

Passover (Part 7)

God's Festivals & Paganism

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Ezekiel 9:8 (New Revised English Bible – NRE) While the killing went on, I was left alone; and I threw myself on the ground, crying out, "LORD, are you going to destroy all the Israelites who are left in this outpouring of your anger of Jerusalem?"

The context here is where God gave Ezekiel a vision. In it, He told the angels to go around and place a mark on the forehead of those who were crying and sighing for all the abominations that were done in Jerusalem. So Ezekiel becomes alarmed, as he sees the large number of people who are being put to death. And I want you to hear God's response to that question—the anguished request of Ezekiel's.

Ezekiel 9:9 He answered, "The iniquity of Israel and Judah is very great indeed. The land is full of bloodshed. The city is filled with injustice. They are saying, 'The Lord has forsaken the land and does not see.'"

Some of you will have Bibles in which that word that is translated here "injustice," is translated "perverse" or "perversity." Both of those words apply. Perverse, or perversity, means willfully deviating from acceptable or normal behavior. It means contrary, refractory, or capricious. "Injustice" is an act that inflicts undeserved hardship—a violation of 'fair play.'

I bring this up because we have witnessed, [on national news] this week, vivid examples of what happens when people feel that the restraints of even "normal, acceptable, societal behavior" no longer have to be followed. We saw outright robbery, destruction of property, putting people in fear, inflicting serious injury and pain. And we saw wanton murder as well.

All of this was done with a feeling of complete justification, and apparently without any thought that they are going to have to pay for what they have done. All of this was done under the shameful pretense of seeking justice while, at the same time, denying justice and taking civil rights away from those they were attacking.

Do two wrongs ever make a right? Justice, in the biblical sense, is not only what one receives in court. Rather, it is what one gives everyone else. Justice is fairness. Justice is doing what is right.

In the book of Amos, justice is so closely associated with righteousness that the two can hardly be separated.

You might turn to Proverbs 18. Justice is doing unto others as you would have others do unto you.

Proverbs 18:13 (NRE) To answer a question before you have heard it out is both stupid and insulting.

And we might say, in this case (especially in Los Angeles), that it is also "deadly."

Proverbs 18:17 In a lawsuit, the first speaker seems right, until another comes forward to cross-examine him.

Proverbs 18:2 The foolish have no interest in seeking to understand, but only in expressing their own opinions.

The way these people are reacting is a special snare to those who are self-important. All of this is being done by people who have seen only 81 seconds of "evidence" on this particular case. Rodney King received *justice*, because justice is more than the final decision. Justice includes the entire process! What King did not get was "revenge." But in virtually every case that is brought before the court, there is a loser. That is reality.

And that is why it is God's advice to His people (in the book of Matthew) to "agree with your adversary while you're in the way, lest he haul you before the judge." It is another way of saying that God's advice is to settle it privately. Settle it out of court. Do what you can to 'cut your losses.'

Now, if Rodney King had done that after being stopped for speeding at 115 miles per hour through the streets of Los Angeles, this would have never occurred—because he would have submitted to the police, who then would not have beaten him. Instead, the entire nation is caught up in a crisis that has cost the lives of 43 people. Two hundred more are critically injured. And it is altering the lives of millions until the day of their death, and costing billions of dollars besides.

This is NOT to evaluate the quality of the jury's decision, but, rather, to focus on the irresponsible irresponsible 'grab for power' by those who rioted. And also to emphasize the wisdom of God's counsel to His people, even from scriptures that one might think or surely judge as being obscure or unimportant. But man is to live by every Word of God. And we need to be impressed by how much more important it is to obey *God's major commands* that form the foundation for a whole way of life.

Such a command is the one that we have been studying. Passover (and its proper observance) is major! And I am convinced that one of the major reasons the Jews rejected the Messiah is because they failed to have the teaching God would have supplied if they had been keeping the Passover properly. They were not looking for a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. They were looking for a conquering Messiah who would remove them from the bondage of Rome, and give them the "justice" that they felt they deserved.

Psalms 111:10 (NKJ) The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

There is a Chinese proverb that goes like this: "I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand." That is the issue here. Do you know that when Solomon made his famous request to God that it was not directly for wisdom—but rather for understanding, that he might be wise in judging God's people, Israel. That is, to be fair and to give them justice. We are counseled, by the book of Proverbs, that wisdom is the main thing. "Above all, get wisdom." But we find that "wisdom" is a part of a *process* preceded by getting knowledge and

then understanding. *Wisdom is the right application of the evidence presented to us by life's circumstances.*

That is the issue in regard to the evidence the Bible presents about Passover. But these people involved in the riots there in Los Angeles have not sought after "wisdom." They were not after "understanding." They were merely grabbing for power!

