

That Night of the Lord

(aka Night to be Much Observed)



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The Holy Bible in Its Original Order.

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The exodus of the ancient Israelites from Egypt is generally viewed as a fictional account in the Old Testament of an enslaved people that were rescued by God from oppressive overlords. The world sees a strict God who substituted the bondage of a hapless people for one that demanded obedience to a primitive and restrictive ritual law with harsh judgments. While the story of the exodus is one of the most well-known in the world, most consider it a myth about a people long-dead and give it little regard or consider that it has significance for today.

Beyond that, some might be aware of the holyday observances instituted during the exodus account but their usual assessment is that these holydays exist primarily to appease a harsh God with bloody animal sacrifices. Even the Passover is usually regarded as inconsequential until the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ 3,500 years later.

In contrast, true Christians understand that the Old Testament was the foundation of the Law and holydays that were upheld and kept by Jesus Christ and the apostles. They know that the holydays bring a deep understanding of God's plan of salvation for mankind. Nevertheless, there is one particular observance that even some true Christians find confusing and hard to understand.

The holyday in question is commonly called the night to be much observed (but properly named *That Night of the Lord* in scripture as is discussed later). This night occurs on the first of the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Not only is it a holyday but the night itself is an observance and memorial commanded by God. While it has deep spiritual meaning for all true Christians, it is one of the least understood.

God says of That Night of the Lord that it is a night to be **much observed** (Exo. 12:42). Obviously then, God expects it to have meaning and purpose for us today but why does God command

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observance of that night? What was its meaning to the generations of ancient Israel and what is the significance of that night for Christians today? And just as important, *how* are we to observe it?

That Night of the Lord Foreshadowed

The particular night that God commands to be much observed is the first night of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In God's calendar, it is Nisan (Abib) 15, and immediately follows the Passover on Nisan 14. While it was on this night that the ancient Israelites began their exodus from Egypt, this night was originally **foreshadowed** in Genesis 15 when God ratified a covenant with Abraham.

That Night of the Lord had its beginning even before the nation of Israel came into existence because that night was foretold hundreds of years prior to the exodus from Egypt. In the book of Exodus, Moses recorded: "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel in Egypt *was* four hundred and thirty years, And it came to pass **at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, it was even on that very same day, all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a night to be much observed** to the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt. This *is that night of the LORD* to be observed by all the children of Israel in their generations." (Exo. 12:40-42).

Indeed, after 400 years in captivity, Israel *was* delivered (Gen. 15:13) just as God had promised. In fact, both the Passover and That Night of the Lord were foreshadowed in a covenant that God made with Abraham. God specially chose to establish His covenant with Abraham because he **obeyed** God's voice and kept His commandments and His laws (Gen. 26:5).

The story begins in Genesis 15: "After these things the Word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, 'Fear not, Abram, I *am* your shield and your exceedingly great reward.' And Abram said, 'Lord GOD, what will You give me since I go childless, and

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the heir of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Behold, You have given no seed to me; and lo, one born in my house is my heir.’ And behold, the Word of the LORD *came* to him saying, ‘This man shall not be your heir; but he that shall come forth out of your own loins shall be your heir.’ ” (Gen. 15:1-4).

Then, God took Abraham outside **on the night of Nisan 14** and said, “Look now toward the heavens and number the stars – if you are able to count them. ... So shall your seed be.” (Gen. 15:5). In a physical sense, this promise would be fulfilled through the nation of the children of Israel; spiritually, it is yet to be fulfilled as God brings “many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10) through the promised Seed, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16). God told Abraham in Genesis 22:17-18 “That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the seashore. And your seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your seed [Jesus Christ] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

God promised Abraham that an heir – physical offspring – would come from his own loins. However, the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:3) was only the beginning of the fulfillment of this promise. The birth of Jesus Christ was the ultimate fulfillment (Gal. 3:16).

In addition to children (physical and spiritual), God also promised to give Abraham and his descendants the land in which he was living. “And He said to him, ‘I *am* the LORD that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it.’ ” (Gen. 15:7).

To all of this Abraham asked, “Lord GOD, by what shall I know that I shall inherit it [all these promises]?” (Gen. 15:8). In response, God told Abraham to prepare a special sacrifice that would confirm the covenant. “And He [God] said to him [Abram], ‘Take Me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young

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pigeon.’ And he took all these to himself, and divided them in the middle, and laid each piece opposite the other; but he did not divided the birds. And when the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.” (Gen. 15:9-11).

