

THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Objectives:

- To understand the customs surrounding the feast of unleavened bread in Jesus' time.
- To gain an awareness of the meaning of leaven (sin) in the believer's life.
- To identify the specific instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Approach: (*hold up a basket of bread and muffins or a picture of bread*)

Most of us love bread--homemade bread, biscuits, cornbread, whole wheat bread, blueberry muffins, crackers--and the list could go on and on. Bread is the substance of life--it adds texture and nutrition to our diet but it also adds variety. Many of the foods we eat everyday are enhanced by bread or are breaded in some fashion. We do not realize how much bread we eat until, for whatever reason, we have to avoid them. The feast we will be studying today focuses on bread and is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread.



I. GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING THE FEAST

A. **The Feast of Unleavened Bread is the second feast in the 7-feast cycle.**

It occurs on the night after Passover, or Nisan 15.

1. The term "Unleavened Bread" is often used interchangeably with the term "Passover" to denote the eight-day period of commemoration of the flight from Egypt.
2. "The commandments instituting this feast were given prior to the Exodus from Egypt." ¹
3. Interestingly, God promised the Hebrews that He would not allow an enemy to invade their land during a pilgrimage feast such as Passover/Unleavened Bread. Exodus 34:24

¹ Howard, 1997, p. 66.

"For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year." (NKJV)

B. God gave four specific instructions concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

1. There were special sacrifices that were to be offered in the temple each day. Lev. 23:8 and Numbers 28:19-24.
2. The first and seventh days of the feast were Sabbaths--a holy convocation to the Lord. No work was to be done on those days. (Exodus 12:16, Lev. 23:7-8; Num. 28:25; Deut. 16:8).
3. Leaven was strictly forbidden during the eight days of this feast. No less than six Biblical passages emphasize this prohibition of leaven. (Ex. 12:14-20; 13:6-8; 23:15; 34:18; Lev. 23:6; Deut. 16:3, 8).
4. This feast was declared to be a memorial to be kept forever.
"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." Exodus 12:17

C. The prohibition against leaven was a total prohibition.

1. "Leaven" is known as "hametz" in Hebrew. It literally means "sour." The term "leaven" refers to any fermenting product such as yeast or baking powder.
2. Eating of leavened bread during the feast carried severe consequences, according to Scripture. Ex. 12:15 *"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."*
3. The leaven was to be removed from the house according to the passage we just read, but further scriptural passages reveal that leaven was not to be found anywhere in the land:
Ex. 13:7 *"Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders."*
Deut. 16:4 *"Let no yeast be found in your possession in all your land for seven days."*

D. "Search for Leaven" ceremony. On the night before Passover, each family observes a ritual search for any leftover or missed leaven in the house.

1. Prior to the search a major housecleaning has taken place. All products containing yeast are removed from the house.
2. Some Jewish families even use separate utensils and dishes that have had no contact with leaven of any kind during this feast.

3. The father of the household takes a candle, wooden spoon, feather and a paper bag. He leads the children on a search for missed breadcrumbs, which the mother has purposefully left behind. When the breadcrumbs are found, the father brushes them onto the spoon with the feather and empties the crumbs into the paper sack. Once all the crumbs are collected, the bag is tied shut and burned.

a. As the leaven is burned the following blessing is recited:

"Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot (a commandment or religious duty) and commands us to burn the hametz."

b. As a precaution against missed breadcrumbs, the following prayer is recited: "Any hametz which is in my possession which I did not see, and remove, nor know about, shall be nullified and become ownerless, like the dust of the earth."

II. JESUS AND THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

A. **As unleavened bread is pure, so Jesus was pure.** The matzoh is a picture of Christ: it is pierced--He was pierced; it is bruised--he was bruised; it is striped; it is by His stripes we are healed; and it is pure--He was without sin.



1. Only unleavened bread was used in the Temple because the offerings presented there had to be pure.
2. Jesus referred to Himself as the "bread of life" in John 6:35.

B. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, which means "house of bread."



First century manger in Bethlehem

C. Just as Passover depicts the substitutionary death of the Messiah, so Unleavened Bread depicts the burial of the Messiah.

