
The Pilgrimage to Pentecost

by Jim Rector

Where and when did the spring holyday plan of God start? Was it with the Messiah and His earthly ministry or the disciples of the first century? Perhaps it was even earlier in His dealings with ancient Israel under the Mosaic dispensation or earlier still with Abraham, the father of the faithful. These are all admittedly significant parts of the plan, but the real answer to the question, as is so often the case, is to be found by going all the way back to the time of Creation, to the garden of Eden itself.

When Eve succumbed to the tempting of Satan and Adam followed his wife in disobedience, sin was introduced into God's perfect creation. From this point on, if His purpose for mankind was to come to fruition, one unequivocal reality was absolute—the inevitable need for a redeemer.

So from the very beginning of the human

race, we begin to see the spring holyday plan starting to take shape. When Adam recognized his sin and comprehended his nakedness, do you recall what he did? He did what man has been doing ever since—he took matters into his own hands, and made himself and Eve aprons of fig leaves to cover themselves. But fig leaves weren't good enough for the Almighty, because atonement for sin cannot be achieved through the effort of man. So God Himself slew an animal and took the skins and covered the two sinners, and in so doing He gave us the first hint of what He had in mind for the entire human race that would follow. In this singular ancient event, we see the initial theme of Passover starting to emerge from behind the veil. And in **Genesis 3:15**, we read the first Messianic prophecy in all the Scriptures:

“And I will put enmity between thee (Satan) and the woman (Eve), and between your seed

and her seed (the Messiah); it (Messiah) shall bruise your head (the mortal wound), and you shall bruise his heel (a temporary wound - typical of the crucifixion).”

THE BLOOD OF ABEL

Most Christians are aware that Abel was the first righteous martyr, having been slain in the field by his brother Cain. But he was much more than simply the first to give his life in God’s service. He was also the first human type of the Redeemer to come.

First of all Abel brought a better sacrifice to the altar than did Cain. The Scriptures testify that:

“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yea speaks” (Heb. 11:4).

It was better for two reasons—Abel was, first and foremost, a righteous man, and God pays special attention to the sacrifices of those who are truly His own. Secondly, the nature of his sacrifice was appropriate, because he brought an animal of the flock, as opposed to the produce of the ground. The Biblical principle espoused in **Hebrews 9:22** that says: **“And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without the shedding of blood, there is no remission,”** is the basis for Abel’s superior sacrifice, for it typified the theme of Passover and the slaying of the coming Lamb of God.

Then Abel himself was a type of the future Messiah as well. Not only was he righteous, the Scriptures also state that his death was very special in God’s sight. We read in **Hebrews 12:22-24**:

“But you are come unto Mount Zion, and unto

the city of the living God...unto Yahshua (Jesus) the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

So it is clear that the initial stages of God’s plan of redemption were revealed from the very beginning of His dealings with mankind. The themes of Passover—the coming Redeemer, the lamb of the flock, the shedding of blood, the ultimate sacrifice—all are seen in these early episodes in the lives of Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel.

ABRAHAM’S UNUSUAL EXPERIENCE

Although there are other special types of the Messiah prior to the time of Abraham, there is a very interesting, though rather obscure, event that occurred during the life of the great patriarch that deserves special attention in our discussion. It is found recorded in **Genesis 15**.

We know that God had graciously called Abram to come out of the pagan society of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur—a call to which the patriarch willingly and unhesitatingly responded. Then something very unusual, even mysterious, happened. God confronted Abram and had him take several animals and slay them, dividing their dead bodies and placing the pieces opposite each other with a walkway in between. This practice came to be known as the *covenant between the parts* or the *covenant of the cutting*.

The idea was that when two parties desired to make a binding agreement between them, they would do as Abram did, and then both of those involved would walk between the slain parts, vowing to abide by the terms of the covenant in question, lest they suffer the same fate as the sacrificial animals. Some believe that this was the origin of the popular expression *to cut a deal*.

