
The Ten Commandments

Introduction Part 3

by: Ronald L. Dart

The story of the Exodus is a tremendous story, a wonderful story of liberty and freedom, an end to slavery for an entire people. It's a story of triumph and it's also a story of a great tragedy. Yes, it involves the birth of a great nation, but it also involves the destruction of a great nation and of one of the worlds most powerful rulers. And because the Bible is such a big story, people often only see part of it at a time and they fail to realize the implications of what they read. Some people see only the joy and the freedom for the Israelites. Other readers see the destruction of the Egyptian economy and society and the killing of the firstborn children of all Egyptian families.

The Brutal Subjugation of the Israelites by the Egyptians

The story of the exodus is really one of the greatest crises in all of history and not necessarily the best understood. I knew a fellow once who just couldn't accept the Passover story. "How can we celebrate the death of Egypt's firstborn children?" He wanted to know.

But the part of the story that is not so often told, is the brutal subjugation of the Israelites by the Egyptians. ALL of the Egyptians were involved in the killing of a whole generation of Israelite babies. ALL of the Egyptians were responsible. Everything that happened to the Egyptians was just. If you have trouble imagining how God could do such a thing, maybe you can think of it, as a whole lot of karma coming down, but if you think of God as just, how could God not take some form of justice on the Egyptians for their cruelty? What would it have said if the God of the Hebrews had merely come down there and slipped the Israelites out of Egypt and done nothing whatsoever to repay the Egyptians for hundreds of years of slavery and for the death of a whole generation of little Israelite boys.

The story is told in chapter 12 of the book of Exodus, "The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying {2} "This month shall be to you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you.""

We know now that this was spring.

Verse 3, "Speak to all the congregation of Israel saying, "In the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house. {4} And if the household is too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the lives or souls in the house, every man according to his eating you shall make your count for the lamb."

That is simple. You go out and count everybody, decide how many people there are, and you kill a lamb to cover all these people for this particular occasion. This happened in the 10th day of the first month. Now something crucial begins to develop here. Something that Christians will look back on much, much later.

New Testament Parallel

John the Baptist was preaching near the Jordan River with considerable success, so much that the Jewish establishment wanted to know what was going on out there?

In John the first chapter and verse 19 we read this, "This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" {20} He confessed, and denied not, but confessed, "I am not the Christ.""

Now this is important, because Messianic expectations were running hot and heavy at this time and what they were worried about was, that John the Baptist down there by the Jordan River baptizing lots and lots of people, might become a false Messiah, a messianic figure.

And John said, "No way, not me!" {21} "They said, "Who are you then? Are you Elijah?" and he said, "No!" "Are you that prophet? John said, "No!"

Once again, strong expectations of a Messiah are indicated. Elijah was to immediately precede the Messiah, 'that prophet' was shorthand for a second Moses.

John the Baptist was such a significant figure that they thought he might be making the claim to be Elijah or the second Moses.

Verse 22, "Then they said, "Who are you? So, we can give an answer to the people who sent us down here. What do you have to say for yourself?" {23} John said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, like the prophet Isaiah said.""

John makes a claim right here, that he is the forerunner of the Messiah. {24} "Those that were sent to him were Pharisees, {25} And they said, "Well, if you're not Christ and you're not Elijah and you are not 'that prophet', why are you baptizing then?" {26} John answered and said, "Well, I baptize with water, but there stands one among you who you don't know.""

Jesus was already among them, and they didn't know who He was. {27} "He it is, who is coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe latches I am not worthy to unloose."

John is pointing very high to the one who was to follow him.

"These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. {29} Now the very next day after this happened, John looked up and saw Jesus walking his way, and he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.""

I'm impressed every time I read this, because it implies something, someone would be assumed that John, or anyone else at that time, would not have known, that the Messiah would die a sacrificial death. That's what is meant, when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, that takes away the sin of the world." There can be no doubt that John saw himself as the forerunner of the Messiah, and there can be no doubt, that the Lamb metaphor, is attached to the Messiah in John's mind, not merely as a sacrificial lamb, but that Lamb that takes away the sin of the world.

John went on to say to those standing there, {30} "This is he of whom I said, "After me comes a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me.""

Jesus, you know, was born after John the Baptist, but John the Baptist clearly understood that the messianic figure to come had pre-existed him.

John said, {31} "I didn't know him, but I did know this, that he would be made manifest to Israel, and that's why I'm here, baptizing with water. {32} And John bore record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and it abode upon him."