1. He died a criminal's death but his burial was that of a wealthy man. Normally criminals were given a criminal's burial but the Messiah, was honored in His burial. He was buried in a rich man's tomb. (Matt. 27:57-60) Joseph of Arimathaea was a member of the Sanhedrin.
2. His burial declared His innocence and purity. Because He was without sin (leaven), God did not allow His body to be cast outside the city in the garbage heap.
3. His body did not see decay or return to dust. Ps. 16:10 is King David's prophecy concerning the burial of the Messiah. "As a pure, sinless sacrifice, the Messiah was not under the curse to return to the dust."²

D. We see a picture of Jesus in the "Search for the Leaven" ceremony:

1. The candle represents the Word of God, which shines a light into the dark corners of our lives and reveals hidden sin.
2. The feather represents the Holy Spirit, revealing sin in our lives and directing us to the cross.
3. The wooden spoon points to the tree of crucifixion.
4. The paper bag represents the grave and death to sin.
5. The fire represents the obliteration of our sin. It is never again to be remembered.³

² Howard, 1997, p. 70.

³ Adapted from Scarlata, 1997, p. 172.

III. THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD MADE PERSONAL

A. God has zero tolerance for sin in our lives.

1. A Hebrew who had leaven in his possession during this feast was to be an outcast from the land. "By today's standards of gross immorality, eating leavened bread during this festival week would be considered laughably unimportant. . . But God never changes!"⁴
2. "Why does God hate sin? Because sin is man's declaration of independence of God."⁵
3. "Hametz symbolizes the 'risen yeast' in man, the egoism, arrogance, and self-centeredness which separate him from God. The mystics compared hametz to a dark cloud of egoism which blots out the divine light, and they likened eating it on Passover to worshipping idols."⁶

B. There is nothing "personal" about sin--it infects everything and everyone around it.

1. "Leaven is well-suited as a picture of sin since it rapidly permeates the dough, contaminating it, souring it, fermenting it, and swelling it to many times its original size without changing its weight."⁷
2. "Private sin affects everything a man or woman touches, because it reveals true character, and character is the basis of every relationship."⁸
3. When Achan stole articles from the spoils of Jericho, God commanded that he and his family be stoned. His private sin destroyed his entire family.
4. We can certainly see many examples in Washington of how "private" sin rapidly eats away at the morals of an entire nation.

C. Redemption is to be followed by a holy life and right living.

1. Since we have, by faith, accepted the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb which has covered the guilt of our sin, we are now living "in the Feast of Unleavened Bread where purity and separation from leaven are required."⁹
2. Just as the presence of leaven at Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is an outrage, so the presence of sin in our lives offends our Holy God.

⁴ Hagee, 1999, p. 27.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Unterman as quoted by Hagee, 1999, p. 30.

⁷ Howard, 1997, p. 68.

⁸ Hagee, 1999, p. 45.

⁹ Howard, 1997, p. 71.

D. We need to daily purge our lives of sin by taking the candle of God's Word and searching our hearts. "Every corner, every crack, and every window sill must be scrutinized in its light. The task is not complete until every speck of leaven is purged."¹⁰



1. Paul urges the Corinthians in I Cor. 5:7 to "get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. "
2. "It does no good to simply get rid of the large conspicuous loaves on the table and leave the little pieces of leaven scattered on the floor."¹¹
3. Sin contaminates everything in our lives. Paul says in I Cor. 5:6 "Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?"
4. We are no longer under the power or dominion of sin, according to Rom. 6:1-18. We are no longer helpless slaves to our sin nature, but we do choose to sin when, according to James 1:14-15, we are drawn away by our own lust.
5. I Cor. 5:7 gives us the reason we should daily purge the leaven from our lives: "For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed."

Conclusion:

Let's take a few moments to reflect on the meaning of Passover and Unleavened Bread for us, at the dawn of the third millenium. How has the Lord spoken to you through the Passover Seder we celebrated last evening and through this time of looking at the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

Allow time for class interaction

Close with a prayer of sanctification

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 72.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 71

Bibliography

Hagee, John, "His Glory Revealed," Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1999.

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