

Enjoying Him ... a study on the Feast of Unleavened Bread ... Leviticus 23:4-8

We're back again in the book of Leviticus, and chapter 23 - a chapter famously called, God's calendar of redemption. We've already looked at the first feast, the feast of Passover, Pesach - it was a powerful reminder of the death of Jesus. It was God's rescue mission at Calvary! That truth reminds us that the Jews are God's chosen people - you can read all about it in the OT scriptures and in Romans 9-11. We don't understand why, and we don't need to ... the fact is, he did not choose her as a people to be pampered or mollycoddled; but he chose her for five main reasons:

One, he chose Israel to teach all nations of himself - you find that in Isaiah 43:10-12, where we read: "You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no saviour. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed - I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, that I am God";

two, he chose Israel to show his love and faithfulness - you find that in Deuteronomy 7:7-8, where we read: "The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you ... and brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery";

three, he chose Israel to be a blessing to

all people through the seed of Abraham - you find that in Genesis 12:1-3, where we read: "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"

four, he chose Israel to be a praise to himself - you find that in Isaiah 43:21, where we read: "the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise";

and, five, he chose Israel to bring salvation to all people - you find that in John 4:22, where we read: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews." That's why the first of the seven feasts is of huge importance and significance. And we talked about it last evening!

With that in mind, today we're looking at the second of the seven feasts of Jehovah - the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It's referred to more often than not as Hag HaMatzot.

It's observed for seven days in the Spring - in our calendar, it usually falls somewhere in the months of late March/early April - for a Jewish person, it occurs in the month of Nisan, from Day 15 up to Day 21. This year, 2019, it began on 20 April and it ended with the going down of the sun on 26 April. The PowerPoint slide will give you some idea of where and when it fits in.

You can read all about it at your leisure in Leviticus 23:6-8 and also in Exodus 12:15-20.

I've even put the Hebrew word up there for you!

It's worth noting that today, among Jewish people, the 7-day Feast of Unleavened Bread and the 1-day Feast of Passover are often seen as one big long feast - the lines are blurred together and they are referred to as 'the eight days of Passover.' It also included on Day 3 the Feast of Firstfruits. You can see that clearly highlighted in the slide on the screen!

When Jesus was here, in the days of the Second Temple, it was common to call all eight days, the Feast of Unleavened Bread - you see that in Luke 22:1, where we read: 'Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was approaching ...' Further down in verse 7, we read: 'Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.'

This feast was one of three so-called pilgrim feasts - that's when all Jewish men were required to go up to Jerusalem to take part in them; we know that from Deuteronomy 16:16, where we read: 'Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose.'

You read about them in the Gospel narrative and in the book of Acts - the other two were Pentecost and Tabernacles. One such incident is in Luke 2:42-47, where we read: 'When Jesus was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast - that's the feast of unleavened bread - , according to the custom.' Yes, it was normal for him to go up to Jerusalem for each

of these special festivals ... he was Jewish, he kept the feasts.

We know the sequel to that, don't we! Jesus stays behind and his parents don't know he's missing. They eventually find him; he's in the temple courts, among the elite Torah scholars - he's asking them leading questions, and Dr Luke tells us: 'Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.' People were taken aback by him - and he's only 12 years of age, he was a lowly Galilean, he had no university training, he wasn't even Bar Mitzvah age (that was 13). Never before had they met a young man like this! Then and now, he is the incomparable Christ.

What is the hallmark of unleavened bread? Well, it's just what it says it is - unleavened! It's made from flour and water, there is no yeast in it at all - it's called matzah. We read that in Leviticus 23:6. It's also called 'the bread of affliction' in Deuteronomy 16:3.

On their last night in bondage in Egypt there was no time to let the dough rise - we see that in Exodus 12:39 - the people had to be ready to move out fast! The people will eat no other kind of bread during this feast - no bread rolls or sweet cakes! Nothing like that at all ... leaven is banned from all food.

We know from Exodus 12:15 that leaven is also prohibited in the family home - it has to be totally removed. No cakes, no biscuits, no breads, no cereals, no baking soda, not a trace of leaven anywhere! Yes, this was the original Spring clean! It was quite a ceremony ... here's what took place:

The mother in the home did her bit - in fact, she did most of the work in getting things just right for this feast. The place was spick and span from top to bottom. On the night before Passover, the father would come back in from evening prayers at the synagogue. When he's been out praying, the mother will have placed a few bits of bread on window sills and in different corners of various rooms.

He will perform, what is called, the 'search for leaven' ceremony. He'll have a wooden spoon in one hand and a goose feather in the other. He'll go through every room in the house with a candlelight to pick up the scraps of bread! When he finds some, he'll sweep it up with the feather on to the wooden spoon. When it's all done, he'll take the bits of bread, the wooden spoon, the goose feather, and wrap them in a cloth, put them in a bag, and burn them next morning. Only then are they ready for the feast to begin - and that still happens today in Jewish homes around the world.

