



the Doorposts

by: Tim Kelley

This past week, I received two interesting emails. One was from a fellow named Chris and the other was from a fellow named Jeremy. Both had visited our Ami Yisrael web site, and both had questions. Chris' question was very broad. He wanted me to prove "in (a) simple, non spiritualized manner, why "Jesus/ Yeshua" is the messiah that was promised in the Tnakh?" Being that he had already revealed the fact that he was "closer to a Karaite Jew in beliefs", I realized it would be a challenge, but I would do the best I could. On the other hand, Jeremy's question was much easier to tackle, not because of the question, but because of the fact that he made no statement as to where he was coming from, even though the context revealed that he had a typical Christian background. His question was simply "Were the Gentiles ever under the Torah being the covenant was only made with the nation of Israel?"

When answering their un-related questions, I noticed that in both cases I pretty much started my explanation by going back to a very familiar story - the Passover and Israel's exodus from Egypt.

The story of Passover and how the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt is probably the most foundational event recorded in the scriptures. Nearly 2500 years of world history took place before the Passover, and there have been 3500 years of history since then, but if you were to consider the Passover's place in the Bible, only 5% of it is dedicated to events that happened before Passover, while the rest of the Bible . . . nearly 95% of it, is dedicated to events that did and will take place after that original Passover.

Why is Passover such a pivotal event in the history of Israel? There are a number of reasons, but in this study, I'll only mention two.

The first is that Passover shows us how vulnerable to deception we can be if we don't believe and follow God. The second reason spins off of the first, and that is - Passover shows us that believing and following God oftentimes takes courage and faith. We will begin our study by discussing the second reason, then close with a few comments about the first.

Passover marks the time God really began working with Israel. Think about it. We are introduced to the children of Jacob in Genesis 29, and though we are given brief glimpses into the twelve brother's lives, we never see them as a people, and we never see God dealing directly with them. In other words, there are no "and the LORD said to ..." events. But things changed in the book of Exodus. Exodus is where God called Moses, and Moses began instructing Israel on God's behalf. Passover is where Israel is first tested to see whether they will obey Him or not.

In Israel's first test of obedience, God gave them some very explicit instructions that would have irreversible implications on the future of each Israelite family. Each family was to take a one year old lamb, kill it at the threshold of their door, and paint its blood on the door posts and on the lintel that went above the door. They were then instructed to roast the lamb then take it inside their house, and eat it that evening. They were to stay inside their houses until morning. If they followed God's instructions, all the firstborn of their family would live, but if not, their firstborn would die that night. We read about it in Exodus 12 -

Exodus 12:21-23 Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Pick out and take lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover *lamb*.²² "And you shall take a bunch of hyssop, dip *it* in the blood that *is* in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that *is* in the basin. And none of you shall go out of the door of his house until morning.²³ "For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike *you*.

This passage lists some, but certainly not all the instructions God gave the Israelites to do that night. It is assumed that all the instructions had to be followed, and if they were, each family would emerge from their

homes intact. They would also experience something they probably never expected - their Egyptian neighbors blaming the death of their firstborn on the Israelites and subsequently forcing them out of their homes and out of the country.

If we had the time, we could break down all the instructions we find in the above passage as well as others we find concerning that fateful night. We could find specific cultural and spiritual meaning in practically every instruction, but in this study I want to focus on just one instruction - the instruction to apply the lamb's blood to the doorpost and lintel of the houses. That instruction alone could have a number of spiritual aspects, so this study will focus on the significance of the doorpost in the Egyptian culture, and the impact painting it with lamb's blood had on the Israelite's Egyptian neighbors, and the Israelites themselves.

Why did God instruct the Israelites to put lambs blood on the doorposts and the lintel of their homes? Why didn't He have them put it over the windows, on top of their roof, or on their entrance mat? It would seem that since God was going to be "passing over", it would have been more logical to put the blood on the roof where it would have been more readily seen. And why did it have to be so bold and open? Could they have not simply killed the lamb behind the house, collected the blood in a pan, and left it outside their door so as to not draw the Egyptian's attention? And if it did have to be bold, why not simply paint the entire door with blood? Is there significance to the door post? I believe there is.