In the case of Abram, however, things were handled a little differently. Instead of both parties

walking between the parts, God caused a deep sleep to come upon Abram during which he was supernaturally given specific prophetic information concerning his progeny—the children of Israel. Notice now how emphatically God's words to Abram fit into the theme of the Days of Unleavened Bread:

“And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And He (Yahweh) said unto Abram, ‘Know of a surety that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them...and also that nation, whom they shall serve will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance...in the fourth generation they shall come hither again” (Gen. 15:12-16).

This is directly descriptive of the future exodus of ancient Israel from the bondage of Egyptian slavery. In fact, this signal event would actually occur precisely 430 years to the very day from the occasion of this special sacrifice and covenant recorded in Genesis 15. To further connect what Abram experienced with the theme of the exodus and the Days of Unleavened Bread, we read in the very next verse the following:

“And it came to pass that when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a SMOKING FURNACE and a BURNING LAMP that passed between those pieces” (Gen. 15:17).

First of all, notice the terms *a smoking furnace* and *a burning lamp*. These obviously are references to God Himself, but there is more here. The time setting and the language used are very reminiscent of the exodus from Egypt. We already know that the prophecy concerns this future event, but then so do these special terms as well, for we read in **EXODUS 13:21**:

“And the LORD went before them by day in a PILLAR OF CLOUD to lead the way, and by night in a PILLAR OF FIRE to give them light, so as to go by day and night.”

Secondly, it is most significant that in this particular case both parties did not walk between the parts—only God Himself did. Abram, after all, was asleep. Why depart from the customary way of making this sort of binding covenant? Why wasn't Abram allowed to participate? Simply because it was God's purpose to accomplish this apart from the works of mere human beings. It was done to demonstrate that this great covenant, resulting in the coming Redeemer and the subsequent salvation of the creation, would be achieved only through the **GRACE OF ALMIGHTY GOD!!**

Have you ever connected the spring holyday season with the subject of God's grace? I hope you have, but if, by chance, you have not, let me just mention something that is often overlooked concerning the symbolism and meaning of this special time of the year.

We have been taught for years that the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread picture us putting sin out of our lives. While it is true that we do physically put leaven out of our homes, is it really accurate to say that we ourselves are capable of truly putting sin out in the deepest spiritual sense? I don't think so. When we approach this holyday season from this perspective, we make a critical mistake—we leave our Savior out of the picture!

In reality, the Days of Unleavened Bread symbolize the spiritual work of Christ Himself within the mind, heart and life of the individual believer. Always remember that the Messiah is at the center of every annual holyday. It is a misconception that we merely put sin out and everything is okay. We are involved, of course, in the process, but the work is that of Yahshua (Jesus). And what about grace? Well, tying the Days of Unleavened Bread in with the spiritual work of Christ automatically brings the whole thing into the realm of God's grace, for His redemption, His presence, His power, all are with us as a product of grace. That is why it is so important to understand the significance of Abram's experience in Genesis 15. This was all God's doing, but Abram

and his descendants (spiritually speaking) are the undeserving recipients. That means you and I, brethren. Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread are completely wrapped up in the grace of God.

No single servant of the true God is more correctly equated with the subject of grace than is Abram. It is so interesting and instructive to note that in the area of Biblical numerics, the figure for grace is the number 5. We see this in so many instances, not the least of which is to be found right here in this special event in Abram's life (for a more complete discussion of the number 5 and its relationship to the issue of God's grace, see the article entitled *Grace is a FIVE letter word!*).

You will recall that when God instructed Abram to prepare the sacrifice, He told him to take **FIVE** specific animals, namely a calf, a sheep, a goat, a dove and a pigeon. Interestingly, these very five animals later came to form the basis for the sacrificial system imposed upon the Israelites after their departure from Egypt. Why five animals? Simply because God often uses the number five to designate that which is of grace. And since the five animals in question were typical of the coming Redeemer and His priceless sacrifice, they are clearly indicative that both justification and sanctification come to us by the grace of God.

