

PART IV

"The Meal of the Messiah in Jewish Sources"

The Swiss Dr. **Friso Melzer** once gave in Basel a wise and encouraging thought when I uncovered my own insecurity in German. He stated that "Je klarer der Geist eines Menschen, desto schlichter ist seine Sprache" - the clearer the spirit of a man, the more simple is his language. The main thing is to present significant and meaningful thoughts. My relation to German and English is about the same which I have with my dear wife: I love her but I can not rule over her. Even this day, after fifty three years of happy marriage, she gives her honest, loving and diplomatic alignments in practical theology. So being too "academic" does not promote scientific studies especially when we deal with Jewish thoughts and Midrashic sources. The most beautiful gems in the Jewish literature are to be found in the Midrash.

Probably the best definition of Midrash is given by **Renée Bloch** in her article in *Dictionnaire de la Bible, Supplément*. According to her rabbinic Midrash is a *homiletic reflection or meditation on the Bible* which seeks to *reinterpret* or *actualize* a given text from the past for our present circumstances. It penetrates to the text and *makes it relevant for the contemporary situation*. One of the experts in these studies, Dr. **Zunk** argues that *Midrash is basically a teaching about God*. **Renée Bloch** writes also that *Midrash allows God to speak to the people*. This always means a personal and practical approach, without being too "academic".

I found the blessing in the Midrashic literature while preparing my two main Hebrew books about the Messiah in the Old and New Testaments in the Light of Rabbinical Writings. In the process I came across our subject about the meal of the Messiah. Midrash Ruth reveals ***an eternal perspective on the Messianic banquet*** similar to the Holy Communion in the New Testament. The concepts as "*to eat in this world, and in the Messianic age, and in the World to Come*", "*the bread of the kingdom*", the Messiah, who "*was wounded for our transgressions*", the Messiah who will "*rain down manna*" upon his people, the discussion concerning Elijah recording our good deeds and "*the Messiah and the Holy One subscribing and sealing them*" provided imposing spectacles for studying other Rabbinical writings. According to Jewish scholars Midrashic studies must be based on the normative Rabbinical sources like the Talmud, the Zohar, Yalkutim, the Jewish prayer literature and Medieval Rashi commentaries.

Midrash uses the Bible in order to emphasize the authority of the Scriptures. As an example of this common feature, I may mention that when I once counted in Midrash Lamentations Rabbah the Bible verses which it uses in the first chapter "Parashah" alone, I noted that it made a total of **310 verses**. Compared with the Talmud which has always a jungle of different quotes of the Sages, the Midrash has

them much less. Second, **the role of prophets** is more dominant in Midrash than in the Talmud and in other Jewish writings.

It is also commonly accepted as a precept for the Midrash that *every single detail* of God's revelation, *the Torah, should be interpreted, and every detail explained in relation to the matter in hand and also as an independent unit, for the Torah never loses its literal meaning.* Every statement should be also confirmed by a passage from the Old Testament, because human opinion has only little value as evidence. Midrash often repeats the Aramaic saying, "*ha be-ha talya*", that is "*this depends on that*" - thus *inner bridges* are constructed to connect the subject with the common message of the Bible. This demands the use of an associative method which is suitable to Midrashic studies.

There is an ongoing process in the Christian world toward the "liquidation" of the Bible. When the decision is made to "shut down" the work in a factory, it means a danger of a total bankrupt. However, it is often just enough to clean up the machinery and to "start up" the work over again. The New Testament reflects the same interpretative rules as the early rabbinical writings. Therefore it is logical to use the same methods of the same period in the Christian exegesis too. This will bring blessing to our dilemmatic theological situation. And here the Midrashic literature helps us to find the Jewish roots of our faith.

New light on the Messianic meal

The deepest theological gem in Midrash Ruth concerns the Holy Communion in the light of Jewish sources. We can touch this item only to such an extent that the common components of Midrash Ruth will be uncovered. The Last Supper is based mostly on the biblical Passover feast. It has among the Jews many regulations apparent in the Gospels too. For **the theology of the Holy Communion** these findings are of uttermost importance.

