

Are There *Eight Days* of Unleavened Bread?

By Jamie McNab

When reading some Old Testament scriptures, a question may arise about exactly *how many days* we are supposed to eat unleavened bread. For *how many days* are our homes to be unleavened? As we are dealing with God's commandments, we want to ensure we are doing things right.

The puzzle often starts in Exodus 12:18-19, where we read the following:

In the first *month*, on the fourteenth day of the month AT EVEN, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month AT EVEN.

Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.

It will be important to look closely at the meaning and usage of the term "at even" in the above verses, but perhaps it would be best to lay some basic groundwork first. All scriptures must harmonise, even if it is a matter of "here a little and there a little."

Looking first at verses 15-16 of Exodus 12:

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.

And in the first day *there shall be* an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you.

What can we learn from these verses? Without question, they tell us there are SEVEN days when we must eat unleavened bread. These days coincide with a holy convocation on Day One, and another holy convocation on Day Seven. If we eat leavened products during this SEVEN DAY period we shall be "cut off."

We know the particular *dates* in question are the 15th of Abib to the 21st of Abib:

And on the FIFTEENTH DAY of the same month *is* the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: SEVEN DAYS ye must eat unleavened bread. In the FIRST DAY ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the SEVENTH DAY *is* an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work *therein*. Lev 23:6-8.

From these two passages (and others) we have *clear instructions* to be unleavened for SEVEN DAYS, and to eat unleavened bread for SEVEN DAYS. Seems straightforward?

Enigmatic Verse?

But then we get the apparently enigmatic statement in Exodus 12:18, telling us to eat unleavened bread “on the fourteenth day of the month at even ... until the one and twentieth day of the month at even.” We generally consider “evening” to come at the BEGINNING of the day, based upon passages such as Genesis 1:5:

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

But if “at even” means *the beginning* of the day in Exodus 12:18, then that tells us to eat unleavened bread from *the beginning* of the 14th Abib to *the beginning* of the 21st Abib ... but then we would be able to eat leavened products immediately afterwards, and so we would end up eating unleavened bread DURING the holy convocation of the 21st Abib! We would *finish* the days of unleavened bread before the final holy day of the Feast got underway! Now we know *that* can’t be the case, because Leviticus 23 and other scriptures make it plain that the 15th and 21st are BOTH holy days, and *part of* the seven days of unleavened bread.

On the other hand, if the term “at even” of the 14th means *the end* of the day — then the instruction is to eat unleavened bread from the END of the 14th day to the END of the 21st day. Now that fits in perfectly with the seven days of unleavened running from 15th Abib to 21st Abib, including the two holy convocations on the first and seventh days.

But can we take the term “at even” to mean the END of the day? And wouldn’t that mean that the Jews and others *are correct* when they say the Passover lamb was killed LATE on the 14th of Abib, and not eaten till early on the 15th Abib? After all, Exodus 12:6 tells us of the Passover lamb: **And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it IN THE EVENING.**

And hasn’t the Church of God always taught that the Passover lamb was slain *early* — at the very BEGINNING of the 14th Abib?

So the question boils down to: is “at even” at the BEGINNING of the day, or at the END? Or even BOTH?

Time of Passover

Let’s first of all clarify Exodus 12:6, and the correct time to kill the Passover lamb. Although the KJV refers to killing the lamb “in the evening,” the Hebrew is NOT the same expression as we see later in the chapter. Most modern translations bring out this very important distinction. Exodus 12:6 in the Hebrew uses *beyn ha-arbayim*; this means not just “the evening,” in general, but a very *specific part* of the evening, and is often translated “*between the two evenings*,” or “*twilight*.”

“... then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight,” New American Standard Bible.

“... and the whole congregation of the assembly of Israel shall kill it between the two evenings,” Darby.

“... and the whole assembly of the company of Israel have slaughtered it between the evenings,” Young’s Literal Translation.

Judaism tries to explain this phrase as meaning “between noon and sunset.” The correct meaning, as I brought out in my lengthy article on the Passover (see *WHEN Should We Keep Passover* at www.t-cog.net), is *between sunset and the dark of night* — the period we call “twilight.” God was careful to give very specific and

EXACT instructions as to precisely when we are to keep Passover! There is no doubt. It is in the *early part* of the 14th Abib, AT DUSK.

Example: Day of Atonement

Now when we come to Exodus 12:18, a *different* Hebrew phrase is used. Here, the more GENERAL Hebrew term *ereb* is used (or *ba ereb*, meaning AT "evening"). The Brown Driver Briggs dictionary gives the meaning of *ereb* as: "evening, night, SUNSET." It has a few shades of meaning, all centred around "nightfall" but its EXACT meaning has to be derived from THE CONTEXT.

An excellent Bible illustration of its use is in the instructions on how to keep The Day of Atonement. In Leviticus 23: 27, 32 we read:

Also on the TENTH DAY of this seventh month *there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD ... It shall be unto you a Sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the NINTH DAY of the month AT EVEN, from EVEN unto EVEN, shall ye celebrate your Sabbath.*

Now, when this scripture tells us to begin afflicting ourselves on the "ninth day of the month *at even* (Hebrew: *ba ereb*)," WHEN do we start? If "even" is the BEGINNING of the day — *always* — then we have to begin atonement at the beginning of *the ninth* of Tishri! Yet Atonement is clearly the TENTH DAY, as this scripture plainly tells us. The simple answer is that the term *ereb*, as used here, means the END OF THE DAY. Yom Kippur is from the END of the ninth, to the END of the tenth day. (Sabbath-keepers usually use these verses to show that the Sabbath is to be kept from "even to even.")

But there is more to the story.

