



# Minutes With Messiah

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## Holy Spirit Baptism

*Because of the death of my father in late March, I have fallen behind in writing the articles for this month's issue. Instead, I will include the following, which is one of the questions asked me at my web site, and my answer. For the complete list of questions and answers, go to the web site at [www.geocities.com/riversidecoc](http://www.geocities.com/riversidecoc).*

### **How did Peter KNOW Cornelius and his house received the Holy ghost baptism?**

I think we can find the answer to your question in what is said in the description of the incident, and what Peter said when he later described it to the church in Jerusalem. We can see clearly from the text how Peter knew that they had received a baptism with the Holy Spirit.

In Acts 10:44-46, the scripture says, While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. The passage itself says that Peter and those who were with him recognized it because they heard them speak with tongues. From Acts 8:14-18 we know that the gifts of the Holy Spirit (which, according to 1 Corinthians 12 includes speaking in tongues) were not unknown to the apostles. So how did this differ from times such as Acts 8?

In Chapter 11, Peter tells the church in Jerusalem what had happened at Cornelius house. And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? (Acts 11:15-17) Peter says he knew this to be the baptism of the

Holy Spirit because it happened just the way it happened to the apostles on Pentecost. Maybe it included the noise of a wind and the tongues like fire; maybe it didn't. What it did include was the Holy Spirit coming upon the household of Cornelius and allowing them to speak in languages they had not previously learned without the apostles laying their hands on them.

Peter and the others were astonished. Why? Because this was something that had apparently never happened in the ten years since the founding of the church on the Pentecost after Jesus death. Between these two examples of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the only way to get the gifts was, according to Acts 8:17-18, the laying on of the apostles hands. That wasn't necessary in this case. It is the only other recorded case of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. There was no need for it to happen again. It happened once to show the Jews that the apostles were selected by God to spread his word. It happened a second time to show the Gentiles were accepted in the church. Since those are the only two groups of people (Jews and everyone else), it is not likely to happen a third time.

As an aside to the matter, I believe, although there is no direct scripture to support this, that the household of Cornelius also had the power to pass on the gifts of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of their hands. The other side of the coin, though, is that as soon as the apostles and Cornelius and those present with Cornelius had all died, the power to lay hands on people to give them the gifts, and therefore the gifts themselves, ended.

### **Contents**

Holy Spirit Baptism	1
Passover: No Leaven	2
One Day Before Death	4

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# Passover: No Leaven

In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. (Lev. 23:5-8)

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. (Ex. 12:15)

Even many non-observant Jews observe Pesach (Passover). The Pesach Seder (the meal and the order of observance that goes with it) is central to Judaism. At least one aspect of it has even become a cliché in Gentile homes: spring-cleaning.

While there are many customs and laws

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associated with Pesach, the defining law is that there is to be no leavened bread in the household. This law governs the preparation of food, the discussion at the Seder, and even dictates the aforementioned spring-cleaning.

Because of the requirement to rid oneself of *chametz* (leaven), many have equated leaven with sin. *Chametz*, they argue, is something we need to get rid of in our lives; sin is something we need to get rid of in our lives. Therefore, leaven symbolizes sin. Sounds like a good argument. There is only one thing wrong with it.

Look at the passages above. How many days out of the year is leaven to be removed? Three hundred

sixty five? No. Only seven. If leaven is bad, in and of itself, why must we only be without it for one week? If leaven is sin, are we allowed to sin all year, except for the week of Passover? I think not!

## What is leaven?

The Jewish definition of leaven, dating from long before the first century, is any of the five biblical grains (and some include rice and corn) which has been exposed to moisture followed by the lapse of a certain period of time before baking in which the introduction of an agent of change may occur. Many rabbis set this time at eighteen minutes. By this definition, a bread made from wheat flour with no yeast added is considered leavened if the dough was mixed and the cook waited, for whatever reason, before baking it. It may even look exactly like unleavened bread, but it is considered leavened. This is also why wine, which is fermented, is able to be used at Passover. It is not made from a grain, so it does not fall under the prohibition against leaven. (Grain alcohols like beer and whiskey, on the other hand, would be prohibited.)

How does this definition help us to understand what leaven represents at Passover, and why it is acceptable at other times? It has to do with what bread represents.

Throughout Jewish history, and particularly since the destruction of the Second Temple, bread has represented the Torah, the word of God (Deut 8:3; Isa 55:1-4). Leaven, then, is grain that has had the opportunity for an outside element to be added and to work to change the grain. It has had time to ferment, if a fermenting agent is nearby. Does the fermenting agent make the grain unfit for consumption? No. Does it change the nature of the grain? Yes. And that is why a time is set aside each year for unleavened bread. Over time it would be easy for the teaching of God's word, His Torah, to be fermented, changed, adulterated. Once a year God says, "Remember how it was at first. You received my pure law. Go back to the purity of your teaching. Go back to the unleavened bread of My Torah."

Just as God gave his pure word at Sinai but in the passage of time men added agents of change to that word, so once a year God demands that we return to our roots. Is it because change is bad? No. It is just that we occasionally need a reminder that God brought Israel out with a mighty hand. In doing so, he communicated his word. That is also a part of the Passover.

## The reason for the prohibition

Why was leaven originally prohibited? Perhaps if we understand that, we will understand the role leaven plays in our lives.

