

## Bread in the Bible: Food of Life and Death 8-12-18

*Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

### The First Mention (Gen 3:17–19)

The first mention of bread outlines a few points:

1. Bread is a food of gift—it is a food given to man by God in order that man might be sustained in his earthly life.
2. Bread is a food of life—by eating bread shall man live.
3. Bread is a food of death—bread is a constant reminder of man’s fallen state and inevitable death. Bread also fails to sustain man unto eternity. Bread becomes a temporary meal providing temporary sustenance.
4. Bread is a food unique to man—no other creature eats bread as does man. To eat bread requires an effort to create the bread from that which is provided by nature. Only man eats bread, therefore bread becomes a meal symbolic of man.

### Melchizedek (Gen 14:18–20)

Melchizedek is a lesser-known biblical figure, yet one who is of great importance. His name is a combination of the Hebrew *melek(h)* (“king”) and *sedeq* (“righteousness”), thus meaning “King of Righteousness.” He is the king of Salem, a city whose name means “peace.” Finally, Melchizedek is recorded as being a priest of “God Most High.”

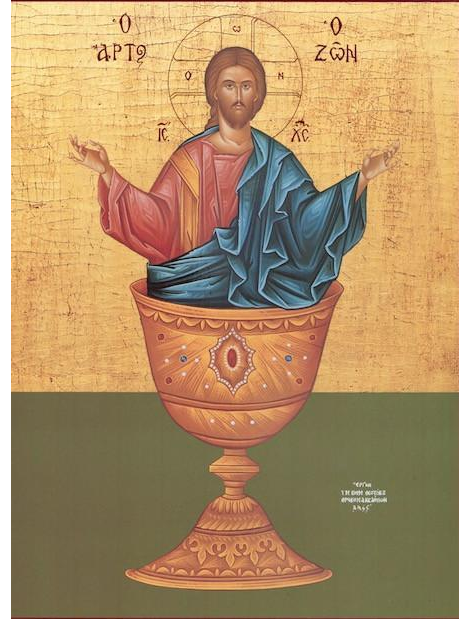
These passages are the first and only direct account of Melchizedek. The combination of his name, his offering (bread and wine), and his blessing indicate a christological significance. Not only is bread (and wine) the food of life, it becomes a food of peace and a food of blessing for Abram through Melchizedek.

### The Exodus (Exod 12:8, 14–20; 16:1–36; Num 11:1–9)

Bread is connected with the Passover meal (the salvation of Israel) as well as the wanderings in the wilderness. Regarding the wanderings specifically, bread is provided by God despite the unfaithfulness of his people in order that they might survive in the wilderness since they were not permitted to enter the promised land. Bread becomes a source of life and salvation *as sent by God*, yet not *the* source of salvation.

### The Bread of the Presence (Exod 25:30; Lev 24:5–9; 1 Sam 21:1–6; Mark 2:23–28)

The Bread of the Presence remained within the temple as a sign of God’s presence within the holy place.<sup>1</sup> That David eats this bread when it was reserved for priests is a prefiguration of Christ, who is himself the



*The Holy Icon of Christ the Bread of Life*

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<sup>1</sup> The LXX renders the Bread of the Presence using the word ἐνσπίτους, which is most commonly used to denote the sense “in person” or “face to face.” Thus, the bread in the temple is not merely a sign of God’s presence, but a meeting with God face to face.

Lord of the Sabbath. The bread that is God's presence now wears flesh and gives himself that all may eat on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath is made for man that man might be nourished.

### **The Birth of Christ (Luke 1:53; 2:1–7)**

The significance of Jesus' self-identification as the bread of life is foreshadowed by two elements of his birth narrative. In the Magnificat Mary speaks the words, "He has filled the hungry with good things." These point ahead to the bread of life that surpasses the manna of ages past. Additionally, Luke records that Jesus is born in a town called Bethlehem, which means "house of bread."

### **The First Temptation of Christ (Matt 4:1–4; Deut 8:3; Gen 1:1–3; John 1:1–3, 14)**

After having fasted for forty days and forty nights, Jesus hungered. Satan approaches and offers a remedy: transform stones into bread. In his response Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8, indicating that man does not live by eating physical bread alone, but by all that proceeds from the mouth of God. That which proceeds from the mouth of God is the Word, involved in the creative act and made flesh. Christ himself is the true bread (e.g., John 6:35) which proceeds from God, and by which true life is offered.

### **The Feeding Narratives**

- The Feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:1–14, 26–59)  
This specific feeding narrative depicts salvation "to the Jew first" (cf., Rom 1:16; Matt 15:24, 26). The basic element of consumption is bread. Following the miracle, Jesus teaches the crowds the meaning of Deuteronomy 8:3 in the Bread of Life Dialogue.
- The Feeding of the 4,000 (Mark 8:1–9)  
This separate feeding narrative depicts salvation "also to the Greek" (cf., Rom 1:16; Matt 15:27–28). Like the previous feeding narrative, the basic element of the meal is bread.
- The Last Supper (Matt 26:26–29; 5:6; 1 Cor 1:30)  
Following the major feeding narratives, both of which serve as precursors, Jesus institutes the Eucharist. His continued emphasis that the bread of life is, in fact, his body continues to echo Deuteronomy 8:3. It also connects himself to the words of his Sermon on the Mount, as St. Paul emphasizes in his first letter to the Corinthians. Additionally, this meal takes place within the context of the Passover, during which the eating of unleavened bread recalled the salvation God had worked for the people of Israel in their exodus from Egypt.
- The Meal on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–35)  
After the resurrection, Jesus walks with two of his followers on the road to Emmaus, but neither of them recognizes him. He stays with them into the evening and eats with them. It is not until the breaking of the bread, following much the same format as in the upper room, that the two followers recognize him. After the resurrection, and certainly after the Ascension, Jesus is seen and recognized within the Eucharist—within the breaking of the bread.



*Fresco depiction of eucharistic bread and fish from the early third century.*

"I have no taste for corruptible food nor for the pleasures of this life. I desire the Bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, who was of the seed of David; and for drink I desire his blood, which is love incorruptible." ~ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Romans* 7:3