

CHURCH *of* GOD

A WORLDWIDE ASSOCIATION, INC.

THE EATING OF UNLEAVENED BREAD *Study Paper*

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INTRODUCTION

This study paper was prepared by the Doctrine Committee of the Church of God, a Worldwide Association. Its purpose is to provide an explanation of the teaching of the Church on the question of whether it is a sin if a person does not eat unleavened bread every day during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

There is no question that all bread eaten during the Days of Unleavened Bread must be unleavened (Exodus 12:15, 19; 13:7; Leviticus 23:6-7; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8). In many cultures bread is an integral part of a standard diet. During the Days of Unleavened Bread we are to learn spiritual lessons by eating bread (and other food) that is *unleavened*. There is such a variety of unleavened bread products that for most people under most circumstances there would be no question that they would consume unleavened bread each day of that week. This paper does not suggest otherwise. In fact, we encourage the eating of unleavened bread every day.

The question that is addressed is a very specific one—whether it would be a violation of God’s instruction about the Days of Unleavened Bread if a person were not to eat unleavened bread on a day during the week.

The conclusion reached in this paper is not a change in teaching. It is a restatement and further explanation of the understanding of the Church on this matter.

THE EATING OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

Does Scripture require eating unleavened bread on each day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

The first biblical command to observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread is given in Exodus 12:15: “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.” The directive continues for the next few verses and concludes in verse 20: “You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.”

The instructions are simple: unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days, and all leavening was to be removed from the houses. Whoever ate any leavening was to be cut off from Israel. In Leviticus 23:6 the command is stated again: “Seven days you must eat unleavened bread.” (The phrase “must eat” and “shall eat” come from the same Hebrew word *tokelu*, meaning “to eat”; and it is an imperative statement.)

Over the years, some have asked how often one is to eat unleavened bread during the festival. Do the above instructions require eating unleavened bread every day for seven days?

For perspective and context, this paper first considers the teaching of the Worldwide Church of God in the 1960s through 1971, then how that teaching was clarified in the 1980s. Next, the paper analyzes some scriptural examples to show how the Hebrew language explicitly expresses the idea of something that is to occur every day. And finally, emphasis is placed on the need to obey God’s command and to learn deep spiritual lessons by eating only unleavened bread during the weeklong festival.

Early teaching

The Worldwide Church of God addressed the topic of eating unleavened bread in various publications during the time Herbert Armstrong was the pastor general. (Emphasis is in the original throughout all quotes.)

In 1964 the *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course* presented a question and answer: “Does God positively command His people to eat unleavened bread—a symbol of obedience—during this festival? ... COMMENT: They were not merely to abstain from all leavened bread during these seven days. That would have meant *only putting out* past sin. They were commanded to do something positive, to eat unleavened bread in the festival. That symbolized obedience, actively *obeying* God, *submitting* to His will” (Lesson 34, p. 3).

Later, in the January-April 1971 edition of *The Good News* magazine, under the heading “The Bible Answers Your Questions,” the following statement was published in answer to the question, “Just what is leaven ... ?”

“We should all see to it that we do eat *some* unleavened bread during each of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. Remember that is a *positive* command. By ‘eating the bread of affliction’ we are reminded of our having been in bondage to sin, from which we are now delivered.”

However, the requirement to eat unleavened bread every day of the Feast was reconsidered. The clarified teaching was explained to the ministry and was also published in a later version of the *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*.

Clarified understanding

In March 1982 a “Question and Answer” section began appearing in the *Pastor General’s Report (PGR)*. As reported in that issue, “Another important step has been taken in maintaining harmony and unity in the ministry and Church by ‘speaking the same thing.’”

The *PGR* further stated: “Every question and answer that appears will have been read and approved personally by Mr. Armstrong” (March 19, 1982, p. 12).

Two weeks later, on April 2, 1982, the following question and answer appeared in the *PGR*: “Question: Exodus 13:7 states that unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. Does this mean that we must eat unleavened bread on each day of this Feast?

“Answer: It is not required to eat unleavened bread for seven days. This instruction means that whenever bread is eaten during this Festival it is to be unleavened. It does not mean unleavened bread must be eaten each day” (p. 2).

A second paragraph was also included in the answer: “Mr. Armstrong wants us all teaching and preaching the same thing, as God has instructed us in His word. Please take note of this answer so that there is peace and harmony in all churches on this often-asked question.”

