

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

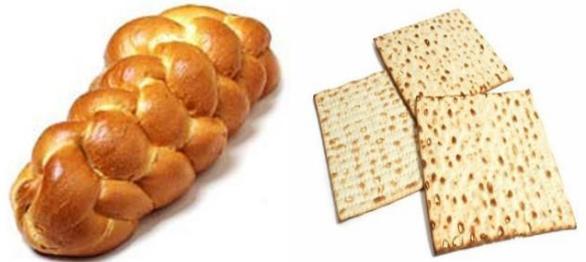
The Specifications of the Feast

The phrase 'unleavened bread' occurs 43 times in Scripture. The first mention is in Genesis 19.3 when Lot baked unleavened bread for two angels who visited his house in Sodom. Perhaps he knew this was the only suitable food for heavenly visitors! The last mention is in 1 Corinthians 5.8 where the Apostle Paul *applies* the feast to Christians today. The Feast of Unleavened Bread itself is mentioned in: **Exodus** 12-13; 23.15; 34.18; **Leviticus** 23; **Numbers** 9.11; 28.17; **Deuteronomy** 16; **2 Chronicles** 8.13 (Solomon); 30.13, 21 (Hezekiah); 35.17 (Josiah); **Ezra** 6.22 (return from captivity); **Ezekiel** 45.21 (millennial); **Matthew** 26.17; **Mark** 14.1, 12; **Luke** 22.1, 7 (time of the crucifixion) and **Acts** 12.3 (Herod's persecution), 20.6.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread began on the 15 Nisan and extended for seven days until 21 Nisan (v.6). This meant the feast was very closely associated with the Passover (v.5). In fact, in the NT these feasts had almost become as one. **Luke 22.1:** *Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover.* No regular work was to be done on the first and last days of the feast as these were 'holy convocations' or sacred assemblies (v.8). A large number of sacrifices were to be offered on each day of the feast including *burnt, meal* and *sin* offerings (Numbers 28.17-25).

The Subject of the Feast

Why was this feast celebrated? Each of the feasts had *historical, agricultural, spiritual* and *prophetical* significance. Like the Passover, the historical significance of this feast is rooted in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. **Exodus 12.39:** *And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, because they were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves. ESV.* **Leaven** is a fermented substance which permeates the dough and causes it to rise. It works internally, rapidly, unseen and operates best in the dark. As such it is a symbol of sin and corruption throughout Scripture.



The NT is full of leaven. It is mentioned 15 times including:

- The leaven of the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees** (Matthew 16.6, 11-12, Mark 8.15, Luke 12.1). The leaven of the Pharisees was *hypocrisy*. They said one thing and did another. Their practice did not match their profession. They had an outward form of religion but no inward reality and laid much greater stress on the oral traditions of men than the word of God. The leaven of the Sadducees was *rationalism*. They were reluctant to believe in the supernatural, denying both angels and resurrection, and thus sought to explain the Scriptures naturally. Beware of this leaven in the form of 'Higher Criticism' and the Jesus Seminar today. Both the Pharisees and Sadducees were marked by fundamentally *erroneous doctrine*.
- The leaven of the **woman** (Matthew 13.33, Luke 13.21). The leaven taken by the woman and hidden in three measures of meal does not symbolise the gospel. The kingdom of heaven is likened, not to leaven, but to the action of the woman in 'hiding' the leaven in the meal. This is the deceitful handling of the word of God (2 Corinthians 4.2); the leaven of *false teaching* (even idolatry, Zechariah 5.7-11) being introduced and spreading its corrupting influence on the pure doctrine of Christ.
- The leaven of **Herod**, or the **Herodians** (Mark 8.15). **MacDonald:** *The leaven of Herod may include unbelief, immorality and worldliness. The Herodians were conspicuous for these sins.* Others suggest it was *materialism* (Tatford). **Downie:** *The leaven of worldliness is found in our lives if we are more concerned about the things of this life than we are about the things that pertain to spiritual life and godliness. Do we spend more time and expend more energy in the pursuit of material progress and prosperity than in endeavours for spiritual prosperity?*
- The leaven of **Corinth** (1 Corinthians 5.6-8). This is described as 'old leaven' (v.7) suggesting something that had been left over from their old way of life and had now been smuggled into their new Christian practice. In this context it was likely *pride* and *arrogance* as well as the sin of *immorality* in their midst (v.2, 6). Paul further adds the leaven of 'malice' and 'wickedness' (v.8), i.e. every form of iniquity and sin that characterised the old life.
- The leaven of **Galatia** (Galatians 5.9). This was the leaven of *false doctrine*. It was being taught by Judaizers that salvation was to be obtained through a mixture of faith and works (circumcision).