Years after the event commemorated by Passover, Moses explained, “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. (Deut 16:3)” The expressed reason is that they came out of Egypt in haste. How in haste? God told them four days in advance that they were to eat unleavened bread. Why does Moses say it is because it was in haste, if they had four days in which they could have made leavened bread? The answer is found in Ex. 12:34. “And the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs being bound up in their clothes upon their shoulders.” Although they had four days to prepare, they immediately packed their kneading troughs. Of all the household goods they packed for the journey, the kneading trough was important enough not to pack last. As a result they had to bake unleavened loaves for four days. Actually, it turned out to be forty years before they needed the kneading troughs, but they could not know that yet.

The “haste” of Israel was not a blind rushing out of Egypt. Instead it was a planned and long awaited exodus. When the time came, the people were so eager to make haste that they packed in advance, and had to do without some things as a result. One of those things was leavened bread. A modern analogy, though imperfect, might be the wife who, preparing for a trip, reminds the family after having done the laundry not to wear anything they plan on taking with them. Other clothes, equally good, have to be worn. For the Israelites, other bread, equally good, had to be eaten.

Every year the Passover is a reminder that God will take His people out of bondage and give them a better land. The unleavened bread does not represent the bondage to sin. Instead it represents the eagerness of the people to leave that bondage. So in prohibiting leavened bread for seven days out of the year, perhaps God is reminding us that we need to set priorities. We need to be packed and ready for our trip to the world to come.

## Leaven in the Christian scriptures

I think that if we look at the ways Jesus and Paul, themselves rabbis, used leaven, we will find that even in the first century of the Christian Era leaven did not represent sin, but something entirely different.

Jesus even likened the kingdom of heaven to leaven (Matt 13:33; Lk 13:21), which hardly sounds like the totally negative thing many have tried to make it.

Perhaps the best known discourses of Jesus concerning leaven, though, are the times he warns his disciples against “the leaven of the Pharisees,” Sadducees, and Herod (Matt 16:6-12; Mk 8:15-21; Lk 12:1). In the Luke passage he calls it “hypocrisy.” In the Matthew passage, the writer says he was speaking of the “doctrine” of the Pharisees. By doctrine, however, he is not speaking of all the teachings of these holy men. In Matt 22:2-3, Jesus even commands his disciples to follow the teachings of the Pharisees, because the teachings are from Moses. Instead, the leaven of the Pharisees must be those things they do

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that don’t accord with their teachings. This accords with the idea, previously expressed, that once a year (at least) we need to examine our teachings and bring them back to the unfermented grain of God’s word.

When Paul spoke of leaven, it was always in the context of the Passover. Even in Galatians 5:9, where Pesach is not mentioned, it is the concept that even the minutest amount of leaven makes a loaf unfit for Passover that is expressed.

The other passage where Paul speaks of leaven is 1 Cor 5:1-8. The context is a discussion of the church glorying in one of their own who was living incestuously. In verse 6 he uses the same phrase as in Galatians 5, and in the same way. He continues by saying that Christians should consider every day as Passover, because our lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, we need to constantly clean house lest any leaven be found. He does talk of the “leaven of malice and wickedness,” but he also speaks of the “old leaven” in a way that implies not that it is sin but any change from the pure word of God.

Why is leaven only prohibited for seven days out of the year? It is obviously not that leaven is in itself sinful. Instead we might as easily ask why Passover was designated to be observed once a year. God knows that man is a forgetful being. So at varying times throughout the year, but especially at Passover, God is telling us in varying ways to remember. Passover, with its unleavened bread and its ceremonies, is but one of God’s reminders that we are not in control.

# ***One Day Before Death***

“Repent one day before your death.”  
Rabbi Eleazar, Talmud, Shabbos 153a

“Be prepared.”  
Boy Scout Motto

What do these two quotes have to do with each other? The first seems to be saying you should put off repentance until it is absolutely necessary. The other says do everything possible to be ready for every contingency. On the face, they would appear to contradict each other. But in fact they agree.

One of Rabbi Eleazar’s more brilliant students asked him, “How can I know what day I will die?” And of course, that is the point. Knowing that we cannot know the day of our death, then, we can see that the two quotes above are actually saying the same thing. We should always be prepared for death. If that means I need to repent, then I should have done so yesterday.

There is a riddle that asks, what is always almost here but never arrives? The answer, of course, is “tomorrow.” Sometime I wonder if the Devil invented tomorrow so he could have a day for everyone to put their good intentions. On the other hand, maybe God invented it for us to put our bad intentions there. However that may be, the only tomorrow we are guaranteed is the one from yesterday.

Jesus could talk of tomorrow. In Luke 13:32-33 he says, “Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following.” But then, Jesus knew in what day and in what manner he would die. Yet even he did not wait until the day before his death to repent.

We, on the other hand, must live expecting tomorrow, but not knowing it will come. We must agree with James (4:14), as hard as it is to do so, that “ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” When I lived in the Chicago area I frequently saw what James was saying. On my way to work some mornings the fog was so thick riding my bicycle was scary. But a mere two hours later the sun would be shining and I could see the traffic (which might have been even scarier). Today is a fog. Soon we will have the light of heaven. But until then, you must “repent one day before your death.” *Every one day.*

Of course, some people will say, “I plan on repenting one day.” Let us hope that “one day” is one day before their death. If that is what you are saying, remember that “one day” had better be today.

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