

Bread from Heaven

Reading: Exodus 16

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Introduction

Good morning to everyone here. It's good to be here, and it's good to see you all. I hope this exhortation will be beneficial to you.

Topic is "Bread from Heaven".

Overview: The Old Testament – physical bread; The New Testament – spiritual bread.

Bread is a staple of life for many, and has been for a very long time. The word 'bread' occurs 325 times in the New King James version of the Bible. Bread is also used as a more general term for food or sustenance (for example: 1 Thessalonians 3:8, 12, Luke 11:3). Indeed, today, bread can indirectly mean money, such as in the expression 'the bread-winner of the family'.

Bread from Heaven in the Old Testament

Let's start in the Old Testament. From the reading of Exodus 16: "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat *and* when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." The complaint of the Israelites to Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (verse 3).

The Israelites were hungry. So they complained to Moses and Aaron; but their complaint was really directed towards God (Exodus 16:8). They had seen the miracles and wonders, but, well, they had been wandering in the wilderness for one month and 15 days. However, in just the last chapter, they had been singing praise to God! They had seen the bitter water of Marah made fit to drink, yet they thought God was going to let them die in the wilderness. Well, from what they said, they weren't even thinking of God. They didn't really understand that God was with them, and that He wasn't going to just leave them to die in the wilderness after all He had done to get them out of Egypt.

So God hears their complaining, and says He will rain down bread from heaven! He gave the

manna freely, but He also tested them in two ways:

Test 1: Gather only enough for each day;

Test 2: Gather 2 days worth on the day before the Sabbath, and none on the Sabbath.

God sent two tests, and the Israelites managed to fail two tests.

The events surrounding this bread of heaven do not reflect well on the people at all.

Let's go earlier, to the first mention of bread in the Bible is in Genesis 3:19. Adam and Eve have eaten of the forbidden fruit, and when God curses Adam, part is:

“In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you *are*,
And to dust you shall return.”

This may explain why bread is such a staple for so many people. Bread is also part of many of God's laws – Ex: 23:18; 34:25; Lev 2:11; 6:17; 7:13; 23:17.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Another topic around bread in the Old Testament is the feast of Unleavened Bread. When the Israelites left Egypt, the feast of Unleavened Bread was instituted – the Passover (see Exodus 12), which is around the time of the firstfruits of the barley harvest. This feast celebrates God leading the Israelites out of Egypt. God had just done the final sign to Pharaoh by killing all of the Egyptian's firstborns, and so the Israelites didn't have time to let their leaven rise the bread – they had to eat unleavened bread. The Israelites entered Canaan on the same day, 40 years later.

Leaven (= Sin?)

Leavened bread is usually easier to eat. However, symbolically, leaven is usually a negative thing. 1 Corinthians 5:8 mentions 'the leaven of malice and wickedness', and 'the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'. 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 reads:

Your glorying *is* not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth.

See, leaven spreads, just as a bad thing such as the flu can spread quickly between people. Matthew 16:5-12, Mark 8:13-21.

The Paradigm of the Law

This leads us to the Old Testament topic of the law. Did you know that in the law, someone who was deformed couldn't offer sacrifices by fire, or offer the bread of his God (Lev 21:16-23). He can eat the bread, but he may not go near the veil or the altar. Just as we see with the leaven, the Old Testament paradigm of the law is one in which the unclean defiles the clean. The dead defile the living. Lepers must live outside the camp. Diseases spread. Those with defects cannot offer sacrifices, and so on. The law teaches us what sin is, and convicts us. Guilty as charged. However, this is not the end of the story. All of this is turned on its head when we get to the New Testament.

Looking Forward

We've talked about bread in the Old Testament. Our last look at bread in the Old Testament is actually the second occurrence of bread in the Bible. Genesis 14:18 reads:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he *was* the priest of God Most High.

We see already, that God has been looking forward, and that the bread is associated with wine, just like in the memorial supper. It has been part of God's plan from the beginning.

Bread from Heaven in the New Testament

As you get into the Gospels, we find that Jesus is the true bread from heaven (John 6). "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

So Jesus is saying that he, the bread of life, is not like normal bread – bread which will sustain you for a while, and which is unable to change you. When Jesus says that we will never hunger and never thirst, we know that there isn't a literal meaning now. However, there is definitely a spiritual "never hungering", and a spiritual "never thirsting" when we eat the bread of life. I think that it is in the Kingdom of God that we will have both spiritual **and** physical "never hungering", and "never thirsting". In John 6:58 Jesus "He who eats this bread will live forever."