Known historically as a “covenant between the parts”, the parties to such a ritual would *both* pass between the parts of severed animals. In so doing, they were stating that if one or both of them broke the covenant agreement they should likewise be **put to death** (Jer. 34:18-20). This is a *self-maledictory oath*; that is, one that requires a *curse* (of death) if the agreement is violated.

In this case, however, only God passed between the animal carcasses demonstrating that **He alone** would take the penalty upon Himself – through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – if **mankind** failed to keep the covenant. That is why, as we will see, Abraham himself did not pass between the pieces. Indeed, only God passed between the parts of the animals and thereby the life of Jesus Christ was pledged as the guarantor for the fulfillment of that covenant!

So Abraham prepared the animals as instructed during the daylight portion of Nisan 14 on what would come to be called Passover. The next verse in Genesis 15 shows the connection between this covenant and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ on Passover. “And it came to pass, **as the sun was going down**, that a deep sleep fell upon Abram. And, behold, **a horror of great darkness fell upon him!**” (Gen. 15:12). All of this occurred as the sun was going down (past its zenith, i.e., past “noon”) at the same time as the Passover on Nisan 14 in 30 AD when Jesus Christ was crucified. The “horror of darkness” was a mirror of the darkness that came upon the land during the time Jesus Christ was on the cross (sixth to ninth hours of the day – Mat. 27:45, et al).

Afterwards, God said to Abraham, “ ‘You must surely know that your seed shall be sojourners in a land *that is* not theirs, (and shall serve them and afflict them) four hundred years. And also I will judge that nation whom they shall serve. And afterward they

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shall come out with great substance. And you shall go to your fathers in peace. You shall be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come here again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.’ ” (Gen. 15:13-16). God told Abraham that his physical descendants would someday become captives in a foreign land but that **he would deliver them** as part of His covenant promises.

Now notice verse 17: “And it came to pass – when the sun went down and it was dark – behold, a smoking furnace and **a burning lamp passed between those pieces.**” God, seen as a burning lamp, passed between the parts of the animal sacrifices. In so doing, God ratified and sealed His covenant promises to Abraham. All of this occurred when the sun went down at the beginning of Nisan 15, the first of the seven days of Feast of Unleavened Bread. The promise of deliverance of Abraham’s descendants included in the covenant was made on the same night would later become That Night of the Lord.

“According to covenantal law, a covenant does not become valid until it has been sealed with a blood sacrifice. The bloody carcasses of the sacrificial animals represent the symbolic death of the one confirming the covenant. By passing between these carcasses, the one who is ratifying the covenant is swearing by an oath that if he fails to perform the terms of the covenant, he will die, and his blood will be spilled on the ground in the same manner as the animals of the covenant sacrifice. Once ratified by this [self-]maledictory oath, the terms of the covenant cannot be changed – neither by adding to them nor diminishing from them.” (*The Christian Passover*, page 270, Fred R. Coulter).

Of course, God always kept His word and never violated the covenant He made with Abraham – the covenant would later be broken by mankind. As a result, Jesus Christ would have to die in order to fulfill the self-maledictory oath God made when He established the covenant.

Now look again at Exodus 12:40-41: “Now the sojourning of

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the children of Israel in Egypt *was* four hundred and thirty years, And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, it was even **on that very same day...** – the **very day** God made this covenant with Abraham – “... **all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.** ” (Exo. 12:40-41). On the same night that God ratified His covenant with Abraham 430 years earlier, the children of Israel departed from Rameses on Nisan 15 just as God had promised to Abraham.

Continuing in verse 42, “**It is a night to be much observed** to the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt. **This is that night of the LORD** to be observed by all the children of Israel in their generations.” (Exo. 12:42). The night that He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt was to be memorialized by all current and future generations. The significance of their liberation, in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and brought about by His hand alone, makes That Night of the Lord one to be MUCH observed.

Physical Israel – Delivered Out of Bondage in Egypt

As captives in Egypt, the children of Israel faced bitter, hard bondage. Their taskmasters ruled with rigor and harshness. In desperation, they turned to God, crying out for deliverance. “And it came to pass after many days the king of Egypt died. And the children of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up to God because of the bondage.” (Exo. 2:23).

