

COURSE 7

THE SHOWBREAD: WHO THEY REPRESENT, WERE THEY UNLEAVENED, AND WHY IT MATTERS

Historians tell us that in the time of Jesus the twelve breads (later called the “Showbread” in English) were actually unleavened—even though they were always called “breads” in scripture. Made from the grain offerings of the Israelites, these breads were always present in the Temple. In this Course, we will consider if God really meant for these twelve breads to be made unleavened when He gave His commandment to Moses, or if He intended something else. Along these same lines, we will consider if making the Showbread unleavened was one of the doctrines of the Pharisees who, as the Messiah said, made void the word of God by their traditions (Mark 7:13).

The twelve breads were a part of the pattern that God gave to Moses and, just like other aspects of the Tabernacle and Temple, they point forward to spiritual truth in the New Covenant:

^{NAS} Hebrews 8:5 who serve a **copy and shadow** of the heavenly things, just as Moses was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, “See,” He says, “that you make all things according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.”

^{NAS} Hebrews 10:1 For the Law, **since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come** *and* not the very form of things, can never by the same sacrifices year by year, which they offer continually, make perfect those who draw near.

Before we look at what these breads foreshadow and the “good things” to which they point, it’s crucial to first see what these breads were in the natural or literal sense.

^{NAS} 1 Corinthians 15:46 However, the spiritual is not first, but **the natural; then the spiritual.**

The reason it’s so critical to see what these twelve natural breads in the Temple pointed to is they show forth God’s plan and pattern for the *spiritual* bread, being all those who love Him and are filled with His spirit.

Important doctrines have been clouded by a failure to understand the difference between the word “bread” in its normal usage as daily *leavened* bread and its figurative usage, when on rare occasions it refers to something that is actually *unleavened*. This Course sets out to make this difference clear, because understanding it will help shed light on many scriptures and therefore on various truths. These truths include what Jesus intended with the Last Supper bread, what the twelve Temple breads pointed to spiritually, and what “breaking bread” referred to for early Jewish believers. It even sheds more light on how the modern-day ritual of Communion (or “Blessed Eucharist”) with unleavened bread was inherited from Rome and was not a ritual kept by the early Messianic Jews.

The Twelve Breads in the Natural Sense

These twelve breads, or Showbread, were made from the grain that the Israelites would harvest from their fields and bring into the Temple as tithes and offerings in “an everlasting covenant for the sons of Israel” (Leviticus 24:8). In King David’s day, they were baked by the Levite family of the Kohathites (1 Chronicles 9:32) and brought fresh each Sabbath into the Holy Place within the Temple. There, the priests would divide and partake of the previous week’s twelve breads that were now replaced by the new ones.

God commanded that this offering be continually in His presence, near to where He symbolically dwelt. The new breads were placed in two rows on the golden overlaid table of Showbread.

The *McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia* explains the various items in the Holy Place of the Temple, including the twelve breads:

The table stood in the sanctuary, together with the seven branched candlestick and the altar of incense. Its position, according to Josephus (*Ant.* iii, 6, 6), was on the north side of the sanctuary, not far from the veil that opened into the most holy place. Besides the twelve loaves, the showbread table was adorned with dishes, spoons, bowls, etc., which were of pure gold (Exod. XXV, 29). These, however, were evidently subsidiary to the loaves, the preparation, presentation, and subsequent treatment of which manifestly constituted the *ordinance* of the showbread.¹⁷⁰

A container of frankincense was initially set upon each of these two rows of bread; later its contents were placed on the altar in the fire (Leviticus 24:5–9) as a memo-

170 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 710.

rial offering to God. Aaron and his descendants would then eat the bread. Together, the Showbread and frankincense were called a “fire offering,” even though only the frankincense actually went into the fire (Leviticus 24:9).



The table itself upon which these twelve hallowed breads were placed had a turbulent history; the scriptural and historical details remain somewhat uncertain. It was most likely taken away when Babylon destroyed the Temple in 586 BC; then after the Babylonian captivity it was probably restored to Jerusalem around 519 BC (Ezra 5:14; 15: 6:5).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus further explained the table’s history that took place a few centuries after the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon. He wrote that the king of Egypt, Ptolemy Philadelphus (283 BC–246 BC), was seeking to procure all the books of the world for a library in Alexandria. Ptolemy wanted the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures translated into Greek so they would be accessible to most people. To encourage the High Priest Eleazar to be amenable to this, he freed approximately 120,000 Jews who, years before, had been taken captive by the Persians and were later brought to Egypt as slaves. He also ordered that an elaborate Showbread table be made out of solid gold, along with other vessels as gifts for the Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁷¹

To fulfill Ptolemy’s translation request, the Israelite High Priest Eleazar sent 72 Jewish scholars (six from each tribe) to perform this task. The result—the Septuagint—pleased Ptolemy and all Greek-speaking Jews living in Alexandria, Israel, and throughout the Diaspora.

The solid gold table ordered by Ptolemy was meant to replace the wooden table (which was overlaid with gold) that was still in the Temple (Antiquities 12.2.8). This may explain why the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures say the table was wood overlaid with gold (Exodus 25:23, 24), yet the Greek Septuagint translation for these verses leaves out the wood, saying it was pure gold.

Years later the Maccabees wrote of the evil king Antiochus Epiphanes attacking Israel and taking the vessels from the house of the Lord (around 167 BC), including the Showbread table (1 Maccabees 1:20–25). Subsequently the Maccabees brought in a new table for the Showbread (1 Maccabees 4:48, 49).

In 70 AD, when Israel was conquered by Rome and the Temple that had been rebuilt by Herod was destroyed, the Showbread table was carried to Rome and placed in a new temple built by the emperor Vespasian. McClintock and Strong write that the table later survived a fire there and then was subsequently taken by the Vandals

171 Whiston, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, “Jewish Antiquities,” 2.2.1–11, pp. 388–393.

to Africa. Later it was then said to have been taken to Constantinople (520 AD) and from there eventually remitted back to Jerusalem.¹⁷²

The Twelve Breads Are Symbolic of the Twelve Tribes

Josephus and the first-century Jewish philosopher Philo both believed that the twelve breads symbolized the twelve months of the year. However, no scriptural basis exists for this belief. In the law given to Moses, God repeatedly directed him to use the number twelve in the Tabernacle to represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

Albert M. Shulman in his *Gateway to Judaism* states the reason for twelve breads: “for the twelve tribes of Israel”¹⁷³

The *McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia* concurs with this understanding of the Showbread:

The twelve loaves plainly answer to the twelve tribes (comp. Revelation 22:2). But, taking this for granted, we have still to ascertain the meaning of the rite, and there is none which is left in Scripture so wholly unexplained.¹⁷⁴

Since we always want to prove our doctrine using the scriptures, let’s see what they show. Notice below in all of these scriptures given to Moses and in many concerning the Tabernacle, the number twelve keeps appearing in reference to the twelve tribes:

^{NAS} Exodus 24:4 And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with **twelve pillars for the twelve tribes** of Israel.

^{NAS} Exodus 28:9 “And you shall take **two onyx stones** and engrave on them **the names of the sons of Israel**,

^{NAS} Exodus 28:10 **six** of their names **on the one stone**, and the names of the remaining **six on the other** stone, according to their birth.

