

From Egypt to Sinai!

The period between Passover and Pentecost is something to which few believers give serious consideration. For most, it is just a span of time from one holy occasion to another. There is, however, Biblical evidence that there may well be more to it than merely the passing of time. This period could prove to be extremely crucial to your spiritual life.

by Jim Rector

God gives instruction in His Word regarding all the annual holydays in Leviticus 23. Most of the information is straightforward enough and easy to understand. The command concerning Pentecost, however, is different. Among all the yearly Festivals, it is unique, or, perhaps better put, the method for arriving at Pentecost is most unusual.

We are told to count the days until Pentecost, and so there must be very a good reason for God having included this in the Law. And, indeed, there is.

The time span between Passover and Pentecost is very special. There is, in fact, no period quite like it in the year. It is a time that has a specific beginning and a definitive ending, bordered first and last by holy occasions.

We are told to count a series of seven 7's or a total of 49 days, followed by the fiftieth day, which is the Festival of Pentecost. The time between Passover and Pentecost is indicative of a journey, just as ancient Israel departed out of Egypt on the first day of Unleavened Bread, so we

who are spiritual celebrate our own deliverance by taking a journey.

In Israel's case, it was a forced march, as though armies were marching into battle. This very 49-day period culminated in their own personal encounter with Almighty God at Mt. Sinai. In fact, the day on which the Law was given was almost surely Pentecost.

Relating this journey to the spiritual, we see that once the Israelites departed from Egypt, they almost immediately began to experience things which they

didn't like, and didn't anticipate, and which they felt were unfair, painful, confusing, frightening, overwhelming. They went, in fact, directly into the wilderness.

Is it possible that this critical span of time between Passover and Pentecost could have specific spiritual overtones for our lives as believers today? I think that this is so. We too go through the same 49 day segment each year. We eat the Passover Feast and keep the Days of Unleavened Bread. 49 days later, we find ourselves precisely where the Israelites did—coming face to face with God on Pentecost.

This period of time was extraordinarily crucial for God's people anciently. I would suggest to you that this is still the case in our day. It was then that Israel had to endure some of their harshest surroundings and encounter some of their greatest tests.

ISRAEL'S EXPERIENCE

It should be clear that the original objective God had in mind was for the people to come out of Egyptian bondage, go into the wilderness for a time of intense preparation, arrive at Mt. Sinai where He would personally confront them, and then, as an empowered and prepared nation, go directly across the Jordan and conquer the Promised Land. This we are told, however, did not occur. Rather, the Israelites began complaining from the beginning.

With God, things just do not usually play out as we humans tend to anticipate. It seems that God's decisions, God's ways, God's plans, are not only different from ours, but often the very opposite of what we would assume. This is one of the powerful spiritual lessons all of His children must learn. Israel was about to experience precisely what this meant in their relationship with the Almighty.

No sooner had the great assembly of people gotten on their way than they were stunned to discover that God wasn't going to lead them directly into the land of Promise—that this journey was not going to be the quick, easy jaunt that they had expected. We read in Exodus 13:

“After Pharaoh had let the people go, God did not guide them to the highway that goes through the land of the Philistines, because it was CLOSE BY. God thought that the people, upon seeing war, might change their minds and return to Egypt. Rather God led the people by a roundabout route, through the desert by the Red Sea” (Ex. 13:17-18).

God always has two great things in mind—a PURPOSE and a PLAN. He will, in His own way and time, reveal the purpose, but the plan or process is something that man will never fully understand or foresee. If he ever did, it would defeat God's purpose. If he ever did, he would find the quickest and easiest way out. So God keeps the process to Himself.

That is why events and circumstances and people come into your life and mine totally beyond our control, and serve to try us, test us, mold and shape us in this life and calling. We no more know precisely how God will work in our lives than we understand rocket science! The process is God's business. Our part is to yield to the Potter's hands, and let Him do what He must do. Israel was unwilling to allow this to happen. They became disappointed in God. They thought Him unfair. Eventually, even though they witnessed incredible miracles beyond anything ever seen on earth, they came to doubt God, and, in the end, they were utterly unable to trust Him to even take the people into the Promised Land. The Scriptures tell us in chilling words that their dead carcasses fell in the wilderness. Not a single one of that generation, save Joshua and Caleb, survived the wilderness. It is a powerful story of enormous implications for spiritual believers today!

