

the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy is soon to come to pass.

Conclusion

As the above has shown, Elam and Persia were distinct powers in the ancient world. This distinction should not be forgotten when interpreting

prophecies relating to the time of the end. How Elam will have her captivity reversed remains to be seen. If military action is ever directed against Iran by the United States and Britain, an invasion of this area would be an obvious option. This could lead in turn to the freeing of this area from Iranian control.

Moses: earth's meekest man

10. The final stroke

John Mitchell

The conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh reaches its climax with the night of the first Passover, in which the Egyptians suffer the loss of their first-borns and Israel leave Egypt in their journey to the Promised Land.

THE PASSOVER in which Egypt was humbled and Israel delivered was the second great sign in the Old Testament of God's plan of salvation. When Abraham offered his son Isaac upon the altar, having said that "God [would] provide Himself a lamb" (Gen. 22:8), He established the principle of the salvation of the individual through faith. But when Yahweh's angel of death passed over the dwellings of the children of Israel as, also in faith, they ate the paschal lamb or kid, having struck their doorposts and lintels with its blood, God established for a chosen people a principle of salvation that was to have far wider ramifications.

And though on both occasions it was the sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, the true Lamb of God, which was symbolised, the significance of the second was greater by far for Israel in the time that then was. It meant the birth of a nation and the institution of an annual 'birthday' in the repetition every year of the two feasts of Passover and of Unleavened Bread. Moreover, the united participation of the twelve tribes of Israel in one great act of faith and deliverance transformed them overnight from a scattering of slaves in the Nile Delta and Goshen into a united people with a common goal and purpose. And to emphasise the radical nature of the event, the calendar itself was changed: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you", said the God of Israel (Ex. 12:2).

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Celebrating the Passover

The preparations for the Feast and for the release had been according to the conditions laid down by Yahweh and transmitted to Moses and Aaron.

Through their representatives the whole congregation of Israel were told that on the tenth day of the month Abib each household according to their tribes was to select a perfect lamb or kid ready for the feast four days later. Households that were too small to consume it were to share the lamb or kid with another household of the same tribe that was similarly placed, provided they ate it together under the same roof: "they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it". Not a bone of the animal was to be broken, and any that was left had to be burned with fire before the dawn. Nor was this to be a sit-down feast: "thus shall ye eat

A table set out with items for a modern Passover celebration.

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it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover" (vv. 8,11).

"I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast" (v. 12), was God's judgement upon a realm that had persecuted His people. But that was not the totality of it. From the beginning, when Moses had appeared before Pharaoh, the contest had assumed a spiritual dimension, as between the gods of the most powerful of the kingdoms of men and the God of Israel. The object of the final stroke was to show conclusively that there is only one true God, as indeed there is to this day. "Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD [Yahweh]" was the final word. (v. 12). When He had finished, both the land and its gods would be prostrate, the one in grief, the other in the dust.

The sacredness of the moment felt by the children of Israel as they gathered around their dwellings "between the two evenings" (v. 6, mg.), that is to say, from the time the sun began to decline to its setting, and the head of the family sacrificed the lamb, must have been very great, and accompanied by earnest prayers for the promised deliverance. When the doorposts and the lintel of the house had been struck with the blood of the animal as prescribed, taking care that none of it fell on the ground to be trodden underfoot, the company were thereby sealed from the outside world until the midnight hour was passed. Then, having been passed over by the angel of death, they bowed their heads and worshipped as they awaited the call to move. That call, when it came, was official. 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 one dead. The Lord had smitten all the first-born in the land, from the son of Pharaoh on his throne to that of the prisoner in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle.

Departing from Egypt

In haste, without waiting for the dawn, the king sent for Moses and Aaron and in desperation said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. Take your flocks and herds, as you have said, and go". Then, most uncharacteristically and in total submission through fear, he added, "And also bless me" (vv. 31,32, NIV).

Thoroughly demoralised, the Egyptians themselves also urged the people to hurry and leave the country. "'For otherwise,' they said, 'we will all die'" (v. 33). Moreover, Yahweh had made the people of the land so favourably disposed that, when the children of Israel asked them for articles of silver and gold, and for clothing, they gave them what they asked for, no doubt as a further incentive towards being rid of them.

The assembly point for the Israelites was the garrison town of Rameses, which they had slaved so hard to build, but no one hindered them now. And the day must have been well worn before they were able to move off for the tented camp named Succoth, or Booths, where they were to take up the lifestyle of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and become strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

How the children of Israel were organised at this stage is not explained, nor whether they had any means of transport. That they were all on foot, men, women and children, all two million of them, seems very unlikely. There were, of course, many camels in Egypt (they had already been among the animals subject to the "grievous murrain" in one of the plagues), but they are never mentioned in the account of the wanderings of the children of Israel over the next forty years. They were, in fact, unclean animals in the eyes of the Israelites; their flesh was forbidden as food (Deut. 14:7). Oxen, however, there were in abundance, both for sacrifice and for food, and they were eminently suitable for harnessing to wagons capable of hauling heavy burdens.

And so, although the only piece of equipment mentioned as the Israelites left home was their kneading troughs, which they bound up in their clothes on their shoulders, there must have been many necessary items, such as vessels, pots and pans, and sleeping mats, which had to be taken. The people must have made a motley throng as they converged on their first encampment at Succoth, some no doubt riding asses, some pushing handcarts, others trudging along heavily laden with possessions.

Moreover, many other people, referred to as a "mixed multitude", went with them, who also wanted to get away from Egypt; a ragtag and bobtail element that was to cause much trouble later on in the journeyings of the Israelites. And in the midst of it all there were large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. One wonders how long it took for Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel to bring order out of chaos, and

turn the rabble into a cohesive community capable of organised movement and control. That it was effectively done is shown by the fact that the Israelites went up out of Egypt “by their divisions” and “armed for battle” (12:51; 13:18, NIV), that is, under military control.

Consecrated to God

Of course, Moses had other, deeper, things on his mind in addition to acting as chief organiser and commissary for the new community. The significance of the Passover had to be made plain to the people, and also the responsibilities that Yahweh had laid down in consequence of it. In future every male child and every animal that opened the womb had to be consecrated to the Lord in recompense for their being spared when the angel of death passed over them in Egypt. So Moses gathered the elders of the people together and explained it all to them.

He said, “Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought you out of it with a mighty hand . . . Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites—the land He swore to your forefathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey—you are to observe this ceremony in this month: For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD . . . On that day tell your son, ‘I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’ This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips . . . You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year” (Ex. 13:3-10, NIV).

He then said, “In days to come when your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ say to him, ‘With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of My firstborn sons.’ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with His mighty hand” (vv. 14-16, NIV).

All this, and much more besides, would have to be explained down through the male ranks of the population so that none misunderstood it, and so it would seem that the remaining days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread would be taken up with this and other organisational matters. For had not Moses said that the seventh day was to be a festival to the Lord? Only then would Israel, having consecrated themselves, be ready to move off under a new and greater sign that they were indeed the people of God.

And when they did move, there was, reverently borne along somewhere in the great procession, a coffin-like vessel containing the bones of the man who had brought Israel to Egypt in the first place, namely the great Joseph, saviour of his people, who had himself prophesied of the exodus and had extracted a solemn promise from the fathers of their tribes, saying, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place” (Gen. 50:25, NIV). So Joseph would be laid to rest in the parcel of ground in Shechem that his father Jacob had specially given to him as his patrimony against the day when the patriarchs and all who have shared their faith will inherit the Kingdom of God.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

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