172 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 153.

173 Shulman, *Gateway to Judaism*, vol. 1, p. 41, s.v. “The Table of Showbread.”

174 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 711, s.v. “Showbread.”

The names of these twelve tribes of Israel were also engraved like seals on these twelve stones on the high priest's garment:

^{NAS} Exodus 28:15 “And you shall make a breastpiece of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen you shall make it.

^{NAS} Exodus 28:17 “And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row *shall be* a row of ruby, topaz and emerald;

^{NAS} Exodus 28:21 “And the **stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve**, according to their names; they shall be *like* the engravings of a seal, each according to his name **for the twelve tribes**.

This description of the high priest with twelve stones on his garment points forward to Christ in type (John 15:13) as the true high priest, keeping the sons of Israel (the twelve stones) close to his heart as he yields to God in the ministry that he was called to:

^{NAS} Exodus 28:29 “And Aaron **shall carry the names of the sons of Israel** in the breastpiece of judgment **over his heart** when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the LORD continually.

^{NAS} Exodus 28:38 “And it shall be on **Aaron's forehead**, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the **sons of Israel** consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, **that they may be accepted** before the LORD.

Time and time again we see this number twelve pointing back to the Israelite people—the nation descended from Abraham that was walking in the covenant:

^{NAS} Numbers 1:44 These are the ones who were numbered, whom Moses and Aaron numbered, with the leaders of Israel, **twelve** men, each of whom was **of his father's household**.

^{NAS} Numbers 7:84 This *was* the dedication *offering* for the altar from the leaders of Israel when it was anointed: **twelve** silver dishes, **twelve** silver bowls, **twelve** gold pans,

^{NAS} Deuteronomy 1:23 “And the thing pleased me and I took **twelve** of your men, **one man for each tribe**.

^{NAS} Joshua 4:8 And thus the sons of Israel did, as Joshua commanded, and took up **twelve** stones from the middle of the Jordan, just as the LORD spoke to Joshua, **according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Israel**; and they carried them over with them to the lodging place, and put them down there.

From this, it's abundantly clear that these twelve breads point to the twelve tribes. This is assuredly not to cause anyone who is not of Israel to feel excluded from God's plan, for God is no respecter of persons. God did not call Abraham because of his DNA, but because of his heart for God and his willingness to be led by Him.

When God summoned Abraham, nobody else was willing to walk with Him. God called him in part because He knew Abraham would command his children after him (Genesis 18:19). Although the Israelites often fell short of God's will, such as in the wilderness, they were the only nation that sought to truly walk with God, and His mercy was with them. A necessary part of God's plan was to have a separated people out of which to bring the Messiah. Other nations were unwilling to walk with God at this time, but His plan was to use Israel and the Messiah as a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6, 60:3). Keeping Israel separate from the ungodly nations was crucial so that it would not become corrupted before the Messiah could fulfill God's plan of redemption for all people.

This requirement for separation from the nations changed after the Messiah came and fulfilled God's plan; this removed the wall of separation between the Jewish New Covenant believers and the believers among the nations (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:14). For several years after the Resurrection, Peter refused to eat with Gentiles until the Lord gave him a vision, which he understood to mean that the believing Gentiles were no longer to be considered unclean (Acts 10). He realized this after the Holy Spirit was poured out on those uncircumcised Gentiles who believed (Acts 10:44–46; 11:1–18) and he was then able to move forward in New Covenant understanding.

Now returning to the number twelve, the Messiah also chose twelve sons of Israel, probably as a spiritual fulfillment of what the twelve tribes were called to:

^{NAS} Matthew 10:1 And having summoned His **twelve** disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

^{NAS} Matthew 10:2 Now the names of the **twelve** apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the *son* of Zebedee, and John his brother;

And concerning heaven and the New Covenant description of it, we see the twelve tribes represented there as well:

^{NAS} Revelation 21:12 It had a great and high wall, with **twelve** gates, and at the gates **twelve** angels; and names *were* written on them, which are *those* of the **twelve tribes of the sons of Israel**.

When Judas died, Peter considered it important to keep the number of apostles at twelve, so one more apostle—Matthias—was chosen (Acts 1:15–26).

Why It Matters Whether These Twelve Breads Were Leavened or Not

Now that we've seen that the twelve breads definitively point to the twelve tribes of Israel, let's turn our attention to why it matters whether the breads were leavened or not.

Some argue that Jesus eating bread at the Last Supper (which they believe was the Passover) would have been fine, because in the Old Testament scriptures matzah was sometimes called "bread." They say that the "bread of God," which was given as a fire offering on the altar to God, was commanded by Him to be made unleavened; yet it was sometimes referred to figuratively as "bread."

Others also argue that, since they believe the Showbread was matzah and was always called "bread" in scripture, it would have been normal for the Jewish disciples to announce that they and Jesus had eaten bread at Passover. These people claim that bread is bread, which can mean either unleavened or leavened. But even today, one would never go around the orthodox sections of Jerusalem announcing they were eating *bread* during Passover, and in Jesus's day the Jewish nation was much more strict concerning the laws of Moses.

These twelve breads were a commandment of God that pointed to spiritual truths in the New Covenant, just as those things in the first covenant under Moses (the Passover, three Festivals, sacrifices, altar, lamp stand, etc.) point forward and show spiritual truth in the New Covenant.

If the Last Supper was not the Passover, and Jesus was therefore eating regular bread as all the scriptures show, then it shows that someone else came up with the ritual of Communion using *unleavened* bread; it was not Jesus or the Jewish disciples.

Jesus said some of the Pharisees' traditions made the word of God void. One of these traditions was likely their making of the twelve breads unleavened. This changed the breads to matzah, voiding the word of God by leaving no typology that could accurately be drawn out.

Typology is a method of biblical interpretation whereby an element found in the Old Testament is seen to prefigure one found in the

New Testament. The initial one is called the *type* and the fulfillment is designated the *antitype*. Either type or antitype may be a person, thing, or event, but often the type is messianic ...¹⁷⁵

A simple example would be the lamb sacrifices being a “type” of Christ, who was called the “lamb of God” and also Christ “our Passover.” He was the fulfillment of what these sacrificial lambs prefigured.

Below we will see which typology fits better for these twelve breads that represent the twelve tribes: regular leavened breads or matzah.



Moses, David, and all the scriptures continually refer to these loaves as “bread.” The Messiah and Paul also called them bread. If these twelve breads were commanded by God to be *unleavened*, that would point out certain spiritual truths. If they were *leavened*, that would indicate other spiritual truths and types.

But the fact is that in the scriptures, He does not command for them to be either unleavened or leavened. God leaves this mysteriously unspoken. Therefore, it would have been the legal decision of the Israelite leaders throughout history to decide how the twelve breads were made.

However, while many scriptures refer to these twelve breads as “bread” (*lechem* in Hebrew), not a single scripture calls them “matzah” (unleavened). This alone is a huge hint as to their original makeup at the time the instruction was given to Moses. If God had expected the twelve breads to be made as matzah, He would not have called them “bread” without qualifying that they were to be unleavened. If God required this, clearly He would have commanded it to Moses and made it unambiguous for future leaders and other believers.

