

The Five W's of Deleavening

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Spring is almost here!

It is officially still winter until March 20th but the warmer, sunny days are bringing the spring flowers out, and Passover is less than a month away now.

Are you looking forward to the spring Holy Days? Are you looking forward to the "Days of Spring Cleaning"?

Yes, there is a real danger that the days preceding the Feast of Unleavened Bread have become the Days of Spring Cleaning! The very mention of the word "deleavening" conjures dread in the minds of many a Christian. Oh! The thought of all that vacuuming, scrubbing, dusting, and the exhaustion that seems to increase each year as our physical temples get older.

How often have we put so much into our physical deleavening work that we have had little energy and alertness left over for the learning of important spiritual lessons of Passover, the Night to be Much Observed and the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Is this what God intended?

Just what deleavening does He want His children to do? What has He commanded His people? This article offers some guidelines on deleavening in a review of "the five W's – the Why, Where, What, Who, and When – of Deleavening."

Why?

Yes, just why *should* we deleaven? After all, the word "deleaven" doesn't even appear in the scriptures! Let us look at God's original command to His people on this subject in the twelfth chapter of Exodus:

**And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying,
(Verse 1 - King James Version throughout)**

Here we read that it is God talking to Moses and Aaron when they were in the final days of Israel's captivity in Egypt. Continuing in verse 2, God proceeds to give them instructions on how the Passover should be kept. Then, in verses 15 and 19, He gives this command:

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.... Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.

So the simple answer to the question, "Why should God's people deleaven?" is that the great God commands it! Yes, but *why* does He command it? All of His commands are always for good reasons. These verses – 15 and 19 – give part of the answer – so as not to be cut off from God's people due to disobedience. Many people who were once counted among God's people have made this serious mistake in recent years. They have accepted the false teaching that they may reject and ridicule this command (and many others), claiming that it was only a requirement for Old Testament Israelites. The result is just as God warned – that they are now cut off from His people (although most would not admit this fact). Verses 17 and 39 give more answers:

And ye shall observe [the feast of] unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever... And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual.

The words for "the feast of" are not in the Hebrew, but were added by the King James Version translators. God says here that His people are to keep the annual practice of deleavening because He brought His Old Testament church out of Egypt. We find later that this great and miraculous event was symbolic of Him freeing His New Testament church from sin. Many scriptures clearly reveal that both Egypt and leaven are symbols of sin. These spiritual aspects will be detailed in messages to be brought to us during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Did God really intend His people to observe this practice forever as we read in verse 17? Or was it – as some claim – nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ? Here are three scriptural records from the early church after Jesus' crucifixion:

And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. Then were the days of unleavened bread. (Acts 12:3)

And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. (Acts 20:6)

Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (I Corinthians 5:6-8)

We know that Jesus kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread and, perhaps more importantly for our example, the above scriptures reveal that His early New Testament church kept it after His death, resurrection and ascension.

Where?

Where should we deleaven? Again, God gives the instruction through Moses:

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses... Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses... (Exodus 12:15, 19)

The single Hebrew word from which the English phrases, *out of your houses* and *in your houses* were translated in these verses is *bayith*, which also can be translated as *homes, households, or families*. Exodus 13:7 expands on this:

Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters.

The English words *with thee in all thy quarters* were translated from the Hebrew *ghebool* which can mean *borders, coasts, bounds, landmarks, space, limits, territory, and region*.

This instruction shows that we are to deleaven all of the areas we are responsible for. We know that this includes our homes; but what about our cars, garages, yards, and our workspaces? Should we deleaven them?

Many years ago Galileo wrote these wise words: "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use." God expects His people to be sensible. He should not have to spell out every single detail – especially for long-time members of His church. He does not expect us to deleaven areas where there has been no chance of leaven getting into. Think about it! Is it possible that leavened products have made their way into your downstairs bathroom or into your tool cupboard? No one ever eats in your car? No one ever carries groceries in the trunk? No one ever eats in your office? Are you sure? If you have little children, of course, there can be no guarantees! But if you are absolutely sure that no leaven has been taken into a certain area of your sphere of responsibility, then don't deleaven it! Our time at this period of the year is so valuable. Why waste any of it? The time would be better used in preparation for the Passover and searching for spiritual leaven.

What?

Exactly *what* should we put off our property for the duration of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread? What is leaven? What are leavening agents and leavened products? Here is a brief review:

There are two main Hebrew words for "leaven" in the twelfth and thirteenth chapters of Exodus 13: *Sehore* means *leaven* or *swelling by fermentation*. *Chametz* and *chamets* (both pronounced khaw-mates) can mean *leaven, leavened bread, the thing leavened, to ferment* and, interestingly when we think of the symbolism of leaven, can also mean *cruel, grieved, sour, embittered, grieved, oppress, and ruthless*.

