

The Feasts of the Lord: The Burial - Jesus in the feast of Unleavened Bread

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Introduction

This is the second in a series on the seven feasts of the Lord that God has given us in His word. We saw last time how Jesus is pictured in the feast of Passover. He is the true Passover Lamb. The feast before us today is tied to the first and in practice Unleavened Bread is simply an extension of the feast of Passover. Now like the first feast, there are some really interesting things to learn about the Lord in both the Biblical account and the Jewish observance of this feast. So let's start with the Biblical account.

The Biblical Commands for Unleavened Bread

Exodus 12:15-20 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. (16) 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. (17) Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. (18) In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. (19) For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. (20) Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread."

Leviticus 23:5-8 The LORD's Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. (6) On the fifteenth day of that month the LORD's Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. (7) On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. (8) For seven days present an offering made to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.' "

The feast of Unleavened Bread was a festival that begun on the day after Passover (i.e. the 15th Nisan) and lasted for seven days. Historically speaking, this feast was a celebration of the exodus in haste from Egypt. The title of the feast gives the game away in terms of what was the major feature of this feast - it was a time of eating unleavened bread. In fact, the Biblical command given above is for each household to search and remove any leaven that may be in the house. So the question needs to be asked: Why has God got it in for leaven? What is so wrong with having leaven in the house during this time or in eating bread that includes leaven? Well? What's so wrong with that? I think a short detour concerning leaven in the Bible is called for...

The A B C's of leaven

Leaven, or yeast, is a fungus that ferments sugars and is used to cause dough to rise. Easton's Bible commentary states *'The use of leaven was strictly forbidden in all offerings made to the Lord by fire (Lev 2:11; Lev 7:12; Lev 8:2; Num 6:15). Its secretly penetrating and diffusive power is referred to in 1Cor 5:6... It is a figure also of corruptness and of perverseness of heart and life (Mat 16:6, Mat 16:11; Mar 8:15; 1Cor 5:7, 1Cor 5:8).'*

It is worth looking again at how the Bible uses the imagery of leaven. Let's start with a general scripture that defines its overall usage and then we'll get more specific.

*1 Corinthians 5:6-8 Your boasting is not good. **Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?** (7) **Clean out the old leaven** so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. (8) Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, **but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***

It is clear that leaven is used in the general sense as a type for sin. It is used of this because of its properties of spreading and influencing everything around it. And even a little bit can have a big impact! As the Apostle Paul states, in speaking of the sin that the Corinthians allowed, 'do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?' If we were going to be more specific, I would draw your attention to five specific sins that are mentioned in connection with leaven. Three of these are spoken by Christ and two by the Apostle Paul. Let's have a look:

- **The leaven of the Pharisees:** *Matthew 16:6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees..."* While Jesus doesn't define the sin of the Pharisees in the Matthew passage we don't have to be in the dark as to what it was for it is the overwhelming characteristic of the Pharisees and it is clearly stated for us in Luke 12:1 which states '*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*' This is the first leaven to beware of. Hypocrisy - saying one thing and doing another - putting on a religious show outwardly when your heart is far from God.
- **The leaven of the Sadducees:** *Matthew 16:6 And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the... Sadducees."* The Pharisees were known for their religiosity and hypocrisy but the Sadducees had a different problem. They were known for their reluctance to believe in the supernatural. They didn't believe in angels or in the resurrection (Luke 20:27-38). They were the spiritual sceptics of their age while maintaining a show of religion.¹
- **The leaven of Herod:** *Mark 8:15 And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of... Herod."* Herod is an interesting case. He was in a position of worldly power but also desired to see Jesus so that he could see a sign. There are several warnings here. One is against the desire for worldliness and power that can easily spread and unfortunately, looking at the Western church today, we see so much of this leaven. But the other warning is in combining this through seeking signs and wonders in attempting to gain greater power. Does that one ring any bells today?²
- **The leaven of legalism:** *Galatians 5:7-9 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? (8) This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. (9) A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.* The problem in the Galatian church was that they started with faith and Jesus plus nothing but were soon persuaded that they needed to add aspects of the law (like observing certain days, circumcision, and righteousness by works etc.). So their faith became Jesus plus... Paul instructed them (in no uncertain terms!) that this was not from God and was in fact a leaven that quickly leavens the whole lump.
- **The leaven of immorality:** *1 Corinthians 5:1,7 It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife... (7) Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.* The context of this well-known passage in Corinthians concerning leaven is sexual immorality. 1st century Corinth, which is in southern Greece west of Athens, was known unfortunately for an 'anything goes' attitude³. It had a reputation for gross immorality. And as we see here it had infiltrated into the Church. Paul correctly identified this as a leaven. The church was following the ways of the culture in which they lived. It was a slippery slope that only headed in one direction. And rapidly. Does this sound familiar? What has happened with sexual immorality in