Shortly after Mr. Armstrong’s death in 1986, the following statement, which supported the 1982 *PGR* explanation, appeared in the *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, Lesson 26 (the 32-lesson edition):

“We are commanded to *eat* unleavened bread during this Festival. That symbolizes *righteousness—active obedience* to God! However, it is not required of every person to eat unleavened bread *every day* of this Festival” (1986, p. 14).

Since differing answers were published in the past, some have understandably asked again: Is it a sin if one does not eat unleavened bread each and *every* day during the seven days of Unleavened Bread? Does the original language of Exodus 12:15 and Leviticus 23:6 require that a person eat unleavened bread every day of the feast week?

Hebrew expression for “every day”

The Church has long understood the principle that unintended errors can occur when people consider one passage in isolation instead of putting all the relevant passages together. These additional scriptures give further insight into how God instructed Israel to keep the Feast.

For example, consider that Scripture makes it clear that sacrifices during the Days of Unleavened Bread were to be offered each day during the week. Numbers 28:17-25 reiterates the command to observe the festival. Also in this context God instructed that a number of daily offerings were to be made. Verse 24 clearly states: “In this manner you shall offer the food of the offering made by fire daily for seven days, as a sweet aroma to the LORD.”

Israel followed these instructions during the reign of King Hezekiah: “So the children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing to the LORD, accompanied by loud instruments. And Hezekiah gave encouragement to all the Levites who taught the good knowledge of the LORD; and they ate throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers” (2 Chronicles 30:21-22).

The Jewish historian Josephus also commented on how Israel kept the Feast: “The feast of unleavened bread succeeds that of the Passover, and falls on the fifteenth day of the month, and continues seven days, wherein they feed on unleavened bread; on every one of which days two bulls are killed, and one ram, and seven lambs ... for it is intended as a feast for the priest on every one of those days” (*Antiquities of the Jews*; Book 3, chap. 10, sec. 5).

The priests clearly understood that Scripture required the sacrifices (including the accompanying unleavened grain offerings) to be made on each of the seven days of the festival. Is there also a command to eat unleavened bread on each day of the festival?

To answer this question, first consider several scriptures that, though unrelated to the Days of Unleavened Bread, do address the question of the frequency of an action:

- Exodus 30:7: “Aaron shall burn on it [the altar] sweet incense every morning.”
- Exodus 36:3: “So they continued bringing to him freewill offerings every morning.”
- 1 Chronicles 9:27: “And they were in charge of opening it every morning.”
- 2 Chronicles 13:11: “And they burn to the LORD every morning ... burnt sacrifices.”
- Ezekiel 46:15: “Thus they shall prepare the lamb ... as a regular burnt offering every morning.”

In each of these passages, something is to be done “every” morning—hence every day.

In these and other scriptures, the Hebrew utilizes a linguistic device known as nominative reduplication to denote the concept of “every.” It simply repeats the word for morning (*bobboqer bobboqer*). Exodus 16:21 offers another example: “So they gathered it [the manna] every morning,” which literally reads “morning, morning” and is translated in the *Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*: “And they gathered it morning by morning.”

This Hebrew device is clearly seen in the NKJV translation of Isaiah 28:19 (“For morning by morning it will pass over”) and Isaiah 50:4 (“He awakens Me morning by morning”).

In the passages cited, God specifically inspired these writers to use this linguistic device to indicate “morning by morning,” meaning daily. A similar Hebrew phrase (*yowm b’yowm*, meaning “day by day”) is used in Exodus 16:4: “And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota [of manna] every day.”

However, in Exodus 12 and in the other passages referring to the eating of unleavened bread, God did not inspire the use of that same linguistic device for “every,” though it was well-known and easily understood by His people. When it came to the instructions for eating unleavened bread, the emphasis was not included that would indicate “daily” or “every.”

Some may point out that in Leviticus 23:8, the command for Israel to “offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days” uses the same wording as the instructions for eating unleavened bread. However, the Hebrew for “every” is not noted here, and this verse is not speaking about eating unleavened bread but about the sacrifices. And the proof that these offerings occurred on each of the seven days is evident by comparing this scripture with Numbers 28.

