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216 - Unleavened Bread

1. Introduction

Prior to the final plague God brought on the Egyptians Moses was given specific instructions on how to prepare for the event. These instructions included the separation handling, preparation and consumption of the sacrifice and introduced new elements that would become prominent as the Law was defined. One of these, **The Unleavened Bread**, becomes a significant figurative link with Christ and salvation.

2. Unleavened bread

Unleavened bread is one of the more familiar elements in Christian worship. Referred to as the Host in Catholicism and used as a vampiric deterrent in horror films its sometimes viewed as a mystical or ritualistic talisman possessing power. As we explore the scriptures we find a very different view of the unleavened bread that dispels these mistaken notions and demonstrates the true nature of the element and its figurative link in God's plan to save mankind. In this lesson we'll discuss

1. The first mention of unleavened bread in the Bible
2. Unleavened bread and the Passover
3. Unleavened bread in the Law of Moses in relation to the sacrifices
4. The table of shewbread or bread of the presence in the Tabernacle
5. The institution of the Lord's supper and unleavened bread, and
6. Misconceptions concerning unleavened bread

Let's take a look at each of these.

3. The first mention of unleavened bread in the Bible

Unleavened bread appears for the first time as angels come to the home of Lot in Sodom. Lot prepares a meal for them referred to in the King James Version as a feast. The text notes that Lot baked unleavened bread for them and they ate (**Gen 19.3**). Aside from the urgency of the invitation which Lot made to avoid the men of the city and the fact that the two beings are angels there doesn't seem to be any further figurative connection. Its interesting that in the presence of two angels unleavened bread would be present. As we'll see, the unleavened bread during the time of the exodus from Egypt, hadn't been given time to rise and so also conveys a sense of urgency or haste. Figurative or symbolic links with unleavened bread really can't be made prior to the commands given to Moses although the significance of its presence may be more than coincidence. Most popular versions of the Bible use the term "***unleavened bread***" while the New International version states that Lot baked them "***bread without yeast***". The meaning remains the same in spite of this difference in terms. The other interesting thing to note is that the

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angels ate what Lot prepared for them.

4. Unleavened bread and the Passover

As God gave Moses instructions for the unleavened bread it doesn't immediately appear that it has any great significance other than the fact it was included. God states, "***And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.***" (Ex 12.8). We can see a similar sense of urgency as we did in the account of Lot. The unleavened bread is accompanied by "***bitter herbs***" and the people were to eat fully dressed with their shoes on, staff in hand and ready to depart. Following this God explains that he'll execute judgment on Egypt that night while sparing his own people.

The instructions don't end there however. Immediately following this overview are specific statements regarding unleavened bread. God states, "***And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.***" (Ex 12.14-15). This is to be observed as a memorial and the Lord adds "***And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever.***" (Ex 12.17).

Of note here is that the instructions for eating unleavened bread and keeping this feast for seven days receives as much attention as the selection, separation and sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Both the eating of the Passover, and keeping of the feast of unleavened bread, are to be held throughout their generations. This statement also implies that God has a future planned for them as his people. The importance of the unleavened bread is without precedent in this example. We can go back to Genesis chapter four where we see that Abel offered of his flocks and was accepted by God in contrast to Cain who didn't. Blood sacrifices continue through the scriptures in the lives of Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Unleavened bread however remains in the background until the time of the exodus and death of the firstborn.

Further emphasis is placed on unleavened bread in the instructions that followed. From the fourteenth day of the month - the Passover - until the twenty-first day, not only were they to eat unleavened bread, but they weren't to have anything with leaven in their houses and anyone who violated this would be cut off from the congregation of Israel (Ex 12.15,19). The exclusion wasn't just for the Hebrews. Foreigners who were in their land were to avoid this as well. On the fourteenth day of the first month leaven would have to be purged from their homes. The unleavened bread would be eaten as part of the Passover observance and then would continue through the next week until the twenty-first day of the month as I pointed out earlier.

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The people had seen the power of God in the various plagues he brought on Egypt. The firstborn of Egypt were to die and the people were given a means of avoiding that through the lamb and blood on their houses. Unleavened bread was being linked to this preservation and the significance of its usage would be memorable. Moses presented this along with the Passover in his address to the people that they should remember the day the Lord brought them out of bondage to a land that flowed with milk and honey. As they kept this feast they were to instruct their children about its meaning. *“And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the Lord brought thee out of Egypt. Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year.”* (Ex 13.8-10).

