

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Exodus 12:14-20

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If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to Exodus chapter 12. Now if you will look at Exodus chapter 12, and especially beginning in verse 14, we are going to continue this study in a chapter that gives us instructions about Passover and the Lord's Supper. Last week we said our attention for that week and this week would turn away from the tenth plague, the tenth strike of God or blow of God against Egypt, and the gods of Egypt. And we would for a little while focus our attention on the institution of the Passover and of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And the bulk of this chapter, Exodus 12, is devoted to this important Old Testament sacrament.

Now as we studied Exodus 12, verses 1 through 13 last week, we noted two or three things in particular about the institution of the Passover. First of all, we noted that God was weaving this great work of redemption into the very calendar of Israel. The calendar of Israel was going to reflect God's work of redemption. And so the first month of the year was not going to be based upon the old agricultural cycle, but it was going to be based upon the redemptive work of God. So God was going to remind Israel, even in the way He scheduled this feast of celebration of what He had done to make them into His people and into a nation. We also observed, as we studied in verses 3 through 11, all those specific details for how the Passover was to be observed, and that the presence of God with His people requires their meticulous preparation. God was going to visit Israel in Egypt. He was also going to visit His enemies with destruction. And it was going to coincide with the worship of His people in the Passover. And because God was coming to Egypt to visit, great preparation had to be made. Just as a lady prepares her house when guests are coming, so also the children of Israel are preparing their house for the presence of the Lord. And then we also saw in the application of that blood sign on the door for the Passover feast that God gives Israel this covenant sign, and that sign itself promises deliverance for them from the destroyer, and it sets forth His merciful providence. Every time they see that blood they are reminded of that blood, and it reminds them of God's merciful protection. There is no difference morally, in an ultimate sense, between Israel and Egypt. Israel was just as worthy of judgment as was Egypt. But the blood protected Israel, and so that blood reminded them of God's merciful providence. And so this week we come to Exodus chapter 12, verses 14 through 20. This is God's word. Let us hear it well.

Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. And on the first day you shall have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day; no work at all shall be done on them, except what must be eaten by every person, that alone may be prepared by you. You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day, I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore, you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land. You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord, we do ask for Your illumination, as we seek to understand the significance of this feast established here. As we consider its details, remind us that every word of Scripture is given by inspiration and it profitable for teaching and correcting, training and righteousness. We would be built up by the truth of Your word. Even a passage, which is perhaps strange, and at first glance, obscure, we ask, O Lord, that You would reveal the might of Your word by teaching us great things, truth for life, from this Word of truth. These things we ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

It is important for us as we come to these instructions in Exodus, and we get these kinds of instructions frequently in the first five books of the Bible, especially the second, third, fourth, and fifth books of the Bible. It is important for us to pay attention to the function of these observances. Obviously they are for the promotion of God's glory. Obviously, there are occasions when the people of God lift up their praises to Him for what He has done and for who He is. But, they also serve the interests of believer's faith. They are designed to strengthen the faith of God's people in God by reminding them of what He has done for them in the past. They are to be perpetually observed. And as such are to continually draw before the eyes of the people of God, a tangible remembrance of what He did in His great work of redemption, so that we never forget what God has done.

And we can speak experientially about how often the great things that the Lord has done for us have grown cold in our hearts. And we have taken them for

granted, or we have forgotten them. Or we have ceased to remember the joy of our salvation, the first blush of our conversion, the things that the Lord has done in our lives. And so also the children of Israel faced that particular temptation. And, in fact, it is interesting to note that the Passover observance is only recorded to have been performed by the children of Israel six times in the Old Testament. Now I am not saying that they only observed it six times. But what I am saying is in the Old Testament, there are only six explicit recordings of the children of Israel remembering to observe the Passover, and there are explicit indications that there were hundreds of years in which the children of Israel forgot to observe the Passover. And so it is particularly poignant, isn't it, that God would give these kinds of strict and meticulous commands to remember His work of redemption, and that the children of Israel in the Old Testament times themselves from time to time fail to do it, forgot to do it, and consequently, forgot Him and lost their faith and trust in Him for a season. And so, these words are important for us.

