



BOOK OF MORMON CENTRAL
<http://bookofmormoncentral.com/>



Religious Studies Center
<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

The Sacrament: Building Upon Christ's Rock

Author(s): Monte S. Nyman

Source: *The Book of Mormon and the Message of The Four Gospels*

Editor(s): Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball

Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, 2001

Page(s): 125-137



The Religious Studies Center is collaborating with Book of Mormon Central to preserve and extend access to scholarly research on the Book of Mormon. Items are archived by the permission of the Religious Studies Center.

<https://rsc.byu.edu/>

The Sacrament: Building upon Christ's Rock

9

Monte S. Nyman

Although the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is an ordinance found in most Christian denominations, its function in the Bible is unclear because the three synoptic Gospels are not explicit on the manner of its administration, nor do they agree completely in the statements regarding it made by Christ. The Book of Mormon is thus an indispensable tool to better understand the reason for this ordinance. Specifically, the writings in 3 Nephi and Moroni delineate the use and purpose of the sacrament as well as how it was administered.

The sacrament of partaking of bread and wine in remembrance of Christ, also known as the Eucharist, is a familiar practice among most denominations of Christianity. Although it varies in the manner and frequency of its administration among the various congregations, they all trace its origin to Jesus' mortal ministry. A review of its origin, as recorded in the New Testament, is basic to an understanding of the sacred ordinance. Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his beloved twelve apostles at the end of his three-year ministry. At this Last Supper, he initiated the ordinance of the sacrament. All three of the synoptic Gospels bear record of this event, which occurred on the evening of the first day of unleavened bread.

Matthew 26:26-29	Mark 14:22-25	Luke 22:19-20, 16-18
And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.	And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.	And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.
And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it;	And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.	Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.
For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.	And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.	For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.
But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.	Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.	And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

From these three accounts, the following observations and comments are drawn: (1) Jesus blessed the bread and gave thanks for the cup of the fruit of the vine before he gave it to his disciples. What he said in the blessing or in giving thanks is not stated. (2) All three of these accounts equate the partaking of the bread that Jesus broke and blessed with his body, and all equate his blood, which was to be shed, with the cup (of wine) that he gave them to drink. Luke's account says the body was "given for you," and they were to eat in remembrance of him. Matthew's account tells us that Jesus instructed all the disciples to drink of the wine. And Luke records that they were to divide it among themselves. (3) All three accounts speak of the blood of the new testament. Mark says the blood of the new testament was shed for many. Luke speaks of Christ's blood being "shed for you." Matthew is unique in speaking of Christ's blood being shed "for many for the remission of sins." (4) Matthew and Mark state that Jesus will not

drink again until he drinks it new in God's kingdom. Luke says Jesus will not drink "until the kingdom of God shall come."

The first observation, the words of the blessing or of thanksgiving not being recorded, may have been because the apostles did not realize the significance of the prayer. Another possibility is that they did record it and it was deleted by the loss of plain and precious parts, as indicated in the Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 13:24-29).

The second observation, the equating of the sacramental elements with the body and blood of Christ, is not as easily explained. Earlier teachings recorded in the Gospel of John also make reference to his personal body and equate it with bread. Following the miraculous feeding of about five thousand men, besides women and children, in Bethsaida (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:5-14), the Savior gave his "Bread of Life Sermon" at the synagogue in Capernaum (John 6). Therein, Jesus designated himself as "the true bread from heaven" (6:32-33) and promised that those who come to him will never hunger or thirst (6:35). Following the murmuring of his listeners over his declaration of being the bread of life, he repeated that he was the living bread:

I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed (John 6:51-55; see also John 4:10-14).

Latter-day revelation sheds much light on the above observation, verifying and clarifying the ordinance as well as refuting some of the traditions that have found their way into divergent Christian dogmas.

