

Lesson 13
READ THIS STORY #1, Basic

Salt

Salt is one of the only dietary staples that is used in all regions of the world. It has no smell. It just has taste. Yet there is no satisfactory substitute for it.

Salt has been used through the ages as a preservative for fish and meat. Salt is able to absorb moisture, which slows the growth of bacteria and shields the salted food from the air.

Although salt is cheap these days, it was extremely expensive during the Middle Ages. Vast quantities were required for preserving foods and making cheese. Salt was also used in the manufacture of glass, soap, and leather. Doctors used salt in one hundred and twenty medical prescriptions as either a drink, a liniment or a compress.

Churches even used salt to drive out evil. They thought the Devil was terrified of salt. So it was mixed with holy water, oil, wine or ashes and used as part of some sacred rituals.

Europe needed vast amounts of salt. It was produced along their Atlantic coast and in the Mediterranean.

Only the affluent could afford salt, which was expensive and heavily taxed. The taxes financed wars. To avoid taxes, salt was frequently smuggled in and out of countries. And speculators hoarded salt to make it scarce and increase its price.

No one in those days would have believed that salt would become one of the cheapest items in a grocery store.