This entire episode, strange and mysterious as it may seem, marked the very time of God's great covenant with Abram. Following the sacrifice itself, typical of Christ's own death nearly 2000 years later and thus of Passover as well, and the subsequent revelation to Abram of what would happen to his offspring, referring to the Exodus and thus the Days of Unleavened Bread, we find Yahweh Himself walking between the sacrificial parts and then making the actual covenant, recorded in **Genesis 15:18** where we read:

"In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'Unto your seed have I

given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.'"

As Dean Wheelock has effectively pointed out in his excellent publication *Hebrew Roots*, this whole episode transpired at the very time that God would later ordain that Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread should occur. The sacrifice was offered in the late afternoon, just as the lambs and later the Messiah Himself would be slain at precisely the same time. Then it was consumed and the prophecy of Israel's future deliverance given after the sun had already gone down and it was dark. This would mark the beginning of the 15th day and coordinates perfectly with the later holyday timing of the Days of Unleavened Bread.

In concluding this section on Abraham, especially in relation to God's grace, it is very interesting that shortly after this most significant event occurred, Abram's name was changed. To create the new name, God inserted the **FIFTH** letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*hey*) into His old name and created *Abraham*—the perfect recipient of God's perfect grace!

TREKKING WITH ISRAEL

The symbolism and circumstances surrounding Pentecost always seems to suggest a journey. When ancient Israel was set free from Egyptian slavery, they were told to get up and get out. Indeed the Scriptures state emphatically that they were *thrust out* and had to leave *in haste!*

Obviously God knew all along that a journey was in the offing for His people. He even commanded them to eat that first Passover quickly, with shoes on, loins girded and staff in hand. This was precisely the opposite from what would normally be expected when eating a meal, then or now, but on that night there would be no time for relaxation. This was to be the night of their deliverance—indeed the *night to be much observed or remembered!*

The record in Exodus tells us that Israel came up out of Egypt *harnessed* (Ex. 13:18). The emendation of the Hebrew in this verse is that the Israelites came out in rank and file—five abreast (or possibly 50). Moses undoubtedly had arranged it this way ahead of time so that the people could move effectively on their journey. The point is that Israel was in a serious march toward a God-ordained objective.

Notice that the Israelites did not travel day and night, but camped at various spots along the way. Had they continued on their journey non-stop, obviously they would have burned out long before they reached their destination. The same holds true for Christians in their spiritual lives. Our growth pattern is never a non-stop, straight-line type of affair, but rather one that tends to produce the same kind of stop and go action. We grow in apparent spurts or sessions, and then we appear to stop and rest a while.

Just getting free from the chains of Egypt was not God's ultimate objective for Israel, and neither is it for His people today. Our freedom has been purchased for us and given to us without cost to anyone except the Father and His Son, both of whom paid the maximum price. That liberty, however, was not and must never become an end in itself. This is the mistake that so many ostensible, professing Christians make. Their journey ends with the cross, in reality, before it ever got started. The freedom of redemption is admittedly the indispensable key, the true starting point, and thus it is the most precious of all possible gifts, but it is still not the final goal. Rather it is the ticket to take the journey along the **WAY!**

Israel's trek took them not by the easier, more direct route of the Philistines, but by the long, hard way of the Red Sea. God's hand was in the direction of Israel's journey, just as it is in the lives of His people today. Sometimes God leads us also by way of the Red Sea, and allows us to encounter the risks, dangers, opposition, persecution, hardship and difficulty associated with this harder

road. The Israelites complained and even were very rebellious at times, but they kept following the pillar of cloud and fire. So must we.

THE COUNT TO PENTECOST

The period between Passover and Pentecost is a time of counting. It implies a future objective, and our involvement in seeing it achieved. Just as ancient Israel had to take the leap of faith and journey out of Egypt, so we too must follow in like manner in the spiritual expedition set before us.

