

Get the Leaven Out

Hallel Fellowship (<http://hallel.info>)

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In modern life people have been interested in getting harmful things out of food. Think of butter and coconut oil. For convenience, cost and health concerns, these natural saturated fats were replaced with partially hydrogenated vegetable oil — margarine and vegetable shortening — for decades until it became known that “trans fats” in partially hydrogenated oils were more harmful than saturated fats.

God gives an odd instruction to His people related to remembrance of the Passover. Somehow, related to the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt by way of plagues that brought the country to its knees. God tells His people to get the leaven out — out of their mouths, out of their homes, and out of the country they would eventually inherit. For seven days, the bread they would eat would be unleavened.

“**Seven days** there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be **cut off** from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land.” (Ex. 12:19)

At that time, the instruction was to eat the Passover (in the Hebrew original language of the text, *Pesakh* פסח) with unleavened bread (*matzot* מצות) and bitter herbs (*m'rorot* מררות) (Ex. 12:8). The reasons given for eating *matzot* were:

“They baked the dough which they had brought out of Egypt into cakes of unleavened bread. For it had not become leavened, **since they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay**, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.” (Ex. 12:39)

“You shall not eat leavened bread with it; seven days you shall eat with it unleavened bread, the **bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste)**, so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.” (Deut. 16:3, the retelling for the second generation since Egypt)

Questions you may be asking yourself so far, or perhaps should be, are:

1. What does God have against leaven?
2. How is leaven connected to Pesakh?
3. Why mustn't we eat it for seven days?

What does God have against leaven?

It helps to know what the Bible means by “leaven” or “yeast” (NIV)? The Hebrew Scriptures use two words for “leaven”: *se'or* (אש Strong's No. 7603), which simply means “leaven”¹, and *khametz* (חמץ Strong's Nos. 2556 & 2557), which means “to make sour/that which is made sour, to leaven/that which is made leavened”².

Se'or shows up in Ex. 12:13; 12:19 and 13:7 and Deut. 16:3, all referring to removing leaven for observance of Pesakh. That word also seen in reference to how the grain offering was to be presented with neither leaven nor honey:

“No **grain offering**, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with **leaven** [חמץ], for you shall not offer up in smoke any **leaven** [אש] or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD.” (Lev. 2:11; cf. 6:14–23)

Khametz in verb and noun forms also is in the Pesakh account and instructions of Ex. 12:34, 39; 13:3, 7. Similar to the usage of *se'or*, *khametz* was not to be anywhere near the blood of the sacrifice of Pesakh, nor in the grain offering:

“You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor is the fat of My feast to remain overnight until morning.” (Ex. 23:18; cf. 34:25)

A related word, spelled the same way originally in Hebrew, is *khometz* (Strong's 2558), which means “vinegar”³, showing the connection of the meaning of *khametz* with “sourness.” Interesting corollaries for this discussion are the instructions for those taking a Nazirite vow to consume no *khometz* (Num. 6:3) and warnings from Proverbs and Psalm:

“Like **vinegar** [חמץ] to the teeth and smoke to the eyes, So is the lazy one to those who send him.” (Prov. 10:26)

“Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, or like **vinegar** [חמץ] on soda, Is he who sings songs to a troubled heart.” (Prov. 25:20)

Other examples of “souring” or “corrupting” expressed by *khametz* are:

“Rescue me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the grasp of the wrongdoer and **ruthless man** [חומץ, “one who is *khametz*”], 5 For You are my hope; O Lord GOD, You are my confidence from my youth.” (Ps. 71:4–5)

“Surely God is good to Israel, To those who are pure in heart! But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling, My steps had almost slipped. For **I was envious of the arrogant As I saw the prosperity of the wicked**. For there

1 Brown, Driver, Briggs and Gesenius. “Hebrew Lexicon entry for S@'or.” *The Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon*. <<http://www.studydrive.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=7603>>.

2 ibid. “Hebrew Lexicon entry for Chamets.” <<http://www.studydrive.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=2556>>.

3 ibid. “Hebrew Lexicon entry for Chomets.” <<http://www.studydrive.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=2558>>.

are no pains in their death, And their body is fat. ... Until I came into the sanctuary of God; Then I perceived their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form. When my heart was **embittered** [חַמָּץ] And I was pierced within, Then I was senseless and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You have taken hold of my right hand.” (Ps. 73:1–4, 16–23)

Since vinegar was commonly made from red grape wine at that time and place, khametz is used in one place to describe wine-stained clothes, with the wine being a metaphor for blood Messiah spills in judgment:

“Who is this who comes from Edom, With garments **of glowing colors** [חַמָּץ “made vinegar”] from Bozrah, This One who is majestic in His apparel, Marching in the greatness of His strength? “It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press? “I have trodden the wine trough alone, And from the peoples there was no man with Me. I also trod them in My anger And trampled them in My wrath; And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, And I stained all My raiment.” (Isa. 63:1–6)

Then we get to a messianic prophecy referring to khometz:

“They also gave me gall [שֶׁרָפָה Strong’s No. 7219 “gall, bitter, poison, venom,” from 7218 “head”⁴] for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar [חַמָּץ] to drink.” (Ps. 69:21; cf. Yeshua offered gall wine during the crucifixion, Matt. 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23,36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29,30)

However, we do see a command to present an offering with khametz:

“You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the *shabbat*, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete *shabbatot*. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh *shabbat*; then you shall present a **new grain offering** to the LORD. You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-10ths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked **with leaven** as first fruits to the LORD.” (Lev. 23:15–23)

What’s going on here? How can God *forbid* khametz from being offered to Him or consumed by His people during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, then *call for* khametz to be offered to Him on the feast of Shavu’ot (Pentecost)?

