

Holy Communion and Gluten-Free Bread

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On the night when He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ, instituted the Sacrament of Holy Communion commanding us to “do this” as He had done.¹ An important part of the “this” is that Jesus used bread.² Therefore, in order for Holy Communion to be a valid Sacrament, we too must use bread.

Canon 924 of the *Roman Catholic Church* states, “§1. *The most holy eucharistic sacrifice must be offered with bread and with wine in which a little water must be mixed.* §2. *The bread must be only wheat and recently made so that there is no danger of spoiling.* §3. *The wine must be natural from the fruit of the vine and not spoiled.*”³

The *Evangelical Lutheran Diocese of North America* (ELDoNA), also states in their *Niles Theses* (2005), article 10, “10) *The use of grape juice or any other element but natural wine for the blood of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is a violation of Christ’s institution, as is the use of anything other than natural bread for the body of Christ.*”⁴

However, the question is then raised concerning what constitutes “bread”? And does bread made from gluten-free flour count as “valid bread” for Holy Communion?

This paper seeks to provide answers to those two questions. However, it is important to note that this paper is not intended to establish any hard and fast laws or rules regarding the use of gluten-free bread for Holy Communion. This paper is not to be taken as a confessional statement either promoting or condemning the use of gluten-free bread for Holy Communion. Instead, this paper simply seeks to raise points of consideration concerning the use of gluten-free bread for Holy Communion. My desire is simply to discuss the issue and leave it to the individual churches and Church Bodies to establish their own doctrinal statements on the matter.

When it comes to the consideration of gluten-free bread for Holy Communion, the issue depends on what we consider is “bread”. According to Canon 924.2 of the *Roman Catholic Church* “*the bread must be only wheat.*”⁵ A teaching that has been upheld in the *Roman Catholic Church* since 1588.⁶ This would thus do away with gluten-free breads as wheat is not gluten-free.

In response to this, the question is asked whether bread, specifically Communion Bread, must contain wheat?

To answer this we must first establish what “bread” is.

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* bread is defined as, “*food made of flour, water, and yeast mixed together and baked.*”⁷ Other versions say, “*usually leavened with yeast,*”⁸ rather than limiting the definition to leavened bread only. *Dictionary.com* defines bread as, “*a kind of food made of flour or meal that has been mixed with milk or water, made into a dough or*

¹ Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25

² Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:23

³ Roman Catholic Church, *Code of Canon Law* (1983), http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3A.HTM

⁴ ELDoNA, *Niles Theses* (2005), http://eldona.org/ELDoNA/Papers_files/Niles%20Theses-1.pdf

⁵ Roman Catholic Church, *Code of Canon Law* (1983), http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3A.HTM

⁶ Joanne Pierce, *Why the Catholic Church Bans Gluten-Free Communion Wafers*,

<http://theconversation.com/why-the-catholic-church-bans-gluten-free-communion-wafers-81062>

⁷ *Oxford Dictionary*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bread>

⁸ *The Australian Oxford Dictionary*, Fifth Edition, 2001, *Oxford University Press*

batter, with or without yeast or other leavening agent, and baked.”⁹ And Wikipedia defines bread as, “a staple food prepared from a dough of flour and water, usually by baking.”¹⁰

From these three sources we learn that bread is defined as “a food made from flour and water”.

This raises another question, “what is flour?”

According to the *Oxford Dictionary* flour is defined as, “a powder obtained by grinding grain, typically wheat, and used to make bread, cakes, and pastry.”¹¹ *Dictionary.com* defines flour as, “the finely ground meal of grain, especially the finer meal separated by bolting.”¹² And Wikipedia defines flour as, “powder made by grinding raw grains or roots and used to make many different foods.”¹³

From these three sources we learn that flour is not limited to wheat. The *Dictionary.com* definition goes on to state, “a finely ground, powdery foodstuff, as of dehydrated potatoes, fish, or bananas.”¹⁴ However, for the sake of this paper, let’s limit our definition of flour to “a powder made from ground grain.”

As one can see “bread” is not limited to wheat. Instead “bread” is made from water and flour, which comes from ground up grain. This includes grains that contain gluten, such as wheat, barley, rye, and spelt, and also gluten-free grains, such as oats, corn, and rice.