The correlation of the living bread with Christ's body and the wine with his blood has led some Christians to believe the doctrine of transubstantiation. This doctrine holds "that the substance of the bread and wine [literally] changes into the body and blood of

Christ, while the 'accidents' (color, shape, taste, etc.) of the first substance remains."¹

Another related doctrine, known as consubstantiation, somewhat softens the above dogma. The believers in this doctrine advocate that the elements of the sacrament "remain bread and wine, but the body of Christ is in and around them."² A third variation is that the partaking of the sacramental elements brings the "spiritual presence" of the Savior into the partakers' lives. Still other religions believe the sacramental elements were merely symbols "employed to call to mind his death" and resultant blessings.³

The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible add significantly to our understanding of the sacrament. My emphasis will be on the Book of Mormon, because the Savior taught the sacrament ordinances to the Nephites almost immediately after he came to them, not long after he had instituted the ordinances among his Jerusalem disciples. Therefore, we have a close parallel between the two experiences. Some consideration will be given to the other latter-day revelations, which substantiate the two experiences.

The Book of Mormon clarifies the real purpose and significance of partaking of the bread and wine. Although among the Nephites Jesus first gave the sacrament to the Twelve and then to the multitude, the only instructions he gave concerning the ordinance were regarding the multitude: "And when the multitude had eaten and were filled, he said unto the disciples: Behold there shall one be ordained among you, and to him will I give power that he shall break bread and bless it and give it unto the people of my church, unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name. And this shall ye always observe to do, even as I have done, even as I have broken bread and blessed it and given it unto you. And this shall ye do in remembrance of my body, which I have shown unto you. And it shall be a testimony unto the Father that ye do always remember me. And if ye do always remember me ye shall have my Spirit to be with you" (3 Ne. 18:5-7). An analysis of these verses clarifies several New Testament concepts and gives additional instruction regarding this sacred ordinance and how it can help us build upon the rock of Christ.

The Blessing

Jesus first instructed his disciples that there was to be one ordained among them to whom he would give power to administer this ordinance (3 Ne. 18:5). This instruction does not mean that there was only one person who was authorized to break and bless the bread. From modern revelation, we learn that the requirements for salvation were the same in all dispensations (D&C 20:25-27). Therefore, the one ordained, to whom this power was given, was the presiding authority of the Church. Today, all power for performing the ordinances of the Church is vested in the president of the Church (46:29; 107:91-92; 132:6-7). On the local or ward level, the president delegates that power to a bishop (107:68-72). The bishop in every ward of the Church, or the presiding authority of each branch, is to supervise the administering of the sacrament. The same supervision of the sacrament was obviously followed among the Nephites. The presiding authority of the Nephites was probably Nephi, since he was the first to whom Jesus gave the power to baptize the people (3 Ne. 11:18-21); he was also the first to be baptized (19:11-12), and he was apparently the president of the Nephite Quorum of the Twelve. Moroni, speaking of the commandment given by Christ, recorded the manner of the elders and priests in administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the Church and testified that "the elder or priest did minister it" (Moro. 4:1). The eternal nature of the gospel again shows that a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood or an elder in the Melchizedek Priesthood may actually administer the sacrament ordinances by blessing the bread and water (D&C 20:46, 76). Thus, the authority to administer was certainly given to the Jerusalem Church, even though the New Testament contains no record of it.

The New Testament states that Jesus "blessed" the bread and then "broke it," and that he gave thanks for the wine (Matt. 26:26-27). However, in Mormon's abridgment of 3 Nephi, the order is reversed, clarifying that Jesus first broke the bread and then blessed it (3 Ne. 18:3). This order is in harmony with the practice of the Church today and agrees with the JST correction at Matt. 26:26 (JST Matt. 26:22). Further, in the 3 Nephi account Jesus promises to give the one ordained to administer the sacrament power to "break bread and bless it" (3 Ne. 18:5), but it does not

say the wine was blessed. However, Moroni later recorded the prayers the elder or priest said as he administered "the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church . . . according to the commandments of Christ; wherefore we know the manner to be true" (Moro. 4:1). The word *commandment* strongly implies that the words of the prayers were given to them by Christ. Moroni continues his record, saying, "And they did kneel down with the church, and pray to the Father in the name of Christ" (4:2). Based on the practice of the Church today, a valid interpretation of "kneel down with the church" is to kneel in behalf of the Church. As one having authority addresses the Father, he represents the entire congregation. The congregation mentally follows the prayer and sanctions it by saying "Amen" at the conclusion of the prayer. The words of the blessing on the bread recorded by Moroni are: "O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it; that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his Spirit to be with them. Amen" (4:3).