I. Howard Marshall gives in his book *Last Supper and LORD's Supper* a detailed analysis of "The Accounts of the Last Supper". There he explains that according to **Rudolf Bultmann** the sacramental table-fellowship between Jesus and his disciples was a kind of transformation of the Hellenistic festive meals and "he undoubtedly meant that he regarded the account of the Last Supper as being unhistorical". There is however "no need for us to be intimidated by him".

Jean-Marie van Cangh has written an article "Evolution in the Tradition of the Last Supper", Berlin 1999. Also she found the "liturgical influence" of the Hellenistic communities behind the Gospel stories. She is suggesting that there are **only two 'cups' in the Last Supper**, "*an eschatological cup* which was included in primitive paschal (or festive) accounts and an *eucharistic cup*, which has been added under the influence of the liturgy" in the Christian churches. In the light of Jewish literature and the actual Seder ordinances this theory seems to be very artificial indeed. In the Passover Seder there are **four cups** to be given for the participants. May I present them and the other elements of the Holy Communion in their proper order.

The "piece of bread" projected in old sources

In the Holy Communion the bread has a deeper meaning *combining the lamb and the unleavened bread*. Jesus said, that he is "the bread of life" - "if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever". The item of manna given by the Messiah was emphasized in Midrash Ruth too and the eternal perspective is expressed both in the Midrash and the New Testament. In the sacrificial language the lamb is called as "*guph ha-pesah*", the body of Passover. That forms a natural association to the sacrificial death of Jesus.

In Midrash Ruth the "*piece of bread*", "*pat lehem*", which Boaz gave to Ruth reflected the common Jewish interpretation that the Messiah will give manna from the heaven. **RaSHI** relates the Messianic meal to **Psalm 22:26**, where we read that "the poor will eat and be satisfied". He understood that this verse "*refers to the time of deliverance, to the days of the Messiah*". In **Shemoth Rabbah** we find a discussion about the Shepherd **Psalm 23 verse 5**: "You prepare *a table* for me; in the presence of my enemies, that means manna; you anoint my head with oil means freedom from cares, and my cup overflows refers to a spring."

Didache speaks about *the "supernatural bread"*. All this forms a logical equation as a whole: the bread compensates the lamb; the lamb is related to Christ, the "lamb of God"; and manna hints to "*afikoman*", the bread which was put aside as well as to the "*wafer*". Together they symbolize the reconciliation of the Messiah by his death and resurrection. By this the antithesis of the Zohar gets a deeper meaning because "*as long as Israel were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices*" they received the reconciliation, but "*now it is the Messiah*" who takes the same role for his people.

The wine and its interpretations

The wine in Midrash Ruth is related to the sufferings in Isaiah 53. This leads us to the essence of Holy Communion. **1 Cor. 11:25-26** interprets the message of wine with the words of Jesus: "This cup is the *new covenant in my blood* - as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the LORD's death until he comes." Here we have the same eternal perspective as in Midrash Ruth.

The Passover liturgy has *four cups of wine*. Every cup has its own name and symbolizes certain features in the Seder. **Justin Martyr** gave his instructions to the Holy Communion. He explained in about 150 A.D. that after the Eucharist the participants had to "greet each other with a holy kiss". "Thereafter the supervisor receives *the cup, in which the wine and water is mixed*."

The *first cup* is called with the name "*kiddush*", which means the same as "sanctification". The *second cup* has the name "*magid*", and it begins the "narrative" part of the Passover. The *third cup* is called as "*koos ha-brakha*", "cup of blessing", as it is revealed in **1 Cor.10:16**: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?" The *fourth cup* is mostly forgotten in the Christian theology. If we examine the Last Supper with a magnifying glass, we will notice that the Gospels do not speak at all about the fourth cup. It was called "the cup

of kingdom", "*kos hamalkhuth*". In **Mark 14:25** Jesus promised that "I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new *in the kingdom of God*".

According to the professor of the Oxford University **David Daube**, Jesus instituted the fourth cup "*to compensate the real, perfect and final coming of the kingdom which is still a matter of faith and hope*". And "*he referred it obviously to the fourth cup*". Jesus did not drink this cup and say "*birkhat ha-shir*", 'the blessing of the song' because "*he moved this part of the liturgy to the fulfilment of the final kingdom of God*". This fits well to the Gospel. In **Luke 22:16-17** Jesus said that he will not eat the Passover "*until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God*" and drink the fruit of vine "*until the kingdom of God comes*."