While it is true that certain rare offerings were referred to *figuratively* as “bread” when they were actually matzah, we will see later in this Course that in each of those instances, God clearly qualified the “bread” to be matzah.

The twelve Temple breads (Showbread) are different, though, because they were never once called “matzah,” nor were they commanded to be made without leaven, whereas the “bread of God” (such as in Leviticus 21:6) that was placed directly on the altar as a fire offering to the Lord was commanded by God always to be made *without leaven*. Therefore, the word “bread” in the phrase “bread of their God” is obviously being used figuratively.

175 Adapted from *Theopedia.com*, s.v. “Biblical typology.”

^{NAS} Leviticus 2:11 ‘No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, for you shall **not offer up in smoke any leaven** or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD.

^{NAS} Leviticus 21:6 ‘They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present the offerings by fire to the LORD, **the bread of their God**; so they shall be holy.

The difference is this: The twelve breads (Showbread) were not offered in the fire to God, but rather they were eaten by the priests. Only the frankincense in the bowls on top of the breads actually went in the fire to God (Leviticus 24:7), so no commandment or any inferred command existed for these twelve *bread*s to be made unleavened.

Pharisaic Tradition That the “Breads” Are to Be Unleavened

If you read Josephus or Philo, who both lived near the time of Christ, you’ll notice that these breads were unleavened at that time, as the authoritative *McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia* relates:

II. *The Bread and its Significance.* — **Whether the bread was to be leavened or unleavened is not said.** The Jewish tradition holds it to have been unleavened (Josephus, *Ant.* iii, 6, 6; 10, 7; Philo, *De Congr.* V, 1); and as Josephus and Philo could scarcely be ignorant of what on such a matter was customary in their time, it is not to be doubted that, **according to the later practice at least**, the bread was unleavened, affording ground for the inference that the same was the case also in earlier times.¹⁷⁶

McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia says that since (according to Josephus and Philo) the breads were unleavened at that time, it could be inferred that they were also unleavened in earlier times. Our concern is not with how these breads were made during the rule of the Pharisees, but with how they were made under the more spiritual leaders such as Moses and David before the legalism of the Pharisees was established.

Josephus and Philo both lived during the time when the Pharisees exercised much control, and Jesus often rebuked the Pharisees and their scribes because they forced certain traditions on the people that were not from God. Jesus spoke of this as he quoted from the Jewish prophet Isaiah:

176 McClintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia*, vol. 9, p. 711, s.v. “Showbread.”

^{NAS} Mark 7:7 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’

Josephus and other sources documented the Pharisees’ great power over their people during the time of Christ. The Sadducees, descended from the high priestly lineage of Aaron through Zadok, were given authority over the twelve breads according to God’s law. They were seen as a wealthy ruling class who had some authority as ministers in the Temple, but the Pharisees exerted even more control, which they used to instill their doctrines, as Josephus relates:

What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people **a great many observances by succession** from their fathers, **which are not written in the law of Moses**; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be **obligatory which are in the written word**, but are **not to observe** what are derived **from the tradition** of our forefathers. (298) And concerning these things it is that great disputes and differences have arisen among them, while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, **but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side**;¹⁷⁷

Jesus also bears witness to this, telling how the scribes and the Pharisees inserted themselves into the place of authority by taking the “chair” of Moses:

^{NAS} Matthew 23:2 saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses;

It must also be remembered that the Pharisees were jealous of the Sadducees and greatly despised them (this can be seen both in the New Testament and in the Talmud). The Pharisees may have been jealous of the Sadducees’ authority over these hallowed breads (see also Ezekiel 44:15, 16), and this jealousy probably led in part to the eventual making of the twelve breads as matzah, without leaven.

The legalistic Pharisees could have felt justified in wanting these breads to be more “holy” by making them unleavened. This would also have forced the Sadducees to then eat the much less flavorful matzah (i.e., the “bread of affliction” as mentioned in Deuteronomy 16:3). This parallels the Roman Catholic Church changing the

177 Whiston, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, “Jewish Antiquities,” 13.10.6, p. 441.

Communion bread from leavened to unleavened after the ninth century.¹⁷⁸ These two disparate groups both preferred the unleavened bread of affliction—the bread of liturgy and ritual—over the more pleasing (leavened) breads of God’s presence and true spiritual communion with Him.



Below, Josephus writes of the Essenes and their *regular bread* (not matzah) service which, as we saw in Course 6, emulated the Showbread:

They work until about 11 A.M. when they put on ritual loincloths and **bathe for purification**. Then they enter a **communal** hall, where no one else is allowed, and eat only one bowlful of food for each man, **together with their loaves of bread**. They eat in silence. Afterwards they lay aside their sacred garment and go back to work until the evening. At evening they partake dinner in the same manner. During meals they are sober and quiet and their silence seems a great mystery to people outside.¹⁷⁹

A historical connection runs from the Zadokite priests under David (who I believe ate their Showbread leavened as it had been since the time of Moses) all the way down to the Sadducees, then to the Essenes, and thus to the Dead Sea Sect (who all ate regular leavened bread in their service that emulated the Showbread).

Course 6 documented that the Dead Sea sect was another Jewish group that held a reverent service with *bread and wine* that most likely emulated the Showbread and definitely pointed to a Messianic banquet. Most scholars agree that Josephus’s account of the Essenes shows a close and similar belief system to the Dead Sea Sect.

Judaic scholar Lawrence Schiffman states that the Dead Sea Sect was probably started by Sadducees.¹⁸⁰ The Sadducees derived their name from Zadok (meaning “righteous”), the high priest who remained faithful to David. (The Greek word for “Zadok” is *Saddouk*, and for “Sadducee” is *Saddoukaios*.)

If it is true that the Showbread was made as regular leavened bread in David’s day, then the Zadokite priests—the forerunners of the Sadducees—would have passed down this same understanding of the breads being leavened to the Essenes as well as the Dead Sea Sect. This would explain why all these groups ate regular leavened breads that emulated the Showbread.

178 See the chapter “The Ritual—Why Didn’t the Jewish Disciples Teach It?” for more on this.

179 Josephus, “Wars,” 2.8.5, <http://essene.com/History/AncientHistoriansAndEssenes.html>.

180 Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 75.

Naturally, the requirement to eat these breads as the far less appetizing *matzah* would have angered some Sadducees. This could have played a part in their eventual withdrawal from Pharisaic control at the Temple services. Hence, these sects that withdrew from the Temple services to protest the Pharisaic injunctions would continue with their own communal bread service using regular leavened breads, which is what we see.

Philo (20 BC–AD 50), who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, wrote of another Jewish group in Egypt called the Therapeutae. They also held a holy meal with regular leavened bread (as mentioned in Course 6) that emulated the Showbread table in the Temple:

...Philo describes the Therapeutae as deliberately **introducing slight differences** in their practices from those at the Temple, **as a mark of respect for the Temple's shewbread.**¹⁸¹

Philo put it thus:

(81) And when each individual has finished his psalm, then the young men bring in the table which was mentioned a little while ago, on which was placed that most holy food, **the leavened bread**, with a seasoning of salt, with which hyssop is mingled, **out of reverence for the sacred table**, which lies thus in the holy outer temple....¹⁸²

Philo, who lived when the Pharisees were in control (and the twelve breads were unleavened), asserted that the Therapeutae ate their bread *leavened* out of reverence for the table of Showbread in the Temple (i.e., to be slightly different). However, another possibility is that they were a similar offshoot of the Zadokites/Sadducees/Essenes/Dead Sea Sect. And if this were true, it would explain the true reason their breads were leavened. Otherwise, it would make no sense for the Therapeutae and the other groups to “taint” God’s plan by making their breads leavened.

