



"He is worse than an infidel who does not read his Bible and acknowledge his obligation to God."
—George Washington

31-Mar-17

Why Do We Observe Unleavened Bread? (Part One)

When someone asks us why we remove leaven from our homes and eat unusual "bread" for a week, we may say something like, "Leaven is a symbol of [sin](#), and the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures putting sin out of our lives." Or we might say, "These days picture our coming out of sin, just as Israel came out of Egypt." These are the common, basic explanations we have all heard while in the church, and we have probably used them many times ourselves.

While these answers are true, they are incomplete because they give a slightly different emphasis than God's Word does. Certainly, leavening is symbolic of sin, and we are required to completely avoid leavening during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Also, all followers of [Jesus Christ](#) must strive against sin and get rid of it wherever they find it in their lives. However, God's instructions for this Feast begin with two other aspects that set the stage for ridding sin from our lives and give us the means to overcome, as we will see.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is first mentioned by name in [Exodus 12:14](#), 17-20:

So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance. . . . So you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of

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Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.

The fundamental reason that [God](#) gives for this Feast appears in verse 17: "for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt." In other words, this Feast is a commanded memorial of God's deliverance. Additionally, because it is a Feast, God intends it to be a time of rejoicing. Granted, the food we eat is somewhat unusual compared to what we normally associate with a festive occasion, but nonetheless, this Feast is an appointed time for us to remember God's deliverance.

The phrase "*Days of Unleavened Bread*" is only used in two places ([Acts 12:3](#); [20:6](#)), and in these instances, Luke refers to a span of time that can be slightly longer than the seven days of the Feast. Aside from this, the seven-day observance itself is consistently called the "*Feast of Unleavened Bread*," showing that this is a time to celebrate.

Physical Israel kept this Feast as a memorial of God delivering them from Egypt. Lot's deliverance from Sodom may also have taken place during this Feast (see [Genesis 19:3](#)). Spiritual Israel keeps it as a memorial of a far greater, spiritual deliverance from the power of darkness.

[Exodus 23:15](#) reiterates the basic reason for this Feast:

You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty).

Again, God ties the command to observe this Feast with His deliverance of Israel from Egypt. The context in which this appears is God's instruction to keep Feasts to Him during three seasons each year. Hitting the high points of the appointed times, He does not mention the avoidance of leavening. Its absence does not mean avoiding leavening is unimportant (as other verses show), but it indicates that God is emphasizing other things in this Feast.

In all of God's instructions for this Feast, there are more references to eating unleavened bread than to putting out or avoiding leavening. The instructions, then, are weighted toward the positive aspect of eating rather than the negative aspect of avoiding. Even the name of the Feast gives us an obvious clue to what God intends the focus to be: eating unleavened bread, rather than avoiding leavening.

[Moses](#) records a third witness of this in [Exodus 34:18](#):

The Feast of Unleavened Bread you shall keep. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, in the appointed time of the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.

We see the same two elements here, and thus the same emphasis. Yet, we must be careful with the wording of these instructions, as it contains a detail that can influence the way we think about this Feast. Both this verse and [Exodus 23:15](#) speak of *coming out* of Egypt. That is indeed what happened, but the wording obscures who was truly responsible.

The effect of such wording can be like a child saying, "The milk got spilled," or "The rock accidentally went through the window." The critical matter of who caused these things to happen slides into the background, and we can understand why a child might prefer that.

The Israelites literally "came out from Egypt"—they walked—but they did not cause themselves to leave it. *God* made it possible for them to walk away from slavery by decimating their captors, and then God Himself led them out of Egypt "by day in a pillar of cloud . . . and by night in a pillar of fire" ([Exodus 13:21](#)).

We should never forget by whose hand these things occurred. Israel "came out from Egypt" *only* because of God's intervention. They had instructions from Moses to follow, and they had to make the effort to walk, but it was not by their efforts that they were delivered. As [Exodus 12:51](#) reads, "And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the Lord brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt" The focus of this Feast, then, must remain on God's activity.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Unity and Unleavened Bread](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh, reflecting on Jesus Christ's prayer for unity in John 17, insists that unity with our brethren is impossible without unity with God first. Adam and Eve severed this unity by yielding to Satan's influence, stimulating their minds with a novel diversion. Sin automatically separates us from God. The key to overcoming rests exclusively in our relationship with God. We are placed in the Body of Christ at His discretion, and are obligated to subject ourselves to His workmanship, keeping Him continually in our thoughts, night and day. We do not produce any fruit unless we are attached to the vine. As members of Christ's body, we must function for the good of the whole body, not competing with other organs or limbs. We must continually see God and function as a son of God. As with our Elder Brother, if we do those things that please our Heavenly Father, He will be there for us. Not responding to God and treating our brethren shabbily, brings harsh judgment upon us. Unity in the Body is brought about by yielding to and using the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, enabling us to love our brother as God has loved us. The more we have in common, the greater will be unity and peace.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Remaining Unleavened](#)

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

We have a tendency to put matters behind us once we are finished with them, but we cannot afford to do this with the lessons we learn from the Days of Unleavened Bread. John Reid shows that those lessons are eternal!

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