The "hallel" linked with the eternal perspective

At the he end the Jewish Passover meal includes the same eternal perspective as the fourth cup. The Jewish tradition of the Seder emphasizes that the feast always ended with a hymn called "hallel", a section of "praise". It consisted Psalms of **Psalm 113 to 118**. They speak about the salvation from Egypt and how all nations and all peoples ought to praise the LORD. Psalm 118 is called in Aramaic a "*royal song*", "*shir matronitha*". It always closes the Passover meal. Rabbi **Akiba** explains in Talmud that the Holy Spirit gave this song, and that the Israelites sang it as they crossed the Red Sea. The tradition here is associated with the names of Rabbi **Jehudah and Shmuel**, who said that "the prophets have commanded Israel to sing this to their Saviour on the day of their salvation". Even **Midrash Tehillim** approves this idea.

The **Zohar** connects the theme of Psalm 118 to Israel's departure from Egypt. It explains that "*there is a reference to One who is to come - therefore Israel ought to sing this to Him who will come*." And the people are going to sing it "*at the redemption which is to come, for it refers both to the past world and to the future world; it contains confirmations of faith and mysteries relating to the days of the Messiah*".

Other similar Messianic banquets in the old tradition

The Dead Sea Scrolls gives new relevance to the discussions about the New Testament. There are many common denominators in the Messianic meal of Midrash Ruth, and in the Eucharist of New Testament as also in the Messianic banquet of the Qumran sect. The Essenes had a habit to bless the bread first, and after that the wine. This is also done in the Eucharist. The Essenes used mostly the concepts "*lehem ve-tirosh*" where the "*tirosh*" was actually "young and sweet wine before it was fermented".

The best description of **the Essene communion** meal is depicted in the "Charter for Israel in the last days". The communion feast of the Essenes was associated with the arrival of the "Messiah of Israel" and it is comparable with the early Christian agape or "love" feasts attached to the sacrament of Eucharist. The word *Yahad*, which is used within the Essene congregation, actually means the "unity" or "oneness", almost the same as the term "communion". Although the Essene banquet was eschatological

in nature, it did not have hope for the future in the "world to come" as Midrash Ruth does.

The **Qumran society** accepted only men of ability and blameless behavior for their close fellowship. In their communal prayer **4Q501** they said: "*Do not give our inheritance to strangers, nor our produce to the sons of a foreigner*". The whole attitude of this sect was impregnated with small hostile remarks against the "outsiders" - as an opposite to the attitude of Midrash Ruth.

The **Christian Eucharist** is intended for sinners who are ready to repent for their behavior without any preconditions. The Essenes ordered that "*no man with a physical handicap - crippled in both legs or hands, lame, blind, deaf, dumb, or possessed of a visible blemish in his flesh - or a doddering old man unable to do his share in the congregation*" can partake their banquet. We can see here that the Messianic banquet of the Essenes is very exclusive in its nature. They did not accept "the outsiders" to their communion, the Yahad. And it did not give to its participants hope for the "world to come" as the New Testament or Midrash Ruth emphasizes. In this sense the writings of Qumran can not be considered as the source for the Holy Communion.

The special message of the so called "third meal"

Both the **Zohar and the Talmud** are based primarily on the same Rabbinic traditions. Even the Messianic emphasis is expressed approximately in the same manner in both of them although the Zohar has not been in that extent under the supervisory eye of the rabbis as is done with the Talmudic texts. There is a justified reason to deal with them together when we examine the Messianic banquet in Midrash Ruth. We find in the **Zohar** a discussion about the "*third meal*", the meal of the Messiah, which includes the components common both to Talmud and to the Jewish prayer book Siddur.

