

# THE THREAD

GOD'S APPOINTMENTS WITH HISTORY

RONALD L. DART

## **Wasteland Press**

Shelbyville, KY USA

[www.wastelandpress.net](http://www.wastelandpress.net)

*The Thread: God's Appointments With History*

By Ronald L. Dart

Copyright © 2006 Ronald L. Dart

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

First Printing – June 2006

ISBN13: 978-1-60047-029-5

ISBN10: 1-60047-029-7

NO PART OF THIS BOOK MAY BE REPRODUCED IN ANY FORM, BY PHOTOCOPYING OR BY ANY ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL MEANS, INCLUDING INFORMATION STORAGE OR RETRIEVAL SYSTEMS, WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM THE COPYRIGHT OWNER/AUTHOR.

Printed in the U.S.A.

*To Allie, the love of my life,  
my unfailing support, without whom  
this book might never have been written.*



# *Table Of Contents*

Prologue	<i>vii</i>
1. Picking up the thread	1
2. Judging Egypt	13
3. The Passover, Old and New	22
4. The Body of Christ	31
5. The Bread of Life	39
6. The Passover by Any Other Name	46
7. Three Days and Three Nights	56
8. From Passover to Easter	69
9. Pentecost	77
10. Baptized With Fire	82
11. Feast of Trumpets, Judgment Day	92
12. The Resurrection	100
13. Trumpets and the Resurrection	110
14. The Day of Atonement	122
15. Reconciled to God	133
16. The Feast of Tabernacles	144
17. Only Here a Little While	156
18. The Dilemma	167
19. The Last Great Day	178
20. Saving the World	187
21. The New Testament Sabbath Day	198
22. The Sabbath and the Gentiles	206
23. Epilogue	225
Appendix 1 The Hebrew Calendar	234
Appendix 2 In Defense of the Holydays	249

## *Acknowledgements*

My profound thanks to Mickie Ranaldo for bearing up under so many readings, and to Faye Brown, Linda Benton, Teeka Glasgow and my wife, Allie, for helping me present a clean manuscript.

# Prologue

*Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom  
or the strong man boast of his strength  
or the rich man boast of his riches,  
but let him who boasts boast about this:  
that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD,  
who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth,  
for in these I delight, declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24 NIV).*

The Bible is a marvelously compact work, considering its scope. The essential things are plainly stated. There is nothing obscure about the Ten Commandments, for example, and the Gospel of the New Testament is easily understood. There is, however, much more to be known about God and what he is doing than can be made plain in the 66 short books that make up the Bible. The Apostle John, when finishing up the 21 chapters of his Gospel, underlined the problem: “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”<sup>i</sup>

And that provides a neat summary of why we have to work so hard if we want to push beyond the margins of what is plainly stated. The Bible is a rewarding book for the serious student. There is so much more to be found if we care to look for it and if we are willing to follow ideas wherever they lead.

There are any number of reasons why we might not understand what is before us. One is the cost of obedience. Jesus warned his disciples to count the cost before embarking on this

## THE THREAD

spiritual journey.<sup>ii</sup> More than one person has faced the cost of discipleship and flinched. There are things in the Bible that a person, consciously or unconsciously, may choose not to understand because it will cost him more than he is willing to pay.

Sometimes, God seems to be deliberately obscure, which is, of course, his privilege: “It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”<sup>iii</sup> I sometimes wonder if God just doesn’t want it to be too easy. After all, it is only human to appreciate more the things we have to work for.

A few years ago, I produced a series of radio programs which systematically explored what the Bible calls, “the feasts of the Lord.” I did the series more out of a sense of duty than for audience response. To my surprise, the response to the programs surpassed that of any series I had done on the air. I had been aware that increasing numbers of biblical teachers and evangelists had been talking about the holydays, but the depth of interest from the public was unexpected.

I hadn’t thought about writing books back then, but with the advent of print on demand publishing, I was left without an excuse. This book, then, grows out of a series of radio programs titled, “Christian Holidays.” Because each program had to stand alone, there is inevitably some repetition. And the style is more oral than written.

The biblical festivals all lie along the same thread, a thread we will follow back in time and far into the future to see if we can apprehend in greater depth what God is doing. In the process, we will look at the practice of the first Christian churches which later generations lost.

The book is not intended as a polemic, but as a pursuit of a mystery. There are a number of technical issues that will not interest some readers, and will be covered in endnotes or appendices, so the reader can stay in the flow of the book. All quotations are from the King James Version or the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

### Abbreviations:

KJV Authorized King James Version.

RSV Revised Standard Version.

NASB New American Standard Version.

ISBE International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.  
NIV New International Version.  
NRSV New Revised Standard Version.  
NKJV New King James Version.

- 
- i. John 21:25 NIV.
  - ii. Luke 14:26 ff.
  - iii. Proverbs 25:2.



# 1

## *Picking Up the Thread*

*Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac,  
whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah;  
and offer him there for a burnt offering  
upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*<sup>i</sup>

Everyone knows that the two most important holidays throughout the Christian world are Easter and Christmas. They have been called “the bookends of Christianity.”<sup>ii</sup> But there is something odd about that. Neither of these days is found *observed* anywhere in the Bible. And if they were as important to the early church as they are today, you would think someone would have said something. Luke might have recorded somewhere in the book of Acts, “We stayed over at Troas through Christmas and then sailed across to Philippi.” Or maybe: “We hastened in order to be in Jerusalem for Easter.” But no, nothing like that is found in the Bible.

