## Feast of Unleavened Bread

## Chag ha-Matzah (חַג הַמַּצַה)

The Feast of Unleavened Bread (*Chag ha-Matzah* [חֵנ הַמַּצָּה] in Hebrew) began on the fifteenth day of Abib (Nisan), immediately following the day of Passover and continued for seven days. Before the Day of Passover, the Israelites removed all the leaven from their houses, and for the eight days that includes Passover and Unleavened Bread, they eat unleavened bread (*matzah*) exclusively. In doing so, they remembered the fact that when they were delivered from Egypt, they had not had time to allow for the leavening of their bread. Hence *matzah* was called "the bread of haste" (Deuteronomy 16:3). The first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is also important because it celebrates the day of Israel's actual deliverance from Egypt, which took place on the fifteenth day of Abib (Numbers 33:3).

By the time of the prophets, and particularly by the time of Christ, the Feast of Unleavened Bread had become so interconnected with the Feast of Passover that the entire eight days of unleavened bread came to be called the Passover, with the paschal event becoming the focus of the entire week of devotion to God (Ezekiel 45:21; Luke 22:1).

The Jewish people have been faithful throughout their generations from the time of the Exodus to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jewish families cleaned their homes thoroughly to ensure that all leaven (and leaven-containing products) was removed. This exercise eventually became the foundation of Western society's "Spring Cleaning" tradition. Removing leaven from their houses helps the Jewish people place themselves and their children in the circumstances as though they were celebrating the first Passover and Feast of Unleavened with their ancestors.

For Christians, the Feast of Unleavened Bread came to symbolize the work of Christ that removes sin from the lives of believers. Leaven in the Apostolic Scriptures was said to be symbolic of sin and false teaching (e.g., the leaven of malice and wickedness [1 Corinthians 5:6-8], the leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees [Mark 8:15], the leaven of legalistic trust in one's self-righteousness [Galatians 5:1-9]). Since the earliest Christians were all Jews, they understood that the interconnection of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the Passover clearly demonstrated the need for atonement which removes sin from the lives of believers.

The fact that the removal of leaven is both an event of one day and of seven additional days helps Christians to understand that believers in Christ initially have sin removed from their lives by the shed blood of the Passover Lamb (1 Peter 1:19) and that the salvation process (Philippians 2:12) is one which extends through time in a sanctification which is manifest in obedience to the Word of God (John 17:17; Ephesians 5:26).

The traditional Jewish ceremony of the removal of leaven in each home is a good example of how God removes sin from the lives of believers. After the house is completely cleaned and all dishes and utensils have been boiled or passed through fire, the father hides ten pieces of leavened bread in the house and encourages the children to find those pieces. The children, however, are not permitted to touch the pieces of leaven when they discover them but bring their father to remove them from the house. The father takes a feather and a wooden spoon and gently removes the leaven from the house and later burns it with fire.

God, as the Heavenly Father, encourages believers, his children, to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith (1 Corinthians 11:28; 2 Corinthians 13:5) and to discover the secret sin in their lives (Psalm 19:12). Believers, however, may not remove the sin. Only the Father can remove it and cast it into the lake of fire, never to be remembered against them. And, he does so with extreme gentleness, for "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The earliest church's celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread emphasized the purification of the inner man, the removal of sin and unrighteousness from the lives of those who had received the Passover in Christ. This is the clear message of 1 Corinthians 5:8: "Therefore let us keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." The believers in Jesus were more concerned with the condition of the heart than they were with ritual purity.

Christians can celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread by sharing the experience of eating *matzah* with the international Jewish community, first by celebrating the Passover and then by celebrating the week-long feast. Symbols that help to bring the celebration to life and serve as object lessons include the menorah, the shofar, the prayer shawl, and banners.

For detailed information about the Feast of Unleavened Bread, read *Our Lost Legacy:* Christianity's Hebrew Heritage and Christian Celebrations for Passover by Dr. John D. Garr or go to <a href="www.HebraicCommunity.org">www.HebraicCommunity.org</a> to connect with the Stability series and other teaching materials about virtually any subject relating to Christian celebrations of biblical festivals and Christian use of biblical and Jewish symbols.

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