our day? What is the attitude of the church? Does it stay true to what God says in His word or has the leaven started to spread its influence through the church? Unfortunately, to ask the question is to answer it. It is not the job of the church to judge the world. But it is the role of the church to maintain and obey God's word within it. (see Paul's discussion of this straight after the passage quoted above in 1 Cor. 5:9-13.)

Jesus is the unleavened bread

The unleavened bread speaks of the total sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Do you realise that if Jesus had committed but one sin then He could not have been the sacrifice for our sin? It was a lamb without defect that was sacrificed at Passover and it was bread without leaven that was eaten at the feast of unleavened bread. When you think of all the different ways that a person gets led into sin it is incredible that our Saviour lived His whole life without failing once! But that is what He did. The Bible record is clear on this: *'You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. (1 John 3:5) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)* Did not Jesus tell us that He is the true bread? He is the unleavened bread on whom we should feed.

*John 6:32-35 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. (33) For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (34) Sir, they said, "from now on give us this bread." (35) **Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.***

It is also worth noting that this feast was observed on the 15th Nisan for this is when Jesus was buried in the tomb having been taken down from the cross late on the 14th Nisan. It all points to Christ! Now let's look at a couple of Jewish observances connected to this feast for they are amazing and full of instruction.

Jewish Observance of the Feast: The Personal Application

We read above that the Biblical command concerning the feast of Unleavened Bread was for the Jews to remove any yeast (leaven) from their house. This became a tradition called 'Bedikat HaMetz' (meaning 'the search for leaven'). Chumney gives the details of this tradition as follows:



'The preparation for searching and removing the leaven from the house actually begins before Passover (Pesach). First, the wife thoroughly cleans the house to remove all leaven from it. In the Bible, leaven is symbolic of sin. In cleaning the house, the wife is instructed to purposely leave ten small pieces of leaven (bread) in the house. Then the father takes the children, along with a candle, a wooden spoon, a feather, and a piece of linen cloth, and searches through the house for the ten pieces of leaven. By nightfall on the day before Passover (Pesach), a final and comprehensive search is performed. At this time, the house is completely dark except for the candles. Once the father finds the leaven (bread), he sets the candle down by the leaven and lays the wooden spoon beside the leaven. Then he uses the feather to sweep the leaven onto the spoon. Without touching

the leaven, he takes the feather, spoon, and leaven, wraps them in a linen cloth, and casts them out of the door of the house. The next morning (the fourteenth of Nisan), he goes into the synagogue and puts the linen cloth and its contents into a fire to be burned.'

This is very instructive for our own lives in looking at what the personal aspect of this feast is for us. The house that contains the leaven is a picture of our lives and our bodies - the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16). The search for the leaven was a complete 'spring clean' of their entire house to ensure that no leaven had fallen into any little cracks. The candle that illuminates the room in the search for the leaven is a picture of the work of the word of God which is a light unto our path (Psalm 119:105). Once the leaven is found, the feather (representing the Holy Spirit who is often pictured as a Dove) sweeps the leaven (sin) onto the wooden spoon (a type of the wooden cross of Christ) which is used to remove the leaven (sin). This is all placed with in linen (the righteousness of Christ) and is judged by fire (representing the judgment that Christ bore in taking away OUR sin.)

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened.⁴ For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. (8) Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The personal ongoing aspect of this feast is also expressed in the verse above. It speaks of our sanctification or holiness in our walk as Christians. We keep the feast spiritually by removing, through the word of God (the candle) and the work of the Holy Spirit (the feather) any leaven of wickedness and malice. And we feed upon the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. That is how we keep the feast today in a spiritual sense. We walk in truth. We aren't perfect and are not expected to be. But we are to be honest about our condition before God and man acknowledging that without Him, Jesus, we are nothing. We allow the word of God and the Holy Spirit to work in our lives as we remain open and soft towards our Lord. We remain truthful before God acknowledging our sin (leaven) knowing that *'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'* 1 John 1:9

An outward example: Jesus clears out the leaven from His Father's house

As noted above, in preparation for Passover and Unleavened bread the Jews would clear out any and every speck of leaven that were in their homes. So ... the question is 'did Jesus do this?' And if so, in what way did He do it? Jesus did do this. He specially cleared out the leaven that was in His Father's house. And note also the timing when this event occurred.

