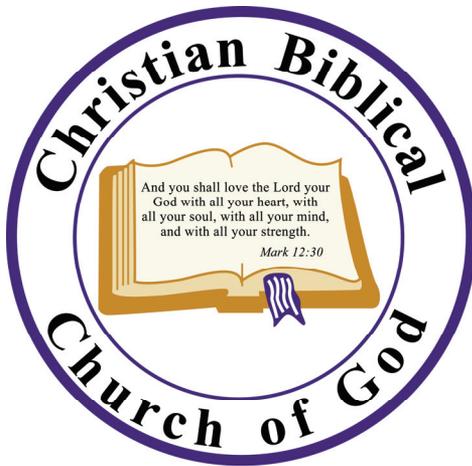


The Night to be Much Observed



by
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The Night to be Much Observed

Far from being an “Old Testament” ritual law, the “Night to be Much Observed” has deep spiritual meaning today for true Christians. But why does God command us to observe this night? What did this night picture for ancient Israel—and what is its true meaning for the Church today?

Moreover, just *how* are we to actually “observe” this night?

As most in God’s Church know, the Night to be Much Observed is the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and commemorates Israel’s exodus from Egypt. As we will also see, this special “night” was foreshadowed in Gen. 15 when God ratified His covenant with Abraham.

For Christians, the Night to be Much Observed is an occasion to truly rejoice as we acknowledge God for His personal intervention in our lives—in leading us out of spiritual bondage to this world, out of “spiritual Egypt.”

The *King James Version* of the Bible and *The New Testament In Its Original Order* will be used throughout this booklet.

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The “Night to be Much Observed” Foreshadowed

In order to really understand the Night to be Much Observed, we need look first at its historical background—because **this night was foretold** even before the nation of Israel came into existence. In the book of Exodus, God gave this command to the children of Israel: “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass **at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day** it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. It is a **night to be much observed** unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: **this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations**” (Ex. 12:40-42).

Indeed, after 400 years in captivity (Gen. 15:13), Israel *was* delivered. And as we will see, Israel’s deliverance occurred just as God had promised. In fact, both the Passover and the Night to be Much Observed were foreshadowed in a vital covenant that God made with Abraham. God specially chose Abraham to be party to His covenant because he obeyed God’s voice and kept His commandments and His laws (Gen. 26:5).

The story begins in Genesis, the fifteenth chapter. “After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward’. And Abram said, ‘Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Behold, to

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me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.’ And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, ‘This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir’ ” (Gen. 15:1-4).

God promised Abraham that an heir—physical offspring—would come from his own bowels. 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).

Then, God took Abraham outside—**on the night of the fourteenth of Nisan**—and said, “Look now toward heaven, and tell [count] the stars, if thou be able to number them ... so shall thy seed be” (Gen. 15:5). On a physical level, this promise would be fulfilled through the nation of Israel; spiritually, it will yet be fulfilled as God brings “many sons unto glory” (Heb. 2:10) through the promised Seed, Christ (Gal. 3:16). God told Abraham in Gen. 22:17-18 that “in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy Seed [Christ] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”

Later, during the daytime portion of the fourteenth, God told Abraham to prepare a special covenant sacrifice in which He was going to confirm His covenant with Abraham. “And he said unto him, ‘Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.’ And he took unto him all

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these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls 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** (see Jer. 34:18-20).

In this case, however, God was showing that **He alone would take the penalty** upon Himself—by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—for mankind’s failure to keep the covenant. That is why, as we will see, Abraham himself did not pass between the pieces—only God passed between the parts of the animals. Thus in this ceremony, our Lord and Savior pledged His own life to guarantee the fulfillment of that covenant!

The next verse in Genesis 15 has deep spiritual meaning. “And when the **sun was going down**, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, a horror of great darkness fell upon him” (Gen. 15:12). This is symbolic of the death of Jesus Christ. At the exact same time on Nisan 14 in 30 AD—as the daytime portion was ending and the sun was going down—Jesus had died and was sealed in the tomb. Then, at sunset, the 15th began.

The account continues: “And he said unto Abram, ‘know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great

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substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full' ” (Gen. 15:13-16).

Here, God tells Abraham that his offspring would someday become captives in a strange land—but that **he would deliver them** in accordance to the covenant promises. Notice that this promise of deliverance was made at or just after sunset—which would have been the beginning of the 15th of Nisan, which would later become the Night to be Much Observed.

Now notice verse 17: “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.**” While Abraham was in a deep sleep, God alone passed between the parts of the animals—pictured here by the burning lamp.

This passage shows that God ratified and sealed His covenant with Abraham by passing between the parts of the sacrificial animals. The covenant included a *maledictory* oath—that is, one that requires a *curse* (death) on those who violate the agreement.

Notice: “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 ani-

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mals of the covenant sacrifice. Once ratified by this 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 never violated the covenant He made with Abraham—He has always kept His word. Mankind is the guilty party, having repeatedly broken God’s covenant. Yet, to guarantee the total fulfillment of this all-important covenant, Christ agreed to pay the penalty in our place.

Now look again at Ex 12:40-42. “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even [on] **the selfsame day**”—the **very day** God made this covenant with Abraham—“it came to pass, that **all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt**. It is a **night to be much observed** unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that **night of the LORD to be observed** of all the children of Israel in their generations” (Ex. 12:40-42).

On the “selfsame” night that God had ratified His covenant with Abraham some 430 years earlier, He kept His promise to Abraham—the children of Israel departed from Rameses on the 15th day of Nisan, just as God had planned.

Physical Israel—Delivered out of Bondage in Egypt

As captives in Egypt, the children of Israel faced a bitter, hard bondage. Their taskmasters ruled with

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rigor and harshness. In desperation they turned to God, crying out for deliverance. “And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage” (Ex. 2:23).

