

Graeco-Roman Voluntary Associations and Interpretation of the New Testament

Daniel Institute
BD IV 414 (Biblical Studies)

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The Church as a Collective Group: Acts 4:32-35

A United Fellowship

All the believers **were one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but **they shared everything they had**. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that **there was no needy person among them**. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it **was distributed to anyone who had need**.

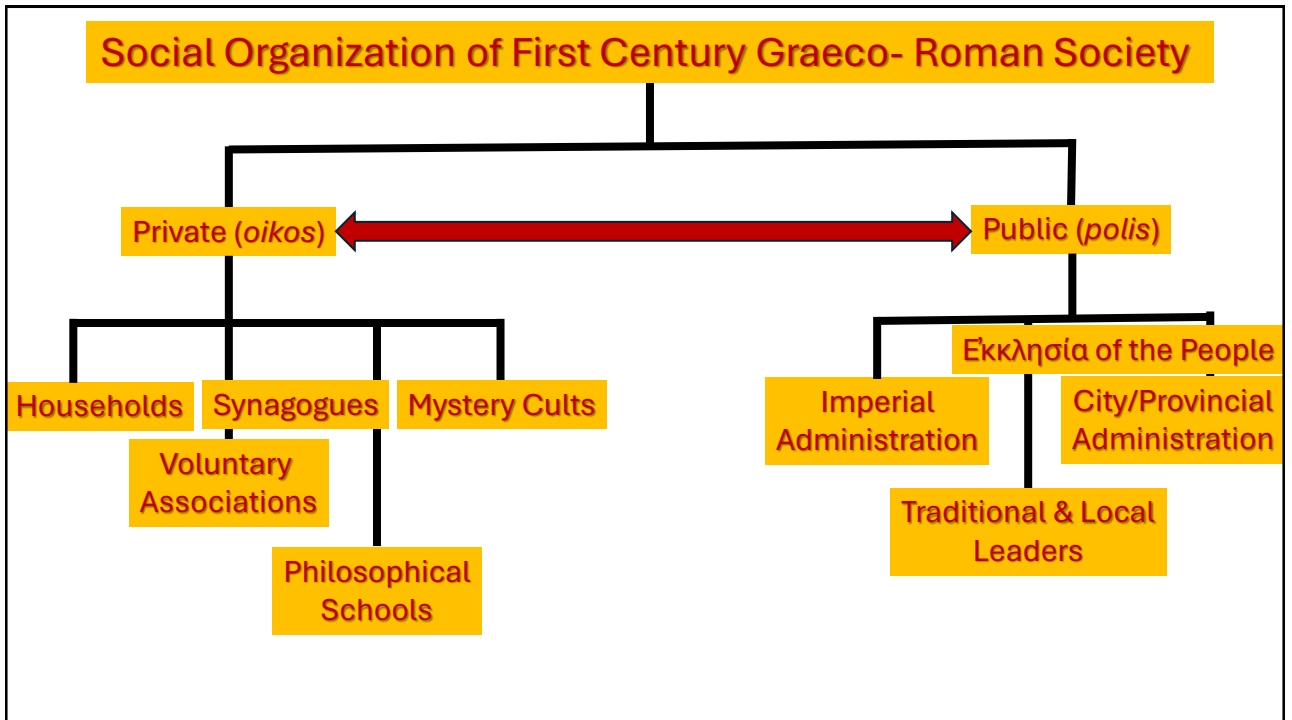
A Communing Fellowship

A Caring Fellowship

A Charitable Fellowship

What was unique about the manner in which the New Testament Christians socialized?

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3

What is the relevance of how first century Graeco-Romans collectively socialized as groups for interpreting the New Testament?

4

Understanding collective socialization of Graeco-Roman societies will shed light on similarities and differences between New Testament Churches and their social environment, and also help interpret passages which describe such social interactions

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Where did New Testament Churches fit in this structure and how does that impact our interpretation?