Once the Israelites turned from the Way of the Philistines, which would have been the obvious direct route into Canaan, they began to experience the wilderness preparation of God, and just as quickly did they respond. As they encamped by the Red Sea, Pharaoh's army approached them, and even though the people had been miraculously delivered by God on numerous occasions, they feared their circumstances and said:

“Was it because there weren't enough graves in Egypt that you brought us out to die in the

desert? Why have you done this to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we tell you in Egypt to let us alone, we'll just go on being slaves for the Egyptians? It would be better for us to be the Egyptians' slaves than to die in the desert!" (Ex. 14:11-12).

Once again God spared the Israelites, taking them safely across the Red Sea, destroying Pharaoh and his armies in the process. But even that wasn't good enough for the people. As soon as they were safely across, notice what transpired:

"They traveled on from Eilim, and the whole community of the people of Israel arrived at the Sin Desert, between Eilim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after leaving the land of Egypt. There in the desert the whole community of the people of Israel GRUMBLED against Moses and Aaron. The people of Israel said to them, We wish that the Lord (YHVH) had used His own hand to KILL US off in Egypt! There we used to sit around the pots with the meat boiling, and we had as much food as we wanted. But you have taken us out into this desert to let this whole assembly starve to death!" (Ex. 16:1-3).

The apostle Paul uses the example of ancient Israel's response to God as a warning for all believers. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, he writes the following:

"For, brothers, I don't want you to miss the significance of what

happened to our fathers. All of them were guided by the pillar of cloud, and they all passed through the sea, and in connection with the cloud and with the sea they all immersed themselves into Moses, also they ate the same food from the Spirit, and they all drank the same drink from the Spirit—for they drank from that Spirit-sent Rock which followed them, and that Rock was the Messiah. Yet with the majority of them God was not pleased, so their bodies were strewn across the desert. Now these things took place as prefigurative historical events, warning us not to set our hearts on evil things as they did. Don't be idolaters, as some of them were...And let us not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, with the consequence that 23,000 died in a single day. And let us not put the Messiah to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by snakes. And don't grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the Destroying Angel. These things happened to them as prefigurative historical events, and they were written down as a warning to us who are living in the last days. Therefore, let anyone who thinks he is standing up, be careful not to fall" (I Cor. 10:1-12).

The period between Passover and Pentecost is the time span between Egypt and Sinai, and it is of great spiritual significance. Each year, God tells His people to count off 49 days, one at a time, until they reach the 50th day or Pentecost.

Pentecost consists therefore of a journey—a set of steps that leads to a specific destination. Those 49 days, a perfect multiple of 7 x 7, are indicative of the journey of Israel from Egypt to Sinai, from bondage to freedom, from weakness to great empowerment, from the worship of false gods to a confrontation with the true God of the universe! The very same things are at work in the spiritual lives of believers.

The period of time between Passover and Pentecost is very special. It was critically important for God's original people Israel, and it is even more crucial for us today. The problem is that we have generally failed to sense the significance of this annual time span, and consequently most of us have never really absorbed many of the potential lessons and preparation that God intended. And the time has come for that to change.

If it was the will of God that ancient Israel be prepared during their journey from Egypt to Sinai, then it is a strong likelihood that He desires the same sort of thing for His people today during that identical time slot each year. It is more than just of passing interest that the Israelites did not offer the omer or wavesheaf on one day only, but on every day during the count to Pentecost, indicating to us that each day is important and means something. It is not without significance that God commanded that this time period be counted by His people. There is clearly a special focus placed upon these 49 days, and we all need to be acutely

aware of it.

MESSIAH PREPARED

There is good reason to conclude that this same time span between Passover and Pentecost was a key period in the life of the Savior. I say this because of the following information from the gospel accounts:

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all give similar versions of John the Baptist, Christ's baptism, the temptation in the wilderness, the return to Galilee, and the choosing of the disciples. In the book of John, however, things read differently, and yet there must be an appropriate way of merging all these records, so that we can see the complete picture of what transpired.

John's account indeed speaks of the Baptizer, although the specific event of the Messiah's baptism is not recorded. We do, however, have the testimony of John the Baptist that he had witnessed the Holy Spirit descending upon Christ like a dove from heaven (John 1:29-34). So we can be assured that this is in the same general time period as the synoptic gospels place it.

Now, according to both Matthew and Mark, Yahshua (Jesus) did not leave for Galilee until after John the Baptist was put in prison (Matt. 4:12, Mk. 1:14). This fact followed the temptation of Christ by Satan. John's gospel, however, shows the Messiah in

Galilee before the imprisonment of John the Baptist (Jn. 2:1, 3:22-24). Obviously the fourth gospel is referring to a different and earlier situation.