One further point: In the Talmud (which was written by rabbinic successors of the Pharisees), there is discussion and debate among the rabbis about a previous rabbinic school’s decision concerning not having “large loaves” during the Passover. They deliberate over what this meant and what size is considered “large,” to which one rabbi responds that it meant the size of the Showbread. Another retorts that it would not have meant this because the Showbread bakers were very careful (using

181 *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Therapeutae.”

182 Yonge, *The Works of Philo Judaeus*, “On the Contemplative Life or Suppliants,” 10:81, <http://earlyjewishwritings.com/text/philo/book34.html>.

many oscillations, hot ovens, etc.) to ensure that these breads remained unleavened; thus, the prohibition of “large” more likely applied to the breads made by the common people, who might not be skilled enough to keep larger loaves unleavened.¹⁸³

However, it is also possible that this previous rabbinic school’s writing referred to an earlier time when the twelve breads were made leavened (“large loaves” would thus have referred to the risen Showbread). If this is accurate, then what was actually intended was that the breads were not to be made as the usual “large loaves” but rather unleavened during the Passover Festival (when all leaven was forbidden). Jewish scholars often had to decide which law superseded or took precedence when a conflict occurred. Since God did not command the Showbread to be either leavened or unleavened, it would have been acceptable to have them unleavened during Passover.

It is true that the Mishnah (the first major written record of Jewish oral traditions) mentions a complex contraption with 28 ventilation tubes placed on the Showbread table to prevent the twelve matzahs from leavening. However, God never gave Moses instruction for such a device in the scripture, so it would have been a later addition by the Pharisees when they changed these breads to unleavened (matzah). Most likely the Pharisees took a few scriptures out of context (such as Ezekiel 4:13, Hosea 9:4, or Malachi 1:7) to justify making the twelve breads as matzah; in these scriptures the Hebrew speaks of “defiled bread.”

Since God never commanded these breads to be unleavened, it makes sense that the priests who lived in those earlier, less legalistic days would have preferred the more flavorful leavened breads to matzah. Knowing the true nature of God’s heart as to this offering, the leaders like Moses, Samuel, and David would have made the breads leavened, as this was both allowable and more appetizing for the priests. They would have understood that the truths God was showing in the twelve breads did not require them to eat these breads unleavened. The fact that they were called “breads” in the Torah without ever being qualified as matzah would have strengthened this understanding.

The scripture continually refers to these twelve breads in the Temple as “bread” (*lechem* in Hebrew), and *not once* as “matzah” (unleavened). Even the English term for them is “Show-bread,” not “Show-matzah.” So we should consider the possibility that this making of the twelve breads unleavened in the time of Jesus was a tradition forced by the Pharisees, one that actually made void God’s word by painting a false picture and invalidating what these breads pointed to:

^{NAS} Mark 7:13 **thus invalidating the word of God** by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.”

183 This debate is covered in the Babylonian Talmud, Book 4, Tract Betzah or Yom Tob [Feast Days] ch. 2, pp. 41–43, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/talmud.htm#t04>.

With this invalidation of God’s word by making these breads matzahs, the spiritual truths these breads pointed to became lost to the Jewish scholars who followed. For instance, here is what prominent Jewish Torah scholar Moses Maimonides wrote concerning these twelve breads in his book *The Guide for the Perplexed*:

“The use of the altar for incense and the altar for burnt-offering and their vessels is obvious; but I do not know the object of the table with the bread upon it continually, and up to this day I have not been able to assign any reason to this commandment.”¹⁸⁴

It is very possible that the forcing of these breads to be made unleavened, when God’s commandments did not require it, hid their true spiritual meanings to successive generations.

God Commanded Certain Breads to Be Made with Leaven

Let us consider two other Tabernacle and then Temple offerings that were commanded by God to be baked *with leaven*. Like the twelve breads, they too were always called “bread” and never “matzah.” The original Hebrew referred to them as *lechem* and in the Greek Septuagint as *arton* (i.e., regular bread).

The first of these was a sacrificial offering of thanksgiving that was commanded to be made *with leaven* and was called “bread”:

^{NAS} Leviticus 7:12 ‘If he offers it by way of thanksgiving, then along with the sacrifice of thanksgiving he shall offer unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of *well* stirred fine flour mixed with oil.

^{NAS} Leviticus 7:13 ‘With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving, he shall present his offering with cakes of **leavened bread**.

The other offering, also called “bread,” was for the Festival of Pentecost (Shavout) and was commanded to consist of two **leavened** breads. The Greek word *Pentecost* means “50,” as this festival under Moses happened after the 50 days counting from the morrow of the first regular Sabbath after Passover:

184 Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, ch. 45, p. 356, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/gfp/gfp181.htm>.

^{NAS} Leviticus 23:16 ‘You shall count fifty days to the day after the **seventh sabbath**; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD.

It was on this day, following the true Passover of Christ, that God began to pour out His spirit on all flesh (Joel, Acts 2, 10), causing the two leavened “breads” (Jews and Gentiles) to become “one bread,” i.e., the spiritual body of Christ (Acts 2:16).

These two breads were made with the same measure of flour as the Showbread and were baked with leaven. And like the Showbread, and the leavened sacrifice for thanksgiving, they were never called “matzah” but always “bread”:

^{NAB} Leviticus 23:17 For the wave offering of your first fruits to the LORD, you shall bring with you from wherever you live two loaves of **bread** made of two tenths of an ephah of fine flour and **baked with leaven**.

^{NAS} Leviticus 23:18 ‘Along with the **bread**, you shall present seven one year old male lambs without defect, and a bull of the herd, and two rams; they are to be a burnt offering to the LORD, with their grain offering and their libations, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to the Lord.

Since the thanksgiving offering (also called “thank offering”) and the Festival of Pentecost offering are both made with leaven, it makes sense that they are never called “matzah” (unleavened). Along the same lines, since the twelve breads were called “bread” and never “matzah,” this affords some proof that in the time of Moses they were made as regular leavened bread. Some say that the leaven in bread *always* refers symbolically to malice and wickedness, but then this would have God commanding offerings to Him of malice and wickedness.

At some point in history an argument began between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning the true starting point for the countdown to Pentecost, which began with the waving of the sheaf (Leviticus 23:12) and the *first-fruits offering*.

The Pharisees argued that this 50-day counting was to begin after the Sabbath of the Passover (i.e., the Sabbath of the 15th special day of rest when the Israelites came out of Egypt). The Sadducees argued that since in Hebrew the regular word for the Sabbath (i.e., Saturday Sabbath) was used, that the first Saturday Sabbath in the Festival is what was meant.