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Learning Outcomes

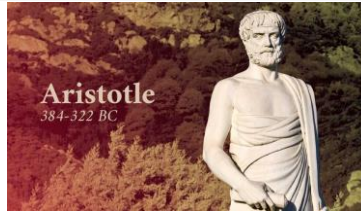
1. Assess the relevance of the key features of the first century Graeco-Roman household for interpreting the New Testament.
2. Critically evaluate the theory that some first century local churches were structured along lines similar to organization of Graeco-Roman Collegia of the time.
3. In what ways do the features of Graeco-Roman banquets and symposia shed light on your understanding of the New Testament's concept of the Messianic banquet?
4. Explain the relevance of various types of funerary rites in first century Mediterranean world for interpreting the New Testament

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Categories of "Private" Socializing Institutions in Graeco-Roman World

1. Household
2. Philosophical Schools
3. Synagogues
4. Voluntary Associations
5. Two common Rituals of socialization: Meals & Funerals

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“Now that it is clear what are the component parts of the state, we have first of all to discuss household management; for the state is composed of households. Household management falls into departments corresponding to the parts of which the household in its turn is composed; and the household in its perfect form consists of slaves and freemen. The investigation of everything should begin with its smallest parts, and the primary and smallest parts of the household are master and slave, husband and wife, father and children; we ought therefore to examine the proper constitution and character of each of these three relationships”

Aristotle (394-322 BC) *Politics* 1260a10-14

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Key Features of Ancient Roman Conception of the Family

- **Paterfamilias:**
 - Father as head of the Roman family with unchallenged authority
- **Roles and Responsibilities:**
 - Family was the fundamental bedrock of society and Emperors regularly issued laws to regulate and enrich family
 - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of family members
- **Multigenerational:**
 - Had several generations living together in a household. Some with adopted children, slaves, freedmen and their families
- **Ancestral devotion/veneration:**
 - Deep respect for ancestors and some often venerated or worshipped.
- **Household gods:**
 - Each household with their own household gods, with daily sacrifices & libations
- **Marriage and Children:**
 - Considered a duty and having children was highly valued even though dangerous for women
- **Education:**
 - Often household organized, usually by a tutor but few at organized schools for rhetoric

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Household Codes in the New Testament

• Background

- Household codes (*Haustafeln*) are sets of rules and guidance on how members of households are expected to relate to each other to ensure order and harmony in society
- First promulgated by Aristotle, these codes were viewed as fundamental for the stability of society and thus became culturally entrenched and reinforced (e.g., Dionysius of Halicarnassus 30-38 BC in *Roman Antiquities* 2.24.3-2.27.2; Seneca 30BC-50AD in *Epistle* 94.1)
- Most biblical scholars believe that the codes in the New Testament were based at least in terms of structure on these cultural codes
- Some highlight important resonances with the OT to show that the codes are heavily influenced by Scripture rather than rote repetition of Graeco-Roman culture

• The Passages

- Eph 5:21–6:9 – the longest and framed by theme of mutual submission
- Col 3:18–4:1 – Paul command to masters was revolutionary
- 1 Pet 2:13-3:7 – Extensive and deals with situations where authority is non-Christian
- Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 2; 5:1-6:2; Tit 2:1-10): Technically Station Codes (apart from 1 Tim 6:1) as they deal with relationship between the Pastor and various age groups and not between the age groups themselves

• Scholarly Debates

- Some regard these codes as reinforcing society's cultural stereotypes, instead of being counter-cultural. Feminist theologians have often tended to problematize them
- Others believe they served important historically relevant apologetic functions in defending NT churches from the charge of being subversive by indicating how traditionally conservative they were
- Others identify important nuanced changes which have been made to the codes in the NT, underlying that these changes are significant enough to demonstrate the difference between Christian code and the society. For example, instructions for males to love rather than "rule", parents to treat their children with sensitivity, and slave-owners to be fair and considerate were uncommon in society.

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Prominent Household Churches in the New Testament

Passage	Prominent Person	Comment
Acts 12:12-17	Mary (Mother of John Mark)	The church met in Mary's gated house and was clearly judged to have been a safe place for Peter to report after release from prison by angel
Col 4:15	Nympha	Presumably in Laodicea. The church met in her house so the notion that she was necessarily the leader is unwarranted
Philemon 1-2	Philemon, Apphia & Archippus	This is an interesting scenario. The house was owned by Philemon, but it would appear that Archippus was the leader. The role of Apphia is disputed though she clearly was a prominent Christian worker
Acts 16:31-34	Saved Jailer of Philippi	Not named but the prominence to household in narrative suggests a significant family
Acts 16:13-15	Lydia	Wealthy believer who supported Paul in initial mission in Philippi
2 Tim 1:16; 4:19	Onesiphorus	An Ephesian household. Not clear if it functioned as a house church or rather Onesiphorus was a generous Patron
Acts 18; Rom 16	Several named persons	Corinthian household churches may have been a reflection of different status and may well have contributed to the divisions

