

# THE SACRAMENT

A Historical View

LEE H. VAN DAM

# THE SACRAMENT – A Historical View

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## About the Author



# Preface

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For many years, I have been interested in the history of the sacrament in this dispensation. While serving as a young missionary for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I remember creating a special folder in which I placed information concerning the sacrament – talks, articles, stories, anecdotes, quotes, and such. Eventually that small folder, which grew thicker and thicker over time, was replaced by a number of larger folders and binders about the sacrament.

This book is my attempt to put in writing some of the things I have learned about the sacrament and its fascinating history. As I do so, I wish to express my appreciation to the many people whose meaningful articles, talks, insights, stories, and comments about the sacrament have influenced the contents of this book.

I hope you enjoy reading it. Writing it has been a marvelous experience for me.

- Lee H. Van Dam







## Three Special Sacrament Services

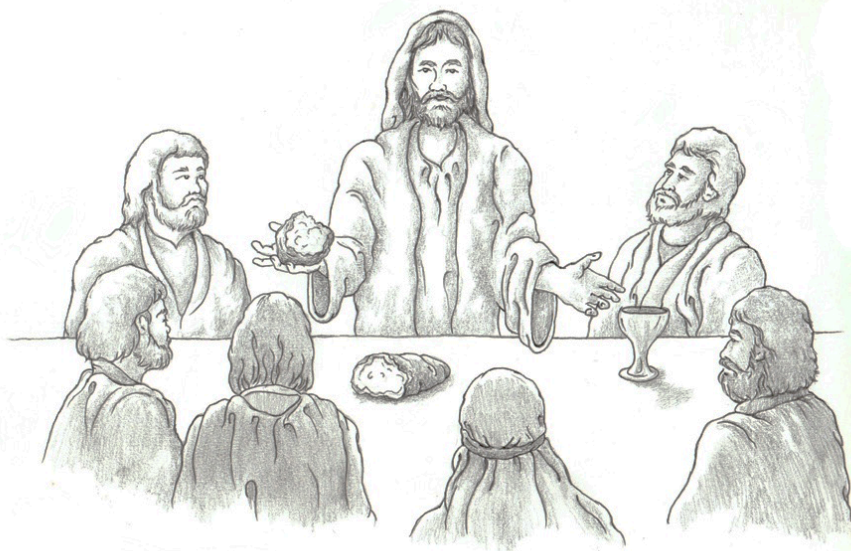
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**Wouldn't it have been a wonderful privilege to have been in attendance at three of the most significant sacrament services ever held?** All sacrament services are special, but in my mind, three of the most meaningful ones in history were the Last Supper, the time that Jesus Christ first administered the sacrament to the Nephites, and the meeting on April 6, 1830 where the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized and the sacrament was first administered in this dispensation.

### The Last Supper

Although the term Last Supper doesn't appear in the scriptures, many people, Christians and non-Christians alike, know to some extent what is meant by the expression. Through the scriptures, and because of the many talks, books, articles, and lessons on the subject, **we, as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, are privileged to have an especially wonderful understanding of the Last Supper and its significance.** Among the many accounts of this event, I particularly like the way Elder James E. Talmage described the Last Supper in his book *Jesus the Christ*. On pages 596 and 597, he writes:

“While Jesus with the Twelve sat at table, He took a loaf or cake of bread, and having reverently given thanks and by blessing sanctified it, He gave a portion to each of the apostles, saying: ‘Take, eat; this is my body.’ Then, taking a cup of wine, He gave thanks and blessed it, and gave it unto them with the command: ‘Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.’ In this simple but impressive manner was instituted the ordinance, since known as the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.”



This first-ever sacrament service, held in a plain upper room in Jerusalem, **provided the pattern we follow today in our sacrament services** – a pattern of reverence, sanctity, and thanksgiving as we remember the life and Atonement of Jesus Christ.

