

The Purpose of Unleavened Bread

This is the time of year when God requires His people to begin a new cycle of special ceremonies and observances. During these occasions that fall at different times through the year, He requires His ministry to proclaim the reasons for their observances. Currently, we are in the time of proclaiming the meaning of the first two festivals: Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. We have long understood that the Passover is the time to commemorate the great sacrifice of the body and blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ. We haven't always been as clear on the meaning of the seven days that immediately follow. For many years, our view of the Days of Unleavened Bread revolved solely around our need to put sin out of our lives; we were fixated on the search for and removal of physical and spiritual crumbs. Fortunately, we have grown to see that these days encompass a much more profound meaning than what we can do to rid ourselves of sin.

As we have been taught, the meaning of this one week period is directly connected to the memorial of the Passover sacrifice, yet has a different emphasis. Today, in keeping with the need to have the meaning of the seven day festival of Unleavened Bread proclaimed, we will rehearse its purpose.

To set the stage we, first of all, need to go back to the time God made a prophecy to His friend Abraham concerning events that would occur to his descendants:

GEN 15:13-14 Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions."

We are told that Abraham's descendants were predestined to be shown favor from God. Later, we find that Joseph was fully aware of that future time of God's favor.

GEN 50:24-25 And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."

The first chapter of EXO reveals that after the death of Joseph the Egyptians' treatment of Abraham's descendants altered greatly; as God had forewarned Abraham, the Israelites became enslaved by the nation where they were sojourning. Eventually, the time referred to by Joseph arrived.

EXO 2:23-25 And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect [MOF: "made Himself known"] unto them. (KJV)

From the time of the foundation of the world, when humanity was cut off from access to the Tree of Life, the only ones who can have access to God are those to whom God chooses to reveal Himself. Being a recipient of that privilege of being introduced to the true God can only be classified as a very special favor by God. But, there was much more involved with the favor that God would show Israel than God's introduction of Himself to them.

3:7-8 And the LORD said: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey..."

God was ready to deliver them, to show them undeserved mercy. For what purpose? It's true that part of the purpose had to do with fulfilling His promise to Abraham, but there was more involved than His extension of undeserved mercy.

EXO 4:22-23 Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."

Moses was to tell Pharaoh the reason for Israel's release was so that they could serve God! Throughout his encounters with Pharaoh, Moses repeated the reason for release. Beginning with his statement to Pharaoh before the first plague (7:14-16), Moses told Pharaoh six times to release Israel so they could serve God: before the 2ND Plague (8:1), the 4TH Plague (8:20), the 5TH Plague (9:1), the 7TH Plague (9:13), and the 8TH Plague (10:3).

This shows that the main reason God extended His favor to Israel was so that **they could become God's servants**. In fact, the focus of serving God doesn't end with the demands made of Pharaoh; it continues to be the foremost emphasis in the events which follow. We now come to the event that made possible the release of Israel from slavery to Egypt:

EXO 12:1-6 The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, "This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight [Hebrew: "between the two evenings"]. (NIV)

The key to Israel's release was a sacrifice which was performed on the 14TH day of the 1ST month of the calendar that God appointed them to keep. Once sacrificed, God gave explicit directions for the way the blood and the body of the lambs were to be used.

12:7 "Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs." (NIV)

The blood of the sacrifice was to be applied to the living quarters of the Israelites.

12:8 " They shall eat the flesh that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs." (TAN)

The flesh of the sacrifice was to be eaten by all who were inside the dwellings to which blood had been applied.

12:12-13 "For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt."

The blood provided protection from death.

12:14 " So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."

The day when the blood of the sacrifice protected Israel from death is to be kept as a memorial and a feast.

12:15 "*Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.*"

12:18-20 "*In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening [when the sun sets, ending the 14TH], you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening [when the sun sets, ending the 21ST]. For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread.*"

Verses 21-24 record the arrival of the 14TH day of the 1ST month, and Moses' directions to Israel to follow through with his earlier instructions, emphasizing that the blood of the sacrifice was the only thing that could protect them from death. Then, the fulfillment of the 10TH Plague on Egypt is related in:

12:29-34 "*And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened...*"

Israel entered the days of Unleavened Bread completely free of leaven. They had no leaven with them!