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The House Churches of First Century Corinth

1. Aquila and Prisca (1 Cor 16:19; cf., Rom 16:3-5)
2. Titius Justus (Acts 18:7-8)
3. Stephanas (1 Cor 16:15-16)
4. Gaius (Rom 16:23)
5. Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2)

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Multivalent Metaphor of the Church as God's Household

1. Architectural: Ordinary Building
2. Religious: Sacred Building (Temple)
3. Anthropological: Family (extended network of relatives)
4. Socio-cultural: Clan or Nation or Empire

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Anthropological background of God's Household

- **Extended family including**
 - Head - “lord”, “master” or “father”: led rituals for household gods
 - Wife - “household manager”, “sphere of her authority”
 - Children - supervision largely under wife
 - Slaves – both persons and property (or employees)
- **Religious, related to οἴκου Ἰσραήλ (House of Israel)**
 - Israel as house transferable to Church as house
 - Covenantal community that belongs to God
 - Operates by God's rules

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Socio-cultural background of God's household

- **Graeco-Roman setting**
 - Household was the basic socio-political, economic and religious unit of the society
- **Empire Politics**
 - Emperor was the *pater patriae* – father of the house of the Roman Empire
- **Social Expectations**
 - Education and formation of children
 - Religious participation of household to avoid angering gods
 - Indispensable to the proper functioning of the nation

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Multivalent depiction of God's household in Ephesians 2:19-22

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Anthropological
Extended Family

Anthropological
Clan & Israel

Socio-cultural
"Political" under God's rule

Architectural
Temple

Church is household and temple of the Trinitarian God who dwells there

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The Church as God's household: 1 Tim 3:15

if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

οἶκῳ Θεοῦ
God's Private Setting

στυλοσ και εδραιωμα της αληθειας
Public Proclaimer & Defender of God's truth

ἐκκλησία Θεοῦ ζῶντος
Public gathering unto the Life Giving and Fearsome God

The Church is designed not just to be a private organization like a household, but also a public one that proclaims the Gospel, brings people to come and share in its power and defend it from Satan's lies

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The Synagogue

• Nomenclature & Debate on Origins

- *Proseuche*, meaning "prayer house" or "prayer hall"
- *Synagoge*, meaning "a gathering place"
- *Hagios topos*, meaning "holy place"
- *Qahal*, meaning "assembly"
- *Bet kneset* or *bet ha-kneset*, meaning "the house of gathering"

• Functional Multiplex

- Synagogues were never considered as replacement of the temple, even after the temple's destruction
- Used for Judicial proceedings, archives centre, temple tax collection, treasuries, prayer halls, education gymnasia, places for public fasts, communal meals, and travelers lodge – thus a communal centre for all Jewish activities
- Many had specific internal feature of the Ark of Scrolls and the Torah shrine, with access to water for purification
- Most synagogues understood themselves as functioning as a mini-Israel

• Diverse Architecture

- Not restricted to a specific location
- No uniform design or floor plan; many diaspora synagogues seem to have been modified residential buildings
- Where numbers were small, Jews met in homes. Modifications ensured entrance was towards Jerusalem temple
- Community was at liberty to build the structures in accordance with their own requirements

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Lee Levine

While it is true that the synagogue's religious profile grew dramatically in Late Antiquity, particularly as expressed in its main hall, which had become – in the words of one sage – a “diminished sanctuary” (B Megillah 29a), the synagogue complex as a whole continued to function as a community center. It remained a multifunctional institution, answering the needs of an often-multifaceted community. The synagogue belonged to the local community that built and maintained it. There was never a higher authority that determined its policies – how it should be built, decorated, or administered, what activities would take place there, or even what sort of liturgy was to be used. This local focus of the synagogue guaranteed that the diversity so evident in the first century remained a hallmark of the institution.

Levine, Lee I. "The first-century synagogue: critical reassessments and assessments of the critical." *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine*. London: Routledge, 2004. 90-122. Page 95.

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Did First Century Churches Model themselves after Synagogues?