God decided the matter by raising Christ from the dead on the morrow of the Saturday Sabbath, and Paul called Christ our “first fruits.” Thus Pentecost also would always fall on a Sunday. The scriptures also bear this out, because Leviticus 23:16 says to

count 50 days until the “day after the seventh Sabbath,” and for that 50-count to end on the day after a Sabbath, it had to begin on the day after a regular Saturday Sabbath.

It is possible that the Pharisees changed this date so that events did not align so closely with Christ being both sacrificed at the 14th-day Passover and then resurrected, fulfilling the unleavened first-fruits offering on the morrow of the Sabbath (i.e., Sunday). This change to the Pharisaic doctrine probably took place sometime shortly after Christ fulfilled this first-fruits offering, but either way the change was not scriptural.

God Also Clearly Commanded When Unleavened Was Required

As we saw in Course 1, God commanded to eat only matzah during the Passover and the seven-day Festival of Unleavened *Bread*—26 Old Testament verses listed there bore this out. So the question to ask is why the twelve Temple breads were always called “bread” and never “matzah” if they were really matzah under Moses?

When comparing the two leavened bread offerings (the thank offering and those breads at the Feast of Pentecost) to the Festival of Unleavened *Bread*, we see a marked contrast. Although the English translations add the word “Bread” to this Festival of Unleavened, the original Hebrew and Greek scriptures never connected the word “bread” at all to this festival name.

Here are a couple of examples where the Hebrew text simply says “matzah” (unleavened) and the Greek Septuagint says *azumwn* (unleavened), but the word “bread” has been *added* to the English translation:

^{KJV} Leviticus 23:6 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**.

^{LXT} Leviticus 23:6 καὶ ἐν τῇ πεντεκαιδεκάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ μηνὸς τούτου ἑορτὴ τῶν ἀζύμων τῷ κυρίῳ ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας ἀζυμα ἔδεσθε

^{KJV} 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.

^{LXT} Exodus 12:8 καὶ φάγονται τὰ κρέα τῇ νυκτὶ ταύτῃ ὅπτα πυρὶ καὶ ἀζυμα ἐπὶ πικρίδων ἔδονται

Whether or not the word “bread” was added to bolster the translator’s concept of Jesus supposedly eating bread at what the translator believed to be the Passover, it has created confusion. In reality, bread had nothing to do with this seven-day festival.

So you would have to ask yourself why is the *exact opposite* true with the Showbread? Why are they never called “matzah” in any scripture (Hebrew or Greek)? And why are they never qualified by God or any prophet as being unleavened? On the contrary, they are simply called breads (*lechem* in Hebrew), just like the other two *leavened* grain offerings seen earlier—the thank offerings and the Feast of Pentecost bread offerings.

Are we to believe that this exact opposite usage is just a coincidence?

One more thing—in addition to all the times the twelve breads are called “bread” in scripture, there is an occasion when they are called “cakes” or *challah* in Hebrew (Leviticus 24:5). However, this doesn’t add much to our investigation since “cakes” in the Temple offerings were either leavened or unleavened depending on God’s direction, but the scripture specifically qualifies them each time as either leavened or unleavened (Leviticus 7:13; Exodus 29:2).

Twelve Breads Show Forth Aspects of God’s Plan for His People

Let’s now consider this picture through a typological, symbolic interpretation—in other words, how certain elements in the Old Covenant prefigure those in the New Covenant. We’ll start with the possibility that the twelve breads were leavened and what this would symbolically portray for the twelve tribes, and then consider the same if the breads were *unleavened*.

In the first scenario we would see that the twelve tribes of Israel were still leavened in the figurative sense since they fell short of God’s will at times (read any book in the Jewish Bible to confirm this). Yet God still accepted them in His presence because they performed the legally commanded blood sacrifices, and their heart was to walk in God’s covenant and in the light He had shown. Thus, the Showbread that symbolized the twelve tribes was placed face-to-face before Him, in His presence:

^{NAS} Exodus 25:30 “And you shall set the **bread of the Presence** on the table **before Me** at all times.

^{LXT} Exodus 25:30 καὶ ἐπιθήσεις ἐπὶ τὴν τράπεζαν ἄρτους ἑνωπίους ἑναντίον μου διὰ παντός

These two rows of six breads sat side by side in the first room (Leviticus 24:6) facing the second room, which contained the Ark of the Covenant, where God was considered to reside; thus they were symbolically situated toward His face in the place where He said He would dwell (Exodus 25:22). However, a veil hung between these two rooms, separating the innermost sacred room from the room containing the Showbread portion. This was true in the movable Tabernacle and later in the fixed

Temple. The priests would enter into the larger room called the Holy Place (where the Showbread dwelt). And when the High Priest passed beyond the veil on the Day of Atonement into the Most Holy Place (also called the Holy of Holies), he would see the Ark of the Covenant, considered the dwelling place of God.

^{NIV} Hebrews 9:7 But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

^{DBY} Hebrews 9:8 the Holy Spirit shewing this, that the way of the *holy of holies* has not yet been made manifest while as yet the first tabernacle has *its* standing;

So Paul is saying that under the law and the first covenant, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and never without blood. This kept the other priests (and symbolically the twelve breads) away from the direct presence of God in this holiest place. Paul then explains that the Holy Spirit was showing that the way directly into God's presence was not yet available while the first covenant law still had its legal standing. When the Holy Spirit tore this veil in half at the time of the Messiah's death, it showed that the way into God's direct presence was now fully available because the full price had just been paid:

^{NAS} Matthew 27:50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up *His* spirit.

^{NAS} Matthew 27:51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split,

With the veil torn in two, the twelve breads were now face-to-face with God, showing that all who believed in the Messiah's sacrifice had direct access to God's presence. In fact, not only could believers enter directly into the holiest place where His full presence dwells, but His spirit could actually infill them.

After the 50-day counting following the sheaf offering (Leviticus 23:15) that we discussed earlier and the coming of the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out for all believers to receive, and anyone—male, female, and proselytes (Acts 1:14, 15; 2:10)—could now be filled with God's spirit:

^{NAB} Acts 2:1 When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together.

^{NAB} Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

Then an event occurred that was quite shocking to these Jewish Messianic believers: God actually filled *uncircumcised Gentile believers* (Acts 10 and 11) with the Holy Spirit:

^{NAS} Acts 10:45 And all the circumcised believers who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles also.

They were all filled with the spirit of God (with the evidence of speaking in tongues). Peter says that this fulfilled what Joel had prophesied (Acts 2:16; see also Isaiah 28:9–12): that a time was coming when God would pour out His spirit on all people—not just the high priest, but on everyone from fishermen to tax collectors to uncircumcised Gentiles—anyone who would receive His forgiveness and His gift. Thus God’s Spirit would be poured out on all mankind:

^{NAS} Joel 2:28 “And it will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions.

In the New Covenant, whosoever desires to enter God’s house through the door may come in (the Messiah said he is the door, John 10:9). Thus the prophecy was fulfilled that God’s house would be a house of prayer for all nations:

^{NIV} Isaiah 56:7 these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; **for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.**”



In Course 2 we saw what Jesus was referring to with the pieces of the one regular *leavened* bread that he broke: that we are the body of Christ. Remember that when interpreting typology or figurative teachings, only the portion of the teaching that fits and is *meant* by the spirit of God should be applied. When something is in question, Jesus said the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth, so we always of course want to be led by God’s spirit. The word of God comes first, and typology can be gleaned from what is already true in God’s word.

