

Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel  
Temple Micah, Washington, DC

## What is Matzah?

### I. Special food for Unexpected Distinguished Visitors

#### 1. Genesis 19:1-3

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground;

And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake ***unleavened bread***, and they did eat.

#### 2. Judges 6

When the angel of Adonai appeared to Gideon, he said, "Adonai is with you, mighty warrior."

Gideon replied, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, give me a sign that it is really you talking to me. Please do not go away until I come back and bring my offering and set it before you."

And Adonai said, "I will wait until you return."

Gideon went inside, prepared a young goat, and from an ephah of flour he made ***unleavened bread***.

#### 3. I Samuel 28

Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and magicians from the land. The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. He inquired of the Adonai, but Adonai did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is

one in Endor,” they said. So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman.....The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked **unleavened bread**. Then she set it before Saul and his men, and they ate.

## II. Sacrificial Bread—Again—Something Very Special

### 1. Leviticus 6

These are the regulations for the grain offering: Aaron’s sons are to bring it before Adonai, in front of the altar. The priest is to take a handful of the finest flour and some olive oil, together with all the incense on the grain offering, and burn the memorial portion on the altar as an aroma pleasing to Adonai. Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it, but it is to be eaten **unleavened** in the sanctuary area; they are to eat it in the courtyard of the tent of meeting. It must **not be baked with leaven...**

### 2. Leviticus 8

Adonai said to Moses, “Bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams and the basket containing **unleavened bread** and gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

### 3. Exodus 23

“Do *not* offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing **leavening.**”

TWO TAKEAWAYS HERE-

UNLEAVENED IS THE FOOD GIVEN TO SPECIAL AND UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

UNLEAVENED IS THE SACRIFICIAL OFFERING.

## III. "ORIGINAL" PASSOVER-MATZAH BIBLICAL TEXT

1. Exodus 12:8 (This command is given as preparation for the night of the 10th plague)

“That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and ***unleavened bread.***”

#### IV. “HASTE” MATZAH

1. Exodus 12:33- The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For otherwise,” they said, “we will all die!” So the people took their dough ***before it was leavened*** and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing..... With the dough the Israelites had brought from Egypt, they baked loaves of ***unleavened bread.*** The dough was ***unleavened*** because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

Conclusion- the biblical tradition comes to confuse the meaning of *unleavened bread* as a special bread made in haste for an unexpected visitor--AND THUS MISTAKENLY CREATE THE *no time for the dough to rise since they had to run out of Egypt quickly idea.*

AND CREATE IN A STILL LATER PERIOD

Lehem Oni-Poor man's bread- slave bread, the bread of affliction

Deuteronomy 16

Observe the month of Aviv and celebrate the Passover of Adonai your God, because in the month of Aviv God brought you out of Egypt by night. Sacrifice as the Passover to Adonai your God an animal from your flock or herd at the place Adonai will choose as a dwelling for God's Name. Do not eat it with HAMETZ, but for seven days eat *unleavened bread, the bread of affliction*, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.

Anthropology-

During a trip to the Middle East, I observed the following-

A Beduoin was seated on the ground near a primitive grill with a container of dough at his side. When a customer appeared, he began baking. Pouring the dough from the container onto the hot grill, he produced a flat pita bread.

Witnessing this activity led to an important insight regarding an ancient form of bread making. In that world, the usual method of baking bread must have involved preparing dough and allowing it to stand until the occasion for baking arose. Then, as now, the standing dough would attract natural yeast spores and other impurities. In the process it would become leavened. I hypothesized that this type of standing leavened dough, suitable for daily meals, was not considered appropriate for important visitors or sacrificial meals.

## CONCLUSION

-Freshly made dough--free of all impurities is what the Bible calls MATZAH. **This is the biblical bread for special occasions—including sudden and special guests.**

Free of impurities makes it right for the sacrifice.

Standing leavened dough is HAMETZ

## MY CONCLUSIONS

This brings us back to the Passover Seder-

In the Passover Seder table we see the transition in Jewish life from the Temple based biblical religion of sacrifice on the altar to the religious revolution of the Pharisees—Judaism as a religion of study, worship and deed—centered on table fellowship.

The dining table in the home replaced the altar in the temple.

In matzah the two symbols come together-

Sacrifice and a special bread served in the home for special guests on a special occasion.

An additional layer is added when Matzah is declared poor man's bread as a way of honoring the mythic admonition to remember the liberation from slavery.