In the last sermon, we saw that God had "a golden opportunity" at the beginning of the second year after Israel left Egypt, to *reconfigure* the Passover observance differently than the original commands given in Exodus 12. We saw, by perusing Exodus 25-40 and Numbers 7-9 (containing instructions for the building the tabernacle and all of its appurtenances—including the consecration of the priests and the Levites) that no such change toward using the tabernacle or the priesthood occurred. Instead, God (in Numbers 9) referred to what were surely *the original instructions* in telling those people to *obey "the ordinances."*

Then we went on to examine, in a fair amount of detail, Numbers 28 and 29. There we found all the instructions regarding the sacrifices to be made at the temple, or the tabernacle, each day, each new moon, each Sabbath and festival. They are all listed there. And conspicuous in its absence are any instructions regarding Passover. Nothing changed!

So we concluded the sermon with these differences that exist between the two approaches. That is, the original Passover instruction, and the traditional celebrated by the Jew.

1 The lamb, with the original one, was killed at the beginning of the fourteenth.

In the traditional, the lamb was killed at the end of the fourteenth.

2 With the original, the lamb was killed at home.

With the traditional, the lamb was killed at the temple.

3 With the original, the lamb was killed by the head of the family.

With the traditional, the lamb was killed by the priest.

4 With the original, the blood was sprinkled on the doorposts.

With the traditional, the blood was sprinkled on the altar, and the fat was burned on the altar.

5 With the original, it was eaten on the night of the fourteenth.

With the traditional, it is eaten on the night of the fifteenth.

6 With the original, it commemorates the Passover.

With the traditional, it commemorates the Exodus.

7 With the original, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread totaled eight days.

With the traditional, the seven days of Unleavened Bread are incorrectly called "*the Passover.*"

There are even more differences between the two, but I think that is enough to give us a pretty good idea. And, by seeing this comparison, one can see that *major reinterpretations and alterations* have significantly changed the meaning of Passover and Unleavened Bread.

What is so interesting is that the Jews *admit* the change—from two separate feasts, to one. And, from this point on, I am going to be doing a great deal of reading. I am doing this because you do not have the resource material available to you, in many cases. In some cases, it would be difficult—maybe well nigh impossible—for some of you to get. I hope that you will bear with me. I hope that I can still make this interesting enough that you will listen; and that you will see that there are researchers who will admit to the very things that I have been teaching you here in the past six sermons, and now on into this seventh one.

First of all, from our familiar "friend," Josephus. From *Antiquities of the Jews*, book II, chapter 15, section 1, he says: "We keep a feast for eight days, which is called the Feast of Unleavened Bread." That is partly wrong and partly right; but he, at least, admits there are eight days to the festival.

The Jewish Encyclopedia—now, that ought to be authoritative—published in 1905, under the title "Passover," from volume 9: "Comparison of the successive strata of the Pentateuchal laws bearing on the festival makes it plain that the institution, as developed, is really of composite character. Two festivals originally distinct have become merged..."

Here are a number of quotes out of *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. It is a modern, authoritative, liberal Protestant dictionary. Many of the things that they have to say are very interesting. Apparently, they have no particular 'axe to grind.' And they are only presenting evidence that they find from the historical record, as well as from the Bible. All of these will be from volume 3, under the title "Passover and Unleavened Bread." The first quote comes from pages 663-664.

In contemporary Judaism the word Pesh, or 'Passover,' is used to refer to a whole range of observances related to the season. This usage has been customary since ca. [about] the second century of the Christian era. . . .As the employment of the one title, Passover, indicates, the Mishna, like Josephus, treated all the observances as parts of a single integrated feast. This has not always been so. [Page 664] This indicates a recollection that there were two separable units or feasts in the single complex of observances. But this distinction was not carefully kept. . . .Amid all the uncertainty about the Passover and Unleavened Bread in Israel, there is general agreement on two points: the feast contains two originally separate components.

From page 665: "In many respects the observance [by the Jewish Samaritans of the Passover at the beginning of the fourteenth] corresponds more closely to the scriptural prescriptions, notably those of Exodus 12, than the true observance in Jerusalem in the days of Jesus—a reminder, among other things, that in its three thousand years or more of history as an Israelite observance, Passover has never ceased to change, however, imperceptibly."

Again, from page 665: "The largest block of material in the Old Testament dealing with Passover and Unleavened Bread is found in Exodus 12: 1-13: 16. It occurs as a part of the narrative of the slaying of the firstborn of the Egyptians and of the ensuing departure of the Israelites. The object of the narrators [i.e., the writers, Moses] is to associate both observances with the historical deliverance of Israel. They do this by stressing that both were established in Egypt."