Zohar Section 2, pages 88a-b explains: "Therefore one must wholeheartedly rejoice in these meals - for they are meals of the *perfect Faith, the Faith of the holy seed of Israel, their supernal Faith*, which is not that of the heathen nations". In the sequel of this text there are then some important aspects as we read: "give joy to the poor." - "And because the Faith is centered in the Sabbath, man is given on this day an additional, a supernal soul, a soul in which is all perfection, *according to the pattern of the world to come*." This enigmatic speech of an "additional supernal soul" comes forth also in many discussions of the Talmud. "Man is given an additional soul on Friday, but at the termination of the Sabbath it is taken away from him".

We can see the third meal also in the tradition of the **Talmud**. It has the name "*melawe malkhah*", "escorting the Queen", a term used to describe the meal and the festivities *at the end of the Sabbath*. Melawe malkhah is called also as "*se'udat David*", King David's banquet. One of the essential features in the praises of "melawe" has always been the role of "Eliyahu ha-Navi" as a herald of the Messiah. This is emphasized also in Midrash Ruth.

The concept "*havdalah*", the "*distinction*" of the wine in the third meal at the termination of Sabbath has its reflections in the New Testament too. The Apostle Paul

is using this word in **1 Cor. 11:29** when he speaks of the Holy Communion: "For any one who eats and drinks without *discerning* the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself." There is a wide discussion in Talmud among the rabbis about the "table order" of each detail in the third meal. "It was taught in **R. Akiba's** name: He who tastes anything before reciting havdalah shall die through choking." **R. Johanan** said: "Three are of those who will inherit the world to come: he who dwells in Eretz Yisrael, and he who brings up his sons to the Study of the Torah, and he who recites havdalah over wine *at the termination of the Sabbath*." Living in Israel was important also for the compilers of Midrash Ruth.

The Talmud uses some common expressions with those in the New Testament. In one of them we read also about "*the table of the LORD*" as it is expressed in **1 Cor. 10:21** that "you cannot partake of the table of the LORD and the table of demons". In Talmud **Berakhoth** we read: "This is the table that is before the LORD - the verse in **Mal. 1:7** opens with 'altar' and finishes with 'table'? R. Johanan and R. Eleazar both explain that as long as the Temple stood, *the altar atoned for Israel, but now a man's table atones for him*." The same words are repeated verbatim in **Menahoth** and **Hagigah**. Also the **Zohar** emphasizes that "as long as Israel were in the Holy Land, *by means of the Temple service and sacrifices they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them*". Even this shows that the Zohar and the Talmud must be examined together.

The story about Paul in Troas and the young man called Eutychus who fell from the third storey tells how after this accident, Paul "*broke bread and ate*". The enigma of that evening meeting at Troas reveals, that Paul "*prolonged his speech*" and "*conversed*" with his audience until the daybreak - as the Jews were in the habit of doing after the third meal on the Sabbath, "the meal of the Messiah". The verse in **Acts 20:7** is usually translated as pointing to Sunday, when the Christians were supposed to have celebrated the LORD's Supper at this strange hour in the late evening. The Syriac **Peshitta**, used by the ancient Oriental churches, says that the meal was an "*eukharistia*" and that it happened "*on the first day on the Sabbath*". The ancient Syrian and Near-Eastern churches still have the custom of celebrating the Eucharist or Holy Communion "at the second hour on Saturday evening". In their churches there are many Jews who circumcise their sons. Celebrating the Eucharist **on Saturday evening** is based on this ancient tradition, which they say originated from the Apostolic Age. Even the Hebrew translation points to the Saturday evening. The Greek is stating that it happened "*en de tee mia toon sabbatoon*" - even this points probably to the Sabbath.

The holy banquet in Didache

The **second section of the Didache**, "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" (**6:3-16:8**) is a kind of handbook for the Church order dealing with advices for the food, Christian baptism, fasting, prayers, Eucharist and the various offices in the Church. The *participation in the Eucharist* was granted only for those who were baptized. The congregation received the Eucharist having first confessed their sin so that the sacrifice would be pure. "*But let no one who has a quarrel with a companion join you until they have been reconciled*." The latter instruction was typical in Jewish writings. In the extensive collection of lawsuits "**Hefetz hajjim**" which speaks against the

improper use of "*lashon ha-ra*", the evil tongue, there are many sayings which warn the believers that "*the Holy Spirit does not get along where there is quarrel and idle talk*". A similar hint to the absence of the Holy Spirit is repeated in Midrash Ruth too.