What we do find may be mildly surprising. We find holidays in the Bible, quite prominently, and in both Testaments. Not only that, but they are found observed by the church in the New Testament. Luke wrote, for example, “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days” (Acts 20:6 KJV). Later, “For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him,

## THE THREAD

to be *at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost*" (Acts 20:16). Before that he had told the Ephesians, "Farewell, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will" (Acts 18:21).<sup>iii</sup>

Nowadays, these holidays are usually dismissed as being merely Jewish; but then we are left to wonder why the earliest Christians followed on in their observance. The days clearly have Jewish/historical roots and yet they were still observed faithfully in *Christian* churches known to be primarily Gentile. There has to be a reason for that.

But first, let me point out some minor issues that are commonly overlooked relative to the holidays of the Bible. For example, the days are not merely "Jewish holidays." Consider this short passage from the law:

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: These are the appointed festivals of the LORD that you shall proclaim as holy convocations, my appointed festivals (Leviticus 23:2 NRSV).

Note well, these are the *Lord's* festivals, not "Jewish holidays." Not only are these the Lord's feasts, they are so designated by his *name*. They are "The appointed festivals of *Jehovah*." <sup>iv</sup>

Then there is the Hebrew word that is here rendered "appointed festivals." The word in Hebrew is *moed*, and it means literally "appointed times." The NRSV is correct in rendering it "appointed festivals," because *moed* is repeatedly used for festive occasions.

Apparently, these "appointments" were there right from the beginning. In the creation account God said: "Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons [*moed*] and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14 NRSV). This could just as easily (and more consistently) have been rendered, "Let them be for signs, and for *appointed times*."

What this suggests to me is that there were divine appointments, holy days, if you will, right from the beginning. And really, there is no reason to think there were not. If God had a plan, then it should not be surprising that he would have special times

marked for special events right from the start.

Here is another example which has been somewhat obscured by the translations. Later in Genesis, God visits Abraham on what appears to be one of these appointed times. These encounters with God were rare and they may have occurred at a festival season. On this occasion, God startled Abraham and Sarah by promising them a son in their old age. Mind you, Abraham is 99 and Sarah nearly as old. Sarah couldn't help herself, she laughed. When Sarah laughed, God replied:

Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time [the *moed*] I will return to you, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son (Genesis 18:13-14).

God had already promised this along with the covenant promise: "My covenant will I establish with Isaac," God said, "which Sarah shall bear unto thee *at this set time* [*moed*] in the next year" (Genesis 17:21).

So Isaac (his name means "laughter") was to be born at the *moed*, and in the spring, thus at what would later be the Passover season. The expression, "time of life," is suggestive of the season when things come alive, hence a spring festival.<sup>v</sup> The serving of unleavened bread here and then a day or so later by Lot in Sodom<sup>vi</sup> might even suggest that the Feast of Unleavened Bread is older than Moses, though I can't imagine what significance it would have had.<sup>vii</sup> What it does suggest is that the thread we are following was already visible at this early date.

So God appears to Abraham at the time of the spring festival, and when he returns at the next spring festival, Abraham will have a son. Now we can follow the thread forward to the time of Moses.

Thanks to Charlton Heston as Moses, nearly everyone knows the story of the Exodus. But there are little things about that story that you may not have noticed. You know that God sent Moses to Pharaoh to say "Let my People go," but hardly anyone takes notice of the *reason* Moses offered to Pharaoh.

"Let my people go," demanded God, "that they may *hold a*

*feast* unto me in the wilderness” (Exodus 5:1). Now this may be nothing but a ruse, an excuse, but it may also be that one of God’s very old festivals was approaching – one of his appointments with history.

Keep in mind that God is constant. He isn’t one way today and another way tomorrow. He spoke to Malachi and said, “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). Later, James would describe God as “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

It should come as no surprise, then, that God would have had his “appointed times,” if at all, right from the beginning. We know that there was a well developed system of law in effect prior to Moses.<sup>viii</sup> No one should be surprised, then, when Moses demands of Pharaoh: “Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness.”

On this occasion, Moses does not call this an “appointed time,” but a *chagag*, a sacred celebration, but such celebrations are later seen to be annual and to fit a calendar. This one is pointed squarely at the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of spring, even though it could not yet have been known as the Passover. Since Pharaoh would not let them go, this spring “festival with no name” was observed in the middle of Egypt, to the eternal dismay of the Egyptians, and became known as the Passover.

What I am suggesting is that the occasions when God acted in history commonly took place at a *moed*, an appointed time. As a result of God’s action, the day itself took on the meaning and even the name of the events. Thus, the festival Moses said they wanted to observe in the wilderness could have been on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month. But that day was not the Passover before this time. It *became* the Passover because on that night God *passed over* the houses of the Israelites and took all the firstborn of the land of Egypt.