The Significance of the Feast

The Feast of Unleavened Bread was associated with the new life of a redeemed people. **Exodus 19.4:** *Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.* We have been redeemed. There now follows an **immediate** responsibility to live accordingly. **1 Peter 1.15-16:** *As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."* ESV

Note. Passover was a **single** day feast which speaks of what Christ has done *for* us (redemption). Unleavened Bread, a **period** feast, followed immediately and suggests what Christ is doing *in* us (righteousness). The period feasts represent the on-going benefits of the unique one-day feasts. Unleavened Bread extended for seven days, which is a *complete* cycle of time and speaks of the whole life of the believer to be marked by *practical* righteousness. This is clearly taught in the NT. For example, Romans 1-5 (Passover); Romans 6-8 (Feast of Unleavened Bread). **Romans 6.1-2:** *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?* Christ has redeemed us from the **penalty** (past), **presence** (future) and **power** (present) of sin.

Any soul that was found eating leavened bread was to be 'cut off' from the congregation of Israel (Exodus 12.19). Likewise, any known sins in the life of a believer cuts them off from the *enjoyment* of communion and fellowship with God. Christian life and living will be a demoralising chore with unconfessed sin in the life.

Requirements

- No leaven was to be **eaten** (Exodus 12.20). *Assimilation*. What sustains us in our Christian living? What are we feeding on? There must be no form of leaven, for *we are what we eat*.
- No leaven was to be **seen** (Exodus 13.7). *Occupation*. The Devil knows that what we *see* creates a desire in us to *have* (see Genesis 3.6, 1 John 2.16). *We become what we look at*. Our gaze then should be focussed upon the glories of the risen Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 3.18).
- No leaven was to be **found** in the **house** (Exodus 12.15). *Association*. Even today the Jews are zealous to remove every speck of leaven from their houses before the feast begins. Some leaven is purposely dropped so they can have the joy of finding and removing it. What sort of leaven is in our *homes* or the *house* of God? The Lord Jesus is recorded as having removed the leaven from His Father's house in John 2. The Passover, and hence Feast of Unleavened Bread was at hand. **John 2.15-16:** *And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.*

Responsibilities

- **Searching**. We should search for leaven in every sphere of life – *personal, spiritual, business, social, assembly*. **Psalm 139.23:** *Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts. Is this our prayer? Our God looks on the heart, knows the heart, tries the heart, ponders the heart, heals the heart, searches the heart and sees the heart. We can count upon Him to reveal the leaven to us.*
- **Purging**. Once the leaven has been found, it must be *put away* (Exodus 12.15). The Corinthians were to 'purge out' the old leaven, i.e. to 'cast out' and 'cleanse thoroughly' their corrupting attitude of *arrogance* and *pride*. They were now to live lives characterised by 'sincerity' and 'truth' (1 Corinthians 5.8). The word 'sincerity' has the thought of being tested by sunlight (as it might shine through a droplet of water and reveal its purity). So we are to hold ourselves up to the *light* of God and His word – this is a continual judging of all our motives, ways and works in His sight. 'Truth' is the quality or state of being real or genuine. *Both 'sincerity' and 'truth' indicate an authentic transparency, a perfect correspondence between their profession of faith and their new life.*
- **Eating**. Not only were the people not to eat *leavened* bread, they were to eat *unleavened* bread. Likewise, we should be constantly feeding on the perfect life of the Lord Jesus. Note the order in relation to the Passover. The blood was first applied, *then* they ate of the roast lamb (suffering and work of Calvary), *then* the leaven was put out of their homes. *Faith* in Christ is necessary to **obtain** life (blood), but *feeding* on Christ is essential to **sustain** life (roast lamb). It is only *then* that leaven will be purged from the life. *Give Him place in the soul and one will learn to abhor everything contrary to His holy mind and will.*