## Christ's Visit to the Nephites

The introduction to the Book of Mormon says, **“The crowning event recorded in the Book of Mormon is the personal ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ among the Nephites soon after His resurrection.”** As recorded in 3 Nephi, one of the most significant things that Jesus did while visiting the multitude in the land Bountiful was to institute the sacrament. In Chapter 18 we read that Jesus commanded his disciples to bring bread and wine to Him. He took the bread and blessed it and gave it to the disciples and the multitude. He then did the same with the wine. He instructed them that they should always observe to do this in remembrance of the body He had shown them and the blood that He had shed for them. **He promised that if they partook of the bread and wine in remembrance of Him, they would always have His Spirit with them.**

A day later, as recorded in Chapter 20, Jesus returned and administered the sacrament a second time. He told the multitude, “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. Now when the multitude had all eaten and drunk, behold, they were filled with the Spirit; and they did cry out with one voice, and gave glory to Jesus, whom they both saw and heard.”

## The Organization of the Church

**April 6, 1830 was a remarkable day.** After nearly 2,000 years, the authorized Church of Jesus Christ was restored to the earth. The meeting to officially organize the Church was held on **Tuesday, April 6, rather than on a Sunday**, in order to honor and commemorate the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ on April 6. The book *Saints, the Standard of Truth* says the following on page 84 about that special day:

“On April 6, 1830, Joseph and Oliver met in the Whitmer home to follow the Lord’s commandment and organize His

church. To fulfill the requirements of the law, they chose six people to become the first members of the new church. Around forty women and men also crowded into and around the small home to witness the occasion.”

After the meeting was opened, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were sustained by those in attendance, after which Joseph laid his hands on the head of Oliver and ordained him an elder in the church. Then Oliver ordained Joseph. Continuing on page 85 of *Saints*, we read:

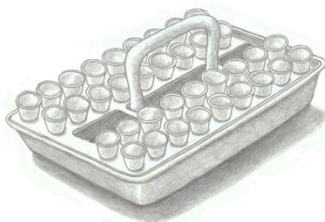
**“Afterward, they (Joseph and Oliver) administered the bread and wine of the sacrament in remembrance of Christ’s Atonement.** They then laid hands on those who had been baptized, confirming them members of the church and giving them the gift of the Holy Ghost. The Lord’s Spirit was poured out on those in the meeting, and some in the congregation began to prophesy. Others praised the Lord, and all rejoiced together.”

## Conclusion

I am grateful for these three special occasions when the sacrament was administered – in Jerusalem, in the land Bountiful, and in the Whitmer home. **As I ponder these accounts, I am impressed with the sanctity and deep meaning of the sacrament ordinance.** I am also impressed with its simplicity.

How grateful I am for the restored gospel, for modern-day revelation, and for the precious opportunity we have to partake of the sacrament each Sunday in remembrance of the remarkable Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. **I love the Savior and am profoundly grateful for His love for me and for His sacrifice in my behalf.**

## *Sacrament Term*



## *Cenacle*

**The Cenacle (pronounced sen'i kəl) is the traditional site in Jerusalem where many Christians believe the upper room is located – the room in which the Last Supper took place and where Christ instituted the sacrament.** The word cenacle comes from Latin and means dining room. The Cenacle is located outside the current walls of Jerusalem in an area called Mt. Zion. During Christ's time, this region was part of the city of Jerusalem.

The scriptures make reference in two places (**Mark 14:15-16 and Luke 22:12-13**) to an upper room being the location of the events of the Last Supper. In Mark we read, "And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. And the disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover."

If you have the opportunity of taking a tour of the holy sites while visiting Jerusalem, your guide will probably take you to visit the Cenacle. **It is a large room with ornate Gothic pillars and a high vaulted ceiling.** It is located in the King David's Tomb compound.

There is considerable debate among scholars concerning whether or not this is the actual room where the Last Supper took place.

(Note – Many Christians also claim that the Cenacle is the location where the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples on the day of Pentecost.)