“And God heard their groaning, and God **remembered His covenant with Abraham**, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” (Exo. 2:24). In Exodus 6:5-6, God says, “...**I have remembered My covenant** [with Abraham]. Therefore say to the children of Israel, ‘*I am* the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and **I will rescue you out of their bondage.** And I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments.’ ” When God makes a promise, He keeps it.

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Therefore, God called upon Moses to lead the children of Israel out from the land of Egypt. From the burning bush, God told Moses: “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who *are* in Egypt. I have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, to bring them up out of that land, to a good land, a large land, to a land flowing *with* milk and honey.” (Exo. 3:7-8). As promised, God would deliver the ancient Israelites from their affliction and bondage in Egypt.

God then instructed Moses to prepare the children of Israel for their journey out of Egypt to the land promised to Abraham. After the Passover on Nisan 14 when the tenth plague against the Egyptians killed all the firstborn (Exo. 12:13), the exodus from Egypt began on the night of Nisan 15: “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, it was even on that very same day, **all the armies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt**. It *is* a night to be much observed to the LORD for **bringing them out from the land of Egypt**. This *is* that night of the LORD to be observed by all the children of Israel in their generations.” (Exo. 12:41-42).

That Night of the Lord is also the beginning of the first of the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Notice, “And in the first day *there shall be* a holy convocation, and in the seventh day there shall be a holy convocation for you. No manner of work shall be done in them, except that which every man must eat, that only may be done by you. And you shall keep the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**, for **in this very same day I have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt**. Therefore you shall keep this day in your generations as a law forever.” (Exo. 12:16-17).

Meaning & Name of the Night of Nisan 15

While some refer to it as the “night to be much observed”, Exodus 12:42 states, “It **IS** that night of the Lord ...” because God is specifically mentioning *THAT* night of Nisan 15 when the *LORD* liberated the Israelites; therefore, the *name* of that night is **That**

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Night of the Lord. The phrase “a night to be much observed” emphasizes *how* we are to regard the keeping of That Night of the Lord.

The Hebrew word for *much observed* in Exodus 12:42 is *shimmur*, meaning an observance. In English, an observance is to notice or perceive something and register it as **being significant**. *Shimmur* is a form of the word *shamar* meaning to hedge about (as with thorns); which is, by extension, to guard, to protect, or attend to something. They express more than simple observation; both mean to **preserve and protect a thing or memory**, to be circumspect and **take serious heed** of it. This is the reason it is translated *MUCH observed*.

But was this observance about a “thing or memory”? God told the Israelites, “**Remember** this day *in* which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for the LORD brought you out from this place by the strength of His hand.” (Exo. 13:3). The night of Nisan 15, That Night of the Lord, was to be **much observed** by guarding, protecting, and attending to the *memory* of what happened in Egypt. They were never to forget the power and might of God who destroyed the Egyptians and their liberation from the hard bondage of slavery.

Physical Israel – Observance of That Night of the Lord

That Night of the Lord is the beginning of the seven days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is the memorial of God’s fulfillment of His covenant with Abraham when He rescued the ancient Israelites. For this reason, He commanded them to guard, protect, and attend to the **memory** of it. The night of Nisan 15, *THAT* particular night, is the *only* night of all the holydays (Passover is not a holyday) that God specifically sets apart as a special memorial. As such, it was a night to remember because they had fled from a place of bondage and death and began a journey toward a land of abundance and life.

In addition to remembering that night, proper observance also

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required them to eat unleavened bread (Exo. 12:15). The bread was unleavened since there was no time to allow the bread to rise because they had to leave Egypt in haste. It was properly called the **bread of affliction** (Deu. 16:3) because up to that point they had been slaves in Egypt all their lives. They lived in bondage, serving the will of others in hard toil and misery until they died. The unleavened bread of affliction was a physical *reminder* of their enslavement in Egypt and *symbol* of their liberation.

Spiritual Israel – Delivered Out of Bondage to Satan

While the children of Israel were the recipients of the physical promises God made to Abraham, the covenant included spiritual promises that are being fulfilled through the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. True Christians are even called Abraham's seed because they are "heirs [of the covenant] according to the [spiritual] promise" (Gal. 3:29).

