

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Leviticus 23:6-8

The second part of the Feast of Passover, and the main burden of it, is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This in fact became the most common name for the Feast of Passover. Undoubtedly this was because of the duration of the Feast, which was to last for seven days (Exodus 23:14-15).

The main portions of scripture dealing with the details of this Feast are found in Exodus 12:8, 15-20, 31-39; 13:3-10; Deut. 16:1-8; Numbers 28:17-25; Leviticus 23:6-8.

The New Testament references which should be read in connection with the Old Testament references are to be found in Matthew 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-21; Luke 22:1-2; I Corinthians 5:6-8.

Paul's interpretative verse summarizes the truth for us when he wrote: "Therefore let us keep the Feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," (I Cor. 5:8).

I. THE OLD TESTAMENT INSTRUCTIONS

With the coming of the Passover Festival, the head of the house must cleanse his house of all leaven. For seven days no leaven was to be seen in his dwelling. All in the house must eat of unleavened bread from the first day until the seventh day. Anyone found with leavened food in the house would be cut off from the congregation of Israel. This ordinance was to be kept each year in all households.

A. The Feast's Dates – Exodus 12:15-19

The Feast began on the evening of the 15th day of the first month and lasted until the twenty-second day of the same month. In Leviticus 23:6 it states that the Feast began on the fifteenth day of the first month.

B. During the Feast – Exodus 12:15, 19, 20

Every house must put away all leaven. It was a time of great cleansing, of separation from leavening influences.

1. Leaven Naturally – Leaven (or yeast) is a little bit of sour dough, and when placed in a batch of dough has the action of fermentation. Leaven puffs up. It works silently, secretly and gradually, until the whole is leavened. All the dough is affected by its mysterious operation and fermentation. It causes the dough to rise. Its influence permeates the whole until all is leavened, until all becomes like itself.

2. Leaven Spiritually – Almost without exception leaven in scripture is used to symbolize that which is evil, either in doctrine or practice. Both Old and New Testaments set this forth. The Old Testament use of leaven is evidently symbolic of that which must be put away.

C. The Feast represented separation by God and unto God

The importance and significance of unleavened bread in Israel may be seen in the

various occasions when the Lord commanded it to be used. The spiritual truth becomes more evident as these scriptures are considered.

1. Unleavened bread was used in the **consecration** of the priests to their office and ministry (Leviticus 8:2, 26; Exodus 29:2, 23).
2. Unleavened bread was also used in the **vow of separation** of the Nazarite unto the Lord (Numbers 6:12).
3. Unleavened bread was also used in the **food** of the Priests, especially in the Meal offering, as well as the Peace offering (Leviticus 2:4-5; 6:14-18; 7:11-13).
4. Unleavened bread was used in all the **Feasts** of the Lord, except that in Pentecost leavened bread was offered (Exodus 34:18; Leviticus 23:5-6).
5. Unleavened bread was used when the Angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon in his **call to service** (Judges 6:11-24).
6. Unleavened bread was to be used in the Passover Feast as Israel was about to be **separated** from Egypt's life of slavery and bondage (Exodus 12:17, 31-34).

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING

There are five distinct references to leaven in the New Testament and a consideration of the contextual use of each will show that leaven is indeed evil and that which has to be put away. Leaven is seen to be symbolic of sin, human weaknesses, infirmities, false doctrine or corrupt practices.

A. The Leaven of Herod – Mark 8:15; 6:14-28. A study of the references to Herod shows that he was a very sinful and worldly man. He feared the Word of God in John's mouth but was not prepared to repent. He was sly as a fox, sensual, proud and murderous. He was controlled by the spirit of the world. Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the **leaven of Herod, the spirit of worldliness**.

B. The Leaven of the Sadducees – Matthew 16:6-12. Jesus also warned the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Sadducees. There was no mistaking what the leaven of the Sadducees was: their doctrine. The Sadducees did not believe in the supernatural, in spirit, in angels, or in the bodily resurrection (Matt. 3:7; Mark 12:18; Acts 5:17; 23:6-8). The doctrine of the Sadducees works like leaven, corrupting and influencing all those who receive it. **Liberalism** is the counterpart of the **leaven of the Sadducees** today.

C. The Leaven of the Pharisees – Matthew 16:6-12; Luke 12:1. The Lord Jesus also warned His own to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. No mistake could be made here because Jesus interprets the symbol of the leaven of the Pharisees as hypocrisy (Read also Luke 11:37-44; 12:1; Matt. 23:3). The Pharisees "say and do not." They do not practice what they preach. Thus, although the Pharisees were religious, fasted, tithed, believed in the supernatural, in the sacred scriptures, they were as whited sepulchers: Externally clean but inwardly they were rotten, as dead men's bones.

D. The Leaven of Corinth – I Corinthians 5:1-13. This chapter clearly shows that the major leaven in the Corinthian church was sensuality. The whole epistle shows other forms of leaven at work in the church also. Note how Paul refers to the action of leaven in which the Corinthians were "puffed up" (I Cor. 4:18-19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4). To be "puffed up" is also symbolic of pride and inflation.

A study of this Epistle shows that the sin of fornication, along with other sins, had not been dealt with in Corinth. It worked like leaven, affecting other members (compare II Corinthians 12:20-21). Paul exhorts the church to “put away” the person who is having such a leavening influence in the church. He told them to “purge out” the old leaven, reminding them that a little leaven would leaven the whole lump.

This purging out of the leaven as seen here is the proper exercise of church discipline. Paul spoke of the leaven of malice and wickedness, which was “old leaven” and needed purging out. All churches need to purge out sin and its leavening influence.

E. The Leaven of Galatia – Galatians 5:9. A study of the context of this epistle to the Galatian church clearly shows that the leaven of Galatia was legalism, a mixture of Law and Grace; having Christ in one hand and Moses in the other. It was a confusion of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant revelation. It was a mixture of flesh and spirit, bondage and liberty, works of the Law and faith in Christ. The Galatians, having received Christ by faith, now sought to go back to the beggarly elements of the Law, hoping to be perfected by legalistic works.

The Judaizing teachers of the Law put their “leaven of legality” in all of the churches which Paul planted. Paul warned the believers of the leavening influence of this teaching unless they arrested its action by purging it out and putting away the subtle influences of such.

Various groups of believers are influenced by this same leaven of the Galatian church and such needs purging out in order that the church may be a new lump, unleavened by corrupting influences. Thus Jesus and Paul clearly interpret for us the symbol of leaven, both in the Gospels and the Epistles. Although the symbol of leaven was never specifically interpreted for us in the Old Testament, it is in the New Testament. All leaven therefore must be put away in order to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

III. THE NEW COVENANT BELIEVER’S RELATIONSHIP TO THE FEAST

In verse 7 Paul says, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed (slain) for us.” In verse 8 he exhorts us “to keep the Feast (holy day)...with the Unleavened Bread of sincerity and truth.” Thus the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread are brought together in his letter to the Corinthian Church.

A. In Sincerity – that is, our walk with Christ is to be in clearness and transparency

B. In Truth – that is, truly; the opposite to deceit and lying. These two words are used in contrast to the “leaven of malice and wickedness.”

The Lord commanded the Israelites to explain the Feasts to their children. When the sons and daughters would ask what the sign of putting away of leaven meant, the head of the house was to tell them. He would explain how God brought Israel out of bondage with a strong hand, separating them from the leavening influences of Egypt.