

An Important Reminder- **How Leaven Pictures Sin**

God offers Christians vital lessons through the Days of Unleavened Bread. What do these days picture, and how can they help you lead a happier life?

By George M. Kackos

The apostles were jolted! First, the sound of a violent windstorm filled the house where they were meeting. Then, almost before they had time to think, glowing flames of fire began leaping upon them.

God's Holy Spirit had entered them, and the power

of that Spirit was far greater than the forces of nature they had witnessed.

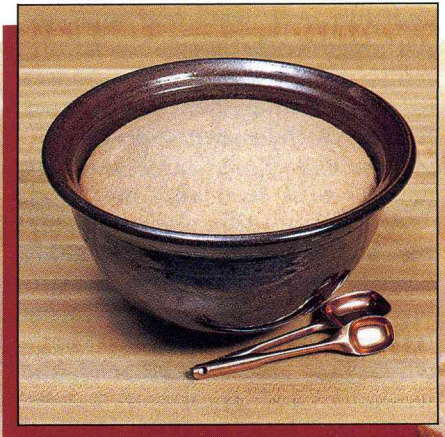
To their amazement, they could now speak words they had not spoken before. Quickly the news spread — here were men who could speak many languages.

Thousands speaking different languages eagerly gathered to hear the apostles. What they heard shocked them. Many were

deeply convicted by their guilt in the death of their Savior, Jesus Christ. A mighty urge to do something stirred within them, and they asked the apostles, "What shall we do?"

The reply echoed loud and clear: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Those early Christian converts



began something that God's true Church still practices — baptism for the forgiveness of sin.

But how, exactly, should a true Christian deal with sin, both before and after baptism? This question brings us to our subject, the Days of Unleavened Bread. To understand this Festival and its meaning and application to our lives, let's go back in history.

These days are commanded

Because of famine, the descendants of the patriarch Israel ended up in Egypt more than 3,000 years ago. There they became slaves (Ex. 1:8-11).

Through a series of miracles, God finally released the Israelites from bondage. Among the miracles was the death of the Egyptian firstborn. To protect their own firstborn, the Israelites were required to begin keeping the Festival called Passover (Ex. 12:3-14).

For Christians today, this Festival pictures our acceptance of Jesus Christ's sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins.

For more information on the Passover and God's other festivals, and what each pictures, write for our free booklet *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?*

God instituted, just after the

Passover, another festival — the Days of Unleavened Bread. This seven-day festival pictured the release of Israel from Egypt (verses 15-17).

The Days of Unleavened Bread were held yearly during Abib, which is the first month of the Hebrew calendar. This month corresponds to the time of the Roman calendar months of March and April. Both the 15th and 21st of Abib, the first and last days of the Feast, are "holy convocations" — days of rest and worship (Lev. 23:6-8).

These days are still kept by true Christians today, and will also be kept after Jesus Christ's Second Coming (Ezek. 43:2, 7, 45:21). This year they fall on April 17 and 23.

Leaven symbolizes sin

During this Festival, all leaven and leavened foods are to be put out of your home and off your property (Ex. 12:15, 13:7). This includes yeast, baking soda, baking powder — all leavening agents, substances that produce fermentation and cause dough to rise. The products of leaven are bread, cake, some crackers, cer-

tain cookies and some prepared cereals and pies. A few candies and other foods also use leavening agents.

Of course, there is nothing sinful about these products themselves. Removing them from our homes is merely a symbolic enactment of removing sin from our lives.

Instead of eating these leavened foods, replace them with unleavened products (Ex. 12:15, 19-20, Lev. 23:6). These include matzos, hardtack and a number of flatbreads. But beware: Some foods that are sold as "kosher for Passover" contain leavening agents.

If you are in doubt about whether a product is leavened, check the list of ingredients on the wrapper. If you are still unsure, ask someone experienced or don't eat it. Remember: "Whatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Whenever you eat bread during these days, it should be unleavened.

Far beyond the physical uses of leaven are the significant *spiritual* meanings.

After being jeered at and



tempted by the hypocritical Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus said to His own disciples, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). The disciples didn't know what He meant. Do you?

