

Two Events that Restarted the Calendar – Exodus 12: 1-14

Portions adapted from "A Perpetual Memorial" Christopher Holdsworth

How many ways can you start the same year? Of course I'm not talking about reversing time **and** redoing a portion, because no one yet has Doc Browns Back to the Future DeLorean. What I am talking about is, how many times in one year can you mark a day as the start of something new. Of course as a residual from our being part of the Roman Empire, the United States and Europe both celebrate January 1st as New Years Day – the start of both the solar and our calendar year. But then in the US there is also the start of summer, usually celebrated on Memorial Day. Then there is Independence Day, which marks the beginning of our nation, which officially happened with the signing of the Declaration of Independence on July Fourth, 1776. But to these national holidays, you could also add the start of baseball, football, basketball, fishing or hunting season – whatever your favorite sport may be. Then there is Labor Day which marks the start of the next school year. Can you think of any other days of the year that you celebrate as the start of something new.

Once you leave western culture, you would be amazed at how many different national and cultural holidays there really are – probably at least one holiday for every day of the year... somewhere. But every country at least celebrates both the start of the year and their birth as a nation.

For the Hebrew people the start of their calendar year - Rosh Hashanah – just happened in September at the start of the fall planting season. But their national birthday – the day they were first born as a nation – happens in the spring; usually very close to the same day we celebrate Easter, for reasons which will soon become obvious. Their national birthday marks the day that God's death angel passed over the land of Egypt sparing only the Hebrew people after which they were literally kicked out of the country to begin their trek back home to the promised land.



So as God had instructed Moses, on this particular historic day -- at twilight which is when the Hebrew day begins – the Israelites were to kill a lamb and with its blood mark the top and sides of their house doors while they went inside to stay for the evening. There inside, they would roast the entire lamb and eat all of it, accompanied only with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. They were further instructed to eat this meal hurriedly while being fully dressed for travel; even having their walking sticks in hand ... which with the unfolding events of the rest of that first evening made sense.

Then, at midnight when the death angel passed over the land, there was not a single Egyptian home, including Pharaoh's, which did not have one or more first-born sons now dead. So in the earliest hours of the morning as loud cries of lamentation rose over the land, Pharaoh hurriedly gives Moses and Aaron permission to go and joins with his other officials in urging them to leave hastily – before any more destruction fell on the Egyptians. Thus, sunrise on their first day as nation, saw the Hebrew people walking out of Egypt heading home (Exodus 12:29-32).

For 244 years, we have celebrated the birth of the United States with cookouts and fireworks. But for over 3,465 years now as instructed by God to make this a "perpetual commemoration," Hebrew people around the world have celebrated their birth as a nation by continuing to sit down every Passover evening, being fully dressed for travel, to eat the very same meal of mutton, bitter herbs and unleavened bread, along with a few additional symbolic foods, as they once again tell the story of God's death angel passing over and the beginning of their journey back to the Promised Land.

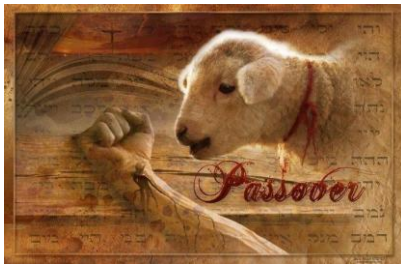
As the book of Hebrews points out, it took a great act of faith on the part of Moses and the Israelites to celebrate this first feast of Passover – before the event ever happened. Had God's death angel not passed over that night, think of the retaliation which the Egyptians would have inflicted on their Israelite slaves for attempting to escape from the land. (cf. Hebrews 11:28) But it did happen and this Passover event became such a defining moment in the history of the people of God that that it restarted their calendar; they have counted their years as a nation – and now as a unique people - from this date ever since; the Passover literally restarted the calendar for the Hebrew people.

There is a much deeper significance to the Passover, which even when pointed out by their own prophets, by John the Baptist and also by Jesus, that the Hebrew people never caught on to. **As signified by the blood splashed on their doorposts, it was the death of another in their place – for the Israelites, the sacrifice of a lamb – which caused the death angel to pass over that night.** Certainly the Hebrew people ate meat on other occasions, but the only purpose of this Passover lamb this evening was to give its life so that they might live. By cooking and eating the lamb whole, they were identifying themselves with the lamb ... taking the lamb into themselves ... it becoming a part of them; thus seeing the lamb's blood on the doorposts the angel passed over.

That someone – in this case a lamb – could sacrificially give their life in substitution for another, is one of those deep truths that have been buried within the Biblical record from its very beginning. Told that on the day they ate the forbidden fruit they would die, **Adam and Eve** did die spiritually in that their sin now separated them from fellowship with God. Yet they also expected to die physically, except that God took the

life of an animal in exchange for theirs. They then wore that animal's skin thereafter as a reminder that another had died in their place.