Thus based solely on the dictionary definition of bread, one can make “valid” bread from gluten-free grains such as oats, corn, and rice. Therefore, one could make gluten-free bread for Holy Communion and still consider it “valid bread”.

However, when discussing Communion Bread it is important to consider the Hebraic and Greek definitions of bread. Therefore, we must determine whether or not the Israelites/Jews or the Greeks limited bread to wheat bread.

Hebrew has four words for bread:

- *uggah* (עֲגָה), which refers to a cake or loaf of bread, from the word *uwg* (ע ו) meaning “to bake”.
- *chori* (חֹרִי), which refers to white bread, from the word *chavar* (חָוַר), meaning “white”.
- *matstzah* (מַצֵּה), which refers to the Unleavened Bread used during Passover.
- *lechem* (לֶחֶם), which is the most common word for bread, which can also refer to generic “food”, and comes from the word *lacham*, meaning “to eat”.

We will discuss the *matstzah* or Unleavened Bread in a moment, but first we need to address the more common *lechem*.

Lechem is the most common Hebrew word for bread. But is *lechem* limited to “wheat”? According to the Old Testament the Israelites made bread from wheat, barley¹⁵ and spelt¹⁶. In Ezekiel 4:9, the prophet is commanded by God to make bread (*lechem*) from wheat, barley and spelt. And in Judges 7:13, a loaf of barley bread (*lechem*) tumbled into the Midianite camp.

We can already see from this that the Jews didn’t limit the term “bread” to wheat.

⁹ *Dictionary.com*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bread>

¹⁰ *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bread>

¹¹ *Oxford Dictionary*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/flour>

¹² *Dictionary.com*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/flour?s=t>

¹³ *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flour>

¹⁴ *Dictionary.com*, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/flour?s=t>

¹⁵ Judges 7:13; Isaiah 28:25; Ezekiel 4:9

¹⁶ Ezekiel 4:9

Now before we discuss the Unleavened Passover Bread, let us first discuss the Greek definition of “bread”.

Greek has four words for bread:

- *prosthesis* (πρόθεσις), which refers to the Show-Bread in the Temple.
- *kollurion*, which refers to a bread roll.
- *azumos* (ἄζυμος), which refers to the Unleavened Bread used for Passover.
- *artos* (ἄρτος), which is the most common term for bread, which can also refer to generic “food”.

Artos is the most common Greek word used for bread. And is the word used in the Institution of Holy Communion.¹⁷ But is “*artos*” limited to wheat?

In John 6:9,13 Jesus used bread (*artos*) made of barley to feeding the 5000+ who were present.

We can see from this that the Greek “bread” is not limited to wheat but also includes barley.

In addition, the Roman Empire also used bread made from spelt,¹⁸ Rye,¹⁹ and as of 43AD oats.²⁰

Now, even though *artos* is the word used during the Institution of Holy Communion, the specific bread (*artos*) that Jesus would have used is *azumos*, or Unleavened Bread. The Unleavened Bread that Jesus used is called *matstzah* or *matzah*. It is for this reason that the *Roman Catholic Church*, the *Byzantine Rite Eastern Catholic Churches*, the *Syro-Malabar Church* and the *Maronite Church* all use unleavened²¹ bread for Holy Communion.²²

Both the *Roman Catholics* and the *Eastern Orthodox* use Communion Bread made from wheat.²³ – The *Roman Catholics* actually condemn the use of Communion Bread made from anything other than wheat.²⁴ – However, the Jews do not limit the Passover Bread to wheat.

According to the Jewish traditions five grains are permitted for use in Passover *matzah*: wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats.²⁵

Although, there is some disagreement amongst scholars over the identification of these grains.²⁶ Most Orthodox Jewish scholars accept the five grains as wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats. However, others have suggested farroe instead of spelt, sorghum instead oats, and different subspecies of barley instead of rye or oats.²⁷ One scholar suggests that the five grains should be translated as, “*According to this scholarship, the five species are: wheat, six-row barley, emmer wheat, two-row barley, and spelt.*”²⁸

¹⁷ Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23

¹⁸ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spelt>

¹⁹ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rye>

²⁰ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oatcake>

²¹ The *Eastern Orthodox*, *Armenian Churches* and *Eastern Catholic Churches* all use leavened bread to symbolized the “risen” Jesus.

²² Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacramental_bread

²³ Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sacramental_bread; Roman Catholic Church, *Code of Canon Law (1983)*, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_P3A.HTM

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²⁵ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matzo>; Eliyahu Kitov, *More on Chametz*, https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1686/jewish/More-on-Chametz.htm; Stephanie Butnick, *This Matzo isn't a Mitzvah*, <https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/95982/this-matzo-isnt-a-mitzvah>,

²⁶ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matzo>; Rabbi Don Linzer, *Are Oats Really One of the 5 Special Grains? When Science and Halakha Collide*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110630020925/http://www.the-daf.com/talmud-conceptual/are-oats-really-one-of-the-5-species-of-grain/>

²⁷ Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spelt>; Rabbi Don Linzer, *Are Oats Really One of the 5 Special Grains? When Science and Halakha Collide*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110630020925/http://www.the-daf.com/talmud-conceptual/are-oats-really-one-of-the-5-species-of-grain/>

²⁸ Rabbi Don Linzer, *Are Oats Really One of the 5 Special Grains? When Science and Halakha Collide*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110630020925/http://www.the-daf.com/talmud-conceptual/are-oats-really-one-of-the-5-species-of-grain/>

However, for the sake of this paper will we accept the majority view that the five special grains that can be used to make Unleavened Passover Bread are: wheat, barley, spelt, rye, and oats.

Which means, if we're to simply follow the Jewish guidelines concerning the Unleavened Passover Bread (*matzah*), then we could make Communion Bread from wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats. Thus, if we were to use Communion Bread made from one of these five grains then that would be "valid bread", and would be keeping with the command and institution of Jesus Christ.

The significant feature about this is that oats are gluten-free. "*Non-contaminated, pure oats are gluten-free. They are safe for most people with gluten-intolerance. The main problem with oats in gluten-free eating is **contamination**. Most commercial oats are processed in facilities that also process wheat, barley, and rye.*"²⁹

Jews with a gluten-intolerance will use a gluten-free oat *matzah* for Passover. Rabbis prefer that Jews use wheat *matzah* for Passover, – many Rabbis are hesitant to use oat *matzah* due to the uncertainty over the Hebrew translation – but those with a gluten-intolerance are permitted to eat oat *matzah*.³⁰

This, therefore, provides us with a gluten-free alternative for Communion Bread – that is if we solely follow the Jewish guidelines concerning the Unleavened Passover Bread. If we define "bread" as "food made from water and flour" and define flour as "ground up grains" we have several other gluten-free alternatives, such as corn and rice. –

Thus regarding the use of gluten-free bread for Holy Communion. The *Roman Catholics* condemn the use of bread made from anything other than wheat. For Passover the Jews permit the use of bread made from either wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats, and permit Jews with a gluten-intolerance to eat Unleavened Passover Bread made from gluten-free oat flour. The Old Testament using the term "bread" (*lechem*) to refer to breads made from wheat, barley or spelt, and the New Testament using the term "bread" (*artos*) to refer to breads made from wheat or barley. And the dictionaries define "bread" as a food made from water and flour, which is made from ground up grains, including, but not limited to, wheat, barley, spelt, rye, oats, corn and rice.

Even though the *Roman Catholics* limit the Communion Bread to "wheat only", the Old and New Testaments increase the definition of "bread" to include barley and spelt, the Jews increase the definition further to include rye and oats, and the dictionaries increase the definition even further to include all types of grain.

Even if we exclude the secular dictionary definitions, the Scriptural definition of "bread" includes breads made from wheat, barley or spelt. Thus, the rule to limit "bread" to wheat only is not in keeping with Scripture. Scripture does command us to use bread for Holy Communion but we need not limit our definition of "bread" to wheat only.

If we follow the guidance of the Jews, that *matzah* bread, which is what Jesus would had used at the Passover Feast on the night when He was betrayed, can be made from wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats, then, if we were to solely follow the practice of the Jews, Communion Bread could be made from wheat, barley, spelt, rye, or oats.

Henceforth, if a church were to make gluten-free Communion Bread from oat flour, we could undoubtedly consider this "valid bread" and in keeping with the command and institution of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁹ Faith Durrand, *The Oat Conundrum: Are Oats Gluten-Free?*, <https://www.thekitchn.com/the-oat-conundrum-are-oats-glu-137074>

³⁰ *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matzoh>