The prayer itself confirms that it represents all who partake of it and that it is in remembrance of Christ's body (which was laid down and then resurrected). It then specifies our part of the covenant and God's promised blessings to follow. There are three parts of our commitment: (1) to be willing to take upon ourselves the name of Christ, (2) to always remember him, and (3) to keep his commandments. If these three commitments are kept, God promises that the partakers will always have his Spirit to be with them (Moro. 4:3).

A comparison to the baptismal covenant recorded in Mosiah 18 shows that the commitments made at the sacrament ordinance are the same as the ones made in the waters of baptism when a person enters into the Church. To take upon us the name of Christ is to become a part of his family. It is "to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people." It is to accept other members of the Church as brothers and sisters, to be "willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; yea, and [be] willing to mourn

with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8-9).

The second commitment, to always remember Christ, is to agree "to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things, and in all places that ye may be in, even until death" (Mosiah 18:9). To remember Christ means we are mindful of his example and will follow it seven days a week, not just on Sunday; we will exemplify in our lives the principles he taught; and we will pattern our lives after Christ's life in our social and occupational activities. We are his children and should be proud of his family name.

The third commitment is to "serve him and keep his commandments" (Mosiah 18:10). As our Father of eternal life through the Atonement,⁴ Christ is the head of the family. He will delegate our stewardship to us through revelation to his children and will give us rules to govern us as members of his household. In exchange for following these rules, Christ agrees to "pour out his Spirit more abundantly upon [us]" (18:10). Since all are born with the light of Christ, the members of his family are promised an additional source of light and truth—the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through the sacrament, the covenant of baptism is reaffirmed by both man and God, but more should be remembered. The sacrament prayer states that we "eat [the bread] in remembrance" of Christ's body (Moro. 4:3; D&C 20:77). Through the breaking of the bread—symbolic of his body—we do so "in remembrance of" Christ (Luke 22:19), confirming the correct purpose of the sacrament.

But what are we to remember? We are to remember that through his Resurrection, we too may be resurrected. We should acknowledge his Resurrection and give thanks to our Father in Heaven for this blessing of his son. Furthermore, we might remember that the Lord has given us certain commandments to make our bodies fit tabernacles for the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:13-20; D&C 89). As we live in this mortal state of probation, we are preparing ourselves for our endless resurrected state (Alma 12:24). The type of resurrection we receive is commensurate with the degree of glory that we have prepared ourselves to receive (D&C 88:14-24). A reflection of our past week's activities in relation to the commandments given to keep our bodies as fit temples of God and to be worthy of his Spirit would be most appropriate as we partake of the bread. We should also make personal com-

mitments to do better in our areas of weakness and thank our Father for the blessings of the past week. Through partaking of the bread, we have an opportunity to periodically evaluate our progress toward immortality.

After instructing the disciples concerning the bread, Jesus gave them wine to drink and had them administer it to the multitude in the same manner as they had administered the bread (3 Ne. 18:8–9). He then informed the disciples that partaking of the wine was another witness to the Father that they would keep the commandments (18:10). However, the wine was to be partaken of “in remembrance of [Christ’s] blood, which [was] shed for [them]” (18:11).

Again, the Spirit was promised to those who would always remember him (3 Ne. 18:8–11). Moroni also recorded the exact prayer for administering the wine as he concluded the record of the Nephites: “The manner of administering the wine—Behold, they took the cup, and said: O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee, in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this wine to the souls of all those who drink of it, that they may do it in remembrance of the blood of thy Son, which was shed for them; that they may witness unto thee, O God, the Eternal Father, that they do always remember him, that they may have his Spirit to be with them. Amen” (Moro. 5:1–2).