Paul sets the record straight and puts it all in perspective when he writes in Colossians 2:17, 'These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.' Take a look at a piece of matzah, unleavened bread - what do you see? It has indents across it that look like stripes; it is also pierced to keep it flat in the oven. Think about that, then think about the Lord Jesus!

It's all there in Isaiah 53:5, where we read: 'He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.'

The prophetic meaning of this Feast is found in the work of Jesus - you see, leaven in the Bible is almost always a symbol of sin - so here is one who is sinless! One who is perfect. There is no fault in him, there are no flaws in his character, he never fails - in him, there is no sin! He knew no sin. And he did no sin.

Passover reminds us of his atoning death as the spotless Lamb; the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures his burial in a borrowed tomb - where, because he was sinless and pure, his body did not decay or see corruption like a piece of dough soured by leaven; then, to crown it all, the Feast of Firstfruits represents his resurrection on the third day. He conquers the grave with his resurrection because he is not a sinner under the curse of death.

In one of the great 'I am' chapters, Jesus said about himself in John 6:35, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry' ... he said up the page in verse 33 that 'the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

And, cast your mind back to his birth in the town of Bethlehem - which is 'the house of bread.' He spoke of himself, when he said: 'If a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, etc.' You remember, in the wilderness, God fed the people with manna from heaven - today, we are fed with the finest of the wheat - even the Bread of Life.

My friend, as by faith we feast on him, we discover that Jesus is both our Saviour and our Satisfier.

As I said earlier, when we read through the Bible, we discover that leaven represents sin.

The Hebrew word for 'leaven' is chometz, which means bitter or sour. That's what sin does in our lives - it makes us bitter and sour!

Leaven causes dough to become puffed up so that the end product is more in volume, but not more in weight. Just like pride - we get puffed up, big ideas about ourselves, the big head syndrome - bloated with a lot of air!

That's why Paul is so emphatic in what he says in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; he pulls no punches, for we read: 'Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.'

That's the mega challenge for you and me who profess to love the Lord Jesus - sin should have no place at all in our lives. God is calling us to be a pure people, a genuine people who are marked by holiness. This feast speaks of our sanctification - it's what Paul affirmed in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 as 'the will of God' for each of our lives.

He's not just talking here about the blatantly obvious sins in our lives - the things that our friends can see and the things that cause us heartache and grief ... it's the little things! We read in verse 6, 'Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough?'

We are to deal with it and get rid of every last bit of leaven in our lives - it all needs to go, it needs to be purged if we are to be a purified people. We need to take the candlelight of

God's Word and search our lives. Every corner, every crack must be scrutinised in the light of biblical truth.

A bit like us praying Psalm 139:23-24, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting.'

The task is not complete until every speck of leaven is removed. They didn't get rid of it in order to be redeemed. Rather, they got rid of it **because** they were redeemed. And here's the reason why, the motivation is this: 'Because Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.'

I mentioned earlier that this special feast speaks of sanctification ... the Bible teaches us of four phases in the process of sanctification - one, it is preparatory; two, positional; three, it is progressive; and, four, prospective ... let me explain:

One, preparatory sanctification is the process the Holy Spirit uses to bring us to the point of salvation. He worked with us long before we knew him - we find echoes of that glorious truth in 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and in 1 Peter 1:1-2.

Two, positional sanctification refers to our salvation, the moment we put our faith in Jesus. This is also referred to as justification, when we are declared righteous. Paul says as much when speaking to new believers in 1 Corinthians 6:11 where he reminds them they are washed, sanctified, and justified in the Lord Jesus Christ. You find something similar in Hebrews 10:10.

Three, progressive sanctification describes the spiritual growth of every believer as he becomes more Christ-like in his walk. And that's what the feast of unleavened bread is all about for you and me! See the connection, I'm sure you do. Again, Paul speaks of it at length in 2 Corinthians 7:1 and 3:18.

Four, prospective sanctification is what we are looking forward to in the future. This is the ultimate for every pilgrim bound for Glory - for us, it's the moment of glorification when our sanctification will be finally complete. We read about it in Romans 8:29 and over in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

You see, God not only cares about what we were and what we are going to be; he also cares about what we are now. He is vitally interested in every part of your life. He **wants** to change us and transform us into Jesus look-alikes. And he wants to do it now!

That's the thought behind the Feast of Unleavened Bread - it's an impassioned call from his heart to yours and mine, he has redeemed us, he has rescued us, we are reconciled - to quote the old hymn: 'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven' ... now he wants us to be like Jesus!