older than the Law of Moses (5:12-14,21; 7:25; 8:2). This law states that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4)

and that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). *Everyone* is under this law (Gal. 3:22; Rom. 3:23; 5:12; 1 Cor. 15:22).

The greatest aim of the Law of Moses was to illustrate this law of sin and death; to make people aware that they sinned, and that they deserved to die. "Sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5:13), but was definitely shown to sinners under the Law of Moses (v. 20; 7:7-10,13). To demonstrate to Israel their desperate need for forgiveness, the Law of Moses first showed them their sin, and that they deserved to die—the law of sin and death.

Very few of us today are under the Law of Moses, but *all* of us begin life under the law of sin and death, which is exactly what the Law of Moses was given to illustrate. We all need to break with sin and death just as much as any Israelite ever needed to break with the Law of Moses. In this sense we are under the old covenant before we are baptized; Paul's analogy of marriage applies equally well to Gentiles as it does to Jews. We all need to break our association with this covenant, to break our old man and to embrace new life under the new covenant.

Yet, as Paul in Romans 7 is immediately at pains to make clear, the Law itself was "holy, and just, and good" (v. 12). It is only because our flesh is so prone to sin that we must put our old man to death, symbolically accepting our failure to keep the old covenant. In so doing we are freed to 'marry the new man', to be born again "in newness of spirit" (v. 6) under the new covenant.

Thus the bread is a symbol of our flesh, that is, our old man, governed by the old covenant so long as he lives. Only by putting the old man to death—by breaking our flesh—can we be released from the law and be free to embrace the new covenant in Christ. Our new life in Christ, "that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (v. 4), is aptly symbolised by the emblem of wine.

Summary

The aim of the Law of Moses was to illustrate the law of sin and death. This was, and is, the old covenant. Each of us is born under the law of sin and death, and thus the old covenant. We all need to acknowledge our need for forgiveness under the new covenant, which involves breaking our old, fleshly way of life; to live with Christ we must first die to sin.

The old covenant governs our flesh. The aim of this two-part article is to suggest that breaking the emblem of flesh—the bread—can be

understood to represent breaking the old life we led and thus releasing us from the dominion of the old covenant. This is in contrast to the wine, which represents the new covenant and our new way of life.

The links that we have seen between the old covenant and flesh are evidence enough that our idea is valid. However, there are numerous hints, types and allusions in both the Old and New

Testaments that add considerable weight to our suggestion. The second part will provide further Scriptural evidence that:

- bread is a symbol of old life under the old covenant
- breaking bread is a symbol of breaking our life under the old covenant
- wine is a symbol of new life under the new covenant.

[\(To be concluded\)](#)

Turning to fables

What the Da Vinci Code is all about (2)

Tony Benson

IN [THE FIRST](#) part of this article I referred to the widely read novel by Dan Brown entitled *The Da Vinci Code* and its strange ideas about Jesus Christ and Christianity, ideas which, despite their strangeness, are being accepted by some. It was pointed out that, though claims are made that the material which forms the background to the novel is historically accurate, the book is in fact full of errors. In this concluding part we look at two matters which appear as part of the amalgam of religious ideas in the book.

Gnosticism

It was mentioned at the end of the first part that a character in the novel claims that documents found at Nag Hammadi in the Egyptian desert contain the original Gospels, which were replaced in the fourth century by the Gospels as we know them. It is from these writings that come the only shred of support which Dan Brown produces for the idea, central to his plot, that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married. He mentions two works, referred to by scholars as the Gospel of Philip and the Gospel of Mary Magdalene respectively, and both references are obscure to say the least.

We will take the first as an example. It is an incomplete manuscript, but the historian in the novel quotes from it as though it is an established text, though it is far from certain what is actually being said. This is how the quotation appears in *The Da Vinci Code*:

“And the companion of the Saviour is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on the mouth”;

and this is how it appears in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*:

“And the companion of the [. . .] Mary Magdalene. [. . . loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [. . .]”, where the bracketed portions and dots indicate gaps in the manuscript and surmises as to what it originally said.

We can see from this how dishonestly the matter is dealt with, presenting a text as established when it is only conjectural and with no definite reference to Jesus Christ.

The Nag Hammadi documents were found in a place of that name in Egypt and are currently in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. They are in the Coptic language¹ but appear to be translations of Greek documents, some of which are known from other sources, including the Gospel of Philip. Fifty-two documents have been identified, but they are very fragmented, as in the above example. Scholars date them to some time after A.D. 350. None are Biblical, but some quote from the New Testament Gospels, proving that they were written after them. Others contain fanciful references to Old Testament characters. They are regarded as a hoard of Gnostic works.

Gnosticism was originally thought to be just a heretical branch of Christianity that flourished

1. Coptic is the name given to a development of ancient Egyptian into a language expressed in the Greek alphabet and used in the early centuries A.D., particularly in the Christian Church. In the fifth century the Coptic Church was established as a breakaway church; prior to that the Egyptian Christians were part of the mainstream church.