*John 2:13-17 When **it was almost time for the Jewish Passover**, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (14) In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. (15) So he made a whip out of cords, **and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.** (16) To those who sold doves he said, **"Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"** (17) His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

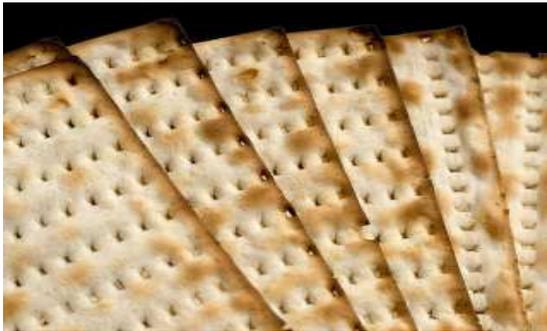
Normally we would read over this without understanding the significance of the approaching Passover but once you understand the command of God to the Israelites to remove any leaven from their homes leading up to the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread, then the significance becomes all the more real. In driving out the money changes and salesmen, Jesus was removing the leaven from His Father's house in preparation for the coming Passover. It certainly makes you wonder what He would think/do to many churches in the West today! Now this event in John 2 occurred early in the ministry of Jesus. But it wasn't the only time that Jesus removed the leaven from His Father's house. In fact, even in the days leading up to His own death on the cross, Jesus again entered the temple and removed the leaven! This is

expressed in the following scripture and follows straight on from the 'triumphant entry' into Jerusalem in that fateful final week.

Matthew 21:10-13 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" (11) The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (12) Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. (13) It is written, he said to them, " 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.' "

Jewish Observance of the Feast: The Messianic Significance

In learning about the Jewish traditions surrounding each feast I was amazed at the truth that God has packed into each one. But one of the best in my opinion concerns the 'matzah' in the Seder ceremony that we discussed in the previous study on the Passover. Matzah is unleavened flat bread seen below. While there is some mystery surrounding its origin, this wonderful tradition apparently goes back before the time of Christ. So have a read of what the Jews do each and every year at the feasts of Passover and Unleavened bread and then we'll discuss its spiritual meaning and Messianic significance.



The ceremony involving the matzah: As part of the Seder ceremony the leader of the Seder will bring out a linen bag containing three pieces of matzah (flat, unleavened bread that has stripes and has been pierced). The second or middle piece of the three is removed from the bag and is broken. Half of the matzah is then wrapped in a linen cloth and is hidden somewhere in the house. This part is known as the 'afikomen'⁵ and it remains hidden until a later part of the ceremony where children are asked to search for the 'afikomen'. The one that finds it is rewarded with a gift and the afikomen is then broken into many pieces and eaten by all that are at the service.

So now it is your time to think! What does this tradition that is replayed year after year and goes back before the time of Christ signify?

The Matzah Messianic Fulfilment: The three pieces of unleavened bread (matzah) that are together in one bag speaks of the Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19). The second piece that is removed from the bag speaks of the second member of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, coming to earth and being found as a man. He is the one that was broken for us at the cross just as the second piece of the matzah was broken. In that the matzah is often pierced and striped, so Jesus was for us. The great prophetic revelation about Jesus Christ foretold this saying 'he was pierced for our transgressions' and 'by his stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53:6). In that the broken matzah was then wrapped in linen signifies the burial of Jesus' body which also was wrapped in linen (Mark 15:46). This was then hidden for a time just as Jesus was hidden in the tomb for 3 days and 3 nights. But the children are then asked to search for the matzah just as we are asked to seek Him as little children. To the one that finds the matzah that had been hidden, a gift is given. The same occurs spiritually for all that seek and find Him are given the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38, Eph 4:7-8). In that everyone in the ceremony is then asked to partake of the

matzah that is no longer hidden, so Christ invites all to spiritually partake of Him saying 'I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.' (John 6:51)

Isn't that amazing? Isn't it sad that the Jewish people can re-enact this year after year and still be ignorant of what this ceremony truly means? Isn't it going to be amazing when God again fulfils His promise to return, save, and open the eyes of His people Israel? How wonderful it will be when they see that to which they are now blinded in part. All of their feasts and ceremonies faithfully re-enacted over the centuries will be filled with such wonder and meaning for them! They will see that Jesus, the One that they pierced, is everywhere throughout their Torah!

