The Feast of Unleavened Bread: Replacing Sin with the Bread of Life

**The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that with God's help we must remove and avoid all types of sin in all areas of our life.**

Immediately after the Passover comes a festival that depicts the next step in the fulfillment of God's master plan. After God has forgiven us of our sins through Christ's sacrifice, how do we continue to avoid sin, since we must go on living in newness of life? How do we live as God's redeemed people? We find the answer in the remarkable symbolism of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

When God freed Israel from Egypt, He told His people that for "seven days you shall eat unleavened bread" (Exodus:12:15). Exodus:12:39 further explains, "And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves."

Leavening is an agent such as yeast that causes bread dough to rise. And the leavening process takes time. The Israelites had no time to spare when they left Egypt, so they baked and ate flat bread. What started out as a necessity continued for a week. God appropriately named this time the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus:23:6), or the Days of Unleavened Bread (Acts:12:3).

When Jesus came to earth as a human being, He observed this seven-day festival—sometimes called the Feast of Passover by the Jews because the Days of Unleavened Bread followed immediately after Passover, so that the two adjoining festivals could seem to be one—and in fact Passover themes do carry over into the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus observed this festival as a child and later as an adult (Luke:2:41; Matthew:26:17). The early Church, imitating Christ in His religious practices, observed it as well.

**Earliest instructions and Christ's teachings**

God gave His earliest biblical instructions concerning this festival to the Israelites as they prepared to leave Egypt: "For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. On the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat—that is all you may do" (Exodus:12:14-16  
  
  
, New International Version). So this was a seven-day festival, with the first and seventh days being annual Sabbaths or Holy Days.

Each year as the Israelites observed this feast, it reminded them of God's deliverance of their forefathers from Egypt. The Creator instructed, "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt" (Exodus:12:17, NIV). The Exodus from Egypt remains as a foundational reason for observing this feast today. Just as God delivered ancient Israel, He delivers us from our sins and difficulties.

Now notice Jesus Christ's teaching about leaven, which expands the meaning of this feast. During Christ's ministry He performed two miracles in which He fed thousands of people. After one of these incidents, when His disciples had gone around the Sea of Galilee, they forgot to bring bread with them. So Jesus told them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew:16:5-6, NASB).

The disciples thought Jesus was referring to their lack of bread. However, He was using the occasion to teach them by calling on the symbolism of leaven. Christ asked them: "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then the disciples "understood that He did not say to beware of the *leaven of bread,*but of *the teaching*of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matthew:16:11-12, NASB).

Some of the members of the religious establishment of Christ's day taught and practiced manmade traditions that were actually contrary to God's law and thus sinful. As Jesus told them, "Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites!" (Matthew:15:6-7).

The Days of Unleavened Bread remind us that with God's help we must remove and all avoid sin—symbolized by leaven—and live genuinely by God's commandments in all areas of our life.

**Continued importance of these days**

During the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Paul taught the same *spiritual lessons*Jesus had, invoking the comparison of sin to leaven. Reprimanding the Corinthian congregation for its divisions and tolerance of sexual misconduct, Paul wrote: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore *purge out the old leaven,*that you may be a new lump, *since you truly are unleavened.* For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore *let us keep the feast,*not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but *with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"*(1 Corinthians:5:6-8).

The church at Corinth was obviously and unmistakably keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread, to which Paul repeatedly alluded. However, Paul used the Corinthians' faithful obedience in keeping the feast physically (removing leaven from their homes) as a basis to encourage them to celebrate this feast with proper understanding of its *spiritual*intent.

Today removing leaven from our homes for seven days reminds us that we, too, through prayer and God's help and understanding, *must recognize, expel and avoid sin.*The Feast of Unleavened Bread is thus a time of personal reflection. We should meditate on our attitudes and conduct and ask God to help us recognize and overcome our shortcomings.

Paul spoke of this much-needed self-reflection in 2 Corinthians:13:5, when he told the Corinthian church: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified."

**Applying the spiritual lessons**

We learn by doing. We learn spiritual lessons by doing physical things. Performing the task of deleavening our homes and avoiding leavening for a week reminds us to vigilantly watch for sinful thoughts and actions so we can avoid them. God knows that, in spite of our good intentions, we all sin.

