

*Finding McLuhan: The Mind/The Man/The Message* (ed. J. Mcleod Rogers et al.; Regina, Saskatchewan 2015) 221–43. ■ Kalmár, I., “The Future of ‘Tribal Man’ in the Electronic Age” [1984], repr. in *Marshall McLuhan: Critical Evaluations in Cultural Theory*, vol. 2: *Theoretical Elaborations* (ed. G. Genosko; London 2005) 227–32. ■ *Marshall McLuhan: “The Official Site for the Estate of Marshall McLuhan”* (www.marshallmcluhan.com). ■ Schuchardt, R. M., “The Medium is the Messiah: McLuhan’s Religion and Its Relationship to His Media Theory,” *Renascence* 64.1 (2011) 43–53. ■ Wilson, R. A., *Cosmic Trigger*, vol. 1: *Final Secret of the Illuminati* [1977] (Tempe, Ariz. 1986).

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See also → Media Criticism

## Meal Customs

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### I. Ancient Near East

The fertility of Mesopotamia and its two main rivers was legendary in antiquity, giving rise to the legend of the Garden of Eden. In addition to the river valleys, forested mountains and foothills east of the rivers, the steppe towards the north, the western desert, swamps, thickets, and the southern lagoons provided diverse biotopes that produced a rich supply of varied foodstuffs and allowed a distinct local cuisine to develop.

The Mesopotamian kitchen made use of many vegetables and garden greens, a multitude of herbs, legumes, mushrooms, aromatics, fruit, berries, and nuts. Meats included goat, beef, pork, mutton, and game. Blood was used as an emulsifier. Common types of fat were sesame oil and the fat from fat-tailed sheep. Two common bird domesticates were duck and goose. Insects were eaten as well, including grasshoppers and locusts. Rivers, marshes, and lagoons provided a variety of sweet- and saltwater fish, crayfish, shrimp, shells and mollusks.

People drank water, beer, grape wine, date wine, and fruit juices. In southern Mesopotamia, beer and date wine were prominent; in the north, grape wine was common. People of means enjoyed drinks cooled by ice transported from the mountains and stored in icehouses.

Customary condiments were vinegar and fermented fish brine, which formed a culinary pair for taste and balance. They seem to have been used with every meal. Two dozen spices, including cumin, saf-

ron, and coriander, are known. Moreover, various documents list spice mortars and expert “spice cooks,” and give instructions on how to roast and dry spices. This underlines the spicy and aromatic nature of the Mesopotamian kitchen. Another distinct element was a limitless access to sweeteners. The sweet fruit of the date palm was used fresh, fermented, dried, or made into syrup. Its great economic importance is articulated in the realms of literature, art, and religion.

Dishes included breads, cakes, pies, porridges, soups, stews, and roasts. A larger proportion of the food than today was probably eaten raw. There seems to have been no essential distinction between sweet and savory dishes, and no conventions about the order in which to eat them. Presentation took precedence over order, with many dishes served together and continuously during a seating.

Pictorial representations of banquets high and low are known throughout Mesopotamian history. The consumption of food and drink was an important way of giving and claiming social status. Banquets could be highly regulated events at which control of space and access was combined with displays of wealth and exoticism. One text lists detailed regulations of conduct at a courtly feast. Food and drink were also important elements in mortuary rituals.

The literary composition “The Infernal Kitchen” presents a caricature of menus clearly meant to combine authentic elements of cooking with burlesque and evidently disgusting ones to create a comic mockery of the preparation and presentation of food. It reveals concern with the seasonality of ingredients and a strong interest in combining and serving dishes, which presumably also applied to actual cooking.

The way ingredients were incorporated, and the sophisticated culinary techniques found in Mesopotamian recipes, point to the existence of an haute cuisine separate from everyday gastronomy. Four collections of food recipes from ancient Mesopotamia are known, which feature such dishes. Three date to the Old Babylonian period, ca. 1730 BCE; a fourth text dates more than a thousand years later. Rather than focusing on savory and sweet, the recipes differentiate “meat” from “green” or “meatless” dishes, and also distinguish local from foreign cuisine. Some dishes bear conventional names, often recalling the preparation or a chief ingredient.

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### II. Ancient Egypt

A frequent request found inscribed on ancient Egyptian tombs is that passersby wish the deceased “1,000 of bread and beer.” These two items were

the primary foods consumed during the Pharaonic era. Upper-class Egyptians dined on bread and beer from institutional bakeries and breweries, commonly depicted in Old through Middle Kingdom tomb paintings and represented by models. Non-elite women worked together to bake and brew for their households. Bread was often made of emmer, but sometimes of barley, particularly before the New Kingdom. Beer was primarily barley-based. Other foods, including pulses such as beans and lentils, and vegetables like onions and lettuce, were eaten with bread as a “sauce” or “garnish.” Lower classes consumed fish, but very little meat, including that of sheep, goat, pig, fowl, and cow. Circumstantial evidence suggests Egyptians ate two large meals, in the morning and the evening, possibly with small meals or snacks in between. Words translated as “breakfast” and “supper” exist in the Egyptian language, and occur together in Pyramid Text 409 and Coffin Texts 261, 660, and 207. While no word for lunch or midday meal has been identified, biological requirements suggest food was consumed between breakfast and supper, possibly in an informal setting. Eating together created and maintained crucial social links. Feasting was a significant part of religious holidays and festivals, and an essential aspect of remembering or worshiping ancestors. Elites depicted themselves in tomb art seated with their families before banquet tables, emphasizing the link between household and food. Food consumption was also deeply meaningful for non-elites. In two personal letters recovered from the workmen’s village of Deir el-Medina, writers address friends as “eating companions,” showing that eating and those with whom one ate were important social indicators. The connection between food and social identity is evident in many biblical passages, demonstrating the universality of this link.

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### III. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

Consideration of meal customs in the HB/OT can be approached through the matrices of social status, yearly rhythm, shared or foreign identity, and on a lesser scale, sedentary versus transhumant. These categories often overlap in various ways. Furthermore, little variation appears in the texts of the HB/OT throughout the various ages until the onset of Hellenism in the 4th century BCE, which led to a new set of meal customs and symbolic values (see “Meal Customs V. New Testament”).

In any case, the basic structure of the mundane meals in Israel and Judah consisted of the everyday triad of grains, wine, and oil, found, for example in Deut 7:12–13; 11:13–14. The historical nature of the depiction in these texts is supported by the early 6th-century ostraca found in the excavation of Tel Arad, in Judah’s south, which contain records of soldiers’ rations made up of grain, flour, bread, oil, and wine. Furthermore, the same goods were brought to temple personnel in 2 Chr 31:5 and Neh 13:12.

In terms of daily rhythm, it is generally assumed (though rarely discussed) that breakfast consisted of gruel or porridge. Lunch was often light and eaten away from the home in the fields (cf. Ruth 2:14; therefore contrast Gen 43:16, 25; 1 Kgs 20:16), with the evening meal being the main meal of the day. Depending on the season, dried or ripe fruit, some vegetables, pulses, and nuts could have supplemented the grains.

This basic meal structure also forms the basis for understanding deviations from it in the biblical texts in order to evaluate their specific flavors and emphases.

Given the depiction of the ancestors largely as transhumant herders in Gen 12–50, the meal customs of such groups influence the biblical portrayal, particularly in two ways. The first is the emphasis on the underlying ethic of hospitality for travelers and outsiders. Abraham’s spontaneous feast for the three visitors (Gen 18), and the credo of Deut 26:5–9 underscore the precarious situation of migrants (cf. Gen 46:34). The second influential element is the presence of certain foodstuffs, especially dairy (cf. Gen 18:8; Judg 4:19).

A significant number of the biblical meal customs concern festive meals in sanctuary or palace settings. Such settings highlight the status of the participants, given the visibility of symbolically high-value foodstuffs, especially meat (1 Kgs 4:22–23 [ET: 5:2–3]) and fine wheat flour (Lev 2:1–2), and they often include a more diverse menu than common meals. The more lavish sanctuary meals were enjoyed more regularly by temple functionaries (e.g., 1 Sam 2:12–15) and in theory three times a year by all Israelites (Deut 16:1–17). There was, therefore, a yearly rhythm between mundane eating and the festive times of Passover-Unleavened Bread in the early spring, Weeks in early summer, and Booths after the final harvest in the fall.