- Many Churches emerged from within Synagogues (e.g., Acts 18:7-11)
 - but that does not make them derivative of synagogues.
- Several doxologies in the New Testament mirror those used in diaspora synagogues (e.g., 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15-16; Rev 4:11)
 - Many more New Testament doxologies are Christological
- Leaders of synagogues were also titled as Πρεσβυτέρους (elders) as was in Christian churches (e.g., 1 Pet 5:1; Tim 5:19)
 - Term was also employed in other settings & churches also employed ἐπισκοπῆς (e.g., 1 Tim 3:1) which synagogues didn't
- Churches had similar liturgical practices as Synagogues – Scripture reading & exposition, hymns, prayers & meals
 - The form of the liturgy does not necessarily equate to derivation
- Some Synagogues evangelized among the Gentiles (e.g., Matt 23:13-15) just as the Christian Churches
 - But Jewish “missionary zeal” was only evident among the Pharisees of Palestine and uncommon in diaspora
- Synagogues never employed the term ἐκκλησία Θεοῦ (Church of God) to describe themselves.
 - Heb 10:25 functionally employs the term ἐπισυναγωγῆν; and James 2:2 συναγωγῆν for gathered Church
- Church was open to all ethnicities despite initial difficulties
 - Some synagogues allowed Gentile “God fearers” to be associated with them without becoming fully members

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Richard Ascough

First, the evidence for the structure of synagogue worship and the titles used for officers in the synagogue comes from a period later than the first century and is generally held not to have been typical of the earlier period. The argument that Jewish proselytism prepared the way for the early Christian mission by preparing a number of God-fearers falters also—the existence of the Jewish mission is thought to have arisen after Christianity and to have been based on Christian missionary methods...Finally, the doubt cast on the use of the synagogue as a model for the Macedonian Christian communities is supported by the lack of any clear literary or archaeological evidence for the presence of a significant number of Jews in Macedonia during the first century CE. This is further confirmed by the marked absence of any references to things Jewish in the texts of 1 Thessalonians and Philippians. Altogether, we can conclude that the Christian communities at both Thessalonica and Philippi probably did not organize themselves as a synagogue, particularly if a better analogous model can be found.

Ascough, Richard S. Voluntary associations and community formation: Paul's Macedonian Christian communities in context. PhD Thesis; Burlington: University of St. Michael's College, 1997. Page 189-190

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Graeco Roman Voluntary Associations or *Collegia*

- **Definition:**
 - A coherent group of people, often mixed genders, but sometimes of same gender who are permanently organized themselves on freely chosen membership for mutually shared common purposes.
 - While generally allowed or tolerated, some associations were banned leading to practice of “fictive *collegia*” where some associations pretended to be for one purpose but in actual fact acted for different purposes
- **Ancient Nomenclature:**
 - Greek: *Neoi, thiasoi, koina, orgeones, eranoi,*
 - Latin: *Sodalitas, Fado, Curia, Fratres & Collegia* (imperial term)
- **Categories:**
 1. Professional:
 - Traders, artisans and specialized workers guilds as well as household workers, slaves and freedmen (domestic *collegia*) & quasi-professional associations which were professions which then adopted particular gods to worship
 2. Funerary & Burial Associations
 - Rare before 2nd century even though other associations also carried out funerals for members
 3. Religious (Cultic) Associations
 - Focused on the worship of a particular deity or deities though cultic acts and special festival. A lot were immigrants
- **Religion:**
 - Almost all associations had deities as their gods, performed some religious rituals, contributed to the burial of members, and often focused on particular trade in the suburb where they met.
 - Associations tended to compete for honour, and some inevitably became source of persecution of Church

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Typical Organization of a Collegium

- **Deities:**
 - Associations dedicated themselves to particular deities and performed rituals at their shrines or temples. Most ensured public displays of allegiance to the Emperor
- **The Schola:**
 - The building owned by the association, often in the neighbourhood where members are drawn
- **Patron:**
 - Individuals or families who gave large donations in exchange for honour & celebrations of birthdays etc
- **Leadership:**
 - Responsible for organizing the the sacrifices, banquets, dues, collections and convening and chairing meetings
 - Often regarded as prestigious and members lobbied for but is financially burdensome
- **Membership:**
 - Size varied between 10 and 100, rare to have more than 100
 - Members were initiated, paid dues, supported each other in difficulties & submitted to discipline
 - Most associations had egalitarian principles, even though there was also competition for honour
 - People joined for mutual fellowship, honour, networking, mutual insurance and risk-sharing