The type of leavening to be put off one's property is the type used for bread, cakes, and cookies. It includes baking powder and yeast. Brewers' yeast and drinks containing it are permissible and may remain in our homes. As has often been said, this is not the Feast of Unleavened Beer!

Although it is true that all household dust does not necessarily contain leaven, as well as taking care not to become pharisaical, we also must beware of the other extreme of carelessness! With deleavening, as with many other areas of our Christian lives, we must strive for proper balance.

Please remember the symbolism! No matter how long we vacuum and how hard we scrub, it is physically impossible to get rid of every single scrap of leaven from our homes. It would take God Himself, or an angel at the very least, to reduce himself to a microscopic size and to work his way through every inch of the nap of our carpets in order to do what even the most efficient vacuum cleaner cannot do. Likewise with the expulsion of spiritual leaven from our lives, we must be doing our part and working hard at it. With both physical and spiritual deleavening, if we do our very best, God's grace will make up for the difference.

Who?

Who should do the deleavening? Throughout the year, "poor ol' Mom" usually carries the main load of the housework. But should the lady of the house do the lion's share of the deleavening?

To answer this question we must remember what leaven pictures. Ask yourself, "Can Mom repent of and get rid of all of my sins? Even if she could, would I really want her to know all of my sins in order to repent of them?"

To properly picture the putting away of sin, all family members – including the children – must get involved and do their part. Here is what God commands regarding teaching our children about their involvement in the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. (Exodus 13:8-9)

Even very young children quickly learn the lesson and meaning of the deleavening process. Our children have really enjoyed the annual deleavening project and – writing and placing Post-it Notes on the unleavened areas proudly proclaiming "No leaven here!" or "Unpuffed!" – they have always looked upon it as a positive family activity as well as a memorable prelude to the spring holy days.

Nevertheless, not every church member, however zealous, is able to enjoy housework. Increasing numbers of our aging church population are in poor health. If this is the case for you, please do not hesitate to ask your fellow members for help. Again, think about what the process symbolizes and remember that none of us can do it alone. We all need help to put out our spiritual leaven.

When?

When should we begin our deleavening? And, more importantly, when should we be finished? Let us go back to the twelfth chapter of Exodus:

Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel. (Verse 15)

What? Does God really want us to be doing deleavening work on the First Day of Unleavened Bread? The following verse clarifies this:

And in the first day there shall be an holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be an holy convocation to you; no manner of work shall be done in them, save that which every man must eat, that only may be done of you. (Verse 16)

This "first day" is specified as the first holy day of God's annual holy day season. He commands His people to hold special services and to do no work other than that involved in the necessary food preparation. Even for ancient Israelites living in tents, this forbade deleavening work on the holy day. The phrase: "the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses" might therefore be better translated, "you shall have put away leaven out of your houses by the first day." Verses 18 and 19 make this even clearer:

In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at even, ye shall eat unleavened bread, until the one and twentieth day of the month at even. Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or born in the land.

All leaven must be off our property by the sunset that closes Abib 14. This is the Night to be Much Observed and the beginning of the First Day of Unleavened Bread. Many brethren, however, choose to have their deleavening work completed a little earlier so that they can spend more time in spiritual preparation for Passover and physical preparation for the Night to be Much Observed and the First Day of Unleavened Bread. No leaven should be permitted on our property until after the sunset that closes Abib 21, which is the Last Day of Unleavened Bread. Most Church of God groups publish holy day calendars to make planning convenient for their members.

When should we *begin* our deleavening? Of course, our circumstances differ and a hard and fast rule cannot be made for all church members. Nevertheless, we are getting close, so we should all be starting to plan now for our physical and spiritual preparations. For example, consider the following:

- When is your last garbage pick-up before the Feast of Unleavened Bread?
- Where can you deposit your discarded leavened products after that last pick-up?
- Do you have enough vacuum cleaner bags and other necessary supplies?
- When would be the best time to put aside a day for pre-Passover fasting?
- Is there any particular problem that I should be examining this year?

So there they are: The Five W's of Deleavening. They may be new for some, but are timely reminders for most.

Let us look forward to the upcoming Feast of Unleavened Bread. Let us be striving for proper enthusiasm and balance in our preparations. Let us put our accent on the spiritual meaning behind the physical, symbolic act of deleavening.

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