

## **Remaining Unleavened**

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Every year God takes us through a series of seven holy days to remind His church of His plan for all mankind. Each holy day reveals important lessons for us to learn and imprint on our minds and characters. Some of us have gone through this rehearsal of God's plan dozens of times, and we seem to learn something new every year.

The Passover season, which includes Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread, is especially meaningful. Passover is the most solemn night of the year, as we commemorate the sacrificial death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In His own body He bore our sins, making possible forgiveness, justification before God, and our ultimate salvation. Because of this, coming before God at this time is tremendously significant to each of us.

We probably prepare more spiritually for this season than any other. Before the Feast of Tabernacles, we prepare by making travel arrangements and securing our lodging—not very spiritual activities. For the Day of Atonement, another solemn time, we indeed prepare to fast and draw close to God, but for the Passover season, we prepare by deeply examining ourselves and our spiritual progress (I Corinthians 11:27-29; II Corinthians 13:5). This introspection helps us to take the Passover worthily and be recleansed of sin.

During this season we concentrate on putting sin out of our lives. We do the best we can to clean our homes to ensure they are leaven-free. We understand physical leaven just symbolizes sin, yet we understand what searching it out means as well: finding sin in the places we least expect. Working to clean our homes of leaven pictures the greater effort of searching out and removing the hidden and hard-to-find sin from our lives.

Then before partaking of the Passover, each of us works extra hard to make sure we are not sinning. If we have been tolerating a sin within ourselves, we are careful to put it away before taking the bread and wine. Though in this life we can never be totally blameless on our own, we want to signify to God our desire and diligence to be pure and righteous before Him (I Corinthians 5:6-8).

Because the spring holy day season makes us acutely conscious of how we are living, we walk softly before God; wanting to be right with Him in every way at this time of year. The Days of Unleavened Bread hammer this point home for seven days. Many of us resolve to do better in the coming year.

### **On to Pentecost**

But now we are on to Pentecost, and we can leave the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread behind us, right?

In one sense that is correct. We must leave the physical days behind us, but we should not leave behind the significance of the lessons and the meaning of this season. Most of us tend to forget the last holy day and focus on the coming one, but as time progresses toward Christ's return, God expects more of us than that.

Certainly, we take the Passover and eat unleavened bread every year. But instead of forgetting the point of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we must take the meaning of being unleavened with us—to use it as a foundation on which we can build our lives throughout the year. In other words, we must continue to work hard to remain unleavened all year long.

The holy days are far more than required holy convocations. God does not want us to sigh with relief that they are past, slipping back into the habits and weaknesses that we have accumulated. God never does anything without a purpose, and the purpose of the holy days is to teach us lessons that we will learn and keep forever. The Days of Unleavened Bread this year may be over, but the spiritual lessons taught in them are eternal!

### **Keeping Your Heart**

Jesus instructs us that our first priority is to strive to be in His Kingdom and to be righteous (Matthew 6:33). He expects us to watch our steps and work to live righteously before Him. Solomon succinctly lists what we need to be doing in Proverbs 4:23-27:

Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you. Let your eyes look straight ahead, and your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. Turn not to the right hand or the left; remove your foot from evil.

The sense of "keep your heart" is that we need to exert more vigilance in guarding our minds than men do over anything else. Governments go to great pains to guard their installations, plans, and secrets, but God says that it is even more important to guard what we allow to reside in our minds.

Why is this so important? Because our hearts, our minds, guide and direct everything we do, and if we do not guard and protect them from the ungodly ideas, beliefs, and entertainments, they can cause our spiritual downfall. It is in our minds and hearts that our characters are shaped, and if we allow perverse and unrighteous character to enter, the righteous character that God wants to see in us will never form.

The other instructions that Solomon gives spring from this. He tells us to ponder and control what comes out of our mouth and what we allow our eyes to view. He teaches us to make sure our feet stay on the right path, as well as to work on establishing our habits and manner of living, meaning we should not become involved in insensitive, hasty, careless, and destructive actions. The prophet Haggai puts all this very concisely, "Consider your ways!" (Haggai 1:5, 7).

### **Reaping What We Sow**

Another of Solomon's proverbs summarizes a second principle we need to consider: "He who diligently seeks good finds favor, but trouble will come to him who seeks evil" (Proverbs 11:27). The individual who strives after good or to do what is right—whether conscious of it or not—is striving after the positive results that will come from living that way. In the same way, a person who decides to live contrary to God's way will automatically produce negative results.

This is the principle Paul mentions in Galatians 6:7: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked [outwitted]; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." When we truly remain unleavened, we

reap the rewards of godly living, such as peace, contentment, mercy, and ultimately eternal life. But the person who lets down and leads a life of sin will reap adversity, misery, destruction, and ultimately death.

The book of Proverbs often contrasts diligence, a positive virtue, and laziness, a negative trait. Proverbs 12:24 is one of these, showing the results of each: "The hand of the diligent will rule, but the slothful will be put to forced labor." On a national scale, we might say this contrasts those who diligently guard their freedoms and rule themselves to those who through laziness have been conquered and forced into slavery. Whatever scale we apply to this, Solomon reveals an ethical principle at work. Unless and until he changes his ways, a lazy person will descend to being a servant to others, while a diligent person will grow, prosper, and control his own life.

Spiritually, the stakes are far higher. Those who strive to master themselves—to exercise self-control to live God's way—will rule in the Kingdom of God (Revelation 3:21; 5:10), while those who slothfully neglect this task could possibly lose everything. Notice Paul's warning in Hebrews 2:1-3:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him . . . ?

### **Works Not Forgotten**

Though we give special emphasis to each of the holy days in their seasons (Matthew 24:45), it would be ideal to carry the lessons from each of these days with us throughout the year. If we did this, there would be no limit to our growth!

The understanding of God's way is cumulative, a process of many years' efforts. As Herbert Armstrong often said, holy, righteous character is not something that God can instantly create by fiat. It grows, develops through experiences of overcoming and growth shared with God, and this requires time. In fact, it requires a lifetime.

By remembering the price paid for us, and applying the lessons from this Days of Unleavened Bread, this process will be accelerated and made easier for us. However, if we fail to appreciate our salvation and neglect to remember the lessons we learned, just the reverse will take place. Some have drifted so far that, like the Hebrews, they need to be retaught the first principles of God's way of life (Hebrews 5:12). If any of us find ourselves in this condition, we need to repent and do the first works, recapturing our first love (Revelation 2:4-5).

God knows the effort it requires for us to change, and He is faithful to reward us for our labors, as He says in Hebrews 6:9-12:

But, beloved, we are confident of better things concerning you, yes, things that accompany salvation, though we speak in this manner. For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that each one of you show the

same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish [*slothful*, KJV], but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

God will not fail to reward us for our efforts of love toward Him. One of the ways we do this is by bringing ourselves under control so that we can properly serve others, which is showing love to our brothers and thus to God (Matthew 25:31-46). Paul emphasizes that we have to show diligence in pursuing eternal life to the very end—ironically, to our dying breath. When we do this, we have God's promise that we will inherit all that He has in store for us in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6).

Therefore, because of the sacrifice made for us and the wonderful promises God extends to us, let us take the industrious effort we made to prepare for the Passover season and the lessons we learned during the holy days and put them into action. Just because Unleavened Bread is over does not mean we should become leavened again. Our task—and a tough one at that—is to remain unleavened all year long.