Page 666: "He [H.G. May, who is a famous Protestant scholar] feels that [Exodus] 12: 1-28 as a whole associates the feast with Jewish life in the Diaspora: 'the representation,' he says, 'is consistently that of a simple, private home celebration with the sacrificial animal a sheep.'"

Page 667: "The fact that it [the account in Exodus 12: 1-28] is given a wholly domestic setting and lacks a temple ceremony—is its most important distinction in relation to all other accounts."

Again, page 666:

In relation to the Passover of the New Testament period, this section disclosed both similarities and differences. There is the same concern for a family arrangement of the feast; though instead of stating that the minimum size of a 'family' is ten, it insists that a man must join with 'his neighbor' (Exodus 12: 4) so that his group may be large enough to consume the lamb. The ordering seems to have been done more in terms of natural family units than by means of the 'companies' of the era of the Mishna. Moreover there is no hint there that Passover was a pilgrim feast [In other words, the people did not leave their houses and go to some central location,] nor even of any common shrine [i.e., no tabernacle nor temple]. . . [In the account of the original Passover in Exodus 12]. There is no explicit reference to priestly or Levitical assistance at the slaughter; the Mishna obviously changes the original meaning of the phrase 'the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel' (Exodus 12: 6) by treating it as a warrant for the three courses [i.e., the three courses of the priests] needed to accommodate all the temple sacrifice. [In Exodus 12] The counsel to kill the lambs 'in the evening' is more literally followed by the Samaritan rite; the Hebrew is properly interpreted as dusk and cannot be fully reconciled with the later practice of making the sacrifice in the late afternoon. . .

Did you hear that, brethren? This is a modern publication.

The most striking difference between this priestly account and the later practice, however, is that the observance, though obviously sacrificial in character, was entirely a domestic affair. There is no clear reference to a shrine; and, instead of being dashed against an altar, there is the application of 'some of the blood' (Exodus 12: 7; cf. vs. 22) to the doorposts and lintel of each house in which the celebration occurs. . . This is not just a simple domestic celebration; it is a most solemn observance.

Now page 668:

From all this Wellhausen [a Protestant German theologian] concluded that the coalescence of Passover and Unleavened Bread did not occur until the time of Josiah. The agricultural festival of unleavened bread was kept as such as a national Israelite feast, he felt, until the days of Josiah. [Now listen to this. This is rich.] The section in Deuteronomy 16: 1-10 was interpreted as an attempt to abolish the private Passover celebrations and to eliminate the apotropaic rites [the divine protection of the blood sprinkled on the doorposts and lintel] characteristic of these [the domestic observance of the Passover]; therefore the Passover was combined with the national feast [of unleavened bread] in Jerusalem.

That is a devastating conclusion! And it ought to be abundantly clear that even the world

recognizes that *the later Jewish tradition of a temple-killed lamb, at the end of the fourteenth, cannot be reconciled with the Bible*. The real error is the attempts by men to make their practices fit the Scriptures, and to continue in humanly devised practices—all the while claiming that their traditions are given the same status as the commands of God.

This, of course, is nothing new. The record of Israelite digressions from God's way is well documented in the Scriptures. And we are going to look at some of these that directly impact on this subject of the Passover.

Psalms 78:1-5 (NKJ) Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark saying of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers. . .

Psalms 78:10-11 They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them.

He is talking specifically about those people who were under Moses—immediately after the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread—that 40 years they spent wandering in the wilderness.

Psalms 78:12 Marvelous things He did in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.

Psalms 78:17 But they sinned even more against Him by rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.

Psalms 78:32-33 In spite of this [In spite of God's mercy. In spite of all that He supplied.] they still sinned, and did not believe in His wondrous works. Therefore their days He consumed in futility, and their years in fear.

Psalms 78:37 For their heart was not steadfast with Him, nor were they faithful in His covenant.

Psalms 78:40 How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!

Psalms 78:54-59 And He brought them to His holy border [to Israel], this mountain which His right hand had acquired. He also drove out the nations before them, allotted them an inheritance by survey, and made the tribes of Israel dwell in their tents. Yet they tested and provoked the Most High God, and did not keep His testimonies, but turned back and acted unfaithfully like their fathers. They were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. When God heard this, he was furious, and greatly abhorred Israel.

That gives us an overview of what began immediately after leaving Egypt, and it continued. We are going to follow this through the Bible, because we need to understand the background of what happened in the days of Hezekiah and Josiah. With this background, we will understand

why those men did what they did.

Let us go all the way back to the book of Judges. We will advance through time—from the time that Israel was in the wilderness, to the time that they were now in the land. Moses is dead. Aaron is dead. Joshua is dead. The elders who survived Joshua are dead. And Israel is now under the system of judges.