To get started, let us lay a little background. We'll go back approximately 270 years to when the Israelites left Canaan to escape a famine.

When Joseph brought his brothers into Egypt, they were monotheistic nomad shepherds living in tents, just as were their ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. As they left Canaan and entered Egypt, Joseph met them in Goshen¹ and gave them clear instructions -

^{ESV} **Genesis 46:33** When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

What was so special about Goshen, and why did Joseph want his brothers to live there? It's been stated that since Goshen was located in the Nile delta, it was probably the most fertile area in the land of Egypt, and thus Joseph wanted them to be able to prosper in their endeavors. Though Goshen was indeed "the best of the land"² and his brothers probably did prosper there, I believe Joseph's motive was more visionary. Here are three reasons why I believe this to be the case:

1. It would have been Joseph's desire that his brothers and their families wait out the famine in Goshen, and then return to Canaan as soon as possible. Unless Joseph had been aware of the prophecy given to Abraham³, and had then been able to connect the dots that he was the one who was to bring the captivity to pass, it would be only logical that he encourage his brothers to return to Canaan after the famine. Goshen was located on the northeast corner of the Nile delta, north and east of the major population centers of Egypt. When the famine was over, the brothers could make a hasty retreat back to their own country. In the mean time, their flocks would have been well fed.
2. Joseph probably thought that their occupation as shepherds might keep them separate from the Egyptians. Though it's evident that the Egyptians did have sheep⁴, shepherding was probably an occupation that was considered to be "beneath" the average Egyptian. In fact, Pharaoh himself appears to have had difficulty finding Egyptians willing to take care of his own sheep.⁵ Thus

¹ Gen 46:29

² Gen. 47:6

³ Gen. 15:13

⁴ Gen. 47:17

⁵ Gen. 47:6

perceived to be not only an alien people, but also a lower class of people, it might be possible to keep his Hebrew brothers and the Egyptians separate.

3. Joseph would have wanted to avoid as much as possible any chance that his Hebrew brothers and their families would assimilate into the Egyptian culture. Joseph had lived in Egypt for many years and was well aware of their pagan culture. They worshipped multiple gods including the god “Khnum” who was thought to be the creator of the bodies of human children, and depicted as a man with a ram’s head ⁶. The Egyptian culture could quickly corrupt the mono-theistic Hebrews, something that his father Jacob as well as his grandfather Isaac and great-grandfather Abraham feared. Thus, when news came that his family had entered Egypt, he mounted his chariot to quickly join his family in Goshen, thus preventing them from traveling deeper into Egypt.



Unfortunately, Joseph’s plan to keep them separate did not work, for by the time we get to the Exodus, they had abandoned their tents and were now living in houses in close proximity to the Egyptians; and in some cases even living with the Egyptians⁷. They had moved beyond Goshen, even moving into the more metropolitan cities⁸. What’s more, they had begun to serve the Egyptian gods⁹.

For all practical purposes, Israel had assimilated into the Egyptian culture. Except for a few physical features - including the custom of circumcising their children, the way they dressed, their nomadic “clannish” culture, and their belief that they were somehow “special” in the eyes of the non-Egyptian god called YHVH, they were probably much like the Egyptians. Eventually, the Pharaoh noticed something else - the Israelite population was growing faster than the Egyptian population. So he attempted to slow that growth down by enslaving the Israelites, and as the exodus story begins, we see Israel crying out to God because they are being afflicted by the Egyptians, the very people they had become a part of.

“What does all that have to do with doorposts?” you might ask. Quite simply - *tents do not have doorposts!* If Israel had not assimilated in the Egyptian culture, the Israelites would have still been living in tents, and there would not have been a “blood on the doorposts” story to tell. That’s a big “if”, and it leads one to ask a number of other “ifs”. What if Israel had returned to Canaan after the famine? What kept them in Egypt? Did the fertile soil of Goshen provide them with such abundance that they did not want to leave? Did they, like the Egyptians, sell themselves to Pharaoh for food and were thus unable to leave? We don’t know. What we do know is that they had given up their nomadic lifestyle and had ‘settled’ in Egypt. They had given up their tents for more permanent structures like houses, and houses have doorposts.

According to archeologists, the Egyptian houses were built out of bricks made of mud and straw that were dried in the sun. These are the “bricks” we see in Exodus 5:8. Since the bricks were dried in the sun and not fired in an oven, they were not very durable, but were sufficient for the Egyptian climate. But they did have one problem; they were not strong enough to hold a door of sufficient mass to keep predators out.

Any builder knows that in order to have a strong and secure door, you have to have a strong door frame. That’s why in most houses, the exterior doors have extra framing around the door that is usually tied into the other framing to give it extra strength. Most exterior doors are also thicker than other doors, and normally have extra and larger hinges, all for the purpose of supporting the door. So the Egyptians, instead of building the door’s supporting structure with brick, built it with stone. That would include the

⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khnum>

⁷ Exodus 3:22

⁸ Exodus 12:37, Numbers 33:3,5

⁹ Joshua 24:15

threshold, side posts, and lintel above the door ¹⁰. By using stone, the Egyptians had strong door frames which would accommodate heavy doors. Because of this type of construction, the Egyptians probably thought their homes were impenetrable, and because the Hebrews lived in houses of similar construction, they probably thought their houses they built were impenetrable as well.

In the Exodus 12 passage quoted above, the Hebrew word for *doorposts* is “mezuzah” (מְזוּזָה) – Strong’s 4201). The plural form of mezuzah is “mezuzot”. When we think of a ‘mezuzah’, we see a small box or tube that contains a scripture written on parchment that is attached to a door. The Jewish understanding is that the parchment is the mezuzah, and the box or tube is just the case that holds the mezuzah. In either case, to call the case or the parchment a mezuzah is an incorrect use of the Hebrew term because a *mezuzah* is simply a doorpost. Never-the-less, the Jewish people have certain thoughts about the mezuzah, one being that it provides protection for your home. According to Chabad.org -

“The mezuzah is also a symbol of G-d's watchful care over the home. The name of G-d, *Sha-dai*, which appears on the reverse side of the parchment, is an acronym for the Hebrew words which mean "Guardian of the doorways of Israel." The placing of a mezuzah on the doors of a home or office protects the inhabitants -- whether they are inside or outside.¹¹”

What we see is that the Egyptians believed the doorposts – the *mezuzot* - of their houses provided them protection, and the Jewish people today believe the words on parchment - the *mezuzah* inside a little box that’s attached to the door of their houses, provides them protection.

Getting back to the Exodus story . . . we can assume that the Egyptians, and the Hebrews for that matter, had this door that they believed to be impenetrable because of their solid threshold, doorposts, and lintel. After the first three plagues, the Hebrews noticed something else about their doors. It seems that their doors were a little more impenetrable than those of the Egyptians. While the Egyptian’s doors could not keep the swarming flies out of their homes, the Hebrew’s doors could. When locusts came right through the Egyptian’s doors, the Hebrew’s doors kept them out. When even a flaming torch could not provide light in an Egyptian’s home, the doors on the Hebrew’s homes kept the darkness out so that even a small candle lit it brightly. There was obviously something very different about the Hebrew’s doors.

As we know, the Israelites only experienced the effects of the first three plagues. The following six seemed to just happen to the Egyptians. The Israelites did not have to do anything to escape those plagues - not even the plague of hail. Though the Egyptians – even those who had come to believe Israel’s God - had to move their livestock inside to protect them from the hail, the Hebrews did not have to do anything. Thus when Moses introduced the tenth plague, the Hebrews probably expected to be spared from it as well. Why would this tenth plague be any different?

But it was different. Moses explicitly told them to do something that would have been called suicide at worst, and - if the term had been available back then - “politically incorrect” in the least. What’s more, they were told to do it in the plain sight of their Egyptian neighbors. They were told to sacrifice a lamb.

