

Doctrine of Leaven

1. In the Jewish life leaven was an important element in the making of bread, in instruction in righteousness, and in the precepts of the law.
2. In bread making the leaven was simply a piece of dough, retrained from a former baking. The leaven itself was made originally from barley mixed with water and then allowed to stand till it turned sour.
3. In the baking of bread a piece of leaven from an old loaf would be taken and 'hid' in the flour. Made in this way the bread was known as 'leavened' in contrast to 'unleaven' bread.
 - *Matthew 13:33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.*
 - *Exodus 12:15 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.*
4. The Law of Moses forbid the use of leaven during the Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread. By this symbolic action the Jews were reminded of their departure from Egypt in great haste.
 - *Exodus 23:15 Thou shalt keep the feast of unleavened bread: (thou shalt eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded thee, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it thou camest out from Egypt: and none shall appear before me empty :)*
 - *Matthew 26:17 Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?*
 - *Exodus 12:34 And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneadingtroughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders.*
 - *Deuteronomy 16:3 Thou shalt eat no leavened bread with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened bread therewith, even the bread of affliction; for thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt in haste: that thou mayest remember the day when thou camest forth out of the land of Egypt all the days of thy life.*
5. It is possible that the prohibition against leaven was made because fermentation speaks of disintegration and corruption, which reminded the Jews of uncleanness. In the sacrifices offered to the Lord upon the Altar of Yahweh only cakes made from flour without leaven could be used.
 - *Leviticus 10:12 And Moses spake unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left, Take the meat offering that remaineth of the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar: for it is most holy:*

6. Leaven was often used as a symbol of evil.
- *Exodus 12:8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.*
 - *Exodus 12:15 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. 16 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. 17 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. 18 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. 19 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. 20 Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.*
7. There were two exceptions to this divine prohibition. Leaven bread could be accompanied with a Thank Offering and could also be offered in the Wave Offering during the Feast of Pentecost.
- *Leviticus 7:13 Besides the cakes, he shall offer for his offering leavened bread with the sacrifice of thanksgiving of his peace offerings.*
 - *Amos 4:5 And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.*
8. During the days of the New Testament, leaven spoke of something which corrupts, such as the thinking of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians.
- *Matthew 16:6 Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*
 - *Mark 8:15 And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod.*

The Pharisees concerned themselves with an outward display of righteousness,

- *Matthew 23:14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. 15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. 16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!*

- *Luke 12:1 In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

The Sadducees were skeptical and filled with culpable ignorance.

- *Matthew 22:23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,*
- *Matthew 22:29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.*

The Herodians enjoyed malice and political intrigue.

- *Matthew 22:16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. 17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? 18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? 19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. 20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? 21 They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's.*
 - *Mark 3:6 And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.*
9. The apostle Paul also used the term leaven in his writings to speak of something corrupt when he spoke of the “*the leaven of malice and evil*” and contrasted that with the “*unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Corinthians 5:6ff). Paul also noted that ‘Christ’ was our paschal lamb that has been sacrificed, bringing new significance to the old yeast [i.e., the Old Covenant].
 10. Great care needs to be taken not to make leaven a universal symbol of evil, for the success of the kingdom of heaven is likened to leaven.