

Just What do You Mean—Unleavened Bread?

By Jamie McNab

This year I am approaching my 35th anniversary of keeping *the Days of Unleavened Bread*. I can look back with many fond memories of past Feast Days.

My first Night to be Much Remembered was a very special occasion. I was very new to God's ways, and anxious to find out everything I could. I kept this special night with a family who had been in the Church only a few months longer than me. In much excitement, I remember staying up talking and fellowshiping with them to almost four o'clock in the morning. Unfortunately, much of the talk had latterly been about demons and the occult. In view of the lateness of the hour, they allowed me to bed down on the sofa in their living room. However, with all the talk of demons and spirit apparitions—and the shadows and strange sounds that I was now hearing in the darkness of the night in a strange house—I found I couldn't sleep at all! I lay awake, sweating nervously and watching the shadows playing on the curtains, hearing branches of the trees tapping on the windows, and praying fervently for daylight and God's protection. For me it was not just a Night to be Much Remembered—it was *A Night Never to be Forgot!*

One of my other memories of these “olden days” in the Church was that the brethren were VERY CAREFUL AND METICULOUS about HOW they kept the Holy Days—particularly *the Days of Unleavened Bread*. We're all familiar with the Bible's instructions to REMOVE all leaven and leavened products from our homes for the duration of the Feast.

I well remember the incredible amount of *energy* and care that went into de-leavening in those days. People would virtually take their entire house apart to find and remove the tiniest speck of anything that even *looked* like leaven! I remember one family that had been feeding bread to the birds in their front garden. The husband explained to me how he had taken a VACUUM CLEANER out onto the lawn and hoovered up all the breadcrumbs! Another had been concerned that there might be breadcrumbs in his dustbin (trash can), and had *set fire* to the inside of it to burn away any leaven!

I remember when my wife and I were first married, we spent *dozens of hours* cleaning every nook and cranny of the house, to ensure not *a speck* of leaven would survive anywhere. Unfortunately, the sheer EFFORT of cleaning out virtually *everything* (yes—including dustbins and the garden), used to leave us physically exhausted by the time the Days of Unleavened Bread actually arrived—so exhausted and drained, in fact, we hardly had enough energy left to appreciate and ENJOY the Holy Days themselves! Many of us in the Church seemed to suffer from this affliction—being so *zealous* of our PHYSICAL de-leavening activities that we almost lost sight of the spiritual import of the Days.

Thankfully, we did eventually arrive at a somewhat more *balanced approach!*

However, thinking back over these memories does forcibly remind me of just how ZEALOUS and FASTIDIOUS we all seemed to be in those days, even over something that was so *physical*. We wanted to GET IT RIGHT—and didn't mind putting in a lot of effort and work to *get* it right.

Which brings me (somewhat belatedly!) to the point of this article.

We do not want to be guilty of “majoring on the minors”—overdoing something that is, essentially, *physical*. But, equally, we do not want to become overly CASUAL and neglectful about God's plain and clear instructions as to HOW to keep His Holy Days. How we deal with certain *physical aspects* of keeping the Holy Days can be very revealing about OUR ATTITUDE towards our Creator!

The question I would like to ask is: When we keep the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, do we keep them with Unleavened Bread? This may seem an enigmatic question but, as we'll see, all that purports to be *unleavened bread* may, in fact, NOT be UNLEAVENED BREAD.

I was reminded of this issue just under a year ago. My wife was in the local supermarket, and met a senior minister of one of the larger Churches of God. He had dozens of boxes of *Jewish Matzos* in his shopping trolley. When my wife remarked on how many boxes he seemed to be buying, he mentioned that it was because of the large number of brethren who would be keeping Passover and Unleavened Bread. He wanted to ensure there was enough “unleavened bread” to go around.

However—are Jewish Matzos actually UNLEAVENED BREAD? Are Matzos suitable for the *Passover ceremony*, and do they fulfil the Biblical requirement on us to EAT UNLEAVENED BREAD for seven days?