It is essentially the same prayer as the one offered over the bread, with the wine being in remembrance of Christ’s blood, which was shed for them. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ bled “at every pore” to pay for the sins of all humankind (3 Ne. 11:11; D&C 19:18; see also Mosiah 3:7; Alma 7:13; Luke 22:44). Thus, the wine is equated with the Atonement. The prayer contains no mention of the participants’ covenant to take Jesus’ name or to keep the commandments. This exclusion may be because they have already so committed themselves by partaking of the bread; they are now to remember a different aspect of the Atonement—the blood of Christ that was shed in Gethsemane, a vicarious payment for their sins. Therefore, they reflect upon the great sacrifice he made, how their past sins contributed to his suffering, and how those sins have been forgiven. Their thoughts should thus be of worship for the willingness of their Savior to make the Atonement and pay for their sins. Perhaps they might extend those thoughts to thanksgiving for the guidance they received

during the week and to plea for the guidance of the Spirit during the coming week.

Partaking

Jesus concluded his instructions concerning the bread and wine by making the sacrament a commandment (3 Ne. 18:12). According to Moroni's later-recorded testimony of Christ's ministry, the Church "did meet together oft to partake of bread and wine, in remembrance of the Lord Jesus" (Moro. 6:6). The account does not clarify the meaning of "oft." In this dispensation, we are given this sacred opportunity weekly. Jesus further attested that "if ye shall always do these things [the proper partaking of the sacrament] blessed are ye, for ye are built upon my rock" (3 Ne. 18:12). Just as proper baptism was the beginning of the building upon the rock, so was the covenant of the sacrament. While the ordinance of baptism was a one-time, long-term commitment, the sacrament serves as a weekly opportunity to keep a proper foundation, the rock of Christ, under our quest for eternal life and to build upon it. For those who fail to observe their sacrament covenants, their foundation becomes one of sand and leads to an entrance into the gates of hell (18:13).

The Savior instructed the Nephites regarding prayer after he spoke of the bread and wine, but then he returned to the subject of the sacrament. This time he commanded the disciples to "not suffer any one knowingly to partake of [his] flesh and blood unworthily" (3 Ne. 18:28). Those who partake unworthily do so to the damnation of their souls (18:29). Moroni also added a warning against partaking unworthily in his contribution to the Nephite record (Morm. 9:29). These same instructions were undoubtedly given to the people in Palestine, because Paul instructed the Corinthian Saints similarly and based his teachings on what Jesus had taught at the Last Supper (see 1 Cor. 11:23–29). Paul added that many among the Corinthians were weak, sick, or even asleep because they partook unworthily (11:30). Elder John Taylor said the same about some of the Latter-day Saints of his day.⁵ President Joseph Fielding Smith declared, "No member of the Church, who refuses to observe this sacred ordinance, can retain the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Ghost. It is as true today as it was in the days of Paul, that many members of the

Church are weak and sickly, in spirit and body, and many sleep, because they have failed to show their love for, and obedience to, the Lord Jesus Christ in the keeping of this commandment.”⁶ The partaking of the sacrament is a serious ordinance and should be done thoughtfully.

On the second day of his divine ministry among the descendants of Lehi, Jesus performed a miracle parallel to his Palestine ministry. He again gave the disciples the sacrament and commanded them to administer it to the multitude (3 Ne. 20:3–5). After they had all received the sacrament, it is recorded that “there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude” (20:6). Christ had miraculously provided bread and wine for the multitude similar to his miracle in Galilee, where he fed the “five thousand men, beside women and children” (Matt. 14:13–21) and later fed “four thousand men, beside women and children” (15:32–38). The Nephite record does not describe how he did it, as do the New Testament accounts, but he did miraculously provide (3 Ne. 20:7).

Following their partaking, Jesus said to the assembled people, “He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled” (3 Ne. 20:8). The multitude experienced the promised fulfillment of the sacrament covenant – they were filled with the Spirit. The result was a united voice of praise and “glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard” (20:9). As we partake of the sacrament, we too should give praise and glory to our Lord for the Resurrection and the Atonement that he provided.