There still remains a difference in Hebrew linguistics regarding the instructions for the sacrifices and the instructions for eating the unleavened bread. A poignant scripture reveals this difference.

In Ezekiel 45:21-23 there is a prophecy about the keeping of the Days of Unleavened Bread in the future. Verse 21 states: “You shall observe the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten.” There is no “morning by morning” Hebrew device or reference to the daily eating of unleavened bread. This is a general statement and is not a specific instruction to eat unleavened bread each day.

However, in verse 23 the sacrifices, which will be reinstated, are described in detail with specificity: “On the seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to the LORD, seven bulls ... daily for seven days.” This is a precise instruction concerning the daily sacrifice. The same expression is not used to describe the eating of unleavened bread.

Punishment for eating leavened food

The most salient factor to consider is not the details of Hebrew grammar, but the question of whether it is sin to abstain from eating unleavened bread on any of the seven days. An important point to consider in this regard is that, according to Scripture, the emphasis in keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread is on avoiding leaven. Eating any leavened product would result in a specific penalty—being cut off from Israel (Exodus 12:19). However, it is significant that these same passages contain *no* specific penalty for the person who fails to eat unleavened bread every day. If it is a sin to eat a leavened product during the Days of Unleavened Bread, and it is also a sin to forgo eating unleavened bread every day during the festival, why did God declare a penalty for only the former?

The emphasis is on the type of bread, not upon how often it is consumed. A person doesn’t keep the festival “better” by eating more bread that is unleavened; he keeps the festival by not eating any leavened bread and eating only unleavened bread whenever bread is eaten.

Even though the Hebrew does not explicitly state that unleavened bread is to be eaten each day during the Days of Unleavened Bread, the act of eating unleavened bread helps the Christian learn important spiritual lessons, lessons that may be missed if we do nothing more than refrain from eating leaven for seven days.

Cultures in which leavened bread is not common

It should be noted that some cultures in the world, particularly in Asia and Africa, do not commonly eat bread as part of their normal diet, which may be based on rice, millet, cassava or other starches that are rarely if ever prepared in a leavened form. In certain of these areas leavened bread represents a luxury that many people rarely eat. It can be challenging logistically and financially for Christians in these areas to acquire unleavened bread or the ingredients necessary to bake it.

In such areas the Church encourages the eating of some unleavened bread during the seven-day festival because of the significant spiritual meaning in partaking of it. However, the Church does not wish to impose the financial burden to acquire and eat unleavened bread when leavened bread is not normally a part of their diet. The Church will make an effort to assist members in such areas to have and eat some unleavened bread during the Feast and, most importantly, to understand the significance of the symbolic meaning of leavening and unleavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

The lesson of eating unleavened bread

It must be clear that the Church is not advocating that members cease eating unleavened bread even for one day during the festival. The eating of unleavened bread is not simply a physical ritual for God's people.

From earliest times, the eating of unleavened bread was to be a reminder of Israel's coming out slavery (affliction) in Egypt: "Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life" (Deuteronomy 16:3).

Also, based on 1 Corinthians 5:8, the Church has correctly taught that during this seven-day period, leaven is symbolic of sin. The "leaven of malice and wickedness" is to be avoided. Refraining from leavened products reminds the Christian of the need to live a life free from the corrupting influence of sin. Instead, one is to partake of the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth," which reminds the Christian of the need to live a life of righteousness.

There is no indication that God intended the eating of unleavened bread to be unpleasant, which could lead someone to falsely conclude that living a life apart from sin was unpleasant and difficult. Many members prepare and enjoy a variety of unleavened products that add a special delight to this season. By enjoying these kinds of unleavened treats, believers are reminded that living a life apart from sin and its influence is good. Those who may not like matzos, or "flat bread," should not use that as an excuse to avoid eating unleavened bread but can seek unleavened alternatives they do like so they can share in the joy of the festival. Most members eat unleavened bread each and every day as their normal practice. No one is suggesting that any of this should change.

Conclusion

Therefore, in continuation of a long-standing belief, the Church of God, a Worldwide Association, teaches that leaven must be avoided during the festival and that when bread products are eaten, they must be unleavened. Where bread is a part of one's normal diet (and unless there are extenuating circumstances), members benefit from the reminder that the bread they are eating is leaven-free, as their daily spiritual life should be sin-free. However, it is not sin if one does not eat unleavened bread each day of the Feast.