The **cup of Eucharist** is blessed in **Didache 9:2** as follows: "We give you thanks, our Father, for *the holy wine of David your servant*, which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever." The **broken bread** is sanctified with the words: "*We give thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be the glory forever. Just as this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.*"

After the food the congregation reads: "To us you have graciously given *spiritual food and drink, and eternal life* through your servant" - Gather the church "from four winds **into your kingdom**, which you have prepared for it - may grace come, and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David".

The Didache speaks of "the holy wine of David" the way the "melawe malkhah", "se'udat David", or King David's banquet does. **This eternal aspect found in Midrash Ruth appears also here** when the Didache refers the sacramental elements of the Eucharist to spiritual food, which promises the eternal life to believers. The ecumenical message of the broken bread unites the Church and gathers the believers from "four winds" to the kingdom of God.

The third meal in the book of Siddur

The Jewish Prayer book Siddur is the soul of the Jewish people. It presents the fundamentals of their faith, it functions as a base for devotion and it is also a kind of calendar for Jewish feasts. The closest equivalent to the above modes of expression is found from the Siddur in the third meal of Sabbath in the Aramaic words of "havdalah", "*this is the meal of the King David*".

In the actual "**Zemiroth**" there are short extracts to the third meal: "In God the LORD is *eternal Rock*, in Him who has spoken to His chosen people in order to sanctify them - may those who enjoy the celebration receive plentiful goodness *when the Redeemer comes for the world to come* - may they enjoy *of the coming world*, the day of Sabbath rest, all those who enjoy it. *May they receive great joy in the sufferings of the Messiah*, so they will be saved to liberty and our redemption will increase - *of Thy Rock we have eaten* - our shepherd, our Father, we have eaten his bread and drunk his wine, therefore we praise his name - *O Rock*, in songs and aloud we thank and bless our God, who has given for our fathers a lovely and good country, nourishment and booty has *satisfied* our souls."

Midrash Ruth speaks much about the concept to "*satisfy*". We must remember the extract in the **Siddur** from its regular morning prayers and of the evening in Sabbath, which is repeated at least three times. "May it be thy will - that we would keep thy statutes *in this world* and merit, and live, and inherit goodness and blessing **in the two**

days of the Messiah and in the World to come" - because God the LORD is *an eternal Rock*." Sometimes the "rock" is also related in the Talmudic tradition to the Messiah.

In our intertextual method we have compared the normative Jewish sources also with the New Testament. Paul has similar expressions as does the Zohar and the Siddur when he speaks of the Holy Communion in **1 Cor. 10:2-4**. According to Revised Standard Version we read: "All were *baptized into Moses* in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same *supernatural food* and all drank the same *supernatural drink*. For they drank from the *supernatural Rock* which followed them, and *the Rock was Christ*." This **resembles** the translation from Soncino Zohar, which uses the concepts "supernal faith" and "supernal soul". Actually the Greek word "*pneumatikos*" would be more accommodating if it was translated as "spiritual".

As a summary we must remember that the idea of the Messiah and his banquet seems to base at the earliest on the teaching of **R. Jonathan**, a contemporary of **Rabbi Yohai b. Hanina**, a Tanna of the 4th generation between **135 - 170 A.D.** The stylistic devices of Midrash Ruth resemble that of the Gospel of Matthew as **Myron Bialik Lerner** has proved and it derives from the same spiritual tradition with the New Testament. Most of these teachings were linked with the Academies of **Tiberias and Sepphoris**, which were the Rabbinic centers at that time.

In the **exegetical analysis** of the common features in Midrash Ruth and in respective Jewish literature, we have seen that Midrash Ruth reflects rabbinic thinking at a wide scale. Both Midrash Ruth and the New Testament comprise a concrete bridge to the coming world, where those who partake of the Messianic meal in this world are seeing its fulfilment in the world to come. However, the real difference between the Christian Eucharist and the Jewish Messianic banquets is in the sacramental nature of the Holy Communion as a token for the expiation of the sin.