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Similarities between Voluntary Associations and New Testament Churches

1. Both were small groups
2. Membership were by voluntary adults even if affected by factors such as ethnicity, profession and household dynamics
3. Both performed rituals and cultic activities, including common meals, banquets and funerals
4. Both benefited from the patronage of wealthy benefactors even though in case of associations, the patron need not be part of the organization
5. Both were generally of egalitarian principles even though limitations of leadership and leadership charisma impacted decision making

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Differences between Voluntary Associations and New Testament Churches

1. Churches were more inclusive whereas associations tended to be selective with membership
2. Churches demanded exclusive allegiance to Jesus whereas associations were polytheistic and allowed members to pay allegiance to as many gods
3. Churches actively evangelized and welcomed new members whereas associations were at best passive in receiving new members
4. Churches tended to be more rigorous in the demands for moral and ethical conformity than many associations even though the later also was concerned about their reputation
5. First century Christians left legacy of written materials which the associations didn't though the later left epigraphs and inscriptions
6. Churches networked with others in more trans-local connections (e.g., Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 7:17; 1 1:16; 16:19; 2 Cor 8:1; 11:28; Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14) than associations which tended to be self-governing and localized

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Graeco-Roman Public Entertainment

- A major expression of Graeco-Roman culture and as such heavily laced with the pivotal cultural values of patronage and honour and shame
- **Types of Entertainment**
 - Dramatic plays
 - Board games: chess-like games
 - Gambling: dice or knucklebones, which were shaken in a cup and rolled out onto a table or the ground
 - Competitive Sports: horse riding, swimming, field sports, boxing, wrestling, athletics, & ball games,
 - Charioteering
 - Gladiatorial fights
 - Roman Triumph: triumphal march celebrating victory with spectacles and weeks of festivities
- **Venues for Entertainment**
 - Theatre (e.g., Acts 19:29-31) – more in eastern Grecian parts of empire
 - The arena (amphitheatre) – more in the western Roman parts
 - The circus (or hippodrome)
 - Public Gymnasia & Baths
 - Homes & public halls for banquets

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Graeco-Roman Small Group Private Entertainment

1. Private Meals
2. The Dinner Party (Communal Meals)
3. Cultic Meals [esp funerary and small sacrificial]
4. Symposium
5. Banquet

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Meals, what is eaten, how it is eaten, with whom it was eaten, when it was eaten and not eaten, what happens when it is being eaten, and what people say about eating, all merge together in defining the identity of the people eating them. It is unsurprising therefore that private and communal meals, as well as celebratory banquets on different occasions and what occurs during these occasions constitute as major socio-cultural and religious feature of a group. Understanding how eating was organized in first century Graeco-Roman settings is important not only for understanding how the New Testament churches self-defined themselves through their eating practices and language. It is also fundamental for interpreting the New Testament itself.

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Meals Motifs in the New Testament

1. **Feeding Miracles**
 - Lk 9:12-17; Jn 6:1-15; Mk 6:30-44; Mk 8:1-10
2. **Jesus at Dinner**
 - E.g., Luke 5:27-32; Mk 2:13-17, Matt 9:9-13; Luke 7:36-50; Matt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9 Lk 22:20-32
3. **Jesus and the food laws**
 - Mk 2:23-28; Mk 7:1-13
4. **Jesus' Parables on Dinners**
 - Lk 14:7-24; Matt 21:
5. **Metaphors of Ingestion**
 - E.g., Jn 6; 7:37; 1 Cor 5:8; Mk 10:38;
6. **The Lord's Supper**
 - Matt 26; 1 Cor 11:23-32
7. **Corinthian Communal Meal Problems**
 - 1 Cor 11:17-22, 33-34
8. **Idol Food Problems**
 - Acts 15:20-29; 1 Cor 8:1-10; Rev 2:14-20
9. **Symposium with Banquet**
 - John 13
10. **The Messianic Banquet Motif**
 - Matt 21:33-46; 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18

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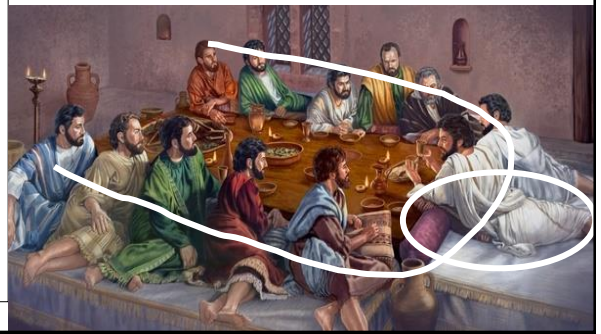
The Last Supper: Lk 22:14-20

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God.'