John actually saw this with his own eyes. {33} "I didn't know him, but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said to me, "Unto whom you shall see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." Then John said something very important, {34} "I saw, and I bore record that this is the Son of God." {35} Again the next day, John stood and was with two of his disciples, and he saw Jesus walking by the river. He said "Look, the Lamb of God," and the two disciples heard him speak and they turned and followed Jesus."

This is interesting because what it tells us is that the reference to the 'Lamb of God' was not lost on John's disciples. They understood the significance. Now I can see how anyone now in the 21st. century, reading the New Testament would understand the significance. In fact, we roll over this and think nothing of it, but how did John's disciples know, that the Messiah to come, would be called the 'Lamb of God', for it seems apparent that they understood this and to understand that He was the 'Lamb' means that they understood He was to die.

It was a long time when theologians who read the New Testament and read many of these references thought that the idea of a suffering and dying Messiah was completely unknown among the Jews, then they found the Dead Sea Scrolls and they found that they were wrong. They found many references in the Dead Sea Scrolls to the idea that the Messiah would come, and the Messiah would die.

Now bear in mind, that in all of Israelite liturgy, the Lamb did nothing, except die. Think about that!

Passover Lamb Selected on the Tenth Day of the First Month

Now the Passover lamb in Egypt was selected on the tenth day of the first month of their calendar. It was in the spring and there is something important that happened on the tenth day of the month in which Jesus died and you kind of expect that, if Jesus is to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. You may even find in your Bible marginal references that goes forward to John chapter 12, it says, "Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead and whom Jesus had raised from the dead."

Now the Passover was killed late on the 14th day of the month and eaten that night. Counting is always tenuous, counting days in the Bible, but in John's usage, the Passover refers to the feast and the first day of the feast was the 15th day of the month. Six days before that was the ninth.

Verse 2, "They made Jesus a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. {3} Then Mary took a pound of ointment (perfume) of spikenard, very costly, expensive and she anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. And the whole house was filled with the odor of the ointment. {4} Then said one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who was going to betray him. {5} "Why wasn't this ointment sold for 300 pence and given to the poor." {6} He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because Judas was a thief, and he carried the bag and he was concerned about how much money was in it. {7} Then Jesus said. "Let her alone: against the day of my burying has she kept this. {8} For you have the poor with you all the time but you will not always have me." {9} Many of the people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there, and they didn't come for Jesus' sake only, they wanted to see Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead." He had become a tourist curiosity, {10} "But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus to death. {11} Because of Lazarus, all kinds of people were beginning to believe on Jesus."

This anointing of Jesus' feet, by Mary, took place after sundown the ninth day of the first month, which actually was then the 10th day of the month (Days were counted from sunset to sunset).

Verse 12, "On the next day," (The 10th day) "many people who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, (on the 10th day,) {13} Took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him and cried, "Hosanna, Blessed is the King of Israel that comes in the name of the Lord." {14} And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon, as it is written, {15} "Don't be afraid daughter of Zion, your King comes sitting upon an ass's colt."

A donkey, not a horse. I don't know if you ever noticed that, it says, "Don't be afraid" and the illusion is, that a King would normally come in riding on a horse. A horse is an instrument of war. It was the tank of ancient warfare. Jesus did not come into town riding high and mighty on a horse, but on a lowly animal, a donkey.

So, on the tenth day of the month, the Israelites in Egypt were to select their lamb, and on the tenth day of the month, Jesus was selected.

Passover Lamb Killed on the 14th. Day of the First Month

It says in Exodus 12 verse five, "Your Lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. It can either be a sheep or it can be a goat, {6} And you shall keep it up to the 14th day of the same month, and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening."

In the evening would come to be known as the time of the evening sacrifice, about three in the afternoon on the 14th. And Jesus will die at that hour, three in the afternoon, on the 14th. just as the Passover lamb in Egypt was killed.

When they had killed the lamb, {7} "They were to collect some of the blood in a basin and strike it on the two side posts and the upper doorpost of the house, wherein everybody was going to eat the lamb. {8} They were to eat the lamb that night, roast with fire, and with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs." This then would've been the night of the 15th. (Remember days start at sunset and go from sunset to sunset.)