Before moving on, it’s important to know a little about the Egyptian mindset towards sheep. As we saw earlier, the Egyptians did have sheep, and though they likely used sheep products (milk, wool), it’s unlikely that they ate them. But one thing is for sure - they did not use them in sacrifice. Notice Moses’ response to Pharaoh when he - in order to bring an end to the plague of flies - told Moses to go sacrifice, but to stay in the land of Egypt -

¹⁰ Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine, Carolyn R. Higginbotham; Brill, Leiden, Bolton, Kohn; 2000; ISBN 9004117687; pg. 89

¹¹ http://www.chabad.org/generic_cdo/aid/278476/jewish/Mezuzah.htm

^{ESV} **Exodus 8:26** . . . "It would not be right to do so, for the offerings we shall sacrifice to the LORD our God are an abomination to the Egyptians. If we sacrifice offerings abominable to the Egyptians before their eyes, will they not stone us?"

In this verse we see that in Moses mind, as it would be in the rest of the Israelite's minds . . . sacrificing the "abomination of the Egyptians (KJV)", i.e. - sheep, is something you just don't do in Egypt. Why? Because to the Egyptians sheep were - or were at least a depiction of - a god. And what was Moses telling them to do? Sacrifice a lamb! But there is more to it than that!

They were to take a lamb, lead it through the streets, and bring it into their home. Imagine that - bringing a living "god" into their home as if it were a pet! Then three days later they were to take that living "god" outside and sacrifice it in front of the door to their house. That would not have been too bad if they could do it quickly, maybe at night and then cover the evidence, but Moses said to do it in the afternoon - in broad daylight - then instead of dumping the blood down a drain, they were to take the lamb's blood and paint it all over the lintel, the doorposts, and the threshold of their home as if to tell their Egyptian neighbors "Hey, look what I just did". Then to top it off, they were to roast it instead of boiling it. That meant that instead of cutting it up and cooking it inside their home in a pot, they had to start a fire of sufficient size to roast a lamb, which meant it had to be roasted outside. Thus the lamb would be hanging on a stake over the fire in the open for about 4 hours - in clear view of their Egyptian neighbors, who by this time had surely guessed that the Hebrews intended to eat it! This is something you just don't do!

Let's remember that earlier Moses had feared that they would be stoned if they did this - and that was when they were going to do it collectively where maybe only a few lambs would have been sacrificed. Now Moses was expecting them - each family - to sacrifice a lamb. Instead of just a few lambs, there were going to be thousands of lambs sacrificed! And for what reason? Because Moses said that if they did not, a destroyer would enter their homes and would kill their firstborn.

"But wait" they probably thought. "We don't have to risk our lives by sacrificing a lamb. A destroyer can't enter our homes . . . we have heavy impenetrable doors hung on rock-solid doorposts! Our mezuzot will protect us!" But then they began to remember the previous plagues and the fact that their doors were just like the Egyptian's doors. They all had rock thresholds, doorposts, and lintels. They began to realize that it wasn't their doorposts - their mezuzot - that had provided them protection, it was the hand of God that protected them - and this time God's protection was not going to be there simply because they were Hebrews.

This time God's protection would depend upon their willingness, or should we say - courage to follow Moses' instructions and cover up their mezuzot, their man-made protection, with the sign of God's protection - the blood of the lamb. To state it a different way, they would have to rely on a different "rock" for their protection than what they had in the past.

So that afternoon, the Israelites, as well as some of the Egyptians who had come to recognize the God of Israel, mustered up the courage to do what they knew might cause them and their families to be stoned by the Egyptians. They took their lambs, killed them and covered the doorposts and lintels of their doors with its blood. They then went inside and ate. It's interesting to note that God never told them to go in and shut the door behind them. Why would they need to? The blood had made the door irrelevant.

As scripture reveals, that night the destroyer made his way through the land of Egypt, but God was always a few steps ahead of him. On any house where God could see doorposts instead of blood, he continued on down the street - He didn't stop and protect that house - and thus the destroyer was able to penetrate their impenetrable door. On the other hand, if all God saw was blood instead of doorposts¹², He stopped at that house and prevented the destroyer from entering in. God delivered the firstborn of the homes that were covered with blood, but the firstborn who were in homes that only had mezuzot, died.