All these appointed times of God took on names and customs which were related to the important events in Israel’s history. They seem never to have imagined that there was any other meaning to these days. Jeremiah said that this would happen again. There will be another Exodus, so great that no one will remember the Exodus led by Moses:

“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD, “that it shall no more be said, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.’ For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers” (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

Traditional explanations say that the festivals came in with the old covenant and went out with the old covenant, that they were purely Jewish and only had application to the Jewish people. But there is good reason to question that. The feasts of the Lord are transcendent, and from the very beginning were pointed, not so much at Israel’s history, but at the very work and ministry of Jesus Christ in history. For after all, it was Christ who was with Israel from the very first day.<sup>ix</sup> For a time, the festivals took on an Israelite historical meaning, but it seems apparent that they were pointing toward something transcendent all along.

### **A Christian Passover?**

The best place to pick up the thread is with the first of the holydays in the year, the Passover. There is a passage in one of Paul’s letters that long ago should have caused us to rethink this question. It was written to a Gentile church, and commentators tell us it was written during the Passover season. Paul is dealing with a serious problem in the church and in the process, he makes a connection to the Passover.

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed *Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.* Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Conybeare and Howsen (1962), recognized authorities on Paul and his letters, acknowledge that this Christian church was observing Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. They had this to say about Paul's letter:

In spite of the opinion of some eminent modern commentators, which is countenanced by Chrysostom [*A.D.* 407], we must adhere to the interpretation which considers these words as written at the Paschal season, and suggested by it. The words leaven, lump, Paschal Lamb, and feast all agree most naturally with this view. It has been objected, that St. Paul would not address the Corinthians as engaged in a feast which he, at Ephesus, was celebrating; because it would be over before his letter could reach them. Any one who has ever written a birthday letter to a friend in India, will see the weakness of this objection. It has also been urged that he could not address a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles as engaged in the celebration at a Jewish feast. Those who urge this objection must have forgotten that St. Paul addresses the Galatians (undoubtedly a mixed church) as if they had all been formerly idolaters (Gal. iv.8), and addresses the Romans sometimes as if they were all Jews (Rom. vii.1), sometimes as if they were Gentiles (Rom. xi.18). If we take 'as ye are leavened' in a metaphorical sense, it is scarcely consistent with the previous 'cast out the old leaven;' for the passage would then amount to saying, 'Be free from leaven (metaphorically) as you are free from leaven (metaphorically);' whereas on the other view, St. Paul says, 'Be free from leaven (metaphorically) as you are free from leaven (literally).' There seems to be no difficulty in supposing that the Gentile Christians joined with the Jewish Christians in celebrating the Paschal feast after the Jewish manner, at least to the extent of abstaining from leaven in the love-feasts. And we see that St. Paul still observed the 'days of

unleavened bread' at this period of his life, from Acts xx:6. Also, from what follows, we perceive how naturally this greatest of Jewish feasts changed into the greatest of Christians festivals. <sup>x</sup>

Throughout most of history, the Passover has been a Jewish festival dealing with a great event in Israel's history that took place on this day. But here is a letter to a Gentile church, identifying the Passover with the sacrifice of Christ and urging them to keep the feast properly. I will have more to say about the Corinthian crisis later, but Paul presents us with a classic example of the transcendent nature of God's appointments with history.

I think readers generally assume that the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month in the Jewish Calendar became important because that's when Israel was delivered from Egypt. But what if Israel was delivered on this day because it was *already* one of the "appointed times" of God, one of the benchmarks of history, when he will act? When it comes to the sacrifice of Christ, that day did not become a Christian festival because Christ was crucified on that day. Christ died on that day because he was the Passover Lamb, and the Passover, one of God's appointments with history, had come.

There is a thread that runs all the way through the Bible, and the thread is unbroken, not cut into bits and pieces. God has had a plan and has been working the plan *from the start*. His appointments with history mark places where we can pick up the thread, and those appointments are marked by festivals.

I know that some of these things may seem complicated and difficult. But maybe if we pick up the thread and follow it along, things will become clearer. The "Festivals of Jehovah" mark places where we can most easily find the thread.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians cited above, identified Jesus with the Passover lamb. But when we follow the thread back, we find it doesn't end where we thought it might, with what we thought was the original Passover. It continues back further into the past. One pointer is a scripture familiar to every student of the New Testament – I think it may have been the first verse I ever memorized:

## THE THREAD

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16 KJV).

The thread from Paul's "Christ our Passover" runs right through this passage and continues back, not merely to the Passover of the Exodus, but to an event long before Moses. It continues to Father Abraham and to the day when God decided to put him to the ultimate test. He called Abraham and gave him this command:

Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you (Genesis 22:2).

God only knows, and I choose my words carefully, what a crushing blow this was to Abraham. Abraham was a very old man who had no children. In the process of time, Sarah came to Abraham and offered her handmaid as a surrogate mother so they could have a child. They got the child, but that was their solution, not God's. That child and his mother became nothing but trouble – then and now.

Then God promised him a son through Sarah, his wife, and a year after that promise, Isaac was born. It is hard to imagine what it would be like to go so long without children, and then to finally have a son. Abraham would have loved this boy like his own life. This command from God to sacrifice him had to be the most terrible moment of his life.<sup>xi</sup>

Abraham rose up early in the morning on the fateful day and made his preparation. He saddled his animal, split the wood, took two of his servants and Isaac his son, and started toward the place. A careless reader might assume that Abraham had so much faith that he just did what God said without a second thought. He would be wrong. Abraham had plenty of second thoughts, and every one of them was fraught with pain. It took a movie, *The Bible*, and George C. Scott's portrayal of Abraham, to make this more real to me. This was hard for Abraham. It was sheer agony, but Abraham followed through.