Conclusion

The feast of unleavened bread points to Jesus as the bread from heaven that was without sin. He is the second or middle matzah that was removed from the three and was broken for our sake. This for me, is very instructive. And it is interesting that Jesus would have been acting this out at the last supper with His disciples. Can you remember when he took the bread at the last supper? What did He say?

Luke 22:19 And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Is it not amazing that Jesus would have been taking the second of the three portions of unleavened bread and breaking that? The Jews had performed this year after year but this was the first time that someone had said 'This is me! The breaking of this second loaf is me. This is my body which is given and will be broken, for you.' Does this not make communion more real? Hopefully it gives you something more to think about when you next celebrate the Lord's Supper. Actually it is not something that you will think about but someone. The bread of Heaven who came down, was broken, hidden and then found by those who seek Him out!

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1. Today they would be the priest or vicar that doesn't really believe the word of God or in a miracle working God but maintains their place in the Church none the less. Today they would be some involved in so called 'higher criticism' or the members of the Jesus Seminar who love to act as the Bible's authority and make pronouncements upon which parts of the Bible did and didn't not actually happen (the latter normally involves anything that requires the sovereign work of God). This is the leaven of the Sadducees to avoid today! Unfortunately this leaven can spread rapidly. ☹
 2. I have recently watched the third part of a DVD series called 'Wide is the gate'. The third part of this series focuses in on the so called New Apostolic Reformation movement. It shows what is happening within this movement of so called Apostles and Prophets and where they are trying to take the church through this desire for power and signs and wonders. It nearly breaks your heart when you see huge congregations and conferences of people seemingly throwing all caution and discernment to the wind in an attempt to have a powerful experience or see signs and wonders. It seems that the Church is putting the pedal down in moving forward with more mystical and Hindu/New Age techniques in an attempt to experience something new. I felt sad after watching what was happening. And make no mistake... it is leaven and it spreads rapidly. ☹
 3. Ray Stedman writes: *The conditions under which the Corinthians lived were very much like the conditions under which we live, or to put that the other way, the conditions under which we live today are Corinthian conditions. Corinth was a beautiful city, a lovely city of palms and beautiful buildings, the center of pleasure for the whole empire, and it was devoted to two things -- the pursuit of pleasure (largely passion), and of wisdom. It was a Greek city, and its inhabitants loved to philosophize, and they were given to what Paul calls, "the wisdom of words." So the two major forces that were active in this*

city, creating the atmosphere in which the Corinthian church had to live, were these: intellectualism and sensualism. This was a city devoted to the worship of the goddess sex. That is why I speak of it as so like modern conditions today. In the city of Corinth there was a temple that was dedicated to the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite, and part of the worship of the Greek goddess was the performance of certain religious ceremonies that involved sexual relationships; therefore, the priestesses of this temple were really prostitutes, and there were some 10,000 of them attached to the temple. The city was openly given over to the practices of licentiousness; it was regarded as a normal, proper part of life and no one ever thought twice about it. If we think we are living under conditions where sensualism is rampant and worship of sex is widespread, these conditions do not yet approach those of the Christians who had to live in Corinth. ↵

4. Always interesting that even in the midst of the sin of the Corinthians Paul still tells them that they are unleavened even though they are told to still clear out the old leaven. In other words, in Christ they are totally spotless but in themselves they still will see sin and need to deal with it through confession. This is the same thought that is shown when Jesus cleaned the feet of Peter. Jesus said that Peter's whole body was clean, but only his feet (as he walked in the world) needed washing. (John 13:5-10) This is the difference between justification and sanctification. It is expressed in Hebrews as well where the writer tells us that 'by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.' (Heb 10:14) ↵
5. 'Afikomen' is actually a Greek word whose meaning is debated. While many say that it means 'dessert' others believe it means 'the coming one'. The latter view obviously is very interesting for it has definite Messianic symbolism. There is an interesting discussion on this and related matters at the following site: <http://www.jewsforjesus.org/publications/newsletter/april-2011/01> ↵