¹² Exodus 12:13

The Israelites left, or better yet, were forced out of their homes the next morning and returned to living in tents. Their Egyptian “friends” turned against them, blaming them for the death of their own firstborn and wanted them out of their neighborhoods. It’s quite possible they believed that their misfortune was as at the hand of the sheep-god Khnum who killed their children because they did not stop the Israelites from sacrificing sheep, and if they didn’t do something to punish the Israelites, he was going to kill them all¹³.

Scripture shows that the Israelites lived in tents for at least the next forty years. Though their faith in God had increased as they saw the plagues unfold, and had reached a zenith at Passover, it quickly waned. Within days they were longing to return to Egypt, and within months, their hopes of reaching the Promised Land had vanished. Those very people who risked everything to save their firstborn died in the wilderness and were buried.

Forty years later, just before Passover and just days before entering the Promised Land, Moses again instructed Israel to apply something to their mezuzot - the doorposts of their houses. He said -

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 11:18-21** "You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ¹⁹ You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ²⁰ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, ²¹ that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

These instructions were given to a new generation of Israelites - some of whose lives were spared as a result of their parents applying the blood of a lamb to their doorpost. If they remembered the salvation that got them to this point, and then wrote God’s instructions - His Torah - on the doorposts of their homes and on their hearts, they would preserve their lives and the lives of their children for generations to come. They were to never cease telling their children the story of the Passover, and they were to always teach their children God’s ways. In effect, they were to forever show their children that the words of God must always be mingled into the blood that is applied to the doorposts of their houses and their heart.

As I conclude this study, I want to bring in a point that I mentioned in the beginning, and that is: we open ourselves up to being vulnerable to deception if fail to maintain faith in God and to follow His instructions. In the days and years leading up to the Exodus, Israel was at its spiritual “low point”. Over the years they had forgotten their Hebrew culture, forsaken the God of their father Abraham, and adopted the Egyptian gods. It seems that the more they moved away from God, the deeper into slavery they fell.

Many Bible students believe that the period of time from when Jacob and his sons entered Egypt until the exodus was a period of 270 years. If God had sent the tenth plague at the end of those 270 years without first giving them the preceding nine plagues, they probably would not have obeyed. They would not have stood up against the ridicule of their neighbors, but instead, would have put their trust in their rock doorposts. As a result, the destroyer would have entered their houses and their firstborn would have died. Fortunately for them (and for us) God sent the other nine plagues first and they helped turn the people back to God.

The American people are in many ways just like the Israelites. Our nation is 240 years old ¹⁴, and for the last 50 years (beginning in the mid 1960’s) has been steadily forgetting our Judeo-Christian culture, forsaking the God of our fathers, and have begun to worship other gods - atheism, humanism, and materialism to name a few. Though God has been giving us subtle warnings over the years, we’ve failed to heed them. What’s more, we’ve gone beyond the Israelites. When the Israelites were faced with the destruction of their firstborn, they in the least considered the idea that their rock doorposts could keep the destroyer out. We Americans have, on the other hand, opened our doors to the destroyer. An article in the February 22, 2016 edition of the “New

¹³ Exodus 12:33

¹⁴ This was originally written in 2016

American”¹⁵ magazine carries the headline “The Devil Entered American Homes Last Month”. The article reveals that the Fox television network has begun to run a series that depicts a man name “Lucifer” as the devil who is tired of doing God’s “underworld” work, and now wants to use his “powers” to fight crime. The obvious intent - according to the article - is to paint Lucifer in a favorable light and God in a negative light.



So it appears that the destroyer has now made it into many American homes and is destroying their children. As a nation, our only hope is that God sends us plagues that will turn us back to Him, just as He did for the Israelites 3500 years ago. Then when we apply the blood to our doorposts, and write God’s word on our hearts, maybe he will deliver us as He did them.

Passover is the beginning of our walk. It is the time of redemption. It’s where our salvation begins. We

cannot understand God or His Torah without understanding the purpose of the blood because the blood is where it all starts. That is why it seems that when we’re asked to explain God, the Torah, and the Messiah, a good place to start is with Passover.

Shalom Alecheim

¹⁵ “the New American” is published twice-monthly by American Opinion Publishing, Appleton, WI