Judges 2:7 So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.

Judges 2:11-13 Then [when Joshua and the elders died] the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals. And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; and they followed other gods from among the gods of the people who were all around them, and they bowed down to them; and they provoked the LORD to anger. They forsook the LORD and served Baal and the Ashtoreths.

Judges 2:16-19 Nevertheless, the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the hand of those who plundered them. Yet they would not listen to their judges, but they played the harlot with other gods, and bowed down to them. They turned quickly from the way in which their fathers walked, in obeying the commandments of the LORD: they did not do so. And when the LORD raised up judges for them, the LORD was with the judge and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the LORD was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed them and harassed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they reverted and behaved more corruptly than their fathers, by following other gods, to serve them and bow down to them. They did not cease from their own doings nor from their stubborn way.

Brethren, are you beginning to get the picture? As long as there is strong, right, good, and righteous leadership of one who is following the way of God, then the people have a tendency to go along in that way. But once the leadership of that righteous man is gone, the people very quickly turn to idolatry—serving other gods, serving Baal, serving Ashtoreth. And from that proceeds all of the multitude of terrible things that we are witnessing here in our own society, here in the United States.

Judges 21:25 In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Simply put—they broke God's commands and served other gods. This continued right on through Samuel's period of judging. During Samuel's period of judging, God permitted them to have a king (Saul), who also proved to be unfaithful. Saul was what we would call today in the political realm a pragmatist. He simply did what seemed right. That is, he did what seemed to work at the time. But there was no real character there. There was no hewing to the straight and narrow of God.

And so God rejected him, and chose David—who was faithful. And He brought great prosperity

to David; and peace to David, too, towards the end of his reign—both of which he passed on to his son, Solomon. Solomon, though, was not faithful like David; and Solomon's sin sets the stage for the next step in Israel's apostasy.

I Kings 11:1 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites.

If you know what comes in verse two, you will probably think, "Well, Solomon didn't think this *little* command of God made any difference." (That is, marrying foreign women.) God said, "Don't do that! If you do that, they are going to turn your heart away." Solomon probably thought that he was strong enough that he could resist it, and he would never turn away from God. A "little" thing, but it was not "little."

I Kings 11:4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.

David seemed to pick up strength as he went along in life. Solomon was the other way. Solomon started out strong, but he tailed off at the end—as his weakness, probably with age, began to become apparent.

I Kings 11:5-9 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.

I Kings 11:11-13 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen."

What Solomon did set the die for most of the rest of Israel and Judah's kings. So when Solomon died, his son, Rehoboam, came to the throne and followed right in the path of his father, Solomon. So a rebellion broke out—the result of which was the separation of Israel and Judah into two nations. The ten-tribe Israel was in the north, and the two-tribe Judah was to the south.

Israel's king was Jeroboam I. Judah's king, from David's line, was Rehoboam. Also, with Judah went the bulk of the Levites.

I Kings 12:25-33 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and dwelt there. Also he went out from there and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will

return back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah." Therefore the king asked advice [took counsel], made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan. He made shrines on the high places, and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi. Jeroboam ordained a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the feast [Tabernacles] that was in Judah, and offered sacrifices on the altar. So he did at Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And at Bethel he installed the priests of the high places which he had made. So he made offerings on the altar which he had made at Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart. And he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and offered sacrifices on the altar and burned incense.

Now, Jeroboam was a politically astute man. I believe the Bible calls him "clever." So he was quick to recognize the possibility that he would lose his kingdom, lose his following, if the people continued to travel south to Jerusalem to keep the Feast. Thus, he made a politically astute move by promoting *another religion*. Even though it says that "he said in his heart," by no stretch of the imagination does this mean that he invented a "new" religion. What he did was incorporate into his system, and give governmental backing to, *already ongoing pagan practices*.

From a book, entitled *The Golden Bough*, written by Sir James George Frazer (an Englishman), from page 120:

The early Babylonian kings, from the time of Sargon I till the fourth dynasty of Ur or later, claimed to be gods in their lifetime. The monarchs of the fourth dynasty of Ur in particular had temples built in their honor; they set up their statues in various sanctuaries and commanded the people to sacrifice to them; the eighth month was especially dedicated to the kings, and sacrifices were offered to them at the new moon [the first day of the month] and on the fifteenth day of each month [the full moon].

Later we are going to see the significance of the fifteenth day of the month in pagan practices. But, if you are thinking, you had better begin to relate it to the fifteenth day of the first month—because, I will tell you here, we are beginning to head in that direction.

But right now we are talking about the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in particular, and the fifteenth days of any month, in general. Remember that we are still, here, talking about Israel (the northern ten tribes) and a very astute political move made by their first king, Jeroboam I—by instituting already ongoