

What is Hametz? An Ethiopian Interpretation

Contributed by [School of Adaptive Agriculture](#)

Source:

The Jews of Ethiopia strongly identify with the story of Passover. In 1985, they had an exodus of their own, where they took almost 8,000 Jews from Sudan to Israel. They commemorate this by breaking all of their dishes and making new ones. This symbolizes breaking from the past and starting over.

Some Ethiopian Jews have no Haggadahs so they read about the Pesach story directly from the Torah. They make their own matzahs from chickpea flour. On the morning of the seder, a lamb would be slaughtered. They also refrain from eating fermented dairy like yogurt, butter, or cheese.

Ethiopian Jews interpreted the law forbidding hametz in a unique way: While non-Ethiopian Jews understand hametz to mean leavened bread, from the Hebrew word le'hahmitz, to rise or leaven, Ethiopian Jews interpreted hametz to mean "kept" or "not-fresh". As a result, they would eat only fresh produce, freshly extracted milk and freshly slaughtered meat; everything else classified as forbidden hametz.