The disciples thought Jesus was talking about physical bread, but He wasn't. He was talking about the *doctrine* of the religious authorities, which led people into sin (Matt. 16:11-12, 23:13). By way of analogy, this leaven of false doctrine has spread through the whole world as a tool of Satan's deception (Rev. 12:9)!

The apostle Paul also used leaven as a symbol for sin. A certain Church member was committing a serious sin and making no progress toward repentance. Paul said this person was like a little leaven that would affect the whole lump — other Church members — with his sinful way of life. The person was put out of the Church.

Since Paul wrote to the brethren during the Days of Unleavened Bread, they would have already put out the physical leavening from their homes. Now he encouraged them to put out the leaven of malice and wickedness — sin. He told them to eat the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth — righteousness (I Cor. 5:1-8).

Sin versus righteousness

When you consider the nature of both leavened and unleavened bread, you can see several spiritual comparisons with sin and righteousness. Let's notice them:

- *Living in sin is easy; being righteous is hard.* Because of its soft texture, leavened bread is easier to eat than unleavened bread. Likewise, going the way of sin is easier than living righteously (Matt. 7:13-14). Obeying God is difficult even for a Christian, because you still have a carnal nature that wants to sin (Rom. 7:14-25).

- *Sin exalts the self; righteousness builds humility.* Leaven puffs bread up. The same is true of sin. It puffs up the sinner — his desire is to exalt himself rath-

er than allow God to rule him (Ps. 10:3). When you choose to live God's righteous way of life, you abase selfish desires.

- *Sin's pleasures are temporary; the benefits of righteousness endure.* Leavened bread left out soon becomes hard and moldy. Unleavened bread lasts much longer. Spiritually, the pleasures of sin soon pass away (Job 20:12-16). The end result is eternal death (Rom. 6:23). Righteousness, in contrast, brings both temporal and eternal blessings (Deut. 28:1-13, Ps. 15).

- *Sin spreads easily; righteous-*



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through the analogy of
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- ness is built slowly. It doesn't take long for leaven to spread throughout a loaf of bread. This is the way sin is — it spreads rapidly (Gal. 5:9), whereas building right character takes a lifetime.

- *Sin is based on deceit; truth is the basis for righteousness.* What you see is not what you get with a loaf of leavened bread. Air pockets give the impression that there's more in the loaf than there really is. Sin also appears to be something it isn't, deceiving the sinner into thinking he is getting something worthwhile when he is only earning the death penalty (Heb. 3:13). With righteousness there is no deceit, only truth (Ps. 119:151, 172).

- *Sin is more prevalent than*

righteousness. Most people prefer leavened bread because they find its taste more desirable. Is it really better? Not necessarily — just more common. People are accustomed to it.

Spiritually, the same is true. Most people prefer to live in sin. But you must reject sin, and choose to live a righteous life (Deut. 30:19).

- *Sin builds a false image; righteousness builds true character.* As you have seen, leavened bread gives a false impression. So does the sinner. He may appear impressive on the outside, but is he? Read Matthew 23:27. True character is based on much more than outward appearance. It involves righteous living based on obedience to God's Word (I John 2:5).

Grow in righteousness

What God is showing us through the analogy of leaven and sin, particularly at this time of the Days of Unleavened Bread, is clear: He wants you to escape the clutches of sin and lead a righteous life. But how can you eliminate sin and grow in righteousness? The following "three Rs" — recognize, resist and repent — can help.

- 1) *Recognize sin.* Can you recognize sin? Many cannot. Why? Most people overlook God's simple, clear definition for sin: "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (I John 3:4, Authorized Version).

Discerning sin is a matter of applying God's law. At the basis of God's law are the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17, Deut. 5:6-21). Do you know what the Ten Commandments are? If not, how can you possibly expect to overcome and put sin — spiritual leaven — out of your life? God's laws are real, working forces that guarantee good results when you are in harmony with them. They were given to be lived and acted upon, not ignored or outrightly rejected!