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you



Which of these two images is more accurate?



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Eating with Gentiles as Practicing the Gospel: Galatians 2:11-14

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'

Communal Meal as expression of the effects of Salvation in the Gospel

Creation of two tables of the Lord splits the Gospel along ethnic lines

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Graeco-Roman Symposium

- **Definition:**

- “The symposium (a drinking together) was the name given the entertainment which followed a δεῖπνον or dinnerparty. In it the pleasure of drinking wine was heightened by agreeable conversation, music, dancing, games, philosophical discussion, etc.” (Dio Chrysostom)
- It was also a typical literary genre in which conversations between philosophers and their students are recounted as occurring during such intimate settings
- Examples include Plato’s Plato, *Symposium* 201d–212c, esp. 206b–209e; and Xenophon, *Symposium* 8.1–41, esp. 8.6–29); both describing a symposium at which Socrates delivered a lecture on “two types of love”

- **Key Features**

- Eating and wine drinking often in the triclinium; rank and honor determined seating arrangement (cf. Lk 14:7-11)
- May begin with religious rituals like sharing first cup of wine, and libations to the gods
- Intellectual talks, sometimes preceded by reading of a short text, debate or discussions and sometimes other forms of entertainment (cf. Mark 6:21-22)
- Occurs among friends and means of bonding and reinforcing social obligations
- Some elaborate symposia might elect a "symposiarch" to oversee the proceedings

- **New Testament**

- The Farewell Discourse in Jn 13-17
- Anointing of Jesus at banquet (Mk 14:3-9; Matt 26:6-13; Lk 7:36-50; John 12:1-8)
- ?1 Cor 11:17-34

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Genre of Jesus’ Farewell Discourse (Jn 13-17) as Symposium

- **Component Parts**

1. A dinner (δεῖπνου – Jn 13:2, 4) is celebrated in advance of the Passover
2. Jesus’ speeches and dialogues with His “friends” (Jn 15:13-15) in intimate setting

- **Sub-genres**

- Historical Narrative of the Lord’s Supper (Jn 13:1-30)
- Testamentary Prophetic Teaching & Dialogue (Jn 13:31-16:33)
- High Priestly Prayer (Jn 17:1-26)

- **Implications**

- It explains the coherence of the five chapters
- Follows in tradition of some Jewish authors comparing Passover Meal celebrations with the Graeco-Roman Symposia
- Coheres with the notion of Hellenization and Romanization of first cent Jerusalem

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The Messianic Banquet

• Definition

- A symbolic festive dining motif as part of eschatological discourse on the joys of immortality or afterlife accompanied the Messiah’s reign
- Often involves metaphorical consumption of large amount of food and/or drink associated with the celebration of the victorious presence of God.
- Tends to combine two separate meals together, namely, the celebratory meal of God’s people and the destruction or feasting of His enemies.
- Major Jewish festivals were seen as anticipation of the banquet

• Common passages

- Old Testament: Isa 25:6-8; 54:5-55:5; Ezek 37-39; Hos 2:1-23, Song 2:4, 5:1; Zech 14:16
- New Testament: Matt 21:33-46; 26:29; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18; Rev 21-22

• Relevance

- Biblical theological motif enabling interpretation of the Jewish festivals
- Aspect fulfilled by and inaugurated by Christ
- Eschatological prophecy inspiring hope
- Ecclesiological implications on how the Church lives before the eschaton

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Spirit Filled Church as Precursor of Messianic Banquet: Eph 5:18-20

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fate of those who will not enter the banquet

The Spirit as Eschatological Wine that fills God’s Church

Celebration of the triumphant and enthroned Christ in the Eschatological community