This fact has great bearing on the major focus God wants us to have during this seven day festival. Because, just as Israel began the seven days of Unleavened Bread totally unleavened, so we begin this yearly festival period after removing all leaven and leavened bread from our dwellings. But is spring cleaning all that this feast pictures? Or is there something more? We are told in ROM 15 and 1CO 10 that **every** example in the Bible has been preserved for us to aid in our spiritual development; and, as we are all aware, most examples involving leaven deal with the presence of sin.

Israel entered the feast of Unleavened Bread protected from death by the blood of the Passover sacrifice. They received that protection through an act of undeserved mercy from God. As we read the example of Israel throughout that seven day period of Unleavened Bread, there is never any sin attributed to the people. In fact, the only flaw mentioned was their lack of faith when the Egyptians came in pursuit on the last day. During that entire span of one week, God **never** attributes any sin to the nation.

It becomes fairly evident that the absence of any sin imputed to Israel during that first feast of Unleavened Bread was a type of the ongoing condition of the spiritual nation of Israel. And just as undeserved favor was foreordained for the physical nation of Israel, so unmerited pardon was foreordained for those who compose the spiritual nation of the Church.

EPH 1:2-4 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,*

The *"foundation of the world"* refers to the result of humanity's first sin. According to God, during the first stage of the fulfillment of His plan—a plan which was determined prior to humanity's first sin—a small number of individuals from among humanity would be selected by God to receive special favor and mercy prior to the extension of the same to the rest of humanity. Those who receive God's favor and mercy at this time cannot make any claim that they deserve His preferential treatment.

ROM 9:13-15 *As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion."*

9:16 *It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.* (NIV)

Being selected by God at this time is due strictly to His undeserved favor, His unmerited benefit:

ROM 11:5 *It's the same way in the present age: there is a remnant chosen by grace.* (JNT)

The action of God choosing individuals to whom He shows mercy is the direct result of the slaying of the Passover Lamb. Access to God's mercy and favor is by invitation only and can only be achieved through the extension of His grace!

In using the word "grace", we must be cautious not to immediately identify the term with the concept of grace used by many groups claiming to be Christian. In order to correctly understand what God means by the term "grace", we need to examine the examples of the application of grace in the scriptural record.

1. Abel & Cain

GEN 4:3 *And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.*

Cain brought what he determined was appropriate: a thank-offering, and no more.

4:4 *Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected* [NIV: "looked with favor on"] *Abel and his offering,*

In addition to a thank offering, Abel, understanding his need for shed blood, brought a sin offering. As a result of Abel's acknowledgment of his sins and need for blood to be shed for him, God showed favor or grace to Abel. Abel's actions and God's response reveal that **grace is connected with shed blood.**

4:5 *but on Cain and his offering He did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.* (NIV)

Cain did not see his need for blood to be shed on his behalf and therefore could not receive God's grace.

4:6-7 *Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."* (NIV)

God had obviously relayed the purposes of the offerings to both brothers. Therefore, Cain knew what was appropriate and what was not. If Cain followed God's instructions he would be treated with favor, the same as his brother; if he refused to follow God's instructions, he would receive no favor.

This shows that **grace is contingent upon obedience.**

2. Noah

GEN 6:8-9 *But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. This is the genealogy of Noah. Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations. Noah walked with God.*

6:22 *Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.*

7:1, 5 *Then the LORD said to Noah, "Come into the ark, you and all your household, because I have seen that you are righteous before Me in this generation"...And Noah did according to all that the LORD commanded him.*

7:16 *So those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.*

What God did for Noah shows that **God is responsible for preserving those who have been shown grace**—He acts on their behalf! He provides them the power they need to accomplish the reason why He selected them—spiritual conversion! This is what Paul shows regarding us in:

PHI 1:6 *being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (NIV)*

3. Abraham

GEN 12:1-3 *Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

God showed favor to Abram that He showed to no one else at that time. God made promises that He made to no other.