A number of additional elements play a role in the elite sphere. Important social messages are communicated through factors such as seating order, the use of specific dishes and cups, and invitations. While chairs (the same word is used for “throne”) were rare in the ANE and the HB/OT, the seating of the fifty high deities in Marduk’s dedication feast in *Enuma Elish* indicates that the celebration of the completion of his palace was very important, and a

similar significance appears in the queen of Sheba's breathless response to "the seating of Solomon's courtiers" in 1 Kgs 10:5.

Likewise, while the nature of the dishes and cups does not appear in relation to common meals, the splendor especially of the cup is highlighted at elite meals. In the royal sphere, the king's drinking vessel is placed prominently in a depiction of a victory celebration on an ivory from Megiddo from the Late Bronze Age (15th–13th cent.), a motif reflected in Ps 23:5 (cf. Pss 16:5; 116:13; and possibly Gen 43–44). The cup takes on even more significance under the Persians (6th–4th cent. BCE), when the Persian Emperor made special gifts of his own cups, which Greek authors recount and is also prominent in Esther. This significance of the dinnerware is also especially on display in the cultic and prophetic spheres.

The significance of the seating order, while less central in the HB/OT, is apparent in, for example, 1 Sam 9:22, where Samuel seats the future king Saul at the head of the guests (and goes on to give him a special portion of the meat). Similarly in 1 Sam 20:25, Abner, Saul's general, takes his place at the king's side, indicating the place of importance.

Rather than seating order, HB/OT texts focus more on the importance of an actual invitation itself as in Esth 5:12 (cf. 1 Kgs 1). Similarly, Barzillai, who provided David with hospitality in David's moment of need while fleeing Absalom, is provided with a reciprocal invitation to return with David to Jerusalem (2 Sam 19:33). The description of the favor is largely the enjoyment of the royal table, and presumably favor in the royal eye. It is a short step in the narrative from seeing the sharing of food as an intimacy that nourishes political or other types of royal favor.

In the cultic sphere where elite dining is not the sole concern – purity and holiness being of central importance – divine consumption is also close to the heart of matters. In the same way that the deities in Ugarit and Babylon have their special drinking and eating vessels, the plates and cups in the Israelite sanctuaries also have their splendor: in Exod 25:29–30, the vessels for the drink offering and plates for the Bread of the Presence are to be made of pure gold, and the same is the case for the First Temple in 1 Kgs 7:48.

In terms of ingredients, meat plays a central role in distinguishing the boundaries between God and humanity, and between Israel and foreign nations. The meat of sanctuary meals is limited in Lev 1–7 to the meat from select species of domestic large land animals and several types of birds (caught, rather than domestic). The dietary prescriptions in Lev 11/Deut 14 reflect and expand the acceptable categories of meat for the Israelites to include some marine animals and other land animals and fowl. These stipulations intend – expressly in Deut 14:2,

21 – to distinguish the Israelites from others. Especially in late HB/OT texts, such distinctions take on increased roles as a means to maintain Israelite or Jewish identity (Isa 66:17; Dan 1; 1 Macc 1:47; 2 Macc 6:18–20).

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#### IV. Greco-Roman Antiquity

Meals differed in name and according to period and geography, but generally depending on economic status Greeks and Romans ate three meals a day, a light breakfast at dawn, a main meal (Gk. δειπνον; Lat. *cena*) at mid to later afternoon, and a light supper. Greeks and Romans ate at a variety of public and private meals that followed centuries long practices and expectations (banquets, association [*collegium*; ἔθνος; θίασος; etc.] meals, graveside commemorations, civic festivals, temple meals) which served also to mark social status.

Greek and Roman satirists (e.g., Lucian, *Sym.*; Petronius, *Sat.*) attest to hierarchical distinctions in their derision of inequitable distribution of quality and amount of food at banquets with hosts and special guests receiving better portions. Festive meals (typically mid-afternoon to the early hours), for which Athenaeus, *Deipn.* furnishes invaluable information for the Greek East, were three courses (d'oeuvres, main, desert) followed by a symposium. In the West guests reclined leaning on their left arms on rectangular couches (κλίνη) and ate with their right hands from shared plates on a parallel bench. In the Greek east they also reclined on curved *sigmae* – or σιβάδια – couches accompanied by shared round tables. Three κλιναι, of typically five guests each lined dining room walls (hence *triclinium* for dining room); σιβάδια allowed for five to nine diners. Women, children, and slaves when present traditionally sat at the foot of the couch or on chairs or benches. Vitruvius (*De Architectura* 6.7.2, 5) describes the Greek household in which men and women banqueted separately in their own dining rooms (ἀνδρών – lavishly decorated; γυναικῶν – plainly so), but material evidence indicates this was not universal. In the high Empire women who attended feasts increasingly reclined with their husbands.

At the symposium, traditionally males but later also women assembled for after dinner discussion that included speeches, recitations of poetry and myths, as well as entertainment that could include sexual activities with attending slaves. The sympo-

sium was punctuated by a series of libations and drinks of wines with a series of craters dedicated to various deities used in a strict succession. Buildings constructed or rented for larger association meetings could include several sets of arranged couches in order to host dozens of members and furnished a visible means together with different portions of food and wine to distinguish elected officials/patrons from others. Banquets at rented temple dining rooms were believed to be accompanied by the deity to whom food was offered in sacrifice. Outside of festive meals, the wealthier ate as the poor did, on chairs at tables. All aspects of food gatherings and meal gatherings were accompanied by rituals; prayers were said over the prepared food as well as at its consumption and the symposium was customarily concluded with a formulaic prayer to health.

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## V. New Testament

Dining practices in Greco-Roman culture, including in Judaism, were important to the emergence of Christian communities, as reflected in many NT texts and stories. Meals involving discourse and other forms of structured social interaction between select diners were common to Greek, Roman, and Jewish settings. Such gatherings held by families or friends, in public, or by associates can be referred to loosely as *συμπόσια*, more strictly the drinking sessions following Greek meals in particular. Despite some cultural distinctions, and well-known controversies involving issues such as order, company, posture, food and drink, it is possible to discern a common ancient Mediterranean meal tradition. The meal was a setting for discourse about significant matters, and was itself counted among such matters.

**1. Jesus as Diner.** The Gospels all present Jesus as eating and drinking. The uncomplimentary memory that Jesus was a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt 11:19) may reflect the historical reality of Jesus’ diverse meal companions. The idea of a distinct meal tradition associated with Jesus (rather than with his first followers) is otherwise unconvincing, given the centrality of formal dining across that society. Jesus’ teaching at table, including about meals themselves, reflects wider debates and controversies about issues such as seating, decorum, and foods. These stories also reflect issues at Christian gatherings, such as qualification for participation (Matt 22:2–14; *Gos. Thom.* 64). Luke’s Gospel goes furthest in developing a picture of Jesus’ presence and discourses at

table (14:1–24; cf. 11:37–52), evoking Greco-Roman philosophical banquets.

**2. Last Supper and Passover.** The “institution narratives” of the Last Supper (Mark 14:22–25 par.; 1 Cor 11:23–26) were not initially ritual recitations, but etiological stories linking the earliest Christian meals with their founder, including a further imperative (in Paul’s and Luke’s versions) given by the command to “do this.” Since Christian meals may have preceded those stories, they should be seen as interpretive in force rather than causative for the mere fact of Christian meals. The Synoptic Gospels do present the final meal of Jesus as a celebration of Passover, but since (other) evidence for the Seder is later (see *mPes*) and similarities of form are few, claimed connections between the Seder and the Synoptic and Pauline supper narratives are of limited value. This does not preclude historical identification of the Last Supper as a Passover, however, and Christian reflection on Jesus as “paschal lamb” was significant. Yet regular eucharistic practice seems related only obliquely to the still-emerging rituals of the Seder.