But surely, we might think, the Jews know what they're doing? They've been keeping Passover and Unleavened Bread for thousands of years. They are sticklers for tradition. They understand the Hebrew language. Surely we can trust them to set us an accurate example of what constitutes *unleavened bread*? Or can we?

Let's remind ourselves as we look at this topic what Jesus said to the Jewish religious leaders in His day, “For *laying aside* the commandment of God, you hold THE TRADITION OF MEN—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.” He said to them, ‘All too well you REJECT the commandment of God, that you may *keep your tradition*’,” Mark 7: 8-9.

Let's firstly have a CLOSER LOOK at just what *matzos* are. Then we'll have a look at some Scriptures and see whether IT MAKES ANY DIFFERENCE what sort of bread we use to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread.

What are Matzos?

In Exodus 12, we read of the original instructions to the children of Israel that for “seven days you shall eat *unleavened bread*.” We understand from Leviticus 23:6 that the instructions are expanded to apply to us all, “And on the fifteenth day of the

same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; seven days you MUST eat *unleavened bread*.”

The Hebrew word used for unleavened bread in these and other verses is *matstzah* (sometimes shown in English as mazzah, with the plural being mazzot or matzos).

Strong’s Concordance defines the word as referring to “something *sweet* (i.e. not soured or bittered with yeast); specifically an *unfermented cake* or loaf.” Gesenius’ Lexicon confirms this.

The usual word in the Old Testament for bread is *lechem*. This appears 297 times. *Matstah* (or matzo) appears 53 times, and simply means *unfermented bread* made without yeast. In its original form, however, we would very definitely be talking of recognisable *bread*—a LOAF OF BREAD, but with the yeast missing. When Gideon made unleavened bread for the angel in Judges 6:19-21 he used an ephah of flour—that’s two-thirds of a bushel, or over 20 quarts. That was a *substantial quantity* of real bread—something that would have been very filling, even for an angel!

In its article on matzos, the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* states, "The size of each mass of dough for mazzah may not exceed one-tenth of an ephah, equal to 43 and one-fifth medium-sized hens' eggs." So matzos would be made from dough weighing a few pounds. The article continues, "The thickness of the mazzah must not exceed the size of a closed fist, four fingers or FOUR INCHES, which was the thickness of the showbread. A *later custom* was to make mazzah one finger thick."

Hold on a moment! Did the Jewish Encyclopaedia just say that matzos were originally up to *four inches* thick? Then we’re talking here of a real LOAF of bread, aren’t we. A “later custom”, we are told, was to make the matzo no more than one finger, or ONE INCH thick. We are not told quite when this latter custom came into being, but it is clear that either custom—original or latter—produced a thick and chunky piece of bread you could *get your teeth into!*

But what are today’s commercial matzos like? Are they *loaves of bread*, one to four inches thick? Do they fit in with what our imagination tells us would have been baked in ancient Egypt in the hours leading up to the Exodus?

Today’s commercial matzos are very thin “crisps”, barely one-tenth of an inch thick. They would perhaps more correctly be described as *dry-crackers*, rather than LOAVES of BREAD.

Where did these commercial cracker-type so-called matzos come from?

They are, in fact, a relatively *modern* invention.

In the 1800’s, *machines* were designed in England that could mass-produce matzos. These worked by rolling the flour dough out *very thinly*. Unfortunately, very thin dough has a tendency to “bubble up” in the baking process. To overcome this unwanted tendency, the machines were amended to punch lots of tiny, but regular, *perforations* in the dough.

Making matzos on a commercial scale soon became BIG BUSINESS, especially in America. The *Jewish Encyclopaedia* explains, "In New York city alone, in 1904, 10,000 barrels of flour were used in making about 1,700,000 pounds of mazzah, distributed among fifteen bakers ... The larger bakeries commence work FOUR OR FIVE MONTHS before Passover."