It was a three day journey to the mountain, and they were surely the hardest three days of Abraham's life. He instructed his

servants to wait while he and Isaac went forward to worship. He had Isaac carry the wood for the fire, and brought along a fire starter and knife. As they walked, Isaac asked, “My father, we have the fire and the knife and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

This must have cut Abraham to the heart, but he replied, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” And they walked on. That short phrase, “God will provide himself a lamb,” echoes down through history to this day. Christians write songs that apply that very phrase to Jesus Christ, whom Paul identifies as “our Passover.”

So, they came to the place and Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. Then came the moment of truth. He bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on the wood. He took the knife in hand to slay his son. This had to be one of the greatest movie scenes of all time, especially if you knew what it meant. Abraham reaches out to take the knife in his hand, with that beautiful boy bound and laid out on the wood, and prepares to actually do the deed. It was only at this last moment that an angel spoke to him and stopped him.

And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son (Genesis 22:12-13).

Why would God do a thing like this? Why would he put Abraham through it? I think I finally begin to understand. We can identify with Abraham easier than we can with God. Abraham was a man. Theologians haven’t helped, presenting us with an impassible God who cannot be touched.<sup>xii</sup> What we learn in Abraham is what Jesus really meant when he said to Nicodemus, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” This is not a gift lightly given, nor is it a gift without cost.

God allowed Abraham to play the role of the Father who

## THE THREAD

makes the greatest sacrifice, his son, his only son. It was a great honor to Abraham, though he may not have seen it that way. His agony was that of a man whose faith was so strong that he would do it, but whose pain was so great that he would have taken his own life rather than that of his son.

This was much more than a test of Abraham's faith. This is one segment of the thread that runs all through history, one significant moment of the plan of God laid out before the foundation of the world. And down through history, the Israelites offered animals again and again as substitutes for their own lives.

Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son; blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice" (Genesis 22:15-18).

In the words, "Your son, your only son," we hear the echo of John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his *only* begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And that "only begotten Son" was our Passover.

I can only believe that this day, the date of Abraham's near sacrifice of his son, was one of God's appointments with history. Surely, it is a day to remember in the history of every man of faith. This may have been the day, generations later, when the Israelites killed a lamb, struck its blood on the doorposts of their houses, and ate the Passover lamb, while the firstborn in all of Egypt were dying. It may have been the very day when Israel was delivered from the bondage of Egypt, just as Christians are delivered from the bondage of sin by the blood of *our* Passover Lamb.

And this may have been the very day, generations later, when

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was pierced in the side and bled and died, while in the Temple, the Passover lambs were being slain. The thread we are following is very long and sometimes faint, but it is there.

In the next chapter, the thread will lead us to Egypt and the fateful days before the first Passover.

---

i. Genesis 22:2.

ii. “The two biggest holidays in the church year are Easter and Christmas – the bookends of Christianity. Both are preceded by a special time that prepares us to worship Christ in a deeper way. Lent moves us toward identifying with Jesus’ sacrifice. Advent gets us ready for a birthday celebration.” (*Group* magazine, November-December 2005, page 50.)

iii. This verse is missing in some ancient manuscripts, but at the very least, it represents an ancient tradition of the first Christians. It may have been a marginal note that found its way into the text, but if so, it was very early and is highly suggestive that this was indeed Paul’s reason for haste.

iv. Jehovah: Most versions of the Bible use the small caps LORD to represent the Hebrew name of God, *YHWH*. There are numerous variations of pronunciation due to the fact that there are no vowels in Hebrew, and the Jewish people strenuously avoid speaking the divine name. One variant is “Jehovah,” which uses the vowel points of *Adonai*, Lord, and was probably intended to be pronounced, *Yehovah*. The Y becomes J in Germanic languages, as in German and English. Most scholarly sources use *Yahweh*, but I prefer the more familiar, “Jehovah.” There are some passages in the Bible that become startlingly clearer when the reader recognizes the name that is behind the word, “LORD.”

v. “The LORD said, ‘I will surely return to you *in the spring*, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.’ And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him” (Genesis 18:10 RSV).

vi. Genesis 19:3.

vii. On the other hand, no sacrifice to God was to be offered with leaven, which was considered a kind of corruption, as sourdough bread (Exodus 34:25). It may be that one does not serve sourdough bread to divine beings. Leaven would come to be seen as a symbol of sin – at least during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

viii. “Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Genesis 26:5). This does not merely suggest that Abraham was a moral man, but that he lived according to a known system of law.

ix. “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: *and that Rock was Christ*” (1 Corinthians 10:1-4).

x. “The Life and Epistles of Paul” by Conybeare and Howsen, 1962, Page 389.

xi. I once heard Angel Martinez, an influential Baptist evangelist preach that this event took place on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, when the Passover lamb was later chosen (Exodus 12:3). I think his vision of this was based on the three day journey to the place of sacrifice. He also made a connection to the day of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, and the decision of the leadership to kill him. I mention this only to point out that some *Christian* preachers see the thread of Jesus’ sacrifice leading back to the Passover and beyond.

xii. Impassible: “incapable of suffering or of experiencing pain.” I can understand why theologians described God as “impassible,” but I think they are missing something very important. Jesus said it to Nicodemus, cited above: “God so loved the world.” This does not describe an emotionless God, one who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities. He who has seen Jesus has seen the Father, and Jesus was not “impassible.” He was moved with compassion, and he suffered pain for us. In Abraham, we are asked to see the meaning of “God so loved the world.”