**3. Christian Meals.** Other NT meal scenes reflect aspects of the sympotic tradition, and presumably of early Christian practice. The miraculous feeding or sign of the loaves (Mark 6:34–44 par.) involves a common ritual sequence of taking, blessing, breaking, and distributing bread in the Synoptics. A slightly different pattern is found in the Gospel of John, whose use of this tradition with the language of Jesus’ “flesh” and “blood” is reminiscent of the Last Supper; but this is more likely to reflect ancient discourse about acceptance of a teacher’s wisdom (Sir 15:3 etc.) than some early sacramental realism.

Meal scenes and controversies in Acts and Pauline literature affirm the centrality of communal meals to early networks of Christ-followers. In Acts, “breaking of the bread” is used with some technical resonance regarding Christian gatherings (2:42, 20:7). The story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35) and the related recognition episode in John (21:1–14) suggest a tradition of knowledge and presence of the risen Jesus at meals.

Stories in Acts concerning commensality and Jewish dietary laws (Acts 10 and 15), while in some tension with the more contemporary Pauline (Gal 2:11–14) account of these controversies, reflect the negotiation of dietary rules and related issues of commensality between Jewish and gentile diners. Concerns about eating meat (1 Cor 8:13) and drinking wine (1 Tim 5:23) seem to have been more ubiquitous and lasting for Christian groups than were kosher rules as such.

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## VI. Judaism

Judaism has many laws and practices around meals and food consumption that have biblical connections. In what follows, after a brief discussion of the blessing after a meal (Grace after Meals) and meal customs associated with the Sabbath, we will move through the Jewish calendar in chronological sequence.

**1. Grace After Meals.** The institution of *Birkat hamazon*, or Grace after Meals, is based on the verse in Deut 8:10: “You shall eat your fill and bless the LORD your God for the good land that he has given you.” The three main blessings of the prayer are attributed to 1) Moses, in thanks for the manna, 2) Joshua, upon entering the land of Israel, 3) David and Solomon, since the former conquered Jerusalem and the latter built the temple, and 4) the rabbis at Yavneh (*bBer* 48b). Rabbi Isaac Luria explained that these four correspond to the four letters of the tetragrammaton (Vital, *Sha’ar ha-kawwanot, Derush* 1, “Regarding the Table”). Rabbinic teaching interpreted the biblical requirement for reciting the Grace after Meals as being invoked after eating an olive-volume of bread. Medieval kabbalists noticed the discrepancy between the satiety of the verse and the legally-defined olive-volume, explaining that through mystical contemplation upon the olive-volume, mystical, and perhaps even somatic satiety would occur (*Zohar* 2:153a–b). Moreover, the blessing increases power within the supernal realm (*Zohar* 2:168b). On account of the biblical requirement that the showbread be present constantly upon the tabernacle’s/temple’s table (Exod 25:30), kabbalists inferred that blessing would not rest upon an empty place, and therefore one must leave at least a few crumbs on the table before reciting the Grace after the Meals (Nahmanides on Exod 25:24; *Zohar* 2:155a).

The seven blessings recited after the Grace after Meals in honor of a new bride and groom have many biblical resonances, recalling the creation of the world and of humans in particular (nos. 1–3), the ingathering of the exiles (no. 4), Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (no. 5), and the joy of newlyweds (Jer 33:14) (no. 6).

In general, on the Sabbath and festivals, it is customary to eat meat, since joy was associated with meat consumption (see Deut 16:14; *bPes* 109a). The same could be said for wine, based on Ps 104:15. The main meals on the Sabbath and Festivals begin with a blessing over a cup of wine (*qiddush*). According to Luria, the combination of bread and wine

served as symbols of the right and left hands of Divinity, respectively, serving to unite the polar forces of Loving-kindness and Judgment (Vital, *Sha’ar ha-kawwanot, Derush* 1, “Regarding the Table”).

**2. Sabbath.** According to the talmudic interpretation of the three iterations of the word “today” in Exod 16:25, one is obligated to eat three meals on the Sabbath (*bShab* 117b). The *Zohar* indicates that these three meals correspond to three different personae within the Godhead. At the Sabbath meals, there is a requirement to have two loaves of bread for the recitation of the blessing “who brings forth bread from the earth” (cf. Ps 104:14). This memorializes the two portions of manna which God sent on the Sabbath as described in Exod 16:22–29. There is a kabbalistic custom based on the teaching of the *Zohar* 2:88a to have twelve loaves of bread in memory of the twelve loaves of showbread displayed in the tabernacle and the temple.

**3. Rosh Hashanah.** The Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is associated especially with the eating of apples and honey. While Rosh Hashanah is not a biblical holiday, some customs associated with it were given biblical associations. E.g., the apple (q.v.) was seen as the ideal fruit, originating in the Garden of Eden. The custom of eating a fish-head is alluded to in the verse “And the LORD will make thee the head, and not the tail” (Deut 28:13), as a sign of strength for the beginning of the new year. Pomegranates are also a favorite food for Rosh Hashanah, their numerous seeds seen as a sign of fruitfulness and alluding to the 613 commandments in the Torah.

**4. Yom Kippur.** Yom Kippur is a fast day, but a tradition of eating a festive meal before the fast emerged in response to an apparent contradiction between Lev 23:27 and 23:32. The former says that the fasting occurs on the tenth day of the tenth month, while the latter indicates that it begins on the evening of the ninth day. The rabbis harmonize the two, explaining that if one eats a hearty meal on the ninth of Tishrei that the observance will be ascribed to them as if they had fasted for both days (see *bBer* 8b).

**5. Sukkot.** On Sukkot, the Feast of Booths, the biblical requirement to dwell in booths (Lev 23:42–43) is fulfilled mainly by eating meals there. A special blessing is recited acknowledging God’s commandment “to dwell in booths.” Isaac Luria instructed that on each of the seven nights of the festival a different biblical figure (*ushpizin*, or guests – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, David) should be invited to join the celebrants, corresponding to the seven lower sefirot, gradients, of the Divine Being.

**6. Pesah (Passover).** On Passover, a special ritual is observed the first night (first two nights in the Diaspora), called the Seder, whose purpose is to

commemorate the exodus of the Israelite nation from Egypt. Many foods are eaten in the course of the ceremony whose purpose is to recall various aspects of the time of slavery in Egypt and the exodus. The eating of *matsah*, unleavened bread, is required on the night of the seder. The *matsah*, which is laden with symbolic significance, is called “the bread of affliction,” (Deut 16:3) a reminder of the time of slavery in Egypt. It also recalls the exodus itself, during which the Israelites had no time to bake leavened bread and rushed out of Egypt with the unleavened cakes on their shoulders (Exod 12:39). Finally, the *afiqoman*, the piece of *matsah* hidden away at the beginning of the seder, is brought out at the end of the meal, and eaten as a reminder of the Paschal sacrifice which is meant to be eaten on a full stomach (*MekhY Pasha* 6, based on Num 9:11). Bitter herbs are consumed as a reminder of the bitterness of slavery. And a special food is eaten along with the bitter herbs, called *haroset*, which is meant to be a reminder of the mortar used for making bricks by the Israelite slaves. Therefore, its texture should be thick like mortar or clay. According to another view it should be red and runny, to remind one of the blood of the paschal lamb put on the doorposts by the Israelites on the night of the exodus (Exod 12:22–23; *yPes* 37d; see Weingarten: 9). The ingredients of the *haroset* also have biblical connections. According to the widespread Ashkenazi custom, the main ingredient of *haroset* is apples, a reminder of Song 8:5, “Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor.” This verse is applied to the exodus story. According to a midrash, the Israelite women came out to the fields and seduced their men, so that the Israelite people would multiply and prosper. Since this sexual activity was said to have happened under apple trees, prompting the choice of apples. Another important ingredient of the *haroset* is walnuts, which recalls Song 6:11.