So when Jesus refers to himself as the living “bread” in John 6, he obviously does not mean anything negative by using the Greek word for regular leavened “bread.” He is only pointing to bread as daily sustenance, and in this context comparing himself to the true manna (the spiritual provision sent from God) called the “bread of heaven.” The same is true when John refers to Jesus as the “lamb of God.” Lambs often have white curly hair and are easily led astray. However, you could not apply those traits to the Messiah, because that is not what John meant in the type or symbolic language that he used. John was using “lamb” typologically in the positive sense, that Christ was perfectly led by God, never resisting (Isaiah 53:7), and also pointing to Christ as the true Passover lamb.

Jesus warned the disciples about the “leaven” of the Pharisees (Matthew 16:6–12), and eventually they understood that he was not referring to the leaven of bread but to the Pharisees’ *teachings*. Paul uses leaven figuratively in a much harsher sense in referring to the man who commits gross sin (1 Corinthians 5). Paul figuratively equates this sin to having leaven at Passover, saying malice and wickedness should not be a part of this spiritual feast that they, and we, have entered into.

None of this presents the twelve tribes symbolized by the Showbread as bad people containing leaven. It only acknowledges that all have sinned, and no one is righteous by himself or able to perfectly keep the law. This is why the virgin birth was needed (Isaiah 7:14)—to bypass the genetic disposition toward sin that is in every son and daughter of Adam. The natural man at his best is not perfectly subject to God and the law, neither can he be (Romans 8:7, as seen in the original Greek text). However, God loves and accepts us into His presence when we follow His commandments and are covered by the blood. This was true in the Old Covenant, and it remains so in the New Covenant, yet with a different blood.

If the Twelve Breads Were Unleavened ...

We have considered the typological truths seen in the twelve Temple breads being leavened. Now we will examine the typology if the twelve breads were matzah and what symbolic picture this would show forth.

If the twelve breads were really matzah (unleavened), then in this typological picture the twelve tribes would be without sin, malice, pride, or any false doctrine. They would always make the right choice as God leads them and they would represent His finished plan revealed—holy and complete, never once falling short of the law but ready to ascend as an unleavened fire offering to God.

Now the Jewish writers of scripture deserve a great deal of credit because they do not hide what really happened. The ups and the downs, the good and the bad—it’s all there for us to read. In both Testaments of the Bible, you can open pretty much any book and see that the tribes of Israel (as well as the believers in the Messiah) were not yet perfected.

Bible history clearly shows that from a typological figurative picture, regular leavened bread fits better for the twelve breads, so let's consider why God did not specify whether they should be leavened or not, and yet He still called them "breads."

We could say that God did not command that these twelve breads be leavened because He was showing that, for the believers, a time would come when they would be unleavened before Him (legally or by experience). Leaving this one offering un-said as to leaven could indicate that God was symbolically showing that the believers could become spiritually unleavened one day.

God knew the twelve tribes under the law would symbolically still have leaven; therefore these twelve breads were called "breads" (*lechem* in Hebrew—regular leavened breads) and never *matzah* (unleavened). God did not command for these twelve breads to be made unleavened, for this could wrongly imply that God saw the twelve tribes as holy and pure in and of themselves at that time.

By not directly commanding that the breads be made unleavened or leavened, God shows that the twelve tribes had free will before Him to strive individually to be holy and clean under the law, without implying that they had actually succeeded in this. Calling them "breads" in the scriptures is just being real with what they represented—and that they were not yet completely unleavened.

Through the blood sacrificial system, God saw the twelve tribes as consecrated and acceptable before Him and thus able to come into His presence, but only because this same system pointed forward to the true deliverer from sin—Messiah the true Passover.

In addition, by not giving Moses any direct command to make the twelve breads without leaven, it would have been legal to bake them as the priests saw fit. If they decided it was God's will to make them unleavened (bread of affliction), then they could do that. And if they felt that the leavened breads were much more appetizing and did not oppose the spirit of any of the commandments, then they could bake them as the more flavorful loaves that would be a blessing to the priests from Aaron every Sabbath.

Later, under the Pharisees' legalistic leadership (and thus not led by God's spirit to understand what God, Moses, and David meant in calling the twelve loaves "bread" without any qualifying description), the Sadducee ministers could be forced to eat them unleavened, as *matzah*, every Sabbath.

Figurative Uses of Bread

Before we get to the one figurative occurrence of bread used during the Festival of the Unleavened (Deuteronomy 16:3), let's first look at some other figurative uses of bread in the Jewish idiom.

Some have tried to argue that because manna was called "bread"—and in their logic it would have been unleavened—they think this is another example of bread

being actually unleavened. However, this misses the fact that manna was only figuratively called “bread.” It was obviously not baked in an oven in heaven, with or without leaven, so this does not apply to the argument as to whether or not the Showbread was leavened.

^{NAS} Exodus 16:4 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will **rain bread** from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in **My instruction**.

^{NAS} Deuteronomy 29:5–6 “**And I have led you forty years in the wilderness**; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot. **You have not eaten bread**, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am the LORD your God.

Thus the scriptures say they ate no bread for 40 years in the wilderness, but they did eat the manna that was called “bread”; but this is not a contradiction as manna was called “bread” only in a figurative sense.

^{JPS} Numbers 21:5 And the people spoke against God, and against Moses: ‘Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? **for there is no bread**, and there is no water; **and our soul loatheth this light bread.**’

So the people first say “there is no bread,” then they say they loathe this “light bread.” The Hebrew word for “light” means “contemptible, worthless, wretched,” and each mention of bread in this verse is *lechem*, the normal Hebrew word for “bread.” So when they declare that there is no “bread,” this does not contradict the fact that they loathe the bread, because manna was not actual bread—it was only called “bread” in a figurative sense.



Several other verses exist in which “bread” appears in the figurative sense. For instance:

^{NAS} Psalm 80:5 Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears, And Thou hast made them to drink tears in large measure.

This, of course, doesn't mean that people cried bread or breadcrumbs, but it is used in a symbolic, figurative, and descriptive sense.

Many more such examples exist:

^{KJV} Psalm 127:2 *It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the **bread of sorrows**: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*

^{KJV} Proverbs 4:17 For they eat the **bread of wickedness**, and drink the wine of violence.

^{KJV} Proverbs 20:17 **Bread of deceit** is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel.

In the verse below, the Canaanite woman came to Jesus for healing, and he symbolically spoke of healing as the “children’s bread,” meaning that healing from God was symbolically “bread” for those who are in covenant with God:

^{KJV} Matthew 15:26 But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the **children’s bread**, and to cast *it* to dogs.

Although this Canaanite woman was outside of the covenant, she did not retreat but instead pressed forward, asking the Messiah to heal her daughter:

^{NAS} Matthew 15:27 But she said, “Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

^{NAS} Matthew 15:28 Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed at once.

Bread of sorrows, bread of wickedness, bread of deceit, children’s bread, and other such figurative usages for bread were commonly spoken and understood in the idiomatic sense among the Jews.