"They," {9} were not to eat it raw. nor boiled in water, but roasted with fire, the head, the legs, everything together. {10} You shall let nothing of it remain till the morning. If there's any of it left over, you burn it with fire. Destroy it completely {11} And this is the way you are to eat it, with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet." (This is unusual by the way. Normally they would not have been at the table with shoes or sandals on), "and your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in haste (quickly). It is the Lord's Passover."

Now why? Well, the answer to that is pretty simple. It is because God expected them to be forced out of Egypt right away. Their departure was going to be quick. They would not go to bed this night. They were to have shoes on their feet and their staff in their hand which meant that they might have to leave at any moment. Why?

Verse 12, "I'm going to pass through the land of Egypt this night," God said, "and I will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, man and beast, and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment, I am Yehovah. {13} And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will 'pass over' you, and the plague will not be upon you to destroy you when I smite the land of Egypt."

Passover

I will 'pass over'. Hence the name of the festival, Passover. And in a Christian hymn is passed the phrase, "When I see the blood, I will pass, I will pass over you." Christians have long understood the connection in the sacrifice of Christ and the blood of Jesus Christ applied to our lives, that makes it possible for God to 'pass over' us as He punishes and chastises the world for their sins.

And here is an interesting sidelight, in its origins, this was an Israelite Festival and it had to do with a piece of Israelite history, but listen to what Paul wrote to a Gentile church some 30 years after the ascension of Christ, first Corinthians chapter 5 verse six, he wrote to these people who were a little proud of themselves and said, "Your glorying is not good, don't you know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump."

Feast of Unleavened Bread

You see the Feast of Unleavened Bread was going on about this time. 1 Corinthians 5 verse 7, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. {8} Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Here we are 30 years after the ascension of Christ and Paul is talking to a Gentile Church about observing the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

In Exodus we go on with the story, in Exodus 12 verse 18, "In the first month, on the 14th day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the 21th day of the month at evening."

It appears that even the Corinthian Church was still doing this.

Verse 19, "Seven days there should be no leaven found in all your houses, for whoever eats that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a stranger, or one born in the land. {20} You shall eat nothing leavened in all your habitations, you shall eat unleavened bread."

It is really striking to find so long after Christ's ascension, a Gentile Church observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Back to Exodus 12 verse 21, "Moses called all the elders of Israel together and passed on to them God's instructions. He said, "You go ahead and take a lamb according to your families and kill the Passover. {22} Take a bunch of hyssops, dip it in the blood, that's in the basin and strike the lintel of the two side posts with the blood in the basin and nobody is to go outside the door of his house until morning. {23} The LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel, and the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you."

Now, I can't imagine what that ceremony was like, the very first time the Israelites ever kept the Passover, but it cannot have been a time of great singing and rejoicing and happiness and celebration of drinking of toasts, not with blood on the door posts. Not with the sacrifice just made, not with the awareness of what's happening that night and that the destroyer is going through the land.

I remember in watching the 'Ten Commandments,' the movie with Charlton Heston, how that they had this green fog, that went through the land. The account in Exodus calls it the plague, but the one thing I thought they did do well, in the movie, was they showed the apprehension and the concern in the Israelite homes, not that they were afraid so much that they were going to die, but they did have a strong sense of the disaster, which was stalking the land that night.

The LORD told them what to do, gave them all their instructions. He said, {24} "You will observe this thing by an ordinance to you and your sons for ever. {25} it shall come to pass, when you come into the land which the LORD will give you, according as he has promised, you shall keep this service. {26} And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say, "Why are we doing this?" {27} You shall say, "It is the sacrifice of the LORD's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses." And all the people bowed their head and worshiped. {28} The children of Israel went away and did as they had been told."

The LORD Smote the Firstborn in the Land of Egypt

Let's continue in Exodus 12 verse 29, "It came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the captive in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of cattle. {30} Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants, and all the Egyptians, and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not somebody dead."

Not exactly the kind of thing you rejoice over. Is it? It was a tragedy, a terrible tragedy.

Verse 31, "And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Get up, and get out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel, go and do whatever you're going to do to the LORD as you have said. {32} Take your herds. Take your flocks. Be gone and bless me also." {33} And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, that they might send them out of the land quickly, because they said, we are like dead man if we don't get these people out of here. Enough already!"

This is why the Israelites had to eat the Passover, with their shoes on, girded, dressed, and their staff in their hand and ready to go, because they were not going to be allowed to wait.

Now there is a little confusion in some people's minds or the fact that they were not supposed to go out of the house until morning. Morning is a rather general term. It is morning after midnight.

And Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Get out of here." The Egyptians did not let these people wait around until daylight. They had to move.

Verse 34, "The people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading troughs were tied up in their clothes."

They didn't have time do anything with their things. They couldn't wait for the bread to rise, that's one of the reasons why, with the Days of Unleavened Bread that followed. In other words, you do not eat leavened bread during the Days of Unleavened Bread.

Continuing in Exodus 12 verse 35, "The children of Israel did what Moses told them. They took of the Egyptians jewels of silver, jewels of gold and raiment. {36} The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so they gave them whatever they asked for. The Egyptians said, "Do you want this? Take it, just get out of here." And they spoiled the Egyptians."

Was that fair? Oh Yes! These people had all their lives, worked for the Egyptians, for nothing. It was time they got paid.

{37} "The children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about 600,000 of them on foot, who were men and there were women and children that would be numbered above that. {38} And a mixed multitude went up with them, and flocks, and herds, and a whole lot of cattle."

What a migration is going on here. It seems so strange to us in a modern world and yet down through history there have been enormous migrations of people that has happened, because of flood, because of famine, because of disease, whatever it is that makes people move. Sometimes they have moved in a very large number. Sometimes migrations happen because of war.

We have had occasions in the modern world to see migrations of people in the face of war. We call them refugees and they go in huge numbers, carrying everything they own with them. The children of Israel were refugees from Egypt and there were more than 600,000 of them.

Verse 39, "They baked unleavened cakes of the dough they brought out of Egypt. They hadn't had time for it to rise. They were thrust out of Egypt and could not wait and had not prepared themselves any food, so they had to bake it as they went."

When they camped they had to throw the dough on the fire, get it cooked, get it eaten and get on down the road.

430 Years

Exodus 12 verse 40, "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years."

You will find some conflicts, by the way on numbers, and this 430 year seems to go way, way back beyond their initial entry into Egypt. It says their sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, not that they sojourned in Egypt for 430 years. But they were there were there for generation after generation, even after they became slaves.

So, Verse 41, "430 years later, even the self-same day, it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt."

The implication of this is that this special holiday was probably an annual observance that went way back before this time, because it was on exactly the selfsame day of a date, 430 years before that, that they came out.

Scholars have speculated about that date, and it may well be the day that Abraham took Isaac to the mountaintop to offer him to God (Genesis 22). The great type of Jesus Christ.

A Night to be Much Observed

Exodus 12 verse 42, "This is a night to be much observed to the LORD for bringing them out of the land of Egypt, this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in all their generations, {43} And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the Passover, no stranger can eat this, {44} Every man's servant that is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, he can eat it. {45} A foreigner and a hired servant shall not eat it. {46} In one house it shall be eaten, you shall not carry forth any of the flesh outside of the house. You are not to break a bone of it." (Not a bone of Jesus was broken.) {47} "All the congregation of Israel shall keep it, {48} And when a stranger will be sojourned with you, if he wants to keep the Passover, let all his males be circumcised and then let him come near and keep it, and he shall be as one that is born in the land. For no uncircumcised person can eat the Passover."

One Law for All

And then the LORD said something I think is very important, something that got lost somewhere down in history. Exodus 12 verse 49, "One law shall be to him that is home born and to the stranger that lives among you."

God doesn't have one set of standards for the Gentiles and another for the Jews.

"So, the children of Israel went out and did what Moses told them to do, and it came to pass that selfsame day, that the LORD delivered them out of Egypt."

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. What would you think if God hadn't exhibited justice on Egypt?
2. Do find it interesting that John the Baptist states that he didn't know Jesus, when they were actually cousins?
3. Is it interesting that majority of the Jews did not realize that the first coming of the Messiah required Him to fulfill the sacrificial lamb of the Passover?
4. Have you ever listed the events of the first Passover with the events leading up to Christ's crucifixion?
5. If you have, does it give the Passover season more meaning?

6. Isn't it sad as to what a lot of Christians miss when they keep Easter rather than the actual Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread?
7. Do you believe that when God smote the firstborns it wasn't just the firstborn sons, it was any firstborn?
8. Isn't it also sad that many people today call God's Holy Days the Feasts of the Jews?
9. These days were never meant for just the Jews, God had long ago decreed for the law to be observed by all of Israel and the stranger that lived amongst them. So, why is it so hard for some to accept that?
10. What truth do you always come to when you reread Exodus?