**7. Shavuot.** The festival of Shavuot is celebrated in commemoration of the Revelation at Mt. Sinai and the giving of the Torah to the Israelite nation through the prophet Moses. It is a widespread custom since the Middle Ages (13th–14th cent. Provence) to eat dairy products at the Shavuot meals. The reason for this is probably the ready availability of milk and other dairy products in the spring after the calving season and the weaning of the calves (Cooper). But rabbis soon offered spiritual explanations for this custom, tying it to biblical verses. Two important 14th-century Provençal works, *Orhot hayyim* by Aaron Hakohen of Lunel and *Kol bo*, an abridgement of the former, attribute the custom of eating dairy and honey on Shavuot to the verse in Song of Songs, “honey and milk are under your tongue” (Song 4:11), since the Torah is likened to these two foods.

**8. Hanukkah.** Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Maccabees over their Greek oppressors (see 1/2 Macc) as well as the miracle of the cruse of oil from the temple that lasted eight days instead of the expected one day (*bShab* 21b). In commemoration of this miracle, it became the custom to eat food prepared with a lot of oil. In Ashkenazic lands, potato pancakes were the oily food of choice, while in Sephardic lands jelly donuts and other fried foods were more common.

**9. Tu Bishevat.** On Tu Bishevat, the 15th day of the month of Shevat in the Jewish calendar, which marks the new year of the trees, it is customary to eat foods that are native to the land of Israel as listed in Deut 8:8 – wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates. A seder for Tu Bishevat, which is modeled after the Passover seder with its use of the number four, was developed in Sabbatian circles, drawing on many biblical passages (see Buxbaum; Elon et al.).

**10. Purim.** The festival of Purim celebrates the victory of the Jewish people over their enemies in the Persian kingdom. Esther 9:15, 18, 19, 22, mention the requirement to observe the day with feasting and gladness. From this derived the custom of an obligatory festive meal on Purim, sometime during the day. While no special foods are associated with this meal, Purim is associated with *homntashn*, three-cornered pastries filled with poppy seeds or other fillings. Originating in Eastern Europe and called *mon-tashn* or poppy seed pockets, these pastries took on the name of Haman, the arch-villain of the story, and were transformed into “Haman’s-pockets.” Based on the parodic nature of the Book of Esther with its series of surprising reversals there is a rabbinic injunction to drink alcoholic beverages to the point of intoxication, expressed as the inability to distinguish between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordecai” (*bMeg* 7b).

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## VII. Christianity

■ Greek Patristics and Orthodox Churches ■ Medieval Times to Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America ■ New Christian Churches and Movements ■ World Christianity

### A. Greek Patristics and Orthodox Churches

Eastern Greek Christianity through the Patristic and Byzantine periods practiced and developed meals identified in the NT, primarily the Eucharist

and the Agape meal (whether embedded together or separable), but it also developed a host of other customs and rituals, developed rules for eating at both regular meals and festive banquets and developed eating codes for monastics, many of them building on non-Christian eating customs. Ignatius of Antioch (*Smyrn.* 8.2), the *Didache* (9–10), and Justin Martyr (1 *Apol.* 65, 67) as well as Pliny the Younger (*Ep.* 10.96) present the earliest extracanonical evidence of communal meals. The *Didache* includes prayers of eucharistic blessing perhaps in the context of a larger banquet. Justin describes Eucharistic celebrations attended by prayers, a kiss of peace, and the distribution of wine with water and bread, as well as deacons bringing consecrated portions to those absent, some of which is confirmed by the *Apostolic Tradition* (4–6, 22–33) and parallel traditions from the *Canons of Hippolytus*, the *Didascalia*, and the *Testamentum domini* (dating from the early 3rd cent. to 4th cent.).

This literature describes a multitude of emergent Christian meal customs as well as liturgical traditions, which include prayers of consecration of bread and wine; the blessing at the altar of food brought by individuals presumably for their own consumption; rules for fasting; prayers at common liturgical meals (Eucharist and/or Agape); private prayers guests are to say individually over their own food at banquets; regulations for the presence or absence of catechumens at meals where the Eucharist is included; exhortations not to eat immoderately; bringing blessed food to the sick and widows; prayers and ritual recitations of Psalms accompanying the lighting of lamps at communal meals; meals of gatherings of widows; the blessing of first fruits of harvest; fasting between Good Friday and Easter. The complex redaction and diverse translation of these texts offer a view of developing shared customs and their geographical diversity.

Outside of these customs, various groups also emphasized consumption of differing items such as milk, cheese, honey oil, bread, salt, and water as either substitution for or complements to eucharistic meal elements. Basil of Caesarea (*Ep.* 93) describes a common practice amongst the laity throughout the Greek East of taking Eucharistic bread home to be consumed at one's leisure. A 4th-century monastic text (Pseudo-Athanasius, *De Virginitate* 12–14) describes a tradition of prayers before, during and after the only meal of the day, accompanied by threefold making the sign of the cross and refrain at the start and conclusion of the meal. Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 2.1–4) presumes the presence of Christians at festive meals and draws on ideals of regulation of desire from Middle Platonism and the development of ἀπάθεια from Stoicism to shape their behavior there. Monastic rules (*Regula Antonii* ascribed to Antony of Egypt for anchorites; the Longer [*Regulae Fusius Tractatae*] and

Shorter Rule [*Regulae Brevius Tractatae*] of Basil of Caesarea for cenobitic Cappadocian ascetics and his sermon on worldly renunciation [De Renuntiatione Saeculi]; and the Precepts [*Praecepta*] associated with Pachomius for cenobitic monks) focus on rules for kinds of food permissible to eat, quantities, meal comportment, reclining at meals, as well as fasting regulations. Christians developed the Greek and Roman tradition of commemorating the dead with meals at grave sites on death anniversaries and other festivals by sharing meals at cemeteries, including on festivals commemorating martyrs at the site of their death where the Eucharist was also celebrated.

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## B. Medieval Times to Reformation Era

In most medieval monasteries the monks or nuns ate together, following the reported practice of the first Christian community (Acts 2:44–46). In the West, the *Rule of Benedict* governed dining, quoting a Gospel injunction against gluttony (Luke 21:34; ch. 39) and Christ's command to receive guests as himself (Matt 25:35; ch. 53). Quadraped flesh was banned (ch. 39), with the blood prohibition and cleanliness rules of Leviticus in view. In contrast, fish were enjoyed in large quantities, having been key to the Galilean economy that sustained the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. From the early 13th century, however, the new Franciscans and Dominicans adopted a largely secular diet by accepting hospitality and gifts, consciously continuing Jesus' practice of dining out (e.g., Luke 15:2). In wider society, the quantity and quality of foods consumed varied by season and circumstance, reflecting biblical feasts (Gen 43:26–34; Esth 9:16–19) and famines (Gen 47:13–19; Acts 11:27–30). The whole annual cycle of feasting and fasting was grounded in the biblical narratives about Jesus, with the Advent fast preceding the Christmas celebration of his birth; Lent coming before the Easter commemoration of his resurrection; and abstinence following Pentecost recalling his instruction to his disciples to fast after he was taken from them (Matt 9:15; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:35). Abstaining on Fridays recollected his crucifixion.

At the Reformation, major controversy erupted over whether inherited dining practices were (mere) custom or biblically well-grounded. Zwingli cited many NT texts to contest Lenten meat, dairy, and egg abstinence, arguing that what a person consumes does not defile them (Matt 15:17). He added that God told Peter that all foods are clean (Acts 10:15) and that Paul teaches that all foods are law-

ful, are a matter of divine indifference, and are eaten according to conscience (1 Cor 6:12; 8:8; 10:25). Nevertheless, in places like England and Scotland, the HB/OT imagery of a united and purified nation under a godly sovereign contributed, with Calvinist influence, to an intensification of Lenten abstinence by increased meat-free days and tougher enforcement. In any case, the need to find and preserve meat alternatives led to the development of the salting and drying of fish, as well as to the use of almonds, which could be made into a milk or used instead of eggs to bind other ingredients.