Now think back to the paradigm of the law. What Jesus is saying is the opposite of that. Jesus is saying that we will live forever if we eat this bread. This is the opposite of the outcome of eating just physical bread. And note that there are no provisos with this one – Jesus is what will spread, not the uncleanness.

Now it's very interesting to have a quick visit back to the topic of leaven. You see, in the same change of paradigm, Jesus flips around the use of leaven. You see, when you think you've got a topic figured out, it turns out that it's not always plain black and white. Jesus likens the kingdom of God to leaven, in that it spreads and multiplies (Matthew 13:33, Luke 13:20-21).

Not "Jesus was in heaven literally". The Jews stumbled because they tried to understand it literally. Just as the manna wasn't in heaven. It was sent by God, and created by His Holy Spirit. Jesus was sent by God, and created by His Holy Spirit. You can still be emphatic that the manna came from heaven – it came from heaven in intent and purpose. Jesus came from heaven in intent and purpose.

The Lord's Supper

We've talked about the feast of Unleavened Bread in the Old Testament. Now, let's visit the feast of Unleavened Bread in the New Testament. At the time of the feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus had the last supper, as you most likely know well. Jesus strongly desired to eat this last supper with them before he suffered. And we know that he will not eat it again until the establishment of the kingdom of God.

As part of the last supper, Jesus says that the bread is his body, given for you, and to do this in remembrance of him. *<pause>* So when we take the bread, we remember him. In the same way that we digest normal, physical, bread, so to must we spiritually digest Jesus – i.e. we must think of him and meditate on him, and what his sacrifice means to us. Not only that, but we do it together. We remember Jesus and his sacrifice together, and thus we can support each other in our endeavour.

Normal bread is a staple part of the diet for many people, and the body of Jesus is a staple for us. Now, in talking about the bread of the last supper, we should not confuse the symbol with the

reality. The bread that Jesus broke, and the bread that is here before us, is a symbol of Jesus' body. Later, when Jesus is crucified, he carries out God's will as far as is humanly possible. With the memorial supper that Jesus has instituted, we remember him, and his sacrifice – and in doing so, Jesus Christ gives life to the world. Without it – without Jesus – we have no hope. We are just like the Israelites wandering in the wilderness without bread.

What Does it Mean to Me?

So I've been through some of the details of the bread of life. But what does it mean to you personally? These are my thoughts on the matter:

Jesus gave everything he could to God so as to carry out God's will, and thus he gave to us:

- His time;
- His effort;
- His compassion;
- His love;
- His body;
- His life.

Jesus didn't stop caring, or loving, or giving, when it came to any of those things. Even when it hurt. Jesus loved God, and he did His will to the end, so that through his death, by giving his body and life, God was pleased to raise him from the dead, and to give us the hope of eternal life. Through eating the bread, we identify with Jesus and his sacrifice.

Those of us that are baptised into Jesus' saving name are adopted sons (Rom 8:23). It is our desire that we obey God's word and will, and show ourselves to be Jesus' friends. Jesus says "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:14) The bread (and the wine) are here to remind us of Jesus. They are here to remind us of Jesus in his absence, and to remind us of all that he has done for us, so as to spur us on in doing good. And surely, the traumatic time of Jesus sacrifice would be something that we would be tempted to gloss over, or forget, just as many worldly historians would not document the troublesome times of their own nation.

Conclusion

The symbol of bread has a rich history, and had meaning to the Israelites in Old Testament times. However, for the Israelites, it did not carry the hope of life eternal. To us, bread, i.e. the bread of life, is a very strong symbol. It symbolises Christ's broken body, and reminds us that Jesus gave his body **for us**, as our representative. We come together, like we are now, and identify with Jesus our Saviour, in the hope of eternal life. Not that we already have it, but that we might strive forwards for Jesus (Phil 3:11).

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Notes

- Bread in sacrifice: Lev 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25; 1 Sam 2:36; 2 Kin 23:9
- <http://www.wcg.org/lit/church/lordssup/bread.htm>
- <http://www.leewoof.org/leewoof/2001/11-18.htm>
- Feeding thousands: Matthew 15:33, Matthew 16, Mark 6, 8 (4000)
- Bread & Wine: Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, 24 (risen), 1 Cor 10:16; 11
- <http://www.wrestedscriptures.com/b08trinity/john6v33v38v51v58.html>
- Christendom Astray: <http://www.christadelphia.org/books/chrastoc.htm>, lecture 17.