God established His covenant with Abraham because He was faithful and obedient. True Christians are also heirs of that covenant if we are, like Abraham, *faithful* and *obedient* to the end. God promised Abraham that "in your Seed [Jesus Christ] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). The covenant and its spiritual promises apply to the spiritual firstfruit seed of Abraham and, ultimately, to all of mankind. For true Christians, That Night of the Lord pictures an exodus from bondage to this world and sin, both typified by Egypt.

Just as the ancient Israelites left Egypt on a journey to the promised land, true Christians have spiritually come out of this world to embark on a journey to the true Promised Land – the Kingdom of God. Even though God commanded Abraham to " 'Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house **into a land that I will show you** ' " (Gen. 12:1), God's promise to Abraham was much more than a physical inheritance and he knew it. As it says in Hebrews 11:9, "By faith he [Abraham] sojourned in the land of promise [Canaan], **like a foreigner**, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the joint heirs of the

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same promise”. But Abraham knew there was a greater spiritual inheritance because the Bible says that “he was waiting for the city [from heaven] with *the* foundations of which **God** is *the* Architect and Builder” (Heb. 11:10).

A true Christian’s life *begins* when God calls us to come out of the bondage and sins of this “present evil world” (Gal. 1:4). Our “exodus from Egypt” starts when God calls us to repent of our sins and we earnestly desire to be baptized and receive God’s Holy Spirit. This journey leads to the *true* Promised Land – the coming Kingdom of God that Abraham knew was his true inheritance. It is not, however, one measured in steps but by continually striving to walk in the perfect law of liberty (Jas. 1:25; 2:12).

That Night of the Lord is most assuredly an occasion to be MUCH observed as we remember our salvation, reflect upon our eternal inheritance, and give thanks to God for His merciful, and undeserved, grace.

The shed blood of the sacrifice of Jesus sealed the New Covenant and, when someone accepts Him as their personal Savior, they become heirs of the covenant promises. As heirs, God promises to free them from the “yoke of bondage” of sin (Gal. 5:1) and make them inheritors of the Promised Land of the Kingdom of God.

Spiritual Israel – Observance of That Night of the Lord

That Night of the Lord is a most appropriate way to begin keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Observance begins after **sundown** on the night of Nisan 15. “It *is* a **night** to be much observed to the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt. This *is* **that night of the LORD** to be observed by all the children of Israel in their generations.” (Exo. 12:42). It is that night that the children of Israel, both physical and spiritual, are commanded to observe for *all* generations.

God brought us out of bondage to Satan and rescued us from the death penalty of sin through the shed blood of His Son’s

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sacrifice. From there, we can look toward the future at the end of our journey when we inherit the eternal kingdom of heaven. As a memorial, That Night of the Lord is a time to REJOICE because we have been liberated from sin and escaped death by God's mercy and grace. Once we were slaves but now we are free. We are to guard, to protect, and attend to the memory of all that God has, and is doing, for us.

The new covenant brings subtle but important differences in the physical and spiritual keeping of That Night of the Lord. For true Christians, it is full of meaning and purpose on a very personal level. It is full of meaning following the observance and keeping of Passover because it is a vision of our liberation from death and our inheritance in the new covenant, all made possible by the willing sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ. Below is a comparison of the physical, old covenant and the spiritual, new covenant events that are to be remembered and memorialized on this night.

#	PHYSICAL ISRAEL	SPIRITUAL ISRAEL
1	They were once slaves of Egypt with no hope of escape.	We were once slaves of Satan with no hope of escape.
2	Their end was death .	Our end was death .
3	God alone made possible their salvation .	God alone made possible our salvation .
4	They were not worthy of God's salvation.	We were not worthy of God's salvation.
5	They fled Egypt in haste .	We had an urgency to repent of sin.
6	The covenant existed because Abraham obeyed God.	The covenant exists because Jesus Christ obeyed God (Phil. 2:8) and shed His own blood (Heb. 13:20).
7	They had no part in establishing the covenant.	We had no part in establishing the covenant.
8	It was a marriage covenant.	It is a marriage covenant.
9	The covenant was (physically) everlasting .	The covenant is (spiritually) eternal .
10	They were inheritors of the covenant promises.	We are inheritors of the covenant promises.