## 2

# *Judging Egypt*

*But Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you,  
That I may lay my hand upon Egypt,  
and bring forth mine armies,  
and my people the children of Israel,  
out of the land of Egypt by great judgments (Exodus 7:4).*

Not long ago, a woman asked me a hard question about the Exodus. “Why did God have to kill all the firstborn children in Egypt?” she asked. “After all, he is God. He is sovereign. He can do anything he wants. Wasn’t there a better way of getting Israel out of Egypt than killing innocent children?”<sup>1</sup>

It’s a fair question. God is all powerful, merciful, kind and gracious. He is forgiving and gentle. So why the death of innocents?

God is all of those things, but none of that would matter if God were not *just*. Justice is a quality of the divine nature that we are tempted to avoid, never considering that mercy is meaningless without justice. If justice does not demand punishment, then there is no need for God’s mercy. Oddly, it was from a sense of justice that the woman asked this question. Was it *just* for God to kill all the firstborn of Egypt? That is the question we have before us, and it lies right along the thread we are following.

The story is told in the book of Exodus. All of the children of Jacob, whose name would be changed to Israel, had migrated to the

## THE THREAD

land of Egypt in a time of famine, but then they made a fatal mistake. When the famine was over, they stayed in Egypt instead of returning home. In the early years, the government of Egypt was dominated by one of their own, a man named Joseph. But after his death, and the death of the Pharaoh who admired Joseph, things began to change for the worse.

For a few generations, the Israelites prospered and multiplied. They were a strong and influential people, and “the land was filled with them” (Exodus 1:7). They were bearing children at a much higher rate than the Egyptians. At length, this became a concern to the Egyptians. And they began to take measures to protect themselves and to advance their own interests at the same time. The latest King of Egypt said to his people:

Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land (Exodus 1:9-10).

Not only were the Israelites outnumbering the Egyptians, they were physically stronger. After all, they were doing all the work. The Egyptians had two concerns. One was a rebellion and the other was the loss of a very effective work force. So they set out to make slaves of the Israelites as they built some of the great treasure cities of Egypt on the backs of Israelite slaves. In the years to come, Egypt owed their entire economy to the success of a slave labor program. This would come back to haunt them later.

The Egyptians did everything in their power to suppress the Israelites, “But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread because of the children of Israel” (Exodus 1:12). The dominant feeling was fear, and one wonders if fear still lies at the roots of anti-Semitism.

So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage; in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they

made them serve as with rigor (vv. 13,14).

Since that wasn't working, Pharaoh resorted to more drastic measures. He called in the Hebrew midwives and gave them specific instructions: "When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; *if it be a son, then ye shall kill him*: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live" (v. 16).

Inconvenient children have always been victims in human society. The state has an obligation to protect the weakest and most helpless of its citizens. Here, the state was the instrument of their destruction. It was the closest thing to selective abortion that the technology of the age allowed. The midwives were to crush the skull of any male child as he was being born.

It didn't work. The midwives refused to do it and lied to the king about it. "The Hebrew women," they said, "are not like Egyptian women, and they give birth before we get there." But that only worked briefly.

So Pharaoh commanded *all his people*, saying, "Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive" (Exodus 1:22).

Sometimes the Bible does not belabor the obvious, so I will. Note carefully, that it was not just the government that was involved in infanticide. It was *all the people* who were charged with taking little Hebrew boys by the ankles and throwing them into the river to drown and it was all the people who were involved in this infanticide.

It is amazing how readily people will come to accept and then participate in such vile acts. We had a horrible example of it in our own time with the participation of the German people in the persecution of the Jews. And the German people, like the Egyptians, ultimately suffered terribly for it. Divine justice finally descended on them in the form of the armies of America, Britain and Russia.

God only knows how many Israelite babies were thrown to the crocodiles of the Nile by that generation of Egyptians. Now here is the question which you must answer if you are going to understand what is yet to come. What is a just God to do about this record of callous infanticide? Can he ignore it? Let it slide? And if he is to

## THE THREAD

punish the nation for it, what punishment is just? Remember, this was not merely the sin of a few. The whole nation was involved in it.

There is an incredible irony in the next phase of this story. There was a young couple, both of the tribe of Levi, who had a son in this terrible time. Not willing to see her son thrown into the river, she hid him as long as she could. But when it became clear that would not work indefinitely, she made a little boat, placed the child in it, and laid it among the tall plants along the river. In a sense, she followed Pharaoh's command. She put him in the river.

The daughter of this good woman, sister of the child, hid herself and watched from a distance to see what would happen to her little brother.

Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. And when she had opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children" (Exodus 2:5-6).

This woman knew what she was doing. And in making the decision to save this child's life, she saved the man who would be the undoing of her own people. She named the little boy "Moses" and brought him up in Pharaoh's household as a prince in Egypt.

God's justice is sometimes a long time coming, and in this case it had to wait for Moses to grow up. The story of Moses from this day until his exile from Egypt to his return to Egypt is a great story in itself, but we will pass over it for the moment to stay close to our thread.

When Moses returned to Egypt with his staff in his hand and God's instructions ringing in his ears, he marched into Pharaoh's presence with a message. "Thus saith the Jehovah, God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness" (Exodus 5:1). Implicit in this is the idea that there was a known festival approaching, which the Israelites were expected to observe.

Pharaoh replied, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah, neither will I let Israel go"

(Exodus 5:2). There is no surprise here.

But Moses and Aaron persisted, and in the process tell us something very important about this festival: “The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, *or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword*” (v.3 RSV).

Note well, this is not a voluntary holiday. It has divine sanctions connected with nonobservance. Yes, it was a deliberate provocation on God's part, but there is no reason to assume this festival was new. There is reason to believe that this is a festival that *became* the Passover after the terrible events to follow.

Pharaoh, of course, refused and made the burden on the Israelites that much worse. At length, God speaks to Moses and brings this issue into sharp focus.

So the LORD said to Moses: “See, I have made you as God to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you. And Aaron your brother shall speak to Pharaoh to send the children of Israel out of his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh will not heed you, so that I may lay My hand on Egypt and bring My armies and My people, the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt *by great judgments*” (Exodus 7:1-4).

One of the most common questions I am asked about this story is, “Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart?” The answer is clear. God is just. He hardened Pharaoh's heart to make him, and all the people of Egypt, pay for what they had done. They had committed wholesale murder most foul. They had killed the weakest of the Israelites in a callous and hateful manner. They had held a people captive generation after generation. They had grown wealthy by the use of slave labor. Justice *demand*ed that a price be paid. Don't overlook the last three words of the above passage: “by great judgments,” because that is what this is all about.

## THE THREAD

In the plagues that followed, Egypt's entire slave-built economy would be left in shambles and the firstborn of every family in Egypt dead. It is chilling when you consider the implications of this. In our own country, we held men slaves through several generations and built our wealth on the backs of slave labor. God only knows how many millions of captive blacks were killed outright in the slave trade. Only God knows how many died on the voyage across the Atlantic and were thrown over the side into the sea.

And it is a tragic irony that, as a direct result of this shameful crime, we fought one of the bloodiest and most insane wars in our history – the American War between the States. Even then, I don't know that we killed as many of our brothers as we did slaves in the trade. This country paid a terrible price for slavery in shed blood and economic loss. And it was *just*. It may have even been the judgment of God. We paid. God knows how we paid.

How can I be so sure that the plagues on Egypt were divine justice? This is not at all hard to see. What was the very first plague that fell on Egypt? God turned the river into blood and gave the Egyptians blood to drink. Why the river? Why blood? Because this is the place where the blood of the innocents was shed. This is where countless hundreds of little baby boys were thrown to the crocodiles. They wanted blood? God gave them blood to drink. This was the most symbolic thing Moses could have done as a first act, to point to the crimes of Egypt – in particular to the bloody murder of countless tiny Israelite boys.

And let me tell you what makes my blood run cold. In our country today, there is a different kind of infanticide going on. It is called "intact dilation and extraction." You may know it as partial birth abortion. There isn't a lot of difference between this procedure and what Pharaoh wanted the midwives to do. As soon as the baby was far enough out to determine that it was a boy, the midwives were supposed to whack its little head on the leg of the birthing stool and kill it. In the modern procedure, a doctor delivers all of the little fellow except the head and then he inserts scissors into the skull and sucks out the brains.

Senator Patrick Moynihan called it *infanticide*. And there is not a lot of difference between this procedure and other third-term abortions. Sometimes the babies survive the abortion and are killed

afterward. And most people in this country seem content to have it so. I can't help wondering how long God is going to wait before he avenges the blood of the innocents on us as he did on the Egyptians.

Anyone who takes justice into his *own* hands on this issue is worse than a fool. Moses tried that early in life and it didn't work. God's justice will transcend anything you and I can imagine. Just be sure you are on the right side of the river when it all comes down.

Nine plagues later, with the Egyptian economy in a shambles, all the people awaited the final judgment of God. They couldn't find a way to repent and avoid it because Pharaoh wouldn't let them. God had hardened Pharaoh's heart to the end that *justice* might be done.

I have told you this story because it is here that we can again pick up our thread. There is a direct line from Abraham to Paul, and it runs right through Egypt. By the time we reach the near end of the thread, we will see the connection as clear as day. But we are not finished yet with Pharaoh.

Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind." But Moses said, "You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God. Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshipping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD" (Exodus 10:24-26 NIV).

This may have been true, but it was also a deliberate provocation on Moses' part. Pharaoh tried to negotiate some standoff that would allow him to save face and keep his slaves. God was not having any of it.

But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go. Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die." "Just as you say," Moses replied, "I will never

## THE THREAD

appear before you again” (vv. 27-29).

Pharaoh had come a long way in the concessions he was willing to make, but it would never be enough. Because God intended to punish Egypt for what they had done. He refused to grant repentance to the Egyptians.<sup>ii</sup>

The Lord spoke to Moses and told him that there was one more plague coming upon Pharaoh and the land of Egypt. This one will be final, he said. Not only will he let you go, he will *force* you all to leave. When that happens, you will ask the Egyptians for their jewels, their gold, their silver, and they will give them gladly. There is another irony in this, because the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptian *people*. “Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s servants, *and in the sight of the people*” (Exodus 11:3).

This plague could not come without warning, so Moses told Pharaoh what God was about to do.

Then Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals” (vv. 4-5).

What a cold, hard sentence God passed upon these people. From top to bottom, from high to low, no social strata were excluded. Not even the animals escaped. But remember that *all* of the people of Egypt were involved in the destruction, not merely of the firstborn of the Israelite children, but every single male child. God’s justice did not extend to taking all the males of that generation as the Egyptians had done. He only took the firstborn.

Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that

you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel (Exodus 11:6-7).

There is a bright line between us now, said Moses, and you will see it. “And all of these your servants,” said Moses, sweeping his hand around the assembly, “shall come to me and bow down to me and say ‘Get out.’ And Moses went out from Pharaoh’s presence in great anger” (Exodus 11:8). That is easy to understand after all the vile acts of the Egyptians and then the final confrontation.

So, we have our answer to the original question. The firstborn of Egypt died and the economy of the nation was destroyed because of their horrible sins against the Israelites. And the people of Egypt knew this as well as anyone. Justice was served.

Out of it came the ancient Feast of Passover. How it became a great Christian holyday is a story not many have heard. But first, we must follow the thread to the first Passover.

---

i. The question may overlook the fact that it was not merely the children of the Egyptians who were taken, but the firstborn, whatever age he might have been. And to say they were all innocent begs the question.

ii. Compare 2 Timothy 2:25 and Romans 2:4. For man to repent, God must grant it. And despite many efforts to end slavery, it still exists today. Some 27 million people worldwide are enslaved or work as forced laborers. That’s more people than at any point in the history of the world. Social Studies Understanding Slavery, Discovery Education, [discoveryschool.com](http://discoveryschool.com).

### 3

## *The Passover, Old and New*

*When I see the blood, I will pass over you (Exodus 12:13).*

How is it possible that a Christian church, about 25 years after the ascension of Christ, was observing the oldest known Jewish holyday? That they were is easily demonstrated. And this wasn't a Jewish church. It was mostly Gentile.

We have a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about 55 A.D. Scholars generally agree that the letter was written about Passover season (see chapter 1). Paul was addressing a problem that was disgracing the church, and almost in passing, as though he took it for granted, he remarked on the observance of the Passover.

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:6-8).

There is no way to misunderstand this. The Corinthian church, mostly Gentile, was observing the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. How is the sacrifice of Christ connected to the Old Testament Passover, why was this church observing it, and why was Paul advocating it?

There is a clue to this in a statement made by John the Baptist. One day as he was baptizing people along the Jordan River, he looked up and saw Jesus walking toward him. And he said, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

As a Christian, you might hear that statement and say, “So?” But if you had been a Jew standing near John at the time, this would likely have been the first time you had heard anything like this. What do you mean, “Lamb of God”? It was not that they weren’t familiar with the idea of a lamb as a sin offering. The law made provision for that.<sup>1</sup> So the idea of a lamb taking away one man’s sins was not strange to John’s companions.

But the idea of a *man* as a sacrificial lamb was utterly foreign. And just as foreign was the idea of taking away the sins of *the whole world*. Judaism was not a world evangelizing faith. It was a *Jewish* faith. And contrary to anything in the Law and the Prophets, Judaism had become an exclusive faith. For Jewish Christians, that was about to change, and the key to that change was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin, not of a man, but of the world.

That theme is also found in one of the favorite scriptures of the Christian faith: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

But gave him how? He gave him as “the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” He gave him as “Christ our Passover.” But we still haven’t established the *Passover* connection. To do that, we have to take a step back into what appears to be the original Passover observance. The story is told in detail in Exodus 12.

On the tenth day of the first month, every household was to select a male lamb or kid. They were then to keep it up until the 14th day and kill it in the evening. They would then take a little blood of the lamb and strike it on the lintels and doorposts of their houses. They would eat the lamb on that night, roasted, with *unleavened*

## THE THREAD

*bread* and bitter herbs. They were to leave none of it to the morning. And then there is this curious bit: “And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’S Passover.”

These people were not even going to bed that night. And by the time they got the lamb killed, dressed and roasted, they were eating it very late. The events to follow were not going to give them much time for leisure.

For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13).

And from this comes the name of this great festival, the *Passover*. As I noted earlier, this day may well have been one of the appointed times of Yahweh even before this time, but the events of this occasion stamped themselves indelibly on the feast. The day was declared to be a memorial, to be observed by a feast, forever. The Passover is not going to go away. It will take on new form and meaning with Jesus Christ, but it will never stop being celebrated.

Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day there shall be a holy convocation, and on the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done on them; but that which everyone must eat; that only may be prepared by you (Exodus 12:15-16).

The seven days of unleavened bread run from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 21<sup>st</sup> of the first month of the Hebrew calendar. The first and the

last days are actually Sabbath days, no matter what day of the week they fall on.

For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread (Exodus 12:19-20).

Hence, Paul's statement to the Corinthians:

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

There was no thought of doing away with the festival. Paul was rather explaining the meaning of the season to Gentiles who otherwise might not know. But the Passover is still connected to the original *in name and in practice*.

Moses gave his instructions to all the elders: "And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood that is in the basin; and none of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning" (Exodus 12:22).