Now 1,700,000 pounds of matzos is a LOT of matzos! But notice that some of the bakeries had to start producing their "unleavened bread" almost FIVE MONTHS before Passover. Question: does bread last FIVE MONTHS? Would YOU like to eat a loaf of bread that was *five months* old? I wouldn't think so—not if you valued your health!

So what were the matzo manufacturers to do? They were commercial concerns. They had a huge market. There was lots of profit to be made. How could they prepare their matzos months in advance of Passover, and maximise their income?

One vital key was to make matzos only from flour that CANNOT SPOIL. The flour must be completely refined and processed. All the nutrients that are necessary for life must be stripped out. The flour must be LIFELESS—inert—such that no self-respecting bacteria would even bother trying to obtain any nourishment from it.

Then the dough must be rolled so thin that, when baked, ALL of it becomes just "crust." Any soft dough, such as is found in normal bread, can spoil. So a matzo must be BAKED HARD all the way through if it is to last for several months.

And, as mentioned earlier, it is necessary to perforate the "cracker" with hundreds of little holes to prevent ugly bubbling (which doesn't occur with thick bread).

So, that is where today's matzos come from. They are a product of man's desire to obtain maximum PROFIT from an instruction of God, even if it requires the production of an almost completely lifeless, empty and unnatural FRAUD! Today's so-called matzos cannot sustain *life*. From a physical point of view, there is no comparison between a dry, baked-hard, de-natured CRISP, and a loaf of life-giving BREAD such as would have been used in Old or New Testament times.

But let's now examine WHETHER IT MAKES ANY DIFFERENCE to GOD!

Spiritual Implications — Passover

Apart from eating unleavened bread for the seven-day *festival period*, we do, of course, also use unleavened bread for the PASSOVER SERVICE.

Exodus 12:6-8 tells us, "Now you shall keep [the lamb] until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight... Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, WITH UNLEAVENED BREAD and with bitter herbs they shall eat it."

Jesus observed the Passover with *unleavened bread*. On His final Passover He changed the Passover symbols to BREAD and WINE. The apostle Paul explains to us, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord

Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took BREAD; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this [loaf of unleavened bread] is MY BODY which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup [of wine] is the *new covenant* in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me," 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

We can see here that *the bread* we take at the Passover represents Jesus' BODY—and the wine represents Jesus' BLOOD.

Jesus explains this further, in John 6:32-35: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the TRUE BREAD from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' And Jesus said to them, 'I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'" And in verse 51 of the same chapter, Jesus said, "I am the LIVING BREAD which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

We are all familiar with the fact that the BREAD we partake of on Passover night *represents* Jesus' BODY—just as the LAMB represented Jesus' body during the Old Testament Passover service.

Now, what *quality* of bread would be appropriate and *fitting* to REPRESENT THE BODY OF OUR SAVIOUR? Would a dead, de-natured, six-month-old piece of CRACKER be the best we could do to represent our Saviour's body, broken for our physical healing? Could we accurately describe such a cracker as *bread of life*?

What sort of LAMB was considered suitable for the Old Testament Passover? Could any bedraggled, diseased, emaciated or worthless animal be chosen for the Passover lamb? No! We are told, "Your lamb shall be WITHOUT BLEMISH, a male of the first year," Exodus 12:5. This lamb was to represent Jesus Christ, a PERFECT and SINLESS Saviour.

And there were VERY DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS as to *when* the lamb should be selected (on the 10th of Abib), *when* it should be killed (precisely at twilight on the 14th), *how* it should be cooked (roasted in fire), and *how* the remains should be dealt with (burned next morning). The priority was for things to be done PROPERLY, on this most serious of occasions—not just take the easiest and MOST CONVENIENT of options. It required CARE and *effort*.

Should we expect to take any LESS CARE when partaking of the New Testament symbol of Jesus Christ's body?

It would be normal for us to take very great care in de-leavening our homes. We check the cupboards, kitchen drawers, cookers, and toasters. We Hoover carpets. We look in every nook and cranny.

