

United Church of God, *an International Association*



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Eating Unleavened Bread

Study Paper

Prepared by Ministerial Services
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All scriptures are quoted from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version* (© 1988 Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee) unless otherwise noted.

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Recently, questions have arisen in the Church concerning the command to eat unleavened bread during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Would it be sin not to eat unleavened bread? Must some unleavened bread be consumed every day? Is it sin not to consume unleavened bread every day?

The question has been explained in different ways over the years, and there is an apparent lack of consistency in our preaching, with some suggesting we must eat some unleavened bread on each of the seven days, while others preach that the sin lies in eating leaven, not in failing to eat unleavened bread every day.

Like most doctrinal questions, this one is not new. It was addressed by the Church in the *Pastor General's Report* in 1982, and at that time Herbert W. Armstrong wrote that the sin lies in eating leavened bread or other leavened products, not in failing to eat unleavened bread each and every day.

This short paper will examine some of the implications of the commandment concerning the Days of Unleavened Bread, and propose that our current and official explanation—that the sin lies in consuming leavened products, not in failing to consume unleavened bread each day—is correct.

The commandment is recorded in several Old Testament passages, including Exodus 12:15, 13:7, Leviticus 23:6 and Deuteronomy 16:3. The command in each case is, “For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.” Unfortunately, the King James Version, the New King James Version and the New International Version use the word *must* in rendering Leviticus 23:6. For example, the NKJV translates it “seven days you must eat unleavened bread.”

This use of the word *must* is interpretive on the part of the KJV, NKJV and NIV translators, and does not reflect any difference in the wording of the Hebrew passages in Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In each case the Hebrew reads “for seven days you [singular or plural] shall eat unleavened bread.” The verb is in the second person masculine plural in Exodus 12:15 and Leviticus 23:6, and in the second person masculine singular (with God addressing the people as if they are one group) in Deuteronomy 16:3. The verb tense is the same in each of the passages, that is, the imperfect tense, which reflects an imperative meaning.

The understanding of the passage lies not so much in the Hebrew words and grammar as in correct interpretation in the light of other passages. Some are claiming that the law requires we eat some unleavened bread on each of the seven days. This interpretation is not correct. Note, in this regard, the Sabbath commandment as recorded in Exodus 20:9 and Deuteronomy 5:13, where we are told, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work.” The meaning of these passages is clearly that there is a span of six days set aside in the weekly cycle in which work may be done, and will normally be done. The implication is not that it is sin to take a day off work, or that it is sin to take a week or two of vacation, and not work. In Mark 6:31 Christ encourages His disciples to take some time to “rest” because they were so busy working that they hardly had time to eat. The synagogue ruler in Luke 13:14 declared, “There are six days on

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which men ought to work,” but neither he nor those who heard him were suggesting that it is sin not to work on any one such day.

If we are to be consistent with our rendering of the Scriptures and we believe that the command for unleavened bread requires the eating of some unleavened bread each and every day, then we should interpret the Sabbath command in a similar fashion (one “must” work every day of the six in a weekly cycle). The fact is that biblical Hebrew is quite capable of indicating that a particular activity is to be undertaken every day or every morning or every evening. Had God wished to inspire it that way, He could have done so. It is quite telling that God did not inspire Moses to use the Hebrew expression that would have made clear the requirement for eating unleavened bread each and every one of the seven days.

Note the following passages: Exodus 16:21 (“So they gathered it [the manna] every morning”), Exodus 30:7 (“Aaron shall burn on it sweet incense every morning”), Leviticus 24:8 (“Every Sabbath he shall set it [the shewbread] in order before the LORD continually”), Numbers 28:10 (“this is the burnt offering of every Sabbath”) and 14 (“this is the burnt offering for each month”) and 2 Chronicles 13:11 (“And they burn to the LORD every morning and every evening burnt sacrifices and sweet incense”). In each of these passages, the Hebrew utilizes a linguistic device to denote the concept of “every”: it simply reduplicates the word for “morning,” “Sabbath” or “month.” Thus the example of Exodus 16:21 might be rendered, “So they gathered it [in] morning, [in] morning . . .”

Had it been God’s intention to instruct His people to eat some unleavened bread on every one of the seven days, without fail, He would no doubt have inspired Moses to use this same reduplication device to denote the concept of “every” day. He did not choose to do so; hence the evidence points to the interpretation of a seven-day period of time in which unleavened bread, as opposed to leavened bread, is to be eaten.

But is it sin if someone fails to eat unleavened bread for the seven days? The answer lies in the penalty established by the law. In Exodus 12:15, the penalty for eating leavening is spelled out: “For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.” Note that the penalty of “cutting off” or exclusion is invoked for the sin of eating leavened bread, not for the omission of eating unleavened bread. No doubt bread was a staple, and it was customary to eat bread every day, but the sin lay in eating leavened bread, not in failing to eat unleavened bread.

We conclude that we are commanded to avoid leavened bread (and, by extension, all leavened products) during the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. It is not required that we eat some unleavened bread each and every day of the seven, but to abstain from all bread for seven days would weaken the lessons of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The Church is not advocating that we avoid all bread since there is deep significance and meaning in eating the unleavened bread.

Mr. Armstrong felt it necessary to state the Church’s position on this issue in 1982. While no one is being told “not to eat” unleavened bread, we must be careful in making

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judgments because someone doesn't eat some unleavened bread each and every day. In most cases this is simply not an issue and is really a personal matter. Most members eat unleavened bread each and every day as their normal routine. No one is suggesting that any of this should change. The command is that we *not eat* any leavening during the seven days. The consuming of unleavened bread takes place during the same seven days and the Church is not advocating that there be any change in this practice. There is significant symbolism attached to the eating of unleavened bread.

In ancient Israel the penalty for eating leavening was to be cut off from the congregation. This was a very serious matter with God and should be taken seriously by Church members today.