12:4 *So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him...*

Abram obeyed—Abram left his way of life for God's way of life, showing that **grace requires repentance**.

4. Lot

GEN 19:15-16 *When the morning dawned, the angels urged Lot to hurry, saying, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city." And while he lingered, the men took hold of his hand, his wife's hand, and the hands of his two daughters, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city.*

Lot was brought out of the city that epitomized sin (tradition says that this occurred on the 7TH day of Unleavened Bread).

19:17-19 *So it came to pass, when they had brought them outside, that he said, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you nor stay anywhere in the plain. Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed." Then Lot said to them, "Please, no, my lords! Indeed now, your servant has found favor [KJV: "grace"] in your sight, and you have increased your mercy which you have shown me by saving my life..."*

God brought them out, but **each one** was required to do his or her part in leaving.

GEN 19:26 *But his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.*

Notice! Lot's wife had been shown the same favor as Lot—her life was spared from being destroyed in Sodom—but, due to disobedience to God's instructions, God ceased to show her favor. This example presents an important warning: **grace can be lost!**

As we saw earlier in EXO 12:15, if we willfully allow sin to reign in us, we will be cut off just as surely as any Israelite who ate leavened bread during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

HEB 10:26-29 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted [KJV: "done despite unto"] the Spirit of grace?

The spirit of God is given as an undeserved gift; to refuse using that power is an insult to God's mercy and grace. To sin willfully is an affront to the extension of God's grace, which Paul warns here, leads to the loss of grace and the imputation of sin, which requires the penalty of eternal death.

5. Moses & Israel

NUM 20:1-6 in the first month [during the Passover/UB period of the 39TH year out of Egypt]...Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron. And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: "If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink." So Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, and they fell on their faces. And the glory of the LORD appeared to them.

They knew they would die without help; we likewise know we will die without help!

20:7-8 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock [1CO 10:4] before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals."

God never indicated He was upset with Israel's complaint on this occasion. He simply told Moses how to remedy their plight.

20:9-10 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?"

Moses let his temper get the best of him, causing him to become irrational; this led him to elevate himself and imply that he had the power to bring them water.

20:11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank.

Moses never spoke to it like God instructed him to do.

20:12 *Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."*

God was upset with Moses because Moses did not clearly reveal that God alone provided the life-giving water. Moses attempted to take the credit along with God when he said, "Must *WE* bring water..."

Although God instructed Moses to perform a certain act, it was not Moses' work that produced the water of life. God and God alone gave the gift of life. This shows that even though God requires effort and works from us, those works can never earn or produce eternal life; **eternal life is the outcome God's grace**, not of our works!

EPH 2:8 *For by grace you have been [KJV: "are"] saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,*

2:9 *not the result of works, so that no one may boast.* (NRS)

From these examples several attributes of true grace can be determined. Grace:

1. is undeserved.
2. is connected with shed blood.
3. is contingent upon obedience and righteous actions.
4. results in God's intervention for the recipient.
5. requires an ongoing attitude of repentance.

With these points in mind, let's now focus on **how the Days of Unleavened Bread picture grace:**

EXO 12:40 *Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was 430 years.*

It began with the introduction of the sign of the covenant at the time Abraham was circumcised in 1877 BC and ended with the beginning of the departure of his descendants from Egypt in 1447 BC.

12:41 *And it came to pass at the end of the 430 years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.*

Israel left on the 15TH day of Nisan/Abib: the 1ST day of Unleavened Bread! "*The end of the 430 years—on that very same day*" refers to the time when God promised to establish His covenant with the seed of Abraham, to give them the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. At that time Abraham, himself, was a sojourner in Canaan because he had not been given possession of it at that time. What is of utmost importance is that the favor or grace that God promised He would extend to Abraham's descendants 430 years earlier began on the first day of Unleavened Bread.