“Bread of Affliction” Used Figuratively in Deuteronomy 16:3

In the original Hebrew or Greek scriptures, neither the Hebrew nor the Greek words for “bread” are ever connected to the name of the feast that we call the Festival of Unleavened *Bread*. Yet there is *one* time when the matzah is figuratively called “bread” (as in the “bread of affliction”) in connection with this Festival:

^{DBY} Deuteronomy 16:3 Thou shalt eat no leavened *bread* along with it; seven days shalt thou eat unleavened *bread* with it, **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.

In the verse above, the first two instances of “bread” are italicized (by me) to indicate that they do not appear in the original Hebrew or Greek text but were added to the English translation. Then we see the term “bread of affliction,” which clearly describes the matzah (badly translated above as “unleavened **bread**”). Thus the matzah is figuratively called “bread of affliction.” No reputable Jewish scholar of the Torah would cite this scripture as affirmation that it’s acceptable to eat bread at Passover, or that it’s fine for the Jews to go around Jerusalem saying they ate bread at Passover.

In both Hebrew and Greek the words for *matzah* and *azumwn* are plural, whereas “bread” (as in the “bread” of affliction) is singular. If this verse were referring to matzah as actual “bread,” the grammatical rules (of Greek at least) would require “bread” to be plural, too. Instead, the sentence structure confirms that God is referring to the *matzah* **figuratively** as the “bread” of affliction.

Those who think that the Last Supper was the Passover regard the Messiah’s eating of bread at that meal as normal behavior. They look at this scripture in Deuteronomy and say, “See, bread is bread.”

However, the Jewish scribes were never confused as to this one figurative use of the word “bread.” They knew that “bread of affliction” described the matzah only in a figurative sense; they never proclaimed, “I guess it’s fine to go around Jerusalem saying we eat **bread** during Passover now.”

This verse in Deuteronomy is a prime example that some commentators cite to prove that “bread is bread.” Although Jesus ate bread at what they believe was the Passover, they insist the bread was unleavened because of rare cases like this, where “bread” refers to something that was unleavened.

It doesn’t occur to them that under no circumstances would Jewish Messianic followers proclaim to the Jewish nation that they, together with Jesus, ate bread at the Passover (had the Last Supper actually been the Passover). The Talmud is clear that if even the high priest ate leaven at the Passover, he would be taken out and whipped.¹⁸⁵ To go around Jerusalem saying they had eaten bread at the Passover would have been shocking in the first-century Jewish idiom, and then to leave it unqualified—by not clarifying that it was supposedly matzah—could have led to whippings and worse.

185 Babylonian Talmud, Book 9, Tract Maccoth, ch. 3, p. 35, <http://sacred-texts.com/jud/t09/mac08.htm>.

Why was it not qualified as matzah? Because it was regular leavened bread served at this Last Supper meal—which actually took place on the night *before* the Passover sacrifice.

“Bread of God” Is Used Figuratively

As we have seen before in this Course, the Levitical fire offering to God, called the “bread of God,” was clearly commanded to be unleavened since God specified that nothing leavened was ever to be placed on the altar in the fire to Him:

^{NAS} Leviticus 2:11 ‘No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, **for you shall not offer up in smoke any leaven** or any honey as **an offering by fire to the LORD**.

Some of the grain offerings from the people would be made into the Showbread, and some of that same grain (ground into flour) went directly on the altar as a fire offering to God. Thus God was showing Himself as partaking with His people by referring figuratively to His portion in the fire as “bread.” God plainly qualified that these fire offerings to Him be unleavened, so the priests would not be confused or accidentally break a commandment (even though He loosely referred to them as His “bread”).

As was already mentioned, several scriptures appear where the word “bread” is used *figuratively* for the matzah that went into the fire offering to God:

^{NAS} Leviticus 21:6 ‘They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present **the offerings by fire** to the LORD, **the bread of their God**; so they shall be holy.

^{NAS} Leviticus 21:8 ‘You shall consecrate him, therefore, **for he offers the bread of your God**; he shall be holy to you; for I the LORD, who sanctifies you, am holy.

^{NAS} Leviticus 21:21 ‘No man among the descendants of Aaron the priest, who has a defect, is to come near to offer the LORD’s offerings by fire; *since* he has a defect, he shall not come near to offer **the bread of his God**.

The previous Course discussed that Jewish communal meals during the festivals were not just meals among the Jews, but that God Himself was regarded more than just a guest since the entire Temple was God’s house. Thus in the Showbread communal meal they partook of bread together, the priests with their “presence breads” and

God with His “bread” in the fire offering on the altar, both of which came from the same grain tithes of the people.

With God’s commandment that nothing leavened was ever to be offered in the fire to Him, it is clear that His bread was only figuratively called “bread,” just as the manna was. God could then also refer to His portion of the sacrifices figuratively as His “bread,” partly to show *that He was joining in the communal meals with them*. The Jews were not confused by God calling his portion “bread”; they did not say, “Oh, I guess this means bread is bread and we can offer it in the fire to God either leavened or unleavened.”

Below, in Leviticus 3, the Hebrew word for “bread” is used figuratively *for the kidneys* from the animal sacrifice that went in the fire to God, as this was God’s portion:

^{NAS} Leviticus 3:10 and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, which is on the loins, and the lobe of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys.

^{YLT} Leviticus 3:11 and the priest hath made it a perfume on the altar—**bread of a fire-offering to Jehovah.**

The “bread of God” also points to Christ, the only man who could be said to be unleavened, who ascended to God directly through the fire. Christ was the only sinless one that this offering pointed to. And Jesus also referred to himself as the “bread of God”—as in the true spiritual manna (also itself figuratively called “bread,” Psalm 105:40). He figuratively comes down as manna from God bringing God’s teaching and spiritual provision:

^{NIV} John 6:33 For **the bread of God** is he who **comes down** from heaven and gives life to the world.”

So we cannot use these figurative occurrences of bread in the scriptures to claim that “bread is bread” and therefore the twelve breads were unleavened, or that the bread Jesus ate at the Last Supper was unleavened. We cannot do this because, when it was important to know, God always qualified in the scriptures whether something was unleavened or not. Of the more than 300 times that “bread” is used in the scriptures for regular leavened bread, only on a few rare occasions does it refer loosely or figuratively to something unleavened. But as we cover each one, we will see that every single time *it is clearly qualified in the text*.

Other Figurative Uses of Bread

Now we will examine the remaining scriptures used by some people to try to prove that bread is bread, since these unleavened items mentioned below are occasionally referred to figuratively or in a loose, generic sense as “bread.” There’s one important distinction, however: God clearly qualifies that each of them are to be made *unleavened*.

“Bread” is used a few rare times to refer to a basket of various unleavened things (cakes, wafers, etc.) that are all called “matzahs,” some of which will go in the fire to God. These are figuratively called “breads.” However, just as with the unleavened “bread of God” that went in the fire to Him, God always indicates specifically when something is actually to be unleavened, as in this priestly ordination service:

^{NAS} Exodus 29:1 “Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them to minister as priests to Me: take one young bull and two rams without blemish,

^{NAS} Exodus 29:2 and **unleavened bread** and unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; you shall make them of fine wheat flour.