As the Passover ceremony nears, we ensure the room is clean and tidy. We have small glasses of red wine, ready poured. The various items are usually covered by immaculately clean napkins. Those who are participating in the Passover do not joke, or engage in much conversation or fellowship. It is the most *solemn evening* of the year, and we try to maintain a very *reverent* atmosphere.

Yet—despite all this detailed care, preparation and solemnity—are we tempted to just pop out to the nearest CONVENIENCE STORE or Wal-Mart, to pick up some six-month old *crackers* as the Passover bread that is to represent the body of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, whose *death* we are commemorating that night?

What sort of ATTITUDE might that display? Great care, attention to detail, a desire to faithfully comply with the spirit and intent of God’s instructions, on this MOST IMPORTANT evening of the year? Or, an example of today’s “instant coffee, no time to waste, must be convenient, more important things to do” generation?

It may be worth thinking about!

Spiritual Implications — Unleavened Bread

Apart from the Passover service itself, we are of course COMMANDED to eat unleavened bread *for seven days*.

The bread that the Old Testament Israelites ate was *genuine bread*—it was a staple part of their diet, helping to nourish them and “fill them up.” It was their normal bread, but *without* yeast or leavening. It was not some type of dried cracker.

For the seven Days of Unleavened Bread, we too are required to eat unleavened bread. With our modern-day fridges and freezers, we can of course choose from a wide variety of foods to fill us up and nourish us. Probably only a *small amount* of bread would be necessary, to ensure that we keep *the command*, and continue to picture the meaning of the Feast period. But would it be too difficult to eat a small amount of actual *unleavened bread* during this seven-day period—rather than a cracker?

Perhaps for a bachelor, living in isolation, it might present a little challenge to obtain, or bake, some “real” unleavened bread. For most members of God’s church, however, it would not be too difficult. A small loaf of unleavened bread, sufficient to last a week, can be prepared and baked in around one hour. Would that be too much time and effort for us to keep the Passover and Unleavened Bread, using the *precise symbols* God has given us?

Perhaps it does seem like *too much trouble* to some people. And as we said at the beginning of this article, we don’t want to over-emphasise the *physical aspects* of the Festival period—but ATTENTION TO DETAIL does say something about our attitude to God’s Word. The instructions given throughout Exodus 12 about the original Passover are very detailed—and failure to have complied fully and strictly could have had fatal consequences.

Malachi 1:6-8 addresses the relationship between our *physical* service to God, and our underlying *attitude*. “A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is My fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer *polluted bread* upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? ” The priesthood in Malachi’s day had little regard for the sanctity of their offerings to God. Anything was “good enough” to give to God, including blind and lame animals. They couldn’t be bothered. Their attitude to their Creator God was a disgrace.

Eating Other “Breads”

As we approach Passover and Unleavened Bread this year, we need to check our motives, and ensure that we take GREAT CARE to keep this Festival period in a manner that is fully pleasing to God. Doing something merely to suit our own carnal convenience may not be all that acceptable to God!

As a concluding comment, if we simply want to satisfy our stomachs, we can, of course, eat ANY grain product during this period of time, provided it is unleavened. If we happen to *enjoy the taste* of Jewish matzos, Ryvitas, or other cracker-type crispbreads, then it is quite in order to eat as much as we want. There is no prohibition on eating these (although, as mentioned earlier, there isn’t much food value in matzos).

BUT—as far as keeping *the spirit* and *intent* of the Passover and Unleavened Bread is concerned, these products do not faithfully picture what God originally commanded. It would be preferable, therefore, to ensure that we use *genuine unleavened bread* for the purpose of honouring God and meeting His requirements, and then, if we want to eat matzos and similar simply for taste and pleasure, that would be *in addition*.

Remember, “...whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we *keep His commandments* and do those things THAT ARE PLEASING IN HIS SIGHT,” 1 John 3:22.