But, there is more to the importance of the connection of grace to the Days of Unleavened Bread than the first day being the starting point of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. To Israel, God commanded observance of the days of Unleavened Bread for specific reasons:

EXO 12:17 *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.* (NAS)

EXO 13:3 *And Moses said to the people: "Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out of this place. No leavened bread shall be eaten."*

13:6-10 *"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days. And no leavened bread*

shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters. And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'This is done because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year."

The main emphasis God makes for Israel keeping the days of Unleavened Bread was to reflect on what God had done for them! Although **God** brought them out, Israel had responsibilities to perform first. They were required to closely follow His directions in placing blood upon their doorframes and eating the lambs. And though Israel's actions did not save them, if they had not followed God's directions, they would not have been saved.

With these things in mind, let's continue the thought that the main emphasis God gives for Israel to keep the Days of Unleavened Bread is to reflect on what God had done and was doing for them through those seven days! At the Passover, we're reminded of what Jesus did for us in offering Himself for our sins. As Paul states in HEB 10:14, "by one offering He has perfected forever them that are being made holy." All of our sins were removed at baptism, yet we all know we still sin. How is it then that we can be perfected forever? That we can be considered without blemish? In one word, grace!

ROM 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

ROM 4:6-8 *just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin."*

God does not impute (or charge with) sin those who are under His grace. Those who are not "charged with" sin are without sin, or without leaven, spiritually. They are not made unleavened because they put out their sins. They are made unleavened by the grace of God, which is the direct result of the sacrifice of Christ.

This fact brings us back to the meaning of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread. If we think about it, brethren, we do not put leaven out of our homes during the Days of Unleavened Bread. We remove all leaven and leavened bread before the days ever begin. The days of Unleavened Bread are days without leaven! We keep these days to picture the result of the sacrifice of our Passover—we now live unleavened lives every day of our lives!

The **seven days** picture the total or complete life-time of each one of us. During the seven days of Unleavened Bread, we portray the state of grace which we are under for the remainder of our lives. This is the most important meaning of this **seven day** festival.

And now that we are unleavened, covered by God's grace, we must avoid the error which eventually caused the end of God's marriage to Israel. Remember: the reason Israel was shown grace—undeserved favor—was so that they could be freed from slavery to Egypt, and then go serve God! Yet, Israel refused to serve God. They chose to reject Him as their master and serve sin instead. Paul warns us not to copy their example:

ROM 6:1-2 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*

6:6-7 *knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.*

6:11-13 *Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*

Just as Israel was released from bondage to Egypt in order to serve God, so we have been released from bondage to sin so that we can serve God.

6:14-16 *For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?*

We serve God through our obedience to His instruction. The only obedience acceptable to God is obedience performed by Christ in us. It is His presence in us that makes possible our serving God as God requires. Hence, we need Christ in us at all times every day of our lives. This is the symbolism of eating unleavened bread every day of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread.

6:17-18 *But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

We were just as much in bondage to sin as Israel was in bondage to Egypt.

6:22 *But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*

Once freed from our old master, sin, we began to serve our new master, God.

6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Eternal life can't be earned. It is given only to those who serve God.

Brethren, during these seven days of the feast of Unleavened Bread, let's keep in mind how privileged we are to be the ones described by David as quoted by Paul in ROM 4, where, in describing the result of the sacrifice of Christ our Passover, he states in verse 7:

Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Then, in describing the state of grace portrayed by the seven Days of Unleavened Bread, he encourages us with the certainty of eternal life by stating in verse 8:

Blessed is the man to whom the LORD will not impute sin.

As we eat unleavened bread each day of the Feast this year, let's make certain that we reflect on why we do so: to portray our ongoing spiritual condition in the sight of God—a condition that exists, not because we are any better than anyone else in the world, but a condition that exists because we are part of God's predestined group, the only ones who now have Christ in them—the group He personally selected to be the first recipients of His mercy and grace.