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### C. Modern Europe and America

Concerns about what, how, and with whom people eat are pivotal in both HB/OT and NT stories. The treatment of food and meal practices form important metaphors in many biblical stories, illustrating central religious concepts about identity, community, and purity. Concerns among modern Christian communities about fellowship, service, and identity are strongly shaped by understandings of biblical texts. While literal emulation of specific verses or stories is generally limited to more strictly defined ritual circumstances, most Christian communities understand the fellowship and service facilitated through meals to be inspired by biblical stories.

Admonitions to share and to meet in fellowship mean sharing food at gatherings for most Christian communities today. Of course, the more formal, ritualized Eucharistic practices found across modern Christian communities take inspiration from Last Supper stories. But even more informal, church suppers and potlucks are frequently understood as inspired by biblical stories, such as Acts 2:42–47, which describes Christian fellowship as, among other things, characterized by breaking bread together.

Food aid in the forms of soup kitchens and aid pantries demonstrate how Christian communities think of Jesus' admonitions to aid those less fortunate as intimately linked to food and meals. Deuteronomy 14:28–29 admonishes God's people to prepare and store food for the less fortunate, while Acts 6:1–4 describes the role of early church deacons in distributing food to the poor. Modern Christians understand verses such as Matt 25:35 to lay out a vision of an inclusive and just community partly on the basis of sharing food. Moreover, emergency food aid has become a central part of many Christian evangelization efforts, thus linking food service to

the Great Commission, Matt 28:16–20, for many Christians today.

For some modern Christian communities, food and meal practices have been critical to their community's identity at certain phases in the community's history. In particular, many alternative Christian communities have used biblically inspired meal practices to help define the boundaries of their groups. The Seventh-day Adventists, an apocalyptic and millennial focused alternative Christianity, adopted a vegetarian diet largely as result of the visions of their prophetic founder, Ellen G. White. White read passages in the first chapter of Genesis as indicating that a faithful people in a state of waiting for the end times must adhere to biblical laws, including vegetarianism. Similarly, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, co-founders of the Unity School of Christianity, taught that vegetarianism was a key purification practice for their adherents. Citing Gen 1:29 as well as commandments against killing, Charles Fillmore argued that vegetarian diets were both healthier and more spiritual.

By enacting and embodying their principles through food and meals, Christians demonstrate how the Bible still affects their daily lives in central and lasting ways.

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### D. New Christian Churches and Movements

One notable custom in recent times is the celebration of the "love feast," or agape. This is a meal, in some cases fairly substantial, and in other instances symbolic, where food is shared, in recognition of a presumed practice of the early Church. Jude 12 mentions a love feast, but gives no details, while Paul mentions a communal meal, but deplores the way in which it is conducted (1 Cor 11:17–22). Some have taken Paul's statement "It is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (1 Cor 11:20) to mean that the love feast is not to be identified with the Lord's Supper, but a separate occasion. Where it includes the sharing of bread, it signifies Christ's presence, which became known to the disciples when he broke the bread at Emmaus (Luke 24:30–32).

The modern celebration of the love feast can be traced to Count Zinzendorf and the German Moravians in 1727, when they revived a service in which they shared food, prayer, religious conversation, and hymns. The Bible's lack of detail has caused various churches to adopt different ways of celebrating a love feast. Some Eastern Orthodox Churches hold an agape meal on Sundays and festival days, and it is common practice to distribute non-Eucharistic bread (the *antidoron*) to the congregation at the end of Divine Liturgy.

The Roman Catholic Neo-Catechumens have been known to celebrate an agape in the form of a meal in a local restaurant after their Easter Vigil. The idea of concluding the Easter Vigil with a shared breakfast is also practiced by Anglicans, although it is not normally referred to as an agape.

Within Methodism, numerous congregations hold agapes: some Primitive Methodist churches favor a “pot luck” meal, where different members of the congregation bring an item of food for sharing. The United Methodists’ *Book of Worship* defines a liturgy for the “love feast,” consisting of a hymn, prayer, the saying of grace, a collection for the poor, and the distribution of bread and the “loving cup.” The loving cup was a two-handled vessel, and in previous years it was ceramic, sometimes with the words “Love Feast” on it, and was passed around the congregation. Care is usually taken to avoid the use of communion bread and wine, so that the practice is not confused with holy communion. The agape is also celebrated by Adventists and the Brethren.

Some Christians in recent times have combined the celebration of the love feast with a form of the Jewish seder, often celebrating a full meal in which the various components of the Jewish Passover are ritually consumed. This practice has proved controversial, since the appropriateness of Christians simulating part of a Jewish festival, often with Christian interpolations, has been questioned.

From 1901 until 1921, the Watch Tower Society (whose members later became known as Jehovah’s Witnesses) introduced the practice of concluding their conventions with a “love feast.” This involved accepting a cube of bread from a steward, who shook hands with all the departing delegates. Owing to the increasing size of these gatherings, the practice became unfeasible, and was discontinued.

Jehovah’s Witnesses are also renowned for withdrawing table fellowship from those who have disassociated with or had been disfellowshipped from the Society, teaching that this conforms to Paul’s instruction that one should not eat with those who call themselves Christians, but were guilty of sexual immorality, idolatry, fraud, and other sinful practices (1 Cor 5:11–13). The Exclusive Brethren take an even more extreme view, holding that one should not eat or drink with anyone outside their organization.

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## E. World Christianity

Table meals can be highly complex social events, as well as an expression of identity and value. Anthropologists have observed that the “code” associated with meals can communicate layers of messages including “the pattern of social relations, social ranking, group solidarity, and economic transactions.” Meals involve food preparation, invitation, celebration, sharing, reciprocity, and the setting of social boundaries. Eating together performs a powerful social function that comes not only from the food consumed, but from the fellowship at the table and the very fact of eating together.

Similar to the Middle Eastern culture, meals are treated as important elements of daily life in Chinese culture. There is a famous saying, “people treat meals as heaven” (*min yishi weitian*). LaoZi says, “a sage seeks to satisfy the belly not the eyes” (*shengren weifu bu weimu*). Chinese eating customs, where dishes are shared in the middle of the table, can be seen as an outward expression of communal and collective thinking. The way to eat a Chinese meal “a few dishes are put on the table, many pick at the dishes with their own chopsticks” (*jipan dacai zhuoshang fang, zhongren kuaizi fenfen jia*) is the ideal picture of a whole family sitting around the table and enjoying a meal together (see fig. 8). Sitting around a “steam boat” (*huoguo*), commonly used to entertain guests at home in Chinese culture, has been observed for over 1,000 years. It is important to know who eats with whom, what one eats or does not eat, when and how often one eats and where one sits to eat in the seating arrangements.

The Italian Jesuit Missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and his colleagues were fascinated by Chinese meal customs and firstly recorded them in details for the Western world during the 17th century. When Protestantism was introduced to China during the 19th century, Chinese Christians were misunderstood as practicing cannibalism in taking communion. Contemporary Chinese Christians largely refrain from having anything that contains animals’ blood, although some would leave the choice to individuals. What they are concerned about is how the table-fellowship of Jesus challenges the eating ethics of Chinese culture. The true *li* (meaning etiquette, social protocol, observing deencies, polite behavior) is based on an uncalculated and loving attitude towards other fellow human beings, as the response to God’s unconditional love. In the same way that Jesus challenges the honor/shame culture of the Mediterranean world, he makes the appeal to the Chinese worldview of “saving one’s face” and introduces what it really means to be honorable at table meals. For Chinese, Christ is best presented as “both the shame-bearer for sinners and honor-winner for believers.” The Chinese relational approach, which centers on the table (developed as “steam boat” theology of home), can in



Fig. 8 “Thanksgiving before meal” (2017)

practice be more effective in their inclusion of outsiders in the new community grounded in relational loving hospitality. This is easier for Chinese people living in a “high context” culture to grasp in comparison to Westerners living in individualistic contexts. Many meal customs in the majority world share the eating culture that values honor/shame, hospitality and community.