Why not? "For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you."

The implications of this are far reaching. It is the blood of the Lamb *applied* that enables God to pass over us and spare us the destruction around us. Some Christians have long understood the connection between the blood of the Passover Lamb and the blood of

## THE THREAD

Jesus. There is an old hymn I remember singing in church when I was a boy:

*Christ our redeemer died on the cross  
Died for the sinner, paid all his due,  
All who receive him need never fear  
Yes, He will pass, will pass over you.  
When I see the blood, when I see the blood,  
when I see the blood,  
I will pass, I will pass over you.*

This hymn represents an understanding of the Bible by an earlier generation of Christians that seems to have faded with time. There was a time when the great hymn writers had more of a sense of connection between old and new. They realized that there is a strong tie between the death of Jesus and the Passover of the Jews, and it often found expression in the hymns of the church. But just as that connection presented problems for the early church, it presents problems today as well. Some Christian folk don't like the idea of anything Jewish connected with their Christianity. Yet here is this old hymn that ties Christ firmly to the Passover.

It seems a shame to me that some churches have lost touch with this great festival. They see Christ in it when they bother to look. But somewhere in their history, they stopped observing it annually *on the anniversary*. In observing communion, or the Lord's Supper every Sunday, or monthly or quarterly, they forgot that it was originally an *annual* observance. And subsequently, they seemed to forget altogether that it was the Passover.

Moses told the elders of Israel:

And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, "What do you mean by this service?" that you shall say, "It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over

the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.” So the people bowed their heads and worshiped (Exodus 12:24-27).

The lesson was passed on from generation to generation as the curiosity of children was answered year by year by the retelling of the story.

At midnight on that fateful night, the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of the captive in prison to the firstborn of Pharaoh himself and even of all cattle. There was not a house where there was not one dead.

Immediately Pharaoh “called for Moses and Aaron *by night*,<sup>ii</sup> and said, “Rise up, and get you forth from among my people.” Get out, he said, lest we all be dead men. This does not suggest that the people could have gone to bed and waited until daylight to leave. In every way, they had to be ready for immediate departure.

So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds; a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves (vv. 34-39).

## THE THREAD

I think a lot of people look no further than this in considering why the feast is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We will look into this later, but first, there is this to consider.

Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years; *on that very same day*; it came to pass that all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:40-41).

This is a remarkable statement, for it gives singular significance to a *given day* 430 years earlier. That day could not have been the day they came into Egypt, because the chronology does not work. The Septuagint version of Exodus says that “the sojourning of the Children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt *and in Canaan*, was four hundred and thirty years.” It isn’t clear exactly what that day was 430 years prior, but it lends credence to the idea that the Festivals of Jehovah are much older than the days of Moses. We can’t be certain, but if once again we follow the thread back in time, we come to a day that may well serve as a precursor of the Passover.

The word of the Lord came to Abram (later called Abraham) in a vision saying “Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” But Abraham had something of a complaint. How, he wondered, could God fulfill his promises seeing that he was old and childless? God went on to promise him an heir, but he did something more. He promised him descendants beyond number along with the entire land over which he traveled. “Lord GOD,” Abraham asked, “whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (Genesis 15:8).

What follows falls strangely on modern ears, but it is a crucial point in our story. It is a prophecy of the sojourn of Israel in Egypt, and also of the judgment of Egypt. It is also one more thing. It is the *moment of the covenant* with Abraham.

So the LORD said to him, “Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.” Abram brought all these to him, cut

them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Genesis 15:9-16 NIV).

Here is the prophecy of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt, of the time lapse of 400 years, of Israel becoming slaves, the eventual judging of Egypt, and the return to their home land.

When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates . . .” (vv. 17-18).

To understand what is happening here, we need to understand the customs surrounding ancient covenants. Everyone is familiar with the idea of blood brotherhood, even among American Indians. In ancient times, they went a little further than cutting themselves and mingling their blood with another. They sometimes actually drank the blood of their new brother, thus creating a new blood kinship. In later years, they shared the blood of a sacrificial animal or shared the meat from a sacrifice.<sup>iii</sup> What is described in Genesis 15 is the beginning point of the covenant between God and Abraham.

The events of the Exodus are the fulfillment of this promise, so I suspect this *is the very day*, 430 years before the Exodus, when

## THE THREAD

the promises were made and the covenant entered.

This day of Abraham's covenant was, in an important way, a precursor of the Passover. And because of the symbolism involved, I suspect it was on an anniversary of this date that Abraham was sent to offer his only son as a sacrifice. It was a day when Abraham had an annual appointment with God.

And it came to pass, on that very same day, that the LORD brought the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt according to their armies (Exodus 12:51).

The very same day as what? Well, it would make sense if it was the very same day of the year that God told Abraham he would do this very thing. *“And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”* (Genesis 15:14 KJV)

Everything of importance seems to take place along this thread. Even the Passover of Christ.

---

i. See Leviticus 4:32-35.

ii. After midnight, when the destroyer had done his work, it was safe to go out. The Israelites were told not to go out of their houses until morning but, in a manner of speaking, it is morning after midnight. They did not go to bed that night.

iii. See the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, article “Covenant in the Old Testament,” for a complete explanation of how covenant customs developed. Two types of covenants are discussed, covenants between men and between God and man.