“My Blood of the New Testament”

There are two kinds of ordinances administered in the Church: those that are necessary for salvation and those that are available to bless the Saints but are not necessary to attain salvation. Blessing the little children (Mark 10:13–16; 3 Ne. 17:21) and administering to the sick (James 5:14–15), both of which Jesus performed, are not saving ordinances. Is the sacrament a saving ordinance or a nonsaving ordinance? The crucifixion of Christ fulfilled the law of Moses, and all things became new (3 Ne. 15:4–5). Those who kept the new commandments he had given

could attain eternal life through the blood he shed in Gethsemane. A new covenant was in effect, which was made through the ordinance of baptism (12:1-2). This covenant was necessary for salvation (Mark 16:15-16). According to the Savior's instructions, the sacrament was a commandment and was to be administered "unto all those who shall believe and be baptized in my name" (3 Ne. 18:5, 11-12). Therefore, the sacrament is a covenant ordinance, and, in a sense, a saving ordinance. It is partaken of as a renewal of our baptismal covenant. Blessings are promised conditionally upon our keeping the commandments agreed upon. Without those blessings we would not gain eternal life. The sacrament is thus a weekly reminder of our initial commitment to be a member of Christ's Church.

Matthew recorded that Jesus' blood of the New Testament was "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Although the disciples were baptized for a remission of sins, the remission of sins came from the baptism of the Holy Ghost (2 Ne. 31:17; Moro. 6:4). As a parallel ordinance, the partaking of the sacrament is a rededication of our covenants, although the ordinance alone does not bring about a remission of sins. Just as baptism brings a remission of sins, so the partaking of the sacrament enables us to have the Spirit with us always (Moro. 4:3; 5:2) in order that we might be forgiven of our sins through the Holy Ghost. As Nephi testified, "I know that if ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism – yea, by following your Lord and your Savior down into the water, according to his word, behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost" (2 Ne. 31:13). If sins are committed after baptism, and they always are, the forgiveness of sins must come from a cleansing by the Spirit – not from the sacrament ordinance itself.

Jesus desired to eat the Passover meal with his disciples because it would be his "last supper" with them until he ate and drank again in the kingdom of his father (Matt. 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18, 30). The Book of Mormon does not mention that Jesus taught the Nephites of this future occasion. However, the Lord revealed to Joseph Smith, when the Prophet set out to procure

wine for the administering of the sacrament, that he would partake again with them in the future. "For behold, I say unto you, that it mattereth not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink when ye partake of the sacrament, if it so be that ye do it with an eye single to my glory – remembering unto the Father my body which was laid down for you, and my blood which was shed for the remission of your sins. Wherefore, a commandment I give unto you, that you shall not purchase wine neither strong drink of your enemies; wherefore, you shall partake of none except it is made new among you; yea, in this my Father's kingdom which shall be built up on the earth. Behold, this is wisdom in me; wherefore, marvel not, for the hour cometh that I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth" (D&C 27:2-5). The Lord then named several of the ancient prophets and apostles who would participate in that great and glorious sacrament meeting (27:5-14). This meeting will take place at Adam-ondi-Ahman.⁷

The New Testament records that Jesus instituted the sacrament among his disciples as an ordinance to help the people remember him until he came again. The New Testament implies an association with his Atonement and the remission of sins. However, it does not clearly give the way the sacrament was to be administered or the reasons and purpose for the ordinance. The Book of Mormon and other modern-day scriptures show how and why the ordinance was given. The significance and purposes of the sacrament are explained. The authority to bless and the prayers of blessings are revealed. New Testament teachings are verified and explained. The sacrament is indeed a saving ordinance for the membership of the Church, and through righteous participation in the ordinance, we may build upon the rock of Christ that becomes our foundation as we come out of the waters of baptism. Through building upon the rock of Christ, we can achieve eternal life.

Monte S. Nyman is professor emeritus of ancient scripture, Brigham Young University.

Notes

1. Jonathan Z. Smith and William Scott Green, eds., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1995), 1099.
2. James L. Barker, *Apostasy From the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 715-16. The various Lutheran congregations believe in the doctrine of consubstantiation.
3. Brigham H. Roberts, *Outlines of Ecclesiastical History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 273. John Calvin advocated the "spiritual presence" doctrine, and Ulrich Zwingli taught the "merely symbols" doctrine.
4. For the use of the term "father" applying to Christ, see the 30 June 1916 message of the First Presidency, "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition," in James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:26-34.
5. In *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1880), 20:360.
6. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Seek Ye Earnestly* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 108.
7. See Bruce R. McConkie, *The Millennial Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1982), 578-88.