As Moses spoke to the people and delivered these instructions they should have been able to identify the promises being fulfilled in these statements. There was to be no leaven found in their houses. They were leaving Egypt. Moses was telling them they could look forward to a time when they had a home. They were being assured that God was remembering the promises made to their forefathers that he would bring them back to Canaan. So in one set of instructions we have preparation for a judgment by God on those who had oppressed them for four hundred years, they would have homes at some point in their future and their nation would be sustained through successive generations.

Another thing to note at this point is that three elements that were part of the Passover have been strongly emphasized and linked. These are the lamb, blood and unleavened bread. The procedures for preparing and eating the Passover were to be remembered, but these three items stand out as critical in their significance. As we move forward in time we find that these are emphasized again as God formalizes the law at Sinai.

5. Unleavened bread in the Law of Moses in relation to the sacrifices

The Law of Moses consists of much more than the ten commandments. At Sinai God gave Moses a number of instructions for constructing the Tabernacle and objects used in worship. He also gave specific instructions for the sacrifices and how they were to be offered. At the end of the time spent at Sinai, which would have been around one year, all aspects of life and worship had been meticulously mapped out. And one of the things that takes a prominent place in all of this is unleavened bread.

To demonstrate the importance of unleavened bread all we need to do is review the scriptures. What we find is a pervasive presence of unleavened bread in nearly all acts of worship and consecration. In the book of Exodus instructions for the feast of unleavened bread are restated as one of three principle feasts to be kept each year (Ex 23.14-15). A reminder to keep this feast is also stated later as God replaces the tables of stone broken by Moses (Ex 34.18).

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Unleavened bread is also an integral part of the consecration of priests who will serve in the Tabernacle before God (Ex 29.1-9, 23). The significance of the unleavened bread is also seen in restrictions that are placed on the priests who would offer the bread. God stated, “*No man that hath a blemish of the seed of Aaron the priest shall come nigh to offer the offerings of the Lord made by fire: he hath a blemish; he shall not come nigh to offer the bread of his God.*” (Lev 21.17, 21). The priests, although human and sinful, were themselves a foreshadow of the priest to come, the Messiah, but the things that were hallowed and offered weren’t to be contaminated by those who were blemished. The same thing was true of the sacrifices. Defects and blemishes made animals unacceptable as sacrifices. Likewise those who offered the sacrifices had to be free of the same.

The book of Leviticus details procedures and components of the sacrifices to be offered. Burnt offerings, thank offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings and others were all accompanied by unleavened bread. The following chart shows the ways in which the bread could be prepared and offered with the sacrifices.

Offering / Usage	Ref	Form	Prep
Meat (Grain)	Lev 2.4	Baked in oven	Unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil or unleavened wafers anointed with oil
	Lev 2.5	Baked in pan	Fine flour unleavned, mingled with oil, part it in pieces and pour oil thereon
	Lev 2.7	Baked in fryingpan	fine flour with oil
	Lev 2.11	All Meat Offerings	No meat offering, which ye shall bring unto the Lord, shall be made with leaven
Sin Offerings & Peace offerings for Nazarite	Num 6.14-17	Basket of unleavened bread	cakes of fine flour mingled with oil (offered with ram for peace offerings)
		Wafers of unleavened bread	anointed with oil
Consecrating priests - ram of consecration	Lev 8.26	Basket of unleavened bread	one unleavened cake, and a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer

Unleavened bread & consecration / sacrifices

As shown, unleavened bread could be baked in an oven or pan, was sometimes “mingled” with oil or was anointed with oil. When a grain offering, referred to in the King James Version as a meat offering was made, it wasn’t to be leavened and had specific forms it could be presented in. Coupled with the other elements offered with the sacrifices the unleavened bread held as great a significance as did the sacrifice itself. All of the offerings consisted of the same presentation with the exception of one special instance of its use - the shewbread.

6. The table of shewbread or bread of the presence in the Tabernacle

In a few lessons we’ll discuss the Tabernacle and its figurative elements but at this point I want to focus on one item - the table of shewbread. God gave instructions for making a table that was to be placed in the Holy Place. This table was made of the same material as the Ark of the Covenant, acacia wood, and was overlaid with gold in the same manner as well. Rings were placed at the corners and like the Ark of the Covenant was to be carried with poles inserted into

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these rings (Ex 25.23-29). The purpose for this table and its exact placement are specific and embody several figurative elements. God stated, *“And thou shalt set upon the table shewbread before me alway.”* (Ex 25.30). The initial instructions don’t give any more information concerning the purpose of the bread. For that we go to the book of Leviticus which provides additional detail.