Many years after his conversion, Paul described the powerful human tendency to sin: "I find then a law, that *evil is present with me,*the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and *bringing me into captivity to the law of sin*which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—[deliverance will come] through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" (Romans:7:21-2).

Paul knew that life itself is a battle with sin. The Bible speaks of "the sin which *so easily* ensnares us" (Hebrews:12:1). We have our own part to play in struggling to overcome sin. Yet we must rely on God to help us. Paul explained this to the Philippians by telling them to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for *it is God who works in you*both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13, KJV).

Indeed, Paul did not end his discussion about struggling with sin in Romans 7 on the seemingly hopeless note of remaining enslaved to sin. He went on in chapter 8 to show that we can be free of the way of sin and death—with Christ's help through God's Holy Spirit.

Our observance of the Days of Unleavened Bread helps us realize our crucial need for Jesus' help in overcoming our weaknesses. And this is reflected in the second aspect of how God commands that this feast be observed—by eating unleavened bread throughout the seven days. What is the significance of the unleavened bread we are commanded to eat?

**The lesson from eating unleavened bread**

To effectively remove sin and to prevent it from regaining a foothold in our lives, we must do something—we must replace our human weaknesses and sinful tendencies with something far better. And we learn this from God's instruction to eat unleavened bread throughout this feast.

What does the unleavened bread represent? Jesus Himself explains in John 6. As the Feast of Unleavened Bread approached, and shortly after He performed a great miracle to feed thousands (John:6:4-13), notice what He told the crowd that followed Him, including some statements we touched on in the last chapter on the Passover:

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you . . . Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you t*he true bread from heaven.* For *the bread of God* is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world . . .

*"I am the bread of life.* He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst . . . *I am the bread of life.* Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven,that one may eat of it and not die.

*"I am the living bread which came down from heaven.* If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world . . . This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. *He who eats this bread will live forever"* (John:6:27-5).

Notice the different terms Jesus applied to Himself—"the true bread from heaven," "the bread of God," "the bread of life" and "the living bread which came down from heaven." He emphasized that this "bread" that God would provide would do much more than satisfy their physical hunger, as He had done when He miraculously fed them. It would satisfy the much deeper *spiritual hunger,* filling the spiritual vacuum that exists in every human being.

**The significance of bread**

How significant was bread to the people of that day? It was crucial in many ways. Bread was the most important part of their diet. It was eaten at every meal. It was so common that the term "break bread" meant to eat a meal. The words "bread" and "food" were virtually synonymous. In traveling, it was common to take bread to sustain oneself. A considerable part of a typical woman's day was occupied with grinding grain to make flour and baking bread from that flour.

Bread was a key part of life throughout the day. It meant *everything* to the people of that time. Bread sustained their lives. Without bread, a person went hungry or starved. We see this reflected in part of the Lord's Prayer—"Give us this day our daily bread." Bread was crucial to people, which is why we find it mentioned more than 60 times in the Gospels.

So what is Jesus Christ's point in calling Himself "the true bread from heaven," "the bread of God" and "the bread of life"? He's saying that just as physical bread was essential for physical life, He as the Bread of God and the Bread from heaven and the Bread of life *is essential for our spiritual and eternal life!* Without Him we do not have and cannot have eternal life!

We see, then, that the spiritual lesson of God's command to eat unleavened bread during this feast is that if we want to rid our lives of the leaven of sin and wickedness, *we have to fill our lives with the unleavened bread of life, Jesus Christ.* We have to take Him into our lives.

That means we accept Him as the final authority in our lives. It means we hunger for Him as we hunger for physical food. It means we desire to learn about Him so we can become like Him in every aspect of our lives. It means we study His teachings and example so we can better follow Him as a disciple. It means we make His priorities our priorities. It means taking in and living by the whole of God's Word.

All of this is part of what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote in Galatians:2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (KJV).

This feast is certainly a time for rejoicing because He God freely gives us the help we need to leave a life of sin and to lead a new life. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed for the forgiveness of our sins, thus enabling us to be unleavened, cleansed of sin. And He continues to help us put sin out of our lives by dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit, thereby leading us to regular repentance and empowering us to live in obedience to God—which brings us to the subject of the next chapter.