God heard their cry! “And God heard their groaning, and God **remembered his covenant with Abraham**, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24). Later, in Ex. 6:5-6, God says, “**I have remembered my covenant** [with Abraham]. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, ‘**I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.**’ ”

When God makes a promise, He keeps it.

God put His plan into effect and called 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 which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows; And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:7-8). As He promised, God provided a way for the Israelites to be delivered from their affliction and bondage in Egypt.

God instructed Moses to prepare the children of Israel for their journey out of Egypt. Following the Passover on the 14th of Nisan—which forced Pharaoh

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to free God’s people—the exodus was to be on the nighttime portion of the 15th. That day would also become the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. “And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread [beginning on the 15th]; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye **observe this day** in your generations by an ordinance for ever” (Ex. 12:17).

As Israel left Egypt, that night became the “Night to be Much Observed” as commanded by God: “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even [on] **the selfsame day** it came to pass, that **all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt**. It is a **night to be much observed** unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that **night of the LORD to be observed** of all the children of Israel in their generations” (Ex. 12:41-42).

The children of Israel were the recipients of God’s physical covenantal promises. Yet, God also made spiritual promises to Abraham—which are being fulfilled through the New Covenant in Jesus Christ. Because we too are Abraham’s seed, we are “heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29)—the spiritual promises of the New Covenant.

Spiritual Israel—Delivered from Satan and his Evil World

For God’s Church (spiritual Israel), the “Night to be Much Observed” pictures our “exodus” from sin and being in bondage to this world—both typed by

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Egypt. “And Moses said unto the people, ‘Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten’ ” (Ex. 13:3).

Recall that God had promised Abraham that “in thy Seed [Christ] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:16). The spiritual blessings of salvation only apply today to God’s true Church—but they will ultimately include all of mankind. Only God’s Church today is being delivered from its bondage to Satan and his evil world—typed by Pharaoh and Egypt.

Being heirs of the promise allows us—through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our “Passover” (I Cor. 5:7)—to be set free from sin, the “yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1). This is being accomplished through the promises of the New Covenant, which was sealed by the blood of Jesus Christ. When one accepts Christ as personal Savior and is baptized into His death (Rom. 6:3), he or she becomes an heir to the promises given to Abraham.

The Night to be Much Observed pictures our release from sin and bondage. On this night, we should reflect on the **incredible truth that God has called us out of this world** and is leading us into His kingdom. In His final recorded prayer, Jesus Christ spoke these words, which are part of the New Covenant: “I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given Me, for they are Yours. All Mine are Yours, and all Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, **but these are [still] in the world**, and I am

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coming to you. Holy Father keep them in Your name, those whom you have given Me, so that they may be one, even as We are one” (John 17:9-11).

Our calling under the New Covenant means that though we are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world. Continuing: “I have given them Your words, and the world has hated them because **they are not of the world**, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. **They are not of the world**, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in Your truth; Your Word is the truth” (John 17:14-17).

Our profound calling ensures our place in the coming Kingdom of God, if we are faithful and obedient to the end. It is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ that delivers us from death and bondage to Satan’s world. Paul wrote, “[The Father] Who has personally **rescued us from the power of darkness** and has transferred us unto the kingdom of the Son of His love” (Col. 1:13).

Paul also writes: “Grace and peace be to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, in order that **He might deliver us from the present evil world**, according to the will of our God and Father” (Gal. 1:3-4).

God provided a Savior, Christ our Passover Lamb (I Cor. 5:7), who took on the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2)—just as pictured in Gen. 15.

The Church—On a Journey to the Kingdom of God

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Just as the children of Israel left Egypt for the Promised Land, we have spiritually left this world and all that it has to offer, and are continuing on our journey to the Kingdom of God. Indeed, God has called us out of this world—and we must obey the will of God just as Abraham did. “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, ‘Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, **unto a land that I will shew thee**’ ” (Gen. 12:1). Abraham “sojourned in the land of promise ... waiting for the city with *the* foundations of which God is *the* Architect and Builder” (Heb. 11:9-10).

So must we. Our eyes must always be focused on the Kingdom of God.

Each year at Passover, we renew our covenant with God the Father and Jesus Christ. This renewal helps us to stay focused on our ongoing “exodus” from this world, pictured by the Night to be Much Observed. Meanwhile, we look forward to the glorious Kingdom of God where we will reign with the Father and Jesus Christ forever!

How to Keep the Night to be Much Observed

This special occasion is to be observed **after sundown** on the nighttime portion of Nisan 15. “It is a **night** to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that **night** of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations” (Ex. 12:42). Also: “And they [the children of Israel] **departed** from Rameses in the first

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month, **on the fifteenth day** of the first month; on the morrow after the Passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians” (Num. 33:3).

Since the evening of the fifteenth begins the Feast of Unleavened Bread, it is good and proper to commemorate the Night to be Much Observed with a Sabbath-type meal. The evening should be opened with prayer.

For Christians, the Night to be Much Observed is an occasion to truly rejoice before God as we **acknowledge His personal intervention in our lives** in leading us out of spiritual bondage to this world—out of “spiritual Egypt.” On this night, we can reflect on its significance—and share in the reading and discussion of various biblical passages appropriate for the occasion.

We should all use this special occasion to worship God, to honor Him, and to rejoice in His love, grace and mercy!

The following is a list of suggested hymns from the Christian Biblical Church of God Hymnal that you can enjoy either before or after the night’s meal.

Page 3	For God Is Love
Page 7	The Lord’s My Shepherd
Page 16	His Mercy Never Fails
Page 70	Who Shall Dwell On Thy Holy Hill?
Page 71	O God, We Have Heard
Page 74	The Heavens God’s Glory Do Declare

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