Notice also, that the feast of the Passover, and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, were two feasts in one. In verses 1 through 13, you had the description of the Passover feast which was to be done in the context of families on one particular night in the center of the month based around the lunar calendar. Whereas the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a week long celebration at the beginning of the year, and these two feasts are elementally linked by the presence of unleavened bread. Unleavened bread was to be used in the Passover feast. Unleavened bread was to be used of course exclusively in the feast of unleavened bread. And these feasts, as described in Exodus 12, it is also important to note are not in the final analysis rooted in agricultural or pastoral observances. In other words, these feasts are not simply feasts celebrating the cycle of the agricultural year, or celebrating certain provisions of God for nomadic peoples who are shepherding their flocks in the fields. Explicitly in Exodus 12, these feasts are linked to God's redeeming work and to specific historical events. In other words, he does not say, celebrate the Passover, because it falls on the night of a full moon, in the middle of the month and do that because those of you who are from Nomadic backgrounds often shepherd your sheep in the night, and you are familiar with the lunar calendar, and it sort of structures your reality and perhaps in Canaan, blood was used to keep demonic forces away from your sheep to protect them and make them fertile. That is not why God says to do the Passover. God says to do this Passover because I have redeemed you in Egypt. And, He says, keep this Feast of Unleavened Bread, because in haste you made unleavened bread and made your way out of Egypt when I redeemed you. So, these feasts are given to memorialize in the hearts of the children of Israel this redemptive work which is related to a historical event. It is not just something that is from the misty past. It is a specific historical event of God's redemption.

With those words of introduction, let's look at two parts in this passage before us. The first part is verse 14. The second part is verses 15 through 20. The first part

gives us the establishment of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Verses 15 through 20, the second part gives us the details of the Feast of Unleavened bread. So we have the feast established in verse 14, and we have the feast detailed in verses 15 through 20.

I. God establishes memorials in connection to His redemptive acts in order to strengthen our faith.

Let's look at verse 14 first. The feast is established here. We learn what the Feast of Unleavened Bread is. And I want to say, in passing, that as we look at this one verse, we are reminded that God establishes memorials in connection to His redemptive acts in order to strengthen our faith. And we see God do this repeatedly. God will establish a memorial. They are not, these memorials are not established by Israel, they are established by God for Israel, and they are established in connection with great redeeming works that He does in order to strengthen their faith. In order to bring to mind the promises that He had made and the promises that He had fulfilled and the providence that He had shown towards them.

And you will notice in verse 14, that there are three parts to the establishment of this feast: A memorial, a feast, and an ordinance. Look at the phrase, "Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord. Throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance." And so we see there, a memorial to you, a feast to the Lord and a permanent ordinance. It is a memorial to you. This feast is a reminder to the Hebrews. It is a reminder of their life of slavery. It is a reminder of the event of God's delivering them out of that slavery, out of Egypt. And so it is a memorial to them. It is a reminder to them. It is something designed to keep them from forgetting the good things that the Lord has done for them.

But it is also a feast to the Lord. It is designed then, not only to be a help to God's people and to their faith, but it designed for the praise and for the adoration of God. And isn't that like all of worship? Worship is ultimately focused on giving glory to God. But as we give glory to God, what do we find? Strangely, we receive benefits which we didn't go necessarily seeking. We didn't go for purely self interested reasons. We went ultimately because we wanted to give praise to the Lord, and we found out what? That the Lord gave back things that we didn't deserve, even things that we didn't expect. And this is to be a feast to the Lord and a memorial to you. It is a feast to the Lord. It is a pilgrim feast. It is a *haj* to use the term. It is a national gathering. They are to appear together in communal celebration before the Lord as a nation. So the Passover has a family element to it, the feast of unleavened bread has a national element to it. It is one of those three great pilgrim feasts of the Hebrew calendar.

And again, at the end of verse 14, it is given as a permanent ordinance. The laws

for this observance are given before Sinai, just like Passover. When Israel arrived at Sinai, they already had some laws, and among those laws, were Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And we are told these laws are permanent continuous and binding. This is a permanent ordinance. You see that echoed by the way, in verse 17. Look down to that passage. "You shall observe this day, throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance."

This passage teaches us much about the nature and function of the sacraments. The sacraments themselves are given as a memorial to God's people. They are given as a feast to the Lord. And they are given as a permanent ordinance. It is true of course, that this sacrament is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Not just in the Lord's Supper, but especially in Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper may be its new covenant counterpart, but Paul makes it clear that the Passover and the Unleavened Bread are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He does so in I Corinthians chapter 5. Turn with me there. I Corinthians 5:7. "Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened, for Christ, our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the feast not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Now that is a passage worth exposition in and of itself. But note just a couple of things. First of all, seeing Christ as the fulfillment of Passover. It is not just that the Lord's Supper is a fulfillment of Passover, it is that Christ himself is the fulfillment and the completion of Passover. The Passover meal, and by the way, it is the seventh Passover meal described in the Bible, that is found in the synoptic gospels. This Passover meal is literally the last Passover meal. Now you say immediately to me, but the Jews still celebrate Passover. That is the last Passover meal celebrated by the Lord Jesus Christ in the synoptic Gospels. The religious significance of the Passover ceased to exist at that point because the fulfillment had come. The type pointed to the antitype, and when the antitype came the need for the type is dispensed with. It may be kept socially and culturally now, but it is of absolutely no spiritual and religious significance, because it has been fulfilled completely and entirely in Jesus Christ.

The other interesting thing about this passage here in I Corinthians 5:7, is that it indicates the fulfillment of the promises of Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in our union with Christ. Because, notice that we fulfill the significance of this not through a ritual, but through moral transformation. You know, the old leaven of malice and wickedness is out. The new leaven, as it were, of righteousness is in. How does that happen in union with Jesus Christ? But that is another sermon for another time.

Back to Exodus chapter 12, verse 14. God has established these memorials in connection with his redemptive acts in order to strengthen our faith. Perhaps monuments or memorials have been significant to you. Perhaps you have had experiences where you have seen things at monuments that caused you to

contemplate things of the past. Some of you have been reading James Bradley's book, *Flags of Our Fathers*, which is about the six marines who raised the American flag atop Mt. Surabachi on Iwo Jima during the Second World War. It is probably the most photographed event of that entire war, maybe of the whole century. It is an image that is indelibly printed on your mind. My father was a marine, and I remember as an eleven year old being taken to Washington D.C. to see the monument, which is a replica of that photograph, of that event. And I remember how struck I was by this memorial; and it brought back a flood of thoughts into my mind. As an eleven year old boy, I wasn't even in existence when the Second World War occurred, but through my father's stories and through the presence of that monument, certain things were sealed in my mind. So also these memorials that God has appointed to His children are designed to seal in our minds His work of redemption.

II. The worship of God demands our preparation, consecration and full attention.

Now secondly, if you will look at the verses 15-20, you will see the details of the feast. The feast is established in verse 14, and it is detailed in verses 15 through 20. In fact, you will find ten instructions here. Just like we saw at least sixteen specific instructions for Passover, we find ten instructions for the Feast of Unleavened Bread. And again, it strikes me as we read this passage that we are reminded that the worship of God demands our preparation, our consecration, and our full attention, and you will see in each of these instructions how our preparation, and our consecration and our full attention are evoked.

Look at verse 15. You will see three things in verse 15 which are stressed. First, we are to eat only unleavened bread for seven days. Seven days, you shall eat unleavened bread. The seven days perhaps refers to a period of completeness. And the rabbis note that whereas some of the Passover regulations were temporary, for instance the spreading of the blood on the lintel and on the door posts, that was temporary. That was a one time activity. That wasn't repeated in the later Passovers. But all of the instructions of unleavened bread were perpetual, they were essential to the observation. Whereas, there was only one Passover where the door posts and the lintel would have been painted, in all the feasts of unleavened bread, these particular commands were going to be kept. They were essential and they were perpetual. The unleavened bread, the bread of haste is to be used. You will find out why this was called the bread of haste when you learn again that the later rabbis required that this bread be made from start to finish in under eighteen minutes or it be thrown out. From the time that you begin kneading it, to the time that it was baked, eighteen minutes, total. Truly the bread, I don't know how much time bread normally takes, but eighteen minutes is pretty good. So it is the bread of haste that is to be used.

Notice again, in verse 15, the second part of the verse, all of the leaven must be

removed on or by the first day, "but on the first day, you shall remove leaven from your houses." Leaven related in these feasts to two things. The leaven, of course, in the Passover, referred to the haste of preparation for the Passover. It reminded the children of Israel that they were going to have to get out of town quick. They had to make their preparations very quickly and be ready to move. And the leaven in the feast of unleavened bread seems to be related to the corruption that leaven often had with later associations in the Bible. In the New Testament, leaven is regularly used as an emblem of a corrupting element, just like you just read in I Corinthians chapter 5. And so with regard to unleavened bread, the removal of leaven from the houses seems to be emblematic of cleansing of impure qualities and such. Of course, removal of, leaven from the houses would have also prevented any kind of an accidental use of the leaven in the process of preparation of the bread. As an added bonus, it would have practically also given you a new start for leaven. Leaven was apparently used like this: it was a lump of dough left over from the last batch. It had already fermented. It would be scooped up when you were preparing your next batch and would be added into it to help the rising of the bread itself. And it would have been utilized over and over. Anything left, would have been kept over. Well, you can imagine that after a year, you are bound to have some stuff that has been around for a while.

Now this actually hit me when I was in Scotland. I had a friend, who had very kindly invited me over to his apartment, and he was going to serve me some breakfast. And he had the coffee and the tea going. He was very kind to have coffee going for a barbarian like myself since he was drinking tea. And he had some other things going for breakfast. And I noticed him open a drawer and remove an object that was solid. I said to him, what is that? He said, oh that is the porridge. You have your porridge in a drawer? Oh yeah, you know we scoop it out of the pan, after the last use and we just put it in the drawer. And then we bring it out again, we add a little water, we stir it up, we put it on the stove and we use it again. Needless to say, I was not thrilled about eating that porridge. You can imagine that after a year some porridge would have some very old elements in it in that kind of a setting. Well, the Feast of Unleavened Bread made sure that you cleaned out all the old leaven and at least you had a new start for the year to come.

At any rate, very seriously, at the end of verse 15, we are told that anyone who eats the leaven is to be cut off. Whoever eats anything leaven from the first day, to the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. This is of course, a reference to Old Testament church discipline. The phrase, *cut off from Israel*, is used thirty-six times in the first five books of the Bible. It is mostly used in connection with violations of God's law, in connection with worship, and sexual immorality. Those two areas are considered so important that a gross offense in them requires that a person be cut off from Israel. It is a representation here of Old Testament church discipline. And it shows how serious these ordinances are to be taken. Trifle with these ordinances, and you find yourself ostracized,

perhaps even physically displaced from the people of God, but certainly put outside of the fellowship of God's people.

Church discipline is something that is designed of course, to protect the purity of the body. But it also designed to be a warning and a protection to the hearts of men. Paul, when he speaks of church discipline being applied in I Corinthians, sees it as a way in which a brother might be won back from the wiles of Satan. The Baptists, last century, as they wrote manuals of church discipline for their local churches had beautiful phraseology in this regard. When they had gone through the various steps of church discipline and had been unable to win a brother back, they said this. Before the congregation, the charges were read, and the brother was put out of the fellowship this was said at the end of the ceremony: "We will cease to call him brother, and now call him friend." In other words, he was no longer considered a brother in Christ. But this was not an act of spite or meanness or vengeance. He was to be considered a friend who might be won back into the brotherhood. And so the cutting off of the new covenant always has in view a restoration of the offending party.

In verse 16, we see two more instructions. The feast is to be observed on the first and seventh days through holy assemblies. On the first day, you are to have a holy assembly, and another holy assembly on the seventh day. A holy convocation, a sacred assembly refers to a religious gathering on sacred days. This word is used seventeen times in the first five books of the Bible. It is used four times right here in Exodus, and it refers to that gathering of God's people on certain holy days. And they are to do that during the feast of unleavened bread. In the second part of verse 16, we learn this: No work whatsoever is to be done except for work related to the preparation of the food for the feast of unleavened bread. No work at all shall be done on them except what must be eaten by every person. That alone may be prepared.

Notice how similar this is to the Sabbath laws that you will later see set down in Exodus chapter 16, and Exodus chapter 20, and Exodus chapter 34 and other passages like that. You see a similarity to the Sabbath laws. One thing: it is a little looser than the Sabbath laws. You remember in the later Sabbath laws, they are not even to cook on the Sabbath. Here they are allowed to cook. Now think, why? Because the purpose of the cooking is a celebration of the feast of the Lord. What is the principle? The Lord wants our full attention. Sometimes, when I am trying to do something else, and my daughter wants my attention, she will say, "Dad, dad, dad," and when that doesn't avail, and I am still reading, she will come over and she will take my chin and she will turn my face around and she will say, "Dad," and I say, "What honey?" And then we begin our conversation. Well, the Sabbath day is the Lord's way of saying, "I want your full attention. I want it on Me. I want you to be thinking about Me. I want you to be thinking about what I have done. I want you to be thinking about My grace. I want you to be thinking about My benefits. I want you to be holy and solely focused on Me." And that is why these particular prohibitions are made for the Sabbath day here for

this particular sacred day in Israel.

So those are the first five instructions. Let's look at the second five. Look at verse 17, you will see two more of them. "Observe this feast, because on this day, I brought you out, I delivered you. You shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, because on this day, I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt." And so the feast is to be observed because of God's redeeming work. It is to be observed that day, because the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt. Notice two things about this. Notice that He is telling them this in Exodus chapter 12, verse 17. Quick question: what has not yet happened? They have not been brought out of Egypt. Yet in the instructions in Exodus 12:17, He said, "Do this because I brought you out." It is in the perfect tense. This is a prophetic perfect. You will find them throughout the Old Testament. In other words, when God announces something, it is so true, that even though it hasn't happened yet, it is just as certain as if it has. So you celebrate this because I brought you out. And He says it to them in advance. Isn't it interesting how the worship of God here, by the way, is drawn into intimate relationship with the redeeming work of God. They are to do this, they are to be carrying out this feast even as God performs the redeeming work.

Notice also that He says, "I brought your hosts out." Now I am not sure exactly of the significance of that, but I do know that hosts is a military term. You would hardly have thought of that motley crew coming out of Egypt as a great army terrible with banners. But I do know this, God is called in the Old Testament the Lord of Hosts. That probably refers to God being the mighty God, the God of armies. It may refer to the armies of the stars or the armies of the angels, or both. But whatever it refers to originally, can't you imagine this? Never again would the children of Israel, having been brought out by hosts by the Lord God of Israel, never again would they have been able to hear the name of God, the Lord of Hosts without remembering that work of redemption where they were brought out of the land of their bondage.

Then again, in verse 17, we are told it's because of this great redemption that the feast is to be permanently observed. Therefore, you shall observe this day throughout your generations, and so this underscores the benefit of observing the feast of unleavened bread for future generations. They will then be able to remember what God had done. I wasn't there at Iwo Jima on Mt. Surabachi, but every time I see that monument or a picture of it, I'm reminded of it. And I'm almost caught up in the historical event of it, because of the connections through my whole family and nation. So also, through the continuing memorialization of this event, future generations will derive spiritual benefit.

Then in verse 18, one more thing. This is the eighth instruction. The feast is to run from the evening of the fourteenth day to the evening of the twenty-first day of the first month. It's probably a reflection, by the way, of the original creation week. Notice that all Israel's feasts ran from evening to evening, reflecting the

days of the original creation, evening and morning. By the way, this is another good reason to view those days as normal days. Because the feast patterns of the first five books of the Bible are all predicated upon those days being understandable to us. Starting in the evening and running to evening. At any rate, it's to go from the fourteenth to the twenty-first. Right in that third portion of the Hebrew month, it begins in the very center of the month and ends before the concluding section, or that second portion of the Hebrew month.

In verse 19, we see the ninth instruction. Anyone who eats leaven, alien or native, will be cut off. Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses, for whoever eats what is leaven, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel. Whether he is alien or a native of the land. The laws of the feast, you see, are to be binding both on Israelites and on resident aliens alike. Though the resident could not partake of the Passover, unless he was circumcised, yet he was to observe the commands to remove leaven. And so the same law applies to both the Jew and the resident alien.

And then finally in verse 20, the tenth instruction is given, and it's a summarizing statement. Nothing leaven is to be eaten, it's a summary statement in parallel form. And by the way, you can see it even in your English, no matter what translation you are reading out of, look at this. You shall not eat anything leavened in all your dwellings, you shall eat unleavened bread. Now in English it is an A, B, C, A, B, parallel. *You shall not* parallels with *you shall. Eat anything leavened* parallels with *eat unleavened bread*. The center piece, the c-section is *all your dwellings*. And so through the use of this parallel, Moses summarizes the instructions that have been given before. You shall not eat anything leavened in all your dwellings. Instead you shall eat unleavened bread.

Now, this passage reminds us again that we ought to come before the Lord realizing His grace, well prepared and consecrated and focused. And it reminds us also that God's redemptive work is the precursor to all our worship. We cannot worship God apart from the redemptive initiative that He has taken. Had He not redeemed us, we would be unable to come into His house and worship Him. And so we see even in the ordinance of the feast, God weaves in what He has done to redeem and deliver His people, and that is the cause for and the ground of their worship. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the memorials that You have granted to Your people. You have not only granted them to Israel of old, You've granted them to the new Israel, Your church. We pray, O Lord and God, that as we see those great memorials set before our eyes, the memorials of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, that we would see them as a feast to the Lord, a remembrance of Your redemption, a cause for praise, a perpetual ordinance, until the Lord comes. These things we ask in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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