Abraham was the next to catch a glimmer of this deep truth when as a test, God ordered him to sacrifice his only son Isaac. As he carried the wood up the mountain, Isaac asked his father where was the lamb for the sacrifice? Abraham replied that *God would provide the lamb* (Genesis 22:8). Now, whether Abraham was remembering a family story from his distant past or was just spinning a tale to comfort his son, we will never know. Because the faith chapter of Hebrews only tells us that had God allowed him to go through with the sacrifice, Abraham fully expected God to raise his son back to life. But instead, God did provide a substitute and in this way the sparing of Isaac's life became a foreshadowing of another sacrifice and other spared lives yet to come.

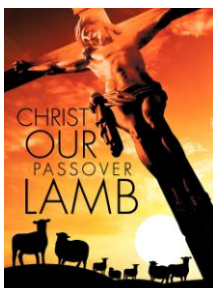


The next hint came as **Isaiah** prophesied concerning the coming Messiah. At first Isaiah described the Messiah as a conquering king, as the Prince of Peace (9:6-7), but as the prophecies further developed, the Messiah was also described as a despised and suffering servant who would die for the sins of the world; like a lamb being led to slaughter.

Isaiah wrote, *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; **like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.***

By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. **The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.**, (Isaiah 53:6-11)*



Surely some of the Hebrew people must have made the connection, that God's Messiah must first suffer before he could conquer. Either that or John the Baptist, received a specific revelation from God, because when he saw Jesus, John did not say "there goes the Prince of Peace," but rather "**behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (John 1:29, 36).

This description of Him as “the lamb of God” could only lead to one future for Jesus of Nazareth – His sacrificial death in behalf of others; yet Jesus never balked at this title. Later in His ministry, He would freely describe Himself as destined to die for the world’s sins (Matt 16:21, Luke 24:26-27).

Think about this for a moment **from His birth, Jesus was destined to be the ultimate Passover Lamb sacrificed so that the death angel might pass over all who received Him – who by faith took Him into themselves, identifying with His death in their behalf.** In Jesus’ case it was not blood splashed on a doorpost, but rather His shed on a cross which caused death to once again pass over those thus protected. It was not by coincidence that Jesus was crucified on the day of Passover, while the streets of Jerusalem ran red with the blood of the sacrificial lambs.

Jesus Christ was the long promised substitutionary sacrifice, that God His Father lovingly sent into our world to seek us and save us and by His death to cause the death angel once for all, to pass over us.

This is what Philip explained to the Ethiopian eunuch as he pondered the meaning of Isaiah’s suffering servant prophecy (Acts 8:27 ff.).

This is also how the Apostle Peter described Jesus to us....

*You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, **but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.** He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God (1 Peter 1:18-21)*

Interestingly, like that first Passover which restarted the Hebrew national calendar. The death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s Messiah, was such a world changing event that it also restarted the entire western world’s calendar. So today whenever we join with other Christians from around the world, in coming to the communion table to remember and celebrate Christ’s death in our behalf, we will be continuing a practice that He Himself began that Passover eve some 2,020 years ago. As He said, when you eat this bread and drink this cup, do this in remembrance of me.

As we just noted, Christ’s death occurred on Passover, a day we now commemorate as Good Friday and then His return to life three days later, on the day we now celebrate as Easter, thus in theory Christians and Jews should always celebrate Passover and Easter on the same weekend. But in deference to the Jewish holiday and to make a clear

separation between the two, the Christian Church early on decided to hold its Easter celebration always on the first Sunday following Passover.

So that is how two very similar events have twice restarted the calendar. First there was the Hebrew Passover, then there was the Christian Passover. But perhaps there is yet a third Passover by which each one of us might restart our personal calendar.

Just as the Hebrew people were to count their life as a nation as having begun on the day of Passover (Exodus 12:2). In like manner, we, who have placed our faith in the Passover offered us by Christ Jesus, may reckon the day of our conversion to Christianity, whether we remember the exact date or not, as the beginning of our new life in Jesus.

First like the Egyptian Hebrews, there was the old enslaved life which you lived before meeting Christ. Now there is the new post Passover life you live because Christ blood has covered you and Christ's spirit now lives in you. This is what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus, *"you must be born again ... from above"*

How about you? Whether or not you can recall a particular day or particular event in which you first accepted Christ as your savior, do you now think of yourself as "redeemed by the blood of the lamb." Have you accepted the death of the Lamb of God in your behalf and have taken Him into your life to now live as a child of God?

If so, then come to this communion table to remember what it represents for you, Christ the long promised Lamb of God who gave His life so that the death angel might pass over you. Remember, rejoice and let this remembrance newly encourage you to now live boldly, as the born again child of God that you have become.

But let scripture also give you a word of warning, that if you have never personally asked Christ to be your savior, if the bread broken and cup shared – symbolic of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus -- have little meaning for you.... then stay away from this table. For to participate in that which you do not believe and have not accepted is to eat and drink judgment against yourself (1 Corinthians 11:29).

Either you have accepted the Passover that Jesus the Lamb of God has provided for you or the death angel still waits for you.

Let us pray that everyone comes to be covered by the blood of the Lamb.