In the patriarchal societies of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, the priority of serving the meal is firstly to the men, then women and children. Even after conversion, this meal custom remains. In Bangladesh, one can distinguish the cultural background of Christians by the way they eat – those who start with dhal (lentils) are from Hindu background and those who finish with it are from Muslim background. In Yemen, a Middle-Eastern culture that is similar to that of Jesus’ days, Christians parallel the killing of a goat in a wedding banquet with the death of Jesus. In Africa, Christians call for the Eucharist to foster the restoration of a genuine communal living. African Diasporas in the UK attempt to discern a radical liberative black spirituality in a white dominated society through the way they choose their food.

Christians in the majority world practice a grace-saying act before the meal with their own language and vocabularies. The cultural codes devolving upon bread in the Jewish culture of the 1st century CE may be carried by rice in contemporary East Asian cultures, the baguettes in South African cultures, the lavash in Armenia or the taro root in Oceanic cultures. The cultural codes of grape wine drunk at the communion are replaced by rice wine in Asia or beer in parts of Africa, which is germane to their daily life and therefore speaks to the local communities.

Meal customs may express fundamentally our reflection of God. Christians take the daily meal as a gift of God, as well as the opportunity to provide hospitality especially as it is related to the matter of the Eucharist. The meal table can therefore become

an image of union between human beings and between human beings and God, expressed with our distinct cultural colors.

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## VIII. Islam

Food etiquette is a concept that exists across different traditions from the Hellenistic period down to the Arabo-Islamic period. In Arabo-Islamic culture, the idea of *adab al-ta’ām* (food morals and mannerisms) was linked to social etiquette, and to considerations of health. For example, in the Qur’ān, the subject of food and meals is introduced through the use of the roots *t-’-m* (“to feed”) or *r-’-l* “to eat” and *sh-r-b* “to drink.” God is the provider of sustenance and the nourisher for all alike (S 41:10; 26:79; and S 6:14; cf. Gen 1:29; Deut 8:3; Luke 12:24) and thus actions like eating and drinking are basic to humanity, including, Prophets (S 25:20 and 21:8). Therefore, meals are associated with rendering thanks to God (S 34:15; cf. Rom 14:6), and are linked to other rulings and customs.

In S 7:31, the Qur’ān calls for moderation and avoidance of excess in eating and drinking as part of maintaining a balance between the body and the soul (cf. Sir 31:12–31). The limitation of food is also seen as a marker of piety and the excess of food as a sign of greed (cf. Prov 23:21; 1 Cor 5:11). In a prophetic ḥadīth, the Prophet said: “the believer eats with one bowl, while the unbeliever eats with seven bowls.” In another tradition transmitted by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, the Prophet stresses proper behavior in matters of food, dress, and giving alms, since God loves to see His creatures enjoying His bounty. Arabic proverbs are also full of references

to overeating as a bad and unhealthy habit, such as, “overeating takes away intelligence” (*al-biṭna tudhhib al-fiṭna*). Therefore, the Arabs encouraged their children to eat less.

Meal traditions are also linked to a balance between the nourishment of the body and the soul. In S 5:112–15, the allegory of the divine banquet is mentioned, and in his explanation of this verse al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (fl. 385/995) makes reference to the banquet (*mā'ida*) which Jesus requests from God following the entreaty of the apostles, which has a symbolic function. Iṣfahānī adds that some Sufis have already interpreted this verse analogically to refer to the realities of knowledge (*ḥaqā'iq al-ma'rifa*). He uses this Sufi allegorical interpretation of the verses to say that the Prophet has equally referred, in a ḥadīth which was narrated by 'Abd Al-lāh Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/652), to the “Qur'an as the banquet of God [on earth], so you should learn from its banquet whatever you can” (*inna hadhā al-Qur'an ma'dubatu'llāhi fata'allamū min ma'dubatihi mā ista'tatum*).

In addition, the Arabs believed that the best food is that which they eat using their hands, since they thought that this habit has a healthier effect on the body and soul. They also paid attention to choosing proper food and diet. In various places the Qur'an mentions honey as a cure for people (S 16:69; cf. Deut 32:13). In another passage (S 2:62; cf. Num 11:4), the Israelites plead with Moses to call upon his Lord to provide a change in their diet, and to give them more green herbs (*baqal*), cucumbers (*qiththā*), garlic (*thūm*), lentils (*adas*) and onions (*baṣal*).

Food is a mediator of respect. In the Qur'an and the ḥadīth giving food to saints is seen as a sign of *tabarruk* (“blessing”) and a way to seek closeness to God (S 76:8–9). Another social act that is associated with meal is giving food to the needy, which saves one from ill (S 74:44; cf. Matt 15:32; Rom 12:20).

Some Muslim communities developed their own meal rituals. For the Sufis, food and meals are associated with cure and creation, and are seen not only in legal categories, but also as integrated into the whole of the mystic's daily experience and spiritual well-being. Thus, sharing meals that are preceded by performing religious chants with other Sufi followers are considered part of their aesthetic religious experience, where eating, drinking, and worship come together to form a holy life. This tradition finds resonance in Christian and Jewish table talk tradition, which involves elements of eating, drinking and the warm gathering of educated people to discuss a topic over fine food and a cup of wine! This gathering also became associated with music.

There are also ceremonial traditions that were associated with the offering of food, especially during religious festivals or in social occasions, such as,

marriages or funerals. This tradition continued to exist from the pre-Islamic period until the present day.

In Arabo-Islamic culture, food is a signifier of social status and sharing a meal is part of portraying friendship. For instance, in pre-Islamic poetry, food and banquets became a poetic motive that celebrates moral social values such as generosity, through which individuals reached moral refinement. In addition, Arabic poetry is full of references to the theme of slaughtering animals to feed the guests *al-naḥr lil-dūyuf* and cooking for guests whether someone is poor or rich. The best banquet is the one which they share with their boon-companions, since exchanging polite conversation with the brethren will increase the appetite and makes the food taste better *muḥadathatu al-ikhwān tazīd min ladhdhat al-ṭa'ām*. Exchanging polite conversation with guests at the table removes any feelings of shyness that a guest might have and will make the guest feel comfortable. The guest will also be offered a prominent place at the table *ṣadr al-mā'ida*.

However, there are a number of blameworthy habits that should be avoided at the food table. A guest should not be the first to start eating, and should not be greedy, or a party-crasher. The host also should not observe every movement of the guest, or should not make certain comments.

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Nuha al-Sha'ar

## IX. Other Religions

As the anthropologist Mary Douglas has observed, the processes of designating certain animal and vegetable materials as “food,” associating individual foodstuffs into “meals,” and differentiating one meal from another (as, e.g., breakfast, lunch, dinner, holiday meals, etc.), reflect deeply embedded cultural values; indeed, food practices, along with language and rites of passage, are among the most significant markers of a culture (Douglas: 79–80; see “Douglas, Mary”). To accept changes in food and meal customs thus requires powerful motivating factors.

Among the many areas of offensive “heathen” practices identified by 19th-century Protestant missionaries were the indigenous meal practices they encountered. Nowhere was this more evident than

in the case of India, with its strict prohibitions on inter-caste commensality, and its long-held tradition of excluding the women of the household from joining their husbands in family meals. (It is worth noting that, by contrast, 18th-century European missionaries in India tolerated these practices, likely viewing them much as they did contemporary European social practices, which maintained strict class separations; for example, even in church fellowship the nobleman and the serf would never break bread together [Carman/Rao: 206].) On the one hand, the missionaries denounced the divisions caused by caste strictures on religious grounds, identifying its disruptive effect on church fellowship as the “most formidable opponent to genuine Christianity” (Newcomb: 189). On the other hand, however, they decried Hindu meal customs as a genuine social ill (e.g., Dennis: 157). In the matter of religion, caste divisiveness made the enactment of the Holy Communion a near impossibility, as members of higher castes would not eat or drink with lower caste actors, or even touch utensils and dishware that had been handled by them.