Putting the four accounts together, it appears that John the Baptist was immersing repentant Jews in the Jordan River, at which time Yahshua (Jesus) comes to him to be baptized. Two of John's disciples follow after Christ, one of them being Andrew, who immediately calls for his brother Peter to join them. Once this is accomplished, He goes into Galilee, where He finds Philip, who then calls Nathaniel (Jn. 1:35-45). Then Yahshua (Jesus) goes to the town of Cana, where He performs the first miracle of His earthly ministry (Jn. 2:1-11).

Within a matter of a few days, the Messiah goes back to Jerusalem for the Passover (Jn. 2:12-13). While there, He drives out the moneychangers and cleanses the Temple. At some point soon after this event, He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He spends 40 days fasting and being tempted of Satan. After this, He then follows the narrative given in Matthew, Mark, and Luke with respect to returning to Galilee after John the Baptist is imprisoned.

The point here is that Christ's temptation in the wilderness may well have transpired during the period of time between Passover and Pentecost. When all four of the gospel accounts are merged, this possibility becomes a definite

plausibility, and if so, it only adds to the fact that this particular time span had great significance in the life of our Savior.

Could the temptation in the wilderness have been a form of preparation for the Messiah prior to the onset of His public ministry? If it was, and it did indeed occur between Passover and Pentecost, it parallels, in the Spirit, God's intent for Israel during the same period of time when they too were tested in the wilderness. They came up short, but Yahshua did not. He won His wilderness battles, and emerged the empowered servant of God upon the earth. It is also interesting that the temptation lasted exactly 40 days, a number specifically related to trial and testing in the Bible.

DISCIPLES PREPARED

In like manner, it appears that the Messiah placed special emphasis on this very same time-frame with respect to the preparation of His disciples, those who would be commissioned to carry on after His departure. How do we know this? Simply by combining the following facts:

We know that the Messiah was slain on the afternoon of the 14th day of the first month. This was the precise time when the Passover lambs were commanded to be killed. He expired at about 3 PM, and was buried just before sunset. He then remained 3 days and nights in the grave, and was resurrected at the end of the third

day or 72 hours after his burial.

Since the Savior died at the same time as the Passover lambs, we know for a fact that the Days of Unleavened Bread commenced at sunset just after His burial, at the beginning of the 15th day. Thus, He was in the grave during the first three days of Unleavened Bread. Upon His resurrection, there were still many days until the next festival.

We are given a very significant fact in regard to our subject in Acts 1. Notice the following:

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen: to whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them FORTY DAYS, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1-3).

Notice that, just as His own ministry had been prefaced with a 40 day period of preparation during the critical time span between Passover and Pentecost, so just before the commencement of the apostles’ ministry were they given an identical 40-day time of special preparation during the very same period between the two spring holy seasons.

Is this a mere coincidence?

Such a thing is doubtful. There is every reason to believe that the days between Passover and Pentecost, the very days that believers are uniquely commanded to specifically count each year, comprise a special time of spiritual preparation that God intends for His people to be aware of and respond to on an annual basis.

This was the case with ancient Israel in their journey from Egypt to Sinai; it was true in the Savior’s life in preparation for His earthly ministry; and it was true in the apostles’ situation as well. The count to Pentecost is very significant. It is a time of divine appointment between God and His true people—a time in which He desires to speak personally and powerfully to each one of us individually. It is appropriately placed at the beginning of each new year, because it is to be a time of spiritual preparation.

It could well be a time of trial for many, even as it was for ancient Israel and for Christ. It may be a period in which God permits Satan to try us in various ways. On other occasions, it might be a time of special instruction or revelation—something that is needed in your life or mine for the coming year’s work in God’s service.

The keys are awareness, focus, willingness to listen for God’s voice, and total submission. These are the requirements for deriving the most good out of this special period.

It is high time that all of us

began to seriously consider this crucial time of the year. It is so easy and natural to merely take it for granted. It used to be that counting the days until Pentecost simply wasn’t done by most believers. We merely consulted our trusty, church-prepared holyday calendars to see on what day Pentecost should fall. The idea of actually counting would have been foreign to most of us. The notion that the count to Pentecost might have far greater meaning than we were generally led to believe was not a priority in our thinking.

Now, things are different, or at least they certainly can be different—and better. Now, we have the opportunity of really focusing on this very special time span, marking off the days of the count, and comprehending that this is a very critical period when God Himself is eager to personally communicate with each of us and prepare us for what lies ahead. I urge you to start now, while these days are in effect, and begin to think and pray about this special time God has given us. Make every day COUNT!

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