Consider Messiah Yeshua’s teachings on leaven and the search for leaven:

“When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. “Be careful,” Yeshua said to them. “Be on your guard against the **yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**” They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.” Aware of their discussion, Yeshua asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but **against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**” (Matt. 16:5–12)

“Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying to His disciples first of all, ‘Beware of the **leaven** of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. But there is **nothing covered up that will not be revealed**, and **hidden that will not be known**. Accordingly, whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in the inner rooms will be proclaimed upon the housetops.’ ” (Luke 12:1-12)

What is the “teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees”?

Pharisees

- This Jewish sect came from the Chasidim, who joined with the Maccabees to defeat Antiochus IV in the second century B.C.
- The group’s motto was that God extended His grace to those who kept His Torah. They were obsessed with righteousness — the Hebrew name for the group was *P’rushim*, the “separated ones” — and considered themselves righteous. Many didn’t need a Savior from sin.
- This sect believed in the Tanakh, amplified by the “teachings of the elders,” later known the “oral law.” The oral law had rules “explaining” the holiness described in the Torah that ended up preventing the sin against God that brought the exiles.
- Some Pharisees condemned Yeshua for eating with, making connections with, “sinners.”
- Some Pharisees, such as Sanhedrin members Nicodemus and Yosef of Arimathea as well as apostle Paul, became disciples of Yeshua. Paul continued to identify himself as a Pharisee.
- Some Pharisees took pride in their piety, even if it was hypocrisy. That was the major contention Yeshua had with Pharisees.

Saducees

- Believed mainly in the first few books of Moses but also accepted the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- According to first century A.D. Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, this Jewish sect didn’t believe in

4 *ibid.* “Hebrew Lexicon entry for Ro’sh.” <<http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=7219>>.

- resurrection, miracles or supernatural beings. Life was all about the here and now.
- It was smaller sect in Israel.
- The group had control of the Temple services. Once the temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the sect quickly died out as the Sanhedrin codified Judaism largely on Pharisaical teachings.
- They took pride in their position and liberty from the “traditions of the elders.”

Yeshua also likened the Kingdom of Heaven to leaven:

“He spoke another parable to them, ‘The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.’” (Matt. 13:33)

Apostle Paul expands on the teaching of getting out the leaven, taught in the context of a congregation that didn’t have a system of discipline, lacked Torah-trained teachers, considered toleration of evil behavior considered reprehensible even by pagan standards, and was proud of it:

“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that **a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?** 7 Clean out the **old leaven** so that you may be a **new lump**, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, **not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**” (1st Cor. 5:6–8)

Is Paul contradicting Messiah’s teaching? Messiah said to beware of pride and hypocrisy and then characterized the expansion of God’s presence on earth as leaven working through dough. Paul uses the “little leaven” teaching again in Gal. 5:9 when warning the congregations of Galatia against circumcision as one of the “works of law” being floated by those who held to them as a threshold for salvation. [See the April 19, 2008, Hallel Fellowship discussion, “Why Should We Celebrate Passover Today?” for a discussion on whether this refers to Torah.]

The meaning of “unleavened” in Hebrew may help. Matzah comes from the verb *matzatz* (מצץ Strong’s 4711), which means “to drain or suck out” in the context of sucking out the sweetness of the dough to make sourdough or grape juice to make vinegar.⁵ Here’s the only usage of the verb form in the Hebrew Scriptures, a prophecy commonly seen as foretelling the re-establishment of the state of Israel, realized in 1948, ahead of a restoration of the two houses of Israel:

“Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day? Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not give delivery?’ says the LORD. ‘Or shall I who gives delivery shut the womb?’ says your God. ‘Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; Be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her, That you may **nurse** [נמץ] and be satisfied with her comforting breasts, That you may suck and be delighted with her bountiful bosom.’ For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I extend peace to her like a river, And the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; And you will be nursed, you will be carried on the hip and fondled on the knees. As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; And you will be comforted in Jerusalem.’” (Isa. 66:8–13)

The teaching of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Shavu’ot (Pentecost) may be expressed this way:

- old leaven = old dough = old way of life in selfishness, sourness, etc.
- unleavened = new dough = the old way of life is “drained or sucked out,” like the lifeblood of the Pesakh
- seven days = a complete span of time (e.g., Creation, 70 sevens of Daniel, etc., seven sevens of Shavuot)
- new leaven = new bread = a new way of life is “poured in”
 - God’s Spirit is poured into new believers, exemplified by the coming with power shown on Yeshua’s disciples on that Shavu’ot, which is celebrated after 50 days of counting incoming grain. The outpouring of God’s Spirit is likened to “living water.”

5 ibid. "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Matsatz." <<http://www.studylight.org/lex/heb/view.cgi?number=4711>>.