

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

LEVITICUS 23:6-8

The feast was to be observed for seven days beginning the fifteenth of the month, the Passover being the evening of the fourteenth. For seven days they were to eat unleavened bread. One possible exception is on the feast of first fruits (see v. 17), however, there are two interpretations of this verse, which we shall study later.

The first day (the 15th of Nisan) was to be a **Holy Convocation** (v. 7). On this day, no **servile work** was to be done (v. 7). Unlike the Sabbath in which **ye shall do no work** (v. 3), on this day only *laborious* work was prohibited. This day was never called a *Sabbath*, for it is only occasionally on the seventh day. The last day (the 21st of Nisan) was also to be a **Holy Convocation** (v. 8). The Jewish sages interpreted **servile work** to be work, “where a monetary loss may be incurred if one would refrain from them.”¹ This work was allowed the other days of the feast.

On the fifteenth there was to be a national (not individual) **offering made by fire** (v. 8). This was one offering made by the nation for the entire period. The Hebrew phrase “שִׁבְעַת יָמִים” means “a seven of days,” thus is taken as a unit, not individual days. The offering is further described in Numbers 28:19. However, other offerings were made daily (see Num. 28:24).

EXODUS 12:15-20

The Exodus passage instructs that the leaven must be removed **even the first day** (v. 15). Modern Jewish interpretation has long been “before the first day,” understanding the **seven days** (v. 15) the same as in Leviticus 23:8, “a seven of days.” Thus, the Jewish interpretation has been, “for a week, you will observe unleavened bread, but first, prior to the week, you will remove the bread.” This interpretation is one of caution but does not seem to hold true by verse 16. I suspect that by the text alone the unleavened bread was removed **even the first day**. Therefore, when Jesus observed the Last Supper (on the 13th, one day prior to Passover) there was still leaven in the home, for the New Testament is unanimous that *bread* and not *unleavened bread* was served. Even in one insists that **even the first day** means *prior to the first day*, leaven at the Last Supper would not have broken the Law.

The first day was a day of **no manner of work** (v. 16). Note that if Jesus was having a Passover Meal at the Last Supper (on the 14th), then He was crucified on the 15th during this **holy convocation** (v. 16). This seems to be an enormous breaking of the Law that even Jesus’ enemies would not do. Verse 16 specifies **no manner of work** but then qualifies that *kitchen labor* may continue. Thus, many Jews consider the **servile work** (Num. 23:7) to be *all work except that needed to prepare a festive meal*.

The seven-day feast was to remind Israel that God **brought your armies out of the land of Egypt** (v. 18). Many teach that it was on the first-day that the Israelites left their homes and the seventh in which they crossed the Red Sea.

NUMBERS 28:17-25

In verse 19, the instruction of Leviticus 23:8 is clarified, that the **sacrifice made by fire** is to be **two young bullocks, and one ram, and seven lambs of the first year**. Though the text does not give the symbolism (if any) of these animals, Jewish teaching is that the bullocks are in reference to Abraham (compare Genesis 18:7), the ram to Isaac (compare Genesis 22:13) and the lambs to Jacob (compare Genesis 30:40).

¹ https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9924/showrashi/true. Accessed June 14, 2022.

An addition of flour and oil was added to the burn offerings (vv. 20-21). Also, a **goat for a sin offering, to make an atonement** was to be given (v. 22).

A BIT ABOUT LEVEN

Leaven is almost universally seen as representing corruption, but we must question this assumption.

In Matthew 13:33, the leaven is *amoral* and could be interpreted negatively or positively.

There is corrupting leaven in the New Testament, but it is always noted as such. See Mt. 16:6 and 11, and note that in 16:12 there is a clarification that **leaven of bread** is not the issue, but rather the **doctrine of the Pharisees**. Mark 8:15 speaks of the **leaven of Herod**.

The Bible often uses the illustration of leaven, such as in 1 Corinthians 5:6, **a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump**. In Matthew 13:33, Jesus is teaching the Jews of that day that even though there are only a few who are faithful and prepared for the Kingdom, they can have a great influence.

A MODERN INTERPRETATION OF THE FEAST

For modern Jewry, the instruction to remove leaven (Ex. 12:15) is taken as an instruction to remove *chametz*. Chametz is one of five types of grain mixed with water and left uncooked for more than 18 minutes. It is *not* a prohibition against yeast or fermentation, both of which are used in wine. In fact, more liberal Jews will eat bagels, biscuits, pancakes and other foods made with baking soda because soda is a chemical reaction, and the food is cooked in less than 18 minutes after the water touches the grains. However, in more orthodox homes all products made with grain are removed from the home. *Chabad*, the Jewish educational movement, says,

“In practice, just about anything made from these grains—other than Passover matzah, which is carefully controlled to avoid leavening—is to be considered *chametz*. This includes flour (even before it is mixed with water), cake, cookies, pasta, breads, and items that have *chametz* as an ingredient, like malt.”

The article above explains that flour is not technically *chametz* because it is not mixed with water, but typically it has been sprayed with water in the milling process and so is removed from the home.²

All *chametz* is sold or burned prior to Passover. Legend has it that the concept of “spring cleaning” comes from the Jewish practice of removing *chametz*.

THE FEAST IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Paul mentions this feast in 1 Corinthians 5:6-9. He begins by mentioning that **your glorying is not good** (v. 6). In fact, modern Jewish interpretation is that the unleavened bread was to remind Jews to *be humble*.

In verse 8 it appears that Paul is instructing the church to **keep the feast**. One should remember, however, that the Corinthian assembly was largely Jewish and thus would be a *feast-keeping* group. He is not giving a command for Christians to **keep the feast**.

² What is Chametz? https://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1742/jewish/What-Is-Chametz.htm. Accessed June 14, 2022.