



Learn Your Bible

Resources to help you learn and understand the Bible

Short Study 22: BIBLICAL SYMBOLS 3 – LEAVEN

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Read Exodus 12:17-20

1. What is leaven? This was an agent added to dough to cause it to rise as it produced carbon dioxide. In biblical times it was probably a piece of dough left over from a previous baking and allowed to ferment. *Unleavened bread* (made from dough without the addition of leaven) remained flat.

2. What does leaven represent? Leaven's ability to permeate and affect the whole dough was seen as the spread of corruption, most notably of sin (but see 4 below). Maybe it was for this reason it was banned from any sacrifices to be offered on the sacred altar. (Offerings that were eaten whole rather than placed on the altar could contain leaven. What were they? See Lev 7:13 and Lev 23:7.)

Sin has a tendency to spread its corruption, both in an individual and in society. Read about King David's adultery with his neighbour's wife Bathsheba, in 1 Samuel 15. In trying to cover up his sin, David piled up sin after sin. What sins can you spot in this lamentable incident (there at least three – you might spot more)?

Corruption of society started at a very early period in humanity's development (see Genesis 6:11-12). What did this lead to? (The next verse gives you a clue).

3. Why was leaven not permitted at all at the Passover? The Hebrews, who had become slaves of the Egyptians, had to leave Egypt in a hurry. They could not wait for the dough to ferment and to rise. Banning of leaven at subsequent Passover celebrations (part of the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* – Lev 23:5-6) was an annual reminder of this hurried departure to freedom).

4. Another use of leaven as an illustration. Jesus used the spreading effect of leaven to illustrate something else. What was it? (See Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21.)

To think about: In what ways does the corruption of sin spread in society? Consider the effect of *salt* as a counter-measure to corruption (Matt 5:13) and how you can be more effective 'salt' in your society.

To dig deeper: Using a concordance, look up the words *leaven* and *unleavened*. See in what contexts they occur.