“And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the Lord. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the Lord. Every sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant.” (Lev 24.5-8). The following chart now adds the shewbread to the list of forms in which the unleavened bread was used.

Offering / Usage	Ref	Form	Prep
Meat (Grain)	Lev 2.4	Baked in oven	Unleavened cakes of fine flour mingled with oil or unleavened wafers anointed with oil
	Lev 2.5	Baked in pan	Fine flour unleavned, mingled with oil, part it in pieces and pour oil thereon
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Consecrating priests - ram of consecration	Lev 8.26	Basket of unleavened bread	one unleavened cake, and a cake of oiled bread, and one wafer
Table of shewbread	Lev 24.5-8	Cakes, baked	made with fine flour, 2/10 deals of flour per cake, frankincense placed on each row, placed in 2 rows - 6 in a row

Unleavened bread including the shewbread (bread of the presence)

The bread was to be made of flour that had been offered by the children of Israel. The bread is described as a cake and this was to be arranged in two rows of six. Many times illustrators will show these in two stacks, which may have been the case, or they could have been laid out in two rows of six side by side. That detail isn’t included but the arrangement may be implied by the instructions to place frankincense on each of the rows. The bread is also referred to as an offering made by fire as we see in the text which designates the shewbread as an offering or sacrifice to the Lord. The cakes were to remain on the table for seven days, being replaced on the sabbath day by the priest. The cakes once removed weren’t discarded, they were to be eaten by the priests in the Holy Place. Also as we read in the earlier instructions this was to be placed on the table in the Tabernacle before the Lord continually, or at all times, as stated in **Exodus 25.30**.

The placement of the table and the bread is also significant. As the Tabernacle was erected we read that Moses *“...put the table in the tent of the congregation, upon the side of the*

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tabernacle northward, without the veil. And he set the bread in order upon it before the Lord; as the Lord had commanded Moses.” (Ex 40.22-23). The Holy Place was separated from the inner part of the Tabernacle known as the Most Holy Place. The separation was made by a veil that hung concealing it. The table of shewbread was to be placed in front of the veil and therefore very close to the position of the Ark of the Covenant. The number of cakes is equal to the number of the tribes of Israel and the fact that God referred to this being before him at all times appears to represent the fact that he was with his people and they were always before him. Newer versions of the scriptures such as the New International Version (NIV) and the English Standard Version (ESV) translate shewbread as “*bread of the presence*” which conveys the meaning better for us today.

Another figurative element that emerges is the frankincense that was to be placed on the cakes. Frankincense was a principle element of the incense used in the Tabernacle which was also in close proximity to the Ark of the Covenant (Ex 30.1-6) and one of three gifts brought to Jesus by the wise men (Matt 2.11).

7. The institution of the Lord’s supper and unleavened bread

As Christ observed Passover with his disciples on the night of his betrayal and arrest he instituted a memorial that would commemorate his death. One of the elements used in this memorial was unleavened bread which had been commanded by God on the night of the first Passover. We’ve seen that the instructions for the Passover were to be carried out throughout their generations so it would have been a necessary part of the feast. We’ve also reviewed the importance of the unleavened bread as it was coupled to the sacrifices that were offered with a stipulation that none of the priests offering the bread could have a blemish. Combining these elements we find figures of Christ in multiple roles fulfilled in his sacrifice and later resurrection.

The first figure is easier for us to identify. Christ was the sacrifice that God was offering on behalf of humanity to save those who will believe. Christ, unlike the animals who were offered, knew God’s plan and was a willing participant in its execution. The animal sacrifices were to be without blemish as Christ was without sin thus representing the coming of the Messiah and his sacrifice. Just as the sacrifices were offered with unleavened bread so Christ was offered with unleavened bread as well.

A second figure we can identify is that of Christ’s consecration as a priest. This wasn’t clear to the disciples at the time and wouldn’t be for another fifty-three days afterward, but on the day of Pentecost their knowledge would begin to grow as the Holy Spirit moved them to preach the Gospel. On Pentecost the church was established and the message of the apostles was the revelation of the new law. The establishment of the church, Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection all worked together to change the nature of worship. Just as Aaron and his sons were consecrated

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with unleavened bread so Christ was consecrated as the high priest of the faith.