^{NAS} Exodus 29:3 “And you shall put them in **one basket**, and present them in the basket along with the bull and the two rams.

^{NAS} Exodus 29:23 and one cake of bread and one cake of bread *mixed with* oil and one wafer **from the basket of unleavened bread**¹⁸⁶ which is *set* before the LORD;

^{NAS} Exodus 29:25 “And you shall take them from their hands, **and offer them up in smoke on the altar** on the burnt offering for a soothing aroma before the LORD; **it is an offering by fire to the LORD.**

I counted 36 times where most English translations say “unleavened bread” in the Old Testament, but in 35 of them the original Hebrew only says “matzah.” Verse 2 above is the only instance where both words—*matzah* and *lechem* (unleavened bread)—actually appear together. However, three points make it obvious that once again “bread” is being used *figuratively* for this basket of matzah.

186 In the original Hebrew of the above verse, the text reads “basket of **matzah**” instead of “basket of unleavened bread.”

First of all, in the Greek Septuagint text, “bread” is a noun, whereas *unleavened* (*azumos*) is an adjective. Therefore the Jewish scholars who translated the Septuagint show that “unleavened” qualifies that this is not regular bread. Secondly, as we see in verse 23, these breads that were placed in a basket were already called the “basket of *matzah*” in Hebrew, leaving no question that they were unleavened. Thirdly, each of the items in the basket was placed on the altar as a fire offering to God (as seen in verse 25) and, as we know, fire offerings were commanded to be unleavened (Leviticus 2:11).

So for any scholar to say, “See, bread is bread, and in these scriptures it’s unleavened so that proves the twelve breads must have been unleavened” does not accurately reflect the meaning of these scriptures. Taking figurative uses of the word “bread” to prove that the twelve breads were therefore matzah does not logically follow.

Likewise, you cannot extend these figurative uses to insist that it was normal for Jesus to eat bread at Passover, or that the disciples went around Jerusalem telling everyone that they and Jesus ate bread during Passover. When it was important to know, God always qualified the type of bread (as we saw in the scriptural examples above). During Passover, knowing the difference between matzah and bread was critical, lest one be cut off from the nation (Exodus 12:15, 19); God made it especially clear that only matzah was allowed.



This same priestly ordination service we just saw in Exodus was also mentioned in Leviticus, where the items again were figuratively called “bread,” yet placed on the fire to the Lord—and therefore necessarily unleavened (Leviticus 2:11)—as the “bread of God”:

^{NAS} Leviticus 8:2 “Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments and the anointing oil and the bull of the sin offering, and the two rams and the **basket of unleavened bread**;

In the Hebrew for this scripture, the word “bread” does not appear; it’s just the basket of matzahs. Similarly, in verse 26 below the Hebrew says “basket of matzah”; the word “bread” is inserted in most English translations:¹⁸⁷

^{NAS} Leviticus 8:26 And from the **basket of unleavened bread** that was before the LORD, he took one unleavened cake and one cake of bread *mixed with* oil and one wafer, and placed *them* on the portions of fat and on the right thigh.

187 I have found the NAS to be a very good translation overall, but in our English idiom, saying “unleavened bread” has become so common that it sounds strange to not add the word “bread.”

Verse 28 refers to this same basket of matzahs, with Moses offering one of each as a *fire offering* to the Lord:

^{NAS} Leviticus 8:28 Then Moses took them from their hands **and offered them up in smoke on the altar with the burnt offering.** They were an ordination offering for a soothing aroma; **it was an offering by fire to the LORD.**

Remember we saw in the previous “bread of God” section that when matzah went up to God as a fire offering, it was referred to figuratively as the “bread of God.” In verse 31, Aaron and the priests partook of the remaining matzah in the basket after God’s portion of this fire offering went up in the smoke to Him, showing a joint participation. Since God symbolically partook of this offering with them, it is referred to as “bread” in a generic or figurative sense:

^{NAS} Leviticus 8:31 Then Moses said to Aaron and to his sons, “Boil the flesh at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and eat it there together with the **bread** which is **in the basket** of the ordination offering, just as I commanded, saying, ‘Aaron and his sons shall eat it.’”

The Jewish priests were never confused about this figurative usage of the word “bread.” Only later was this usage clouded by those who said that the Showbread was to be unleavened, and by others who said that the Last Supper bread was unleavened.



As we’ve seen, many of the figurative uses of the word “bread” were taken out of context and used as apparent proofs that bread is bread. For the true meaning to emerge, the scriptures must be understood from within the Jewish idiom and by ascertaining whether God meant “bread” literally or figuratively, by qualifying it.

One portion of scripture sums it all up: The angel of the Lord (i.e., God manifesting as an angel) comes down to Manoah and his wife, having already promised that they would have a son, Samson, who would deliver Israel. The angel of the Lord then speaks about man’s “bread”:

^{KJV} Judges 13:15 And Manoah said unto the angel of the LORD, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee.

^{KJV} Judges 13:16 And the angel of the LORD said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, **I will not eat of thy bread:** and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the LORD. **For Manoah knew not that he *was* an angel of the LORD.**

^{NIV} Judges 13:19 Then Manoah took a young goat, **together with the grain offering,** and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched:

^{NIV} Judges 13:20 As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame. Seeing this, Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.

So when Manoah speaks of having an earthly meal with this angel of the Lord (i.e., God manifesting as an angel), the Lord in effect says, “I do not eat of man’s bread.” The “bread of God” is that which goes in the fire to God. God has given regular bread to man as a provision of food, but God does not eat man’s bread (or man’s food). The bread of God is pure and unleavened, and while the bread of man is good and flavorful (not necessarily evil), God only partakes of man’s bread figuratively.

Christ was the true “bread of God” that He was looking for, and God sees Christ in those of us who have received him, which makes us acceptable in God’s presence. Because the penalty was paid, He is no longer mindful of our sin as to require payment (Jeremiah 31:34). He casts it away “as far as the east is from the west,” never to remember it against us (Psalm 103:12).

Jesus figuratively called himself “bread,” for he was “made like unto his brethren” (i.e., the twelve “breads” of Israel, Hebrews 2:17), yet without sin. Jesus was the sinless “bread of God” without leaven that can go right up in the fire to God; he was “bread” in the sense of the manna (the “bread of heaven”). He is “bread” because he is our daily sustenance.

Those who are “caught up” to God without seeing death (1 Thessalonians 4:17, Revelation 12:5) can go straight to Him, because they are the spiritual “body of Christ” and legally unleavened. They represent the spiritual fulfillment of what the twelve breads pointed to, and Christ—as the true frankincense that went in the fire to God—sanctified them, thus making the whole offering an acceptable fire offering to Him.

In the Old Covenant, 11 of the Israelite tribes were excluded from partaking of these breads, as were all Gentiles and many Levites (except those of Aaron’s lineage). This shows that partaking of the twelve breads was a high calling, yet it is something we are all invited to fulfill in the spiritual sense.

In the New Covenant all are called, but not all will hear the calling and move into it. Jesus showed this in the parables of Matthew (22:1–14) and Luke (14:16–24) when many began to make excuses as to why they could not come to the Lord's wedding feast. The Lord will have a bride, however, and in the New Covenant this position is open to everyone (John 6:37).