Beyond the basic commandments, God requires obedience to
(Continued on page 22)

Leaven

(Continued from page 16)

biblical principles referring to one's conduct. While some things are not written in the form of a direct command, the underlying principle or spirit of the law is nonetheless just as binding (Matt. 5:17-48, Rom. 13:9)! Under this category fall aspects of God's civil laws and statements made by His apostles and patriarchs.

Examine yourself, as II Corinthians 13:5 commands, and see how God's laws expose the "leaven" in your character. Are you REALLY putting God first in EVERYTHING? Are you humbly submitting to His authority? Can you admit when you're wrong?

For a thorough study of God's

basic law and how it applies in your life, write for our free booklet *The Ten Commandments*.

2) *Resist sin*. We have already seen through the analogy of leaven that sin spreads quickly and easily. Therefore you must resist temptation before it turns into sin (Jas. 1:13-15).

Doing this requires self-control — actively resisting wrong thoughts and replacing them with right thoughts (II Cor. 10:4-5).

In struggling against sin you may reach a point when you grow so battle weary that darts of self-pity and injustice pierce you. At such times it's easy to think you've done all you can. Don't be fooled. You can do more (Heb. 12:4).

Throughout the Bible we see the number 7 used as a symbol of

completeness (Gen. 2:2, Josh. 6:16, Rev. 16:17). In relationship to the Days of Unleavened Bread, the number 7 pictures the complete elimination of sin. You should earnestly strive to eliminate sin from your life (II Tim. 2:19).

3) *Repent of sin*. Even when you recognize sin and resist it, you will still find yourself falling into sin (I John 1:8). When this happens, what should you do?

Strive not to sin, but when you do, seek God's forgiveness. Upon real repentance — abandoning the wrong way and beginning to live the right way — God promises to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).

Some would say not to try so hard — to just rely on grace. But what does God say? "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Will you overcome all sins all at once? Absolutely not! Some sins are so deeply and habitually rooted that they may take years to totally overcome.

Don't use that as an excuse to continue, but don't dismay either. Ask yourself, Am I sinning as often as I once did? Does this sin have as much control over me as it once did?

If the answer is no, you're growing — making progress.

Today the world is in misery because of sin. Yet humanity rejects the very Festival — the Days of Unleavened Bread — that pictures the process that would lead them out of their sins.

What about you? Are you going to keep these special days as God has instructed His people to? Will you be learning the many important lessons that the Days of Unleavened Bread are meant to teach you?

If you do work at ridding your life of sin, you will be greatly blessed, now and in the future as a member of God's Family: "In the way of righteousness is life, and in its pathway there is no death" (Prov. 12:28). □

Are Some Sins Worse Than Others?

By George M. Kackos

Which of these sins is worse: kidnapping and murdering a 6-year-old child, or losing your temper?

Since death is the penalty for sin, we could conclude that there is no difference (Rom. 6:23).

But aren't we overlooking something? Throughout the Bible, God reveals that some sins are worse than others.

After Israel rebelled at Mt. Sinai, Moses said they had sinned a *great* sin (Ex. 32:30). Since there are great sins, there must be lesser sins. Christ's statement to Pilate validates this conclusion: "Jesus answered, 'You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the *greater* sin'" (John 19:11).

Consider the system of punishment for broken laws in ancient Israel. Were all the punishments equal? No. For example, the punishment for kidnapping was death (Ex. 21:16), whereas the punishment for stealing livestock was their restoration (Ex. 22:1).

God's underlying basis for dealing with sin is by the principle of proportionate punishment, in which the punishment fits the crime: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn

for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Ex. 21:24-25).

Christ was explicit — certain things are more important! Included are the weightier matters of the law and the great commandments (Matt. 22:35-40, 23:23).

So what's the point? Don't fool yourself. Some sins you commit are worse than others. They do more damage to your character and the well-being of others. Put top priority on eliminating them. Extract them from your character. Don't tolerate major sins because you have chosen to work only on minor ones (Matt. 23:24).

But don't misunderstand. This is not to say that lesser sins should be overlooked. Jesus was emphatic: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:19).

If you want to be great in God's Kingdom, face all your sins, no matter how big or small. By eliminating them, you will find yourself making rapid progress toward perfection and membership in God's Family. □