The unleavened bread represented Christ's body that was created for the purpose of being killed on the cross (**Heb 10.1-4**). As Jesus instituted the communion or Lord's supper, he stated, **"Take, eat; this is my body."** (**Matt 26.26, Mk 14.22**). Luke's record provides additional detail regarding Christ's instructions. Christ states, **"This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me."** (**Lk 22.19**). In his instructions to the Corinthians to correct their faulty observance of the communion, the apostle Paul restates these instructions as he had received them by inspiration. Paul states, **"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."** (**1 Cor 11.23-24**).

In each of these accounts Christ clearly refers to the unleavened bread in a figurative sense as a symbol of his body. The physical body was prepared to be inhabited by the spirit of the son of God who would offer himself for the sins of the world. Instructions in the New Testament plainly indicate that this memorial is to be remembered continually, is observed on the first day of the week (**Acts 20.7**) and is to be done in the correct manner and spirit as we see in Paul's reminder to the Corinthians. While the physical makeup of the unleavened bread is simple - flour and water - the command of Christ makes it significant. This is another of the practices outlined in the scriptures that we're to observe that makes no sense to those who fail to grasp the spiritual nature of the memory invoked on taking it. Holding the sacrifice of Christ in mind, using the appropriate materials for the elements, observing it at the correct time and doing so regularly are acts of faith and worship toward God. These expressions not only remind us of the sacrifice made on our behalf, it also demonstrates our willingness to follow and comply with God's directives.

8. Misconceptions concerning the unleavened bread

The taking of the unleavened bread is a simple action that has great significance because it's the command of God. Since the first century however there have been too many who have been unwilling to accept the simplicity of the communion and taken it upon themselves to obscure it in mystery and distort its purpose. These misconceptions are not only misleading and in error, but they have a tendency to make Christian worship appear ritualistic and more like pagan worship of the past. We can examine some of these common errors, and using the scriptures, dispel certain ideas while at the same time focusing attention on God, Christ and the sacrifice that was made.

The first misconception that many are aware of is the idea that the bread is transformed into the body or flesh of Christ. This is a misconception of an error called transubstantiation. Its believed that the bread, elevated and ceremoniously blessed, then embodies not the literal flesh of Christ, but the essence of his body. The term essence is one that's confusing. The idea is that

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the bread is transformed not into the literal flesh of Christ but into a substance having the spiritual qualities or aspects that define Christ. In some religious writings its believed that the essence of the unleavened bread may linger for a specific amount of time and is able to strengthen the one partaking. The actual definitions and discussions of this belief are fairly long but this is a condensed version to capture the idea. There are some problems with it.

As I've stated throughout the study of symbolism, there's no power in the objects God used. The power is God and when certain conditions have been met God then acts in accordance with what he has said he'll do. Moses staff is a good example of this. When Moses struck the water of Egypt with his staff the water turned to blood, but the power wasn't in the staff, it was God. When Moses raised his staff to part the water of the Red Sea there wasn't any power in the staff. It was God. Every time a physical action has been commanded by the Lord and his followers performed it as instructed, God then acted, doing what he stated he would do. The power was never in the object - it was always God. We'll see this in a later lesson when we examine the Ark of the Covenant.

When Christ instituted the communion he referred to the unleavened bread as his body. But he was alive and with them. There are no indications that any spiritual energy was unleashed at that time. If it had been the disciples wouldn't have scattered, Peter wouldn't have denied the Lord and other things may have turned out differently as well. But there were no spiritual energies. The bread was just flour and water, and Christ's instructions were simply a device to remember him and his sacrifice. There's nothing more to it and erroneous ideas such as transubstantiation are simply gateways to further error and misconception.

Other ideas that have grown from this are presented in films, books and other things but the truth is that the unleavened bread is simply flour and water. What makes it special is when we prepare it for the purpose of observing the Lords' death for mankind and honor his command to remember what he's done for us.

10. Next

Another element of the Passover was a contrast to the judgment of God against the Egyptians. While the power of Egypt was destroyed the Hebrews were preserved as the Lord promised Abraham. In the next lesson we'll take a look at **The Sanctification Of The Firstborn.**