To combat the divisiveness of caste, the Protestant missionaries in South India (where the problem was most pronounced), instituted the practice of the “love-feast,” a communal meal held for the congregation as a whole. Despite initial resistance to the practice, the missionaries remained committed to it as a means of breaking caste strictures, going so far as declaring at the 1848 Madras Missionary Conference that baptism would be granted only to those who had broken the rules of non-commensality (Richter: 170). Although it is not clear precisely why the missionaries in India chose the term “love-feast,” the term itself recalls the agape meal, a form of table fellowship practiced in the early church (but which had been long abandoned) that evoked the meals shared by Jesus and his disciples, including the Last Supper (Luke 22:7–23; Matt 26:17–30) (Cole: 60–66, 250). In India, the response to the love-feast was mixed; along with positive reports of its effects, published missionary discussions continued to suggest that resistance to breaking the long-standing rules barring inter-caste commensality – even among converts – remained high, if not insurmountable (see Perkins: 301; Smitheman: 101; Anon.: 141). This situation in India is closely paralleled in contemporaneous missionary encounters with the meal customs of the South Pacific Islanders; the missionaries there, as they did in India, had denigrated the Islanders’ traditional meal patterns, which featured regular feasts and extensive food taboos. In their place, the missionaries instituted meal habits such as “Sunday Lunch,” the Sabbath dinner, etc., which they believed instilled in the Islanders a sense of Christian community and temperance (Haden: 28).

Although the Protestant missionaries in India touted changes in meal customs as part of their pro-

gram to convert the Indian heathens, they also viewed it as a means of battling the country’s social ills, looking, in particular, at what they considered to be the shameful treatment of Indian women. In formulating their discussion of the degraded condition of women in India, the missionaries frequently referred to the women’s meal customs, such as enforced fasts and the prohibition of eating until the men of the household had eaten. To add to the negative depiction of this latter practice, one missionary writer highlighted the meagerness of such “leftover” meals, depicting them as being only “the remains of the meal ... if there be enough food for that” (Montgomery: 79). Calls for change, though not unheeded, do not appear to have been based on actual contact with the women of India (who led isolated lives), and so fail to account for the women’s own views of these rules, as for example, their perception of them as acts of self-sacrifice, a highly regarded virtue in India. In any case, despite the missionary outcry, the pleas for change seem to have yielded little if any result (see Murdoch).

In India, the missionary disparagement of Hindu meal customs has been matched by the Hindu view of the Christian diet, in particular, the eating of beef and the use of alcohol, both of which are strongly prohibited for high-caste Hindus. The association of beef-eating and Christianity in India today has become a matter of great rancor, as seen recently in claims that a devastating 2018 flood in South India occurred as “punishment” for Christian beef-eating (Venkataraman). The negative association of beef-eating and Christianity occurs famously in the writings of Mohandas Gandhi, whose works were deeply influential during his lifetime. Noting initially that he believed strongly in the toleration of all religions, Gandhi then expresses a single exception, voicing a dislike for Christianity. According to Gandhi, this dislike reached back to his youth, when he heard a missionary “pouring abuse on the Hindus and their gods,” a memory he later conflated with a contemporary report of a high-caste Hindu convert to Christianity who was forced to “to eat beef and drink liquor” at his baptism. The association left an indelible mark on Gandhi’s view of Christianity, leading him to declare that a religion that encouraged such practices “did not deserve the name [religion]” (Gandhi: 9; see also “Gandhi, Mohandas”). It is worth noting here that Gandhi’s view of the “forced meal” recalls the earlier missionary demand that made breaking the Hindu eating rules a prerequisite for baptism.

In modern times, Indian meal customs have blended with biblical elements, as Indian vegetarian restaurants outside India seek kosher designations. As vegetarian establishments, Indian restaurants naturally abide by the Mosaic restriction on not mixing meat and milk (Exod 34:26; 23:19; Deut 14:21). Although the kosher designation, which

must be awarded by a recognized rabbinic authority, is a religious one rooted in the Torah (Lev 11), it also has commercial ramifications; as one Indian restaurateur in New York City observed, “If we want to run this business here, we will have to be kosher” (Kalyanaraman).

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Herman Tull

## X. Literature

The classic loci for biblical meals are Belshazzar’s Feast in Dan 5 (see “Belshazzar”), and the Last Supper in the Gospels (Mark 14:12–25; Matt 26:17–29; Luke 22:7–23), which provide a template for the distinction between gluttony and nutritious eating. Belshazzar’s Feast is treated in literature outstandingly as a warning against gluttony by the Pearl Poet in *Cleanness* (14th cent.) and as the central part of an adventure plot by Rider Haggard in the eponymous *Belshazzar’s Feast* (1930), where it is the novel’s greatest moment of danger. The Last Supper is portrayed positively as a sacred meal in a great range of writing from the York Baker’s play (with its fascinatingly detailed schedules of accounts) to the more mystical world of the Round Table feast in Robert de Boron’s *Merlin* and onward to Tolstoy’s interpretations of the painting by Nikolai Ge.

The question of verisimilitude in the representation of the Last Supper is at the core of the reporting of biblical meal customs in literature, where the handling ranges from the liturgical approach of the *Ludus Coventriae* (ca. 1390), which may have entailed the actors standing to receive the host from Jesus, to the efforts of Dorothy Sayers in *The Man Born to be King* (1943) to recreate an authentic Jewish Passover meal of the historical period. By way of contrast Vicente Leñero’s modernization of the Last Supper in *The Gospel of Lucas Gavilán* (1979) has Jesus lead the disciples in quaffing from beer bottles rather than drinking wine from a cup.

The literary reporting of meal customs with a biblical slant tends to be a by-product of social and political critiques. For example in English writing, the tradition of the country house feast as the display of the landowner’s munificence provides a quasi-biblical trope (based on the banquet parables of the Gospels) for Caroline poems, such as George Herbert’s “Redemption,” depicting God’s generosity, while yet straying into the dangerous territory of the social tensions provoked by the economic asymmetry which was attacked in contemporary ballads, which for their part invoked God as the punisher of oppressive rich farmers (cf. Achilles: 191–93).

In Nikolai Gogol’s *Dead Souls* (1842) eating is such a pervasive theme that the duality of eating and fasting provides a moral sketch of each character. Similarly, in Knut Hamsun’s novel *Hunger* (*Sult*, 1890), the controlling metaphor seems to be the saying of Jesus in Matt 4:4/Luke 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (cf. Rossi: 423–24).

The origins of eating morality are embedded in treatments of the Genesis story of Eden. In the medieval drama, the Norwich Grocer’s Play (ca. 1565), God makes Adam, as representative of humanity, “the dresser” of the multitude of plants and trees in the Garden and urges him “to have thy delectacion” in everything except the fruit of the forbidden tree. This binary choice provides the background for literary distinctions between healthy, joyful eating and gluttony or worse. It is a form of biblical morality which is scorned in some later literature. In the sophisticated middle-class world of Machado de Assis’ short story “Adam and Eve” (1885), set in the 1700s in the Bahia region of Brazil, a judge at a dinner party recounts a version of the Eden story in which Adam and Eve resist the temptations offered by the Evil One and are rewarded by immediate entry into eternal Paradise. He admits that it cannot be true, since otherwise he and the other guests could not be enjoying the delicious dessert.

The more sinister meal of Judith with Holofernes (Jdt 12:10–13:12) features in numerous literary treatments of the story of Judith, with *La Judit* (1574) of Du Bartas dwelling particularly on the excesses of the banquet (to which Judith, of course, brought her own modest picnic). A more general meal involving a great gamut of biblical characters placed in comic postures occurs in the various recensions of the *Cena Cypriani* (5th cent.). Equally rumbustious, but more barbed, is the medieval satire, *The Land of Cockayne* (14th cent.) in which monks live in cells whose walls are made of pies and where geese fly, ready-cooked, into the abbey, in a parody of the Earthly Paradise. In two of Isak Dinesen’s short stories, “Supper at Elsinore” (1934) and “Babette’s Feast” (1950), an eerie meal takes place in special atmospheric conditions which echo the nar-

rative of the risen Christ's supper with his disciples at Emmaus in Luke 24:30–35.

Perhaps the richest collage of biblical banquet scenes is to be found in Miguel de Unamuno's novel *Abel Sanchez* (1917), where the meal organized by Joaquin becomes a combination of Belshazzar's Feast and the Gospel banquet parables of Luke 14:7–17; 14:16–22 and Matt 22:1–14. Here again the binary distinction between legitimate sustenance and excess is operative.

