

THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Selected Scripture

Introduction:

1 Corinthians 5 – in the midst of a severe reprimand regarding sexual sin in the church in Corinth, Paul makes an appeal that we all need to take seriously. The problem that was plaguing him was that the congregation in that church was not dealing with a serious sin problem. There was someone in the church living in blatant sin and they were actually boasting about their loving accepting attitude toward this man and his lifestyle.

As an aside, that seems to be a very prevalent attitude in many churches today. The only thing that matters is love and acceptance. It doesn't matter what you do. Live any way you want to...pick any lifestyle you prefer...it doesn't matter how you live. There's no right or wrong, no good or bad God loves you and we love you so it's all good.

That is the way the Corinthians were responding to obvious sin in their midst. So Paul challenged them. He challenged their thinking and their actions. He said—*Read vv. 6-8.*

Unleavened bread...Christ, the Passover Lamb...celebrate the festival... What does all of this mean? We will come back to the application of this passage later, but in order to really understand Paul's reference we need to understand something about the Jewish feast of Unleavened Bread.

Last week we began a series about the Holidays of God. Review:

- Spring Feasts – Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost
- Fall Feasts – Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Tabernacles

All of these feasts are not just random holidays instituted by God to provide a reason to stop work and take a break for a celebration. They are shadows of a greater reality, reflections that point toward the Messiah. All of the feasts find their fulfillment in the Messiah, Jesus—the spring feasts in his first coming, the fall feasts in his second coming.

Last week we looked into the practice and the fulfillment of the Feast of Passover. This morning we have come to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In Hebrew it is Hag HaMatzot. We need to look at the Biblical and Jewish practice of this feast, and then to see the Messianic significance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We will conclude by coming back to the implication this feast holds for Christian believers as suggested by Paul I 1 Cor. 5.

The Practice of the Feast of Unleavened Bread

We begin by looking at the timing. An important thing to note regarding these feasts is the overlap that occurs in the timing. In Lev. 23, God outlined the schedule for the Feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the LORD's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work. But you shall present a food offering to the LORD for seven days. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any ordinary work.” (vv.5-8)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread is mentioned five other times in the Old Testament. We will not go through them, but suffice it to say that God gave detailed instructions for offerings and sacrifices which were to be given throughout the seven days of the feast. In the passage we read earlier from Deuteronomy 16, God emphasized the absolute importance of avoiding any leaven during that time. We'll look at that in a moment.

First a note regarding the timing and the days of the feast. Technically, Passover was one day, followed by seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. However, because they are back-to-back feast days, the term Passover was often used to refer to the entire feast time – eight days. Sometimes the names were used almost interchangeably, including all eight days under the name Unleavened Bread as well.

That explains the writers of the Synoptic Gospels referred to the preparation of the Passover feast as the first day of Unleavened Bread (See Mark 14:12, Matt. 26:17, Luke 22:7).

The Biblical practice required that no leaven be eaten during these feast days. Not only that, but all traces of leaven or yeast were to be removed from their homes. Prior to the Passover, in preparation for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there were some very careful procedures observed to be sure that no leaven was found in the house. Every corner would be searched to make sure there wasn't a crumb of bread anywhere that might contain leaven.

Throughout the seven-day feast, there is a synagogue service every day in which certain Scriptures are read. These Scriptures all center around either the Feast of Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread or are in some way related to them. The key passage, which is read in the service every day is from Numbers 28:17-25, where it focuses on the sacrifices to be made, including the offering of a male goat as a sin-offering to make atonement for them.

In the New Testament, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is mentioned in reference to the Messiah's observance of this feast in Matthew, Mark and Luke. As mentioned before, there is a blurring of the distinction between Passover and the first day of Unleavened Bread. The only place this feast is referred to in the Epistles is in 1 Cor. 5, the passage I referred to earlier. We will get back to that in a moment.

The Messianic Implications of Unleavened Bread

There are a couple of things to note when thinking about how the Feast of Unleavened Bread is fulfilled in the Messiah. First of all, whenever the word leaven is used symbolically in the Scriptures, it is always a symbol of sin. This is why it was so important for Jewish families to purge their homes of any leaven. It was symbolic of removing all traces of sin from their lives. They were not to eat leaven or even have it in their homes. Likewise, they were not to participate in anything sinful, nor were they to even permit it to touch their lives.

Secondly, the Feast of Unleavened Bread is fulfilled by the offering of the sinless blood of the Messiah. The Passover itself was fulfilled by the death of the Messiah, but the Feast of Unleavened Bread is fulfilled by the sinlessness of His blood offering. This is the message of the book of Hebrews, especially chapters 9 – 10.

We don't have time to go through those chapters, but if you have some time later today or this week I suggest you read through them, particularly 9:11 – 10:18. In there you will see that the offering of sinless blood accomplished three things:

- The cleansing of the heavenly tabernacle – 9:23-24
- The removal of the sins of the Old Testament saints – 10:11-14
- The application of the blood to the NT saints – 10:15-18

So the full import of the Feast of Unleavened Bread was fulfilled in the sinless life of Christ and the offering of his sinless blood for us.

The Implication of Unleavened Bread for us

I want now to return to that passage in 1 Cor. 5, where Paul makes reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread in v. 8 – *read it*. I want to share with you some thoughts that come from a study on this Feast by Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum.

The background to v. 8 is vv. 6-7 – *read them*. What he says in v. 8 is based on the principle of v. 6 – *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*.

According to v. 7 the believer's obligation is to *purge out the old leaven*. The reason is: *For our Passover has been sacrificed, even Christ*. This speaks to the Messianic implications of the Passover.

Now Paul follows up by exhorting: *let us therefore celebrate the festival*. The reason that believers are to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread is because the Passover is done with; the Messiah, the Passover Lamb, has been slain once-and-for-all.

The application to believers is given in verse 8b: *not with old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*.

Today, as believers, we are not to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in a literal way as it was kept under the Mosaic Law, but in a spiritual way. This is to be observed both negatively with old leaven and positively with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Paul did not mean literal leaven, but *the leaven of malice and evil*: Nor did he mean literal unleavened bread, but *the unleavened bread of*

sincerity and truth. The point which Paul makes is that we must purge our lives of the "leaven of sin," because the Messiah, our Passover, has already been sacrificed for us. In the context of 1 Corinthians, he is dealing with a congregational sin. The way a congregation, a local church, purges leaven from their midst is by means of church discipline.

But, as individual believers, we must also purge our life of leaven. The way we do that is by means of I John 1:9: *If we confess our sins; he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Conclusion

When we receive Yeshua (Jesus) as our Passover sacrifice, we are born again into God's family. Having been born again into God's family means that he can never fall out of that particular family. However, as in any family, fellowship within that family can be broken by sin. This sin, this leaven, must be purged by means of confession.

So the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Characterized by the purging of all leaven from the home, is fulfilled in the shedding of Messiah's sinless blood. We, as Gentile believers, do not celebrate this Feast in the same way. But, by means of confession, we can and must purge our life of the leaven of sin. By doing so, we also keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread in its spiritual sense.