EXACTLY *WHEN* do we start the Day of Atonement? Does the instruction to observe atonement "from even" mean we can all choose, independently, WHEN we want to begin, spread over one or more hours? If "even" means a *general period* of time, from around sunset, to some later time when someone decides "night" has arrived, we could have people beginning "their" Day of Atonement one or two hours *after* their Church of God neighbours in the same town!

Someone might decide, "Well, it's *inconvenient* for me to keep Atonement from 6:30p.m. tonight, because I've got a lot on at work, so I'll start my "even" tonight at 7:45 p.m." Another Church member might choose a *different time* to fit in with *their* plans. Every man doing that which is right in his own eyes?

I think we know the answer. One of the definitions of "ereb" given by Brown Driver Briggs is SUNSET. And the term *ba ereb* would have the meaning of AT SUNSET.

The instructions for Atonement are to keep the day from SUNSET on the ninth until SUNSET on the tenth of the month. And then we can all keep the same time, together, decently and in order.

Sunset Ambiguous

The term *sunset* can itself be ambiguous, as a day can be said to both START *and* FINISH at sunset. It is like our term *midnight*. If I said I'll come round to your house at "midnight next Tuesday" to do some star-gazing and comet hunting, you might wonder, "Does Jamie mean he's coming round at midnight as Tuesday STARTS ... or does he mean the midnight as Tuesday ENDS?" To be clear, I need to specify which "midnight" I have in mind ... or hope the context makes it evident ("I'm picking up my new telescope next Monday evening, and will bring it round first thing so we can have a look at some new comets I've read about. I'll be with you at midnight.")

For the Day of Atonement, God has been very clear and precise. Afflict your souls, and keep the day holy, from SUNSET (*ba ereb*) on the ninth of Tishri, to SUNSET a day later. And for extra clarity, confirms it is on the "*tenth day* of the month."

Getting back to our puzzling verse in Exodus 12:18: we are told **"on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even."** If we use the alternative rendering of *ba ereb* — AT SUNSET — in this verse, in the manner demonstrated by God's use in Leviticus 23, the verse then reads: **"on the fourteenth day of the month at SUNSET, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at SUNSET."**

That harmonises perfectly with the Biblical use of *ba ereb*, and the dictionary definition given by Brown, Driver Briggs.

That still leaves us with some options:

- Is it the sunset that BEGINS the 14th day, until the sunset that BEGINS the 21st day? Answer: NO — for we know the 21st day is the final holy day and is part of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.
- So, is it the sunset that ENDS the 14th day, until the sunset that ENDS the 21st day? Answer: could be, because that harmonises with the other passages that show the SEVEN days of unleavened bread running from the 15th to 21st Abib.
- A third option is for the meaning to include the period from sunset at the BEGINNING of the 14th to sunset at the END of the 21st. This is possible too, since we know that unleavened bread was to be eaten at the beginning of the 14th as part of *the Passover observance*, as well as throughout the SEVEN days of the FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD.

In Exodus 12:7-8 we read, **“And they shall take of the blood, and strike *it* on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall EAT THE FLESH in that night, roast with fire, AND UNLEAVENED BREAD; and with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it.”**

It was probably no more common for the ancient Israelites to eat unleavened bread in their day than it is for us to eat it in *our* day. It would have been an *unusual occurrence*. It would have made the Passover meal very different from a “typical” lamb dinner that they would have been used to. In that sense, the 14th of Abib could be considered as *A DAY* when unleavened bread was eaten ... but NOT one of the SEVEN DAYS of the FEAST of Unleavened Bread, which of course ran from the 15th to the 21st, inclusive.

It is correct, therefore, to say that we eat unleavened bread from the BEGINNING of the 14th day of Abib, until the END of the 21st day of Abib ... eight days in all. BUT ... the 14th day is NOT one of the SEVEN DAYS of unleavened bread during which ONLY unleavened bread could be eaten. After the Passover meal has been eaten, there is NO Biblical prohibition on eating leavened products for *the remainder* of that day. That is why Exodus 12:15 says, **“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.” The leaven is to be out of the houses from the FIRST DAY of unleavened bread — not the “day before” the first day. The death penalty was for those who ate leavened bread during the SEVEN DAYS of the FEAST. The death penalty does NOT apply to the eating of leavened bread during the 14th of Abib AFTER the Passover meal.

Bringing Sin Back into Our Lives?

The question may be asked: but if I eat leaven — which represents SIN — *after* I’ve taken of the Passover, doesn’t that imply that I am “bringing sin back into my life?”

Answer: NO. Leaven is a perfectly fine ingredient that we can use in bakery products throughout the year, and can keep in our homes “with God’s blessing” — OTHER THAN the SEVEN DAYS that He clearly prohibits. There is no prohibition on having leaven in our homes on ANY other day.

Bear in mind, also, that Jesus — our Passover — died for us WHEN we were *sinners*. We were sinners *before* accepting Jesus’ sacrifice — and we still sin *after* accepting Jesus as our Saviour. Eating leaven *after* the Passover — which is nowhere prohibited in Scripture — actually pictures *the reality* of our lives as Christians who do, unfortunately, SIN! And then the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is SEPARATE from Passover, and comes LATER, pictures our COMING OUT FROM SIN, and our new lives as commandment-keepers.

So, in conclusion, there are indeed EIGHT DAYS when we eat unleavened bread. But there are only SEVEN DAYS in the Feast of Unleavened Bread, during which time our homes MUST be unleavened. And on the 14th Abib — the day before the Feast commences — unleavened bread need only be eaten at the Passover service; it is permissible to eat leaven products later on the 14th, but only up to sunset. From the 15th onwards ONLY bread which is unleavened can be eaten, during the SEVEN DAYS of unleavened bread.

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