The Christian tradition of saying grace at meals, often with an allusion to a biblical text, receives occasional attention in literature. François Rabelais has Gargantua pronounce a grace after eating six pilgrims in a salad in Chapter 38 of the First Book of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1534). The grace uses words from Ps 124 (Vulgate Ps 123.) Anthony Trollope's novel, *Doctor Thorne* (1858), has an excursus about the saying of graces in the context of a dinner held by Lord Omnium. The narrator seems concerned that the biblical precedent often cited is inappropriate to the frivolities of social dining: "It is, I know, alleged that graces are said before dinner, because our Saviour uttered a blessing before his last supper. I cannot say that the idea of such analogy is pleasing to me" (217).

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Anthony Swindell

## XI. Visual Arts

In various religions, meals have played an important role in people's relations with each other and with God. In the Bible, as in other religious books, meals abound, both in the HB/OT (e.g., the eating of manna, dietary laws that prohibit eating particular food) and in the NT narratives (food like bread and fish, a beverage like wine, and ritual meal customs that build social capital being striking examples) (Varriano: 94–117). Biblical meal narratives are often vehicles for criticism of both religion and society. Therefore, artists have preeminently used and appropriated narratives of meal customs and histor-

ical representations to criticize religious and societal circumstances of their own times. Two NT narratives in particular have a high artistic appeal: the Last Supper and the Supper at Emmaus.

Holy Communion being Christianity's central ritual, the Last Supper (Matt 26:6–30; Mark 14:3–26; Luke 22:7–20; cf. John 13) is a prevalent topic in visual arts. Leonardo Da Vinci's fresco at the Santa Maria delle Grazie convent in Milan heads a long list of art works portraying a long table with Jesus having dinner with his companions. An icon in itself, this work has been frequently studied, interpreted, and commented on by artists ranging from Andy Warhol to Andres Serrano (Prins: 465). The Last Supper is a motif regularly used in activist (e.g., feminist) art (Wijnia: 53) and has the power to comment on the state of society and the position of religion therein. Noteworthy in this respect is Julia Krahn's *Ultima Cena* (2012), a photograph displaying a long table covered with a white tablecloth against a grey empty background. A feral pigeon is situated on the table that, like the floor, is covered with white flour. People are absent, only trails of footsteps are visible: one pair under the table and a path suggesting that someone walked out of the image. By emphasizing "void," Krahn evokes several questions: what is essential? what does the spectator see? who stays, who departed? Has Jesus dropped out himself, or does he walk toward the spectator? (Rauchenberger: 18–23). In late-modern Western societies where "traditional" Christian religion has seen a downward trend and new forms of spirituality have arisen, this may be considered a post-Christian and post-secular work showing that the Western religious-secular dichotomy has grown weak.

Another biblical scene frequently portrayed throughout the centuries is the Supper at Emmaus (Luke 24:28–35). Famous 16th- and 17th-century depictions of this narrative were made by notable artists like Titian, Caravaggio, and Rembrandt. Shortly after the death of Jesus, the disciples encounter a stranger on their way to Emmaus, whom they identify as Jesus himself in an unexpected way: in the breaking of the bread. Elaborating on the painting by Caravaggio (see → plate 6), and transferring this unexpectedness, in 2013 the American art collective Generic Art Solutions strikingly depicted the table companions as contemporary construction workers gathered around a table with po' boys and Zapp's potato chips and a can of Coca Cola (see → plate 7), thus explicitly combining the biblical narrative and art history as a lens to bring current power struggles to the fore.

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Mirella Klomp

## XII. Film

In biblical epics, meal customs vary according to characters’ ethnic, national, and religious identities, and they often indicate social class. They also sometimes serve as shorthand for a character’s moral status.

Ethnic, national, and religious identities are frequently signaled by the way characters eat. In *The Ten Commandments* (dir. Cecil B. de Mille, 1956, US), for example, when Moses dines with the Bedouin Jethro in the land of Midian (Exod 2:20–21), he sups from communal bowls while seated on animal skins placed on the ground. Later, during his final meal in Egypt with his enslaved Hebrew family, he sits not on the ground but on a stool at a rough-hewn wooden table that would be at home in any pioneer American house. This Passover dinner takes place during the Hebrews’ last night of bondage (Exod 12), and the staging of the scene effectively identifies the Exodus with American values. As Gerald Forshey argues, DeMille’s intention in making *The Ten Commandments* was to promote liberty over and against what the director saw as the threat of Communist totalitarianism (Forshey: 128–29). Moses therefore serves as a stand-in for the rugged frontier American spirit that rises up against tyranny.

Cinematic meals are also frequently used to contrast the debauchery of the rich and powerful with the humility and sobriety of God’s followers. Thus in *The Ten Commandments*, while Moses and his family eat simple food on simple benches, the evil character Dathan dines in sumptuous splendor. Dathan sits in a gold-embossed chair and eats delicacies from a table made from marble and ivory; before his repast, he rinses his hands in scented water (which he then dabs behind his ears). His cup and bowls are made of gold, and he is fanned by a stalwart slave as other slaves play harp and lute in the background. The sumptuousness of his dining signals to viewers that he is not truly a servant of God. Similar depictions of sumptuous dining appear in NT films, including the courtesan Mary Magdalene’s feast in DeMille’s *The King of Kings* (1927, US) and the meals of a debauched Claudius in *The Sign of the Cross* (dir. DeMille, 1932, US) or an equally debauched Herod in *Salome* (dir. William Dieterle, 1953, US).

In Jesus films, notably, Jesus is rarely shown actually eating food. Though he is frequently at table onscreen, almost never does a morsel pass his lips. Nonetheless, it is worth noting how filmmakers differ in their portrayals of the meal customs of Jesus’ day. We have already seen how director DeMille sur-

rounded Moses with humble but sturdy furniture and thus identified that character with American values. In his 1927 *The King of Kings*, Jesus’ last supper is likewise held with the apostles seated at a simple table. Similarly, *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (dir. George Stevens, 1965, US) takes its cue from Leonardo da Vinci’s Last Supper and has Jesus and all of the apostles seated on chairs on the same side of a spare tabletop. Newer films tend to be more influenced by the view of many scholars that, as Jodi Magness asserts, “Jewish villagers in Galilee generally dined while sitting on the ground” (Magness: 81). *Jesus of Nazareth* (dir. Franco Zeffirelli, 1977, IT/UK), for example, has the last supper take place with everyone seated on the bare floor or on cushions. *The Jesus Film* (dir. John Krish/Peter Sykes, 1979, US) and *The Visual Bible: Matthew* (dir. Regardt van den Bergh, 1993, ZA, aka *The Gospel According to Matthew*) follow suit.

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Theresa Sanders

See also → Agape Meal; → Banquet; → Bread; → Bread, Unleavened; → Communal Meals; → Dietary Laws; → Eating and Drinking; → Fasts, Fasting; → Feasts and Festivals; → Food; → Last Supper; → Lord’s Supper; → Passover, Pesah; → Vine

## Meal Offering

→ Sacrifice and Sacrificial Offerings

## Mearah

Though generally a proper noun designating a hiding place (*mē’ārā* “cave”), Mearah in Josh 13:4 seems to be a toponym pertaining to the Sidonian territory. The line from Mearah to Aphek describes a region in Lebanon not conquered by Joshua. This may be the place mentioned in Papyrus Anastasi I (19:2) called *m̄gr*, although the spelling to be expected would be *m̄grt*, i.e., with a feminine ending. Guillaume de Tyr mentions such a cave in the region of Sidon (*Hist.* 19.11) which might be the biblical Mearah.

Just based on the criterion of the biblical name itself which has been preserved, the biblical place Mearah has been identified with a number of sites, among them: Muḡar Jezzīn, a complex of caves at the top of the Lebanon Range east of Sidon, or el-Muḡēriye northeast of Sidon. Unfortunately, the precise name of this place is disputed.