Each gathering of God’s Church must be a Pentecost Day

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Annang Asumang

“The picture that is depicted here is a life of continuous Spirit-filled worship in the presence of the enthroned Christ. This is another characteristic feature of the Messianic banquet... The church is the eschatological community in which the promised Messianic banquet has been inaugurated. When it gathers, it should be celebrating the triumphant and enthroned Christ at the same time as it edifies His Bride. Out of reverence for the exalted Christ, believers should mutually submit to each other. This is the vision of the church that Paul espouses in Ephesians 5:18 and the Holy Spirit is the Mediator, whose fullness makes it a constant reality. In continually being filled with God’s Spirit, believers and the church alike are enacting the Messianic banquet, and so hastening the Lord’s return to consummate His marriage with the church.”

Asumang, Annang. "Be filled with the spirit and not with wine: echoes of the messianic banquet in the antithesis of Ephesians 5: 18." *Conspectus: the journal of the South African Theological Seminary* 5.03 (2008): 21-38. Pages 34, 37

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First Century Jewish Funerary Rites

- **Preparation of the body:**
 - Washing: Preparation of the body by washing as part of purification
 - Anointing: Of forehead with a mixture of vinegar and egg white signifying Jewishness. status of the body. Anointing with oil or perfume by pouring it is done for honourable people (cf., Isa. 1:6; Mark 6:13; Luke 10:34).
 - Wrapping: In plain white linen. Head in separate wrapping. Similar grave clothes for Jesus (Mat. 27:59; Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53, 24:12; John 19:40, 20:5-7). Lazarus was bound with strips of linen, and that his face had been covered by a cloth (John 11:44-45).
- **Procession:**
 - Offer bereaved a ritualized opportunity to mourn the death of their family-member or friend.
 - Family and friends and other adults in the area joined the funeral procession (Luke 7:12). Women usually in front. Lamenting and wailing of the bereaved formed a significant aspect of funeral processions.
 - Some hired professional mourners to lead (cf. Mark 5:38).
- **Disposal/Internment:**
 - Jews forbade cremation or embalming (Gen. 3:19; Deut. 21:23).
 - Occasionally law-breakers and enemies were cremated as a symbol of dishonour.
 - Body was laid onto its resting place, for example a shelf inside a cave, without any belongings.
 - For some, the bones will be collected a year later and placed in a sarcophagus (big coffin) or ossuary (small coffin) and left safely in the cave
- **Mourning:**
 - Public form of the portrayal of grief at a funeral.
- **Commemorations & Return to Grave:**
 - To mourn. To dine with the dead. And often on anniversaries
 - In John (11:31) Mary of Bethany is shown to have returned to Lazarus’ grave to mourn.
 - Due to Hellenization & Romanization, several elements of Jewish funerary practices became modified

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Distinctive features of Graeco-Roman Funerary Rites

- **Laying Out (in state)**
 - Not everyone but occurred among elites and aspiring poor
 - Washed, anointed and clothed body is laid in state for up to three days in the person's home
 - Mourning rituals, such as the wearing of black clothing and the shaving of hair
- **Rituals and ceremonies:**
 - Funeral processions important part of the rituals.
 - Libations, or offerings of liquids such as wine or milk, were poured throughout
- **Burial practices:**
 - Inhumation (burial) and cremation; preferences fluctuating over the centuries
 - Orientation of the body, as well as the type of burial, were believed to have significance for the deceased's journey to the afterlife
 - Burial with personal belongings, such as jewelry, coins, and pottery.
 - Monuments, such as mausoleum, tombs, sarcophagi, and memorials erected in honour
- **Social status and class:**
 - Rites and the type of burial often reflected the social status and wealth of the deceased
 - Funerals of political elite were often accompanied by feasts, games and popular entertainments
 - Special Voluntary associations for funerals were formed specifically to ensure good funerals of members, but other associations also regarded participation in, and organizing funerals as part of their functions

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Examples of Funerals in the New Testament

Passage	Key Feature	Comments
Mk 5:21-43, Lk 8:40-56	Jairus' daughter	Community involvement
Luke 7:11-17	Widow of Nain's son	Procession to burial
John 11:1-44	Lazarus of Bethany	Likely had family mausoleum
Acts 7:54-60	Stephen	Burial not described; died in dishonour and could have had ignoble disposal
Acts 9:36-43	Dorcas	Role of commemoration & celebration of legacy

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Questions?