God led His people through the Red Sea and gained the resounding victory over Pharaoh and his mighty army. He was relentless in His desire that the Israelites be gathered unto Him at Mt. Sinai, for there He would come down and present Himself to the nation as their God and their future Husband. This reality is fraught with such deep spiritual meaning for true believers today.

The rabbis calculate that the people encamped around the base of the mount sometime very early in the third month of the year. They teach that the very day on which the Law itself was written by the finger of Yahweh and presented to Moses was the precise time that would become the day of Pentecost. Whether or not their counting is absolutely correct, there can be no doubt that the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and the holyday of Pentecost are closely related.

On the occasion of both events, God gathered those before whom He was going to appear. In both cases, the episode was accompanied by miraculous signs. At Mt. Sinai, there was thunder and earthquake and the mighty voice of Yahweh. On Pentecost, there was the sound of a great rushing wind, cloven tongues of fire and once again the voice of God heard in all the languages of those present. In the first instance, the Law engraved on tablets of stone was given. In the second, the Holy Spirit, by which the Law

is written on the table of the heart, was poured out. At Sinai, a covenant was made between God and the people, and Israel was betrothed to her Creator. At Pentecost, another covenant was unveiled, and those who are called to participate in it are also betrothed to be married to Christ Himself. There are many other similarities, but these should suffice for our discussion.

FROM PASSOVER TO PENTECOST

Pentecost is considered by the Jews to be a sort of 8th day of the spring holyday or Passover season, so strong is the historic and theological connection between the two. Spiritually speaking, Pentecost represents or marks the climax of the Messiah's sacrifice. What Christ accomplished on earth at Passover was completed and celebrated in heaven at Pentecost, and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, it serves as the inauguration of His heavenly ministry.

It is always inspiring and instructive to remember that the offering of the omer *on the morrow after the Sabbath* was not simply a one-time occasion. The fact is that on every single day during the count to Pentecost, the omer was offered, making the entire time span one of great spiritual significance. While it is absolutely correct to say that Christ was the *firstfruit* of God's spiritual harvest (Rom. 8:29, I Cor. 15:20), it is also true that those who are in Christ are also reckoned by God as *firstfruits* as well, for we read in James 1:18:

“Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of FIRSTFRUITS of His creatures.”

Thus, the offering of the omer during the entire period symbolizes this fact and pictures the

offering of all true believers who are a part of the initial spiritual spring harvest. The beautiful thing about God's plan for His people is that while Yahshua is always central to everything that is accomplished, if we are *in Him* and He in us, then we are regarded by the Father in the same light as His own Son. In other words, the identification with Christ is so close that when God sees us He sees the Savior, or, put another way, He always observes us through the shed blood of the Messiah, and thus the righteousness of Christ arches over us like a rainbow throughout our lives.

From Passover to Pentecost is such a special period of time. Granted the holydays or commanded convocations are not laced throughout the whole span, but there can be no doubt that the entire time is directly related to the spiritual work of Christ in the lives of all true believers.

Pentecost was always one of the great annual *pilgrimage* festivals of ancient Israel. Even from its very inception, it was marked by a relentless journey, fraught with obstacles and challenges. The count to Pentecost is like an army marching toward its destiny, for it is said that Israel came up out of Egypt *by their armies* (Ex. 12:51).

The time period between Passover and Pentecost is also special in that our Savior spent 40 days of that very span after His resurrection preparing the disciples for their coming ministry. In like manner, it is quite possible that Christ's earlier powerful encounter with Satan in the wilderness occurred during this same time segment, and served as a kind of preparation for His own ministry.

Perhaps it would behoove us today to seriously consider the meaning and implications not only of Passover and Pentecost itself, but also the time in between. Here's hoping that you have a very significant pilgrimage to Pentecost! CS