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#	PHYSICAL ISRAEL	SPIRITUAL ISRAEL
11	They were heirs of the promised land (the land of Canaan).	We are heirs of the promised land (the Kingdom of God).
12	God destroyed all their enemies .	God will destroy all our enemies .
13	God fulfilled His covenant promises.	God is fulfilling the covenant promises.
14	God was their King .	God is our Father .

Like with the ancient Israelites, proper observance of that night also requires eating unleavened bread. Eating the unleavened bread of affliction reminds us that we were slaves to Satan and that sin brings death upon us. **The unleavened bread of affliction is a physical reminder of our enslavement to sin and symbol of our liberation from death.**

Since this night represents the beginning our exodus from sin to eternal life through God’s power and merciful grace, reflecting upon our salvation is the singular purpose of this memorial. The purpose of That Night of the Lord is to remember our calling, counting the cost, our baptism, our spiritual begettal, and our journey toward the kingdom of God.

Those that are able to gather together can share stories of their conversion, overcoming sins, trials, blessings, and opportunities to serve God. Whether we are alone or not, it is a time for prayer, scripture reading, and singing of hymns. While having a special meal can help set it apart, it is not required to observe the true meaning of That Night of the Lord (see Appendix B for more information).

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APPENDIX A – Table of Events on Nisan 14 and 15

The following chart is a timeline from Passover night through the night of the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread comparing the events on these days from Abraham through to the new covenant.

ERA	NISAN 14		NISAN 15
	PASSOVER		FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD
	NIGHT	DAY	NIGHT
<i>Abraham</i>	God promises Abram a son and his descendants would be like the stars in heaven if he could count them (Gen. 15:1-6).	Abram cuts the animals in half for a sacrifice and experiences the "horror of great darkness" (Gen. 15:7-16).	God passes between the cut animals of the sacrifice sealing the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15:17-18).
<i>Moses</i>	The ancient Israelites eat the Passover lamb and the Egyptian firstborn die (Exo. 12:29-30).	The ancient Israelites "spoil" the Egyptians (Exo. 12:31-36).	The ancient Israelites begin their exodus from Egypt (Exo. 12:37-41).
<i>Jesus Christ</i>	Jesus Christ eats the Passover bread and wine with His disciples.	Jesus Christ is crucified on the cross.	The first night that Jesus Christ is in the grave.
<i>New Covenant</i>	Passover ceremony (footwashing, bread, wine).	Remember Jesus Christ's crucifixion (1 Cor. 5:7-8).	Observance of <i>That Night of the Lord</i> (a night to be much observed).

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APPENDIX B - Notes on the Old Testament Passover Meal

Some have prepared and eaten a meal for That Night of the Lord fashioned along the lines of the Old Testament Passover meal (lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread – Exo. 12:3-8); however, this is not an appropriate fare for the occasion for two reasons. First, the Old Testament Passover meal (sometimes incorrectly called a *seder* supper) is replaced in the new covenant Passover with unleavened bread and wine (Mat. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22) as Jesus Christ commanded. We are to *partake* of the new symbols of the covenant by eating a small piece of bread and drinking a small sip of wine rather than eating a full meal. This is expounded by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 where he reprimanded those who feasted on a meal, forgetting the solemn remembrance of the broken body and shed blood of our Savior. The lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread were specific to the old, physical Passover covenant. For true Christians, the spiritual new covenant Passover completely replaces the physical old covenant Passover. As a result, inclusion of the Old Testament Passover meal only distracts from, and muddles, the meaning of the NEW covenant as it applies to That Night of the Lord.

Second, incorporating the Old Testament Passover meal into That Night of the Lord is completely unfitting because the Jews today erroneously keep the Passover on the evening of Nisan 15 instead of Nisan 14. Any ties to their corrupted observance of Passover, especially by serving the Old Testament Passover meal of lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread, is confusing at best and, at worst, could lead some to misconstrue the meaning and purpose of That Night of the Lord.

If a special meal is appropriate for the evening, it should avoid the appearance being an Old Testament Passover meal. It should also be for the purpose of enhancing the observance of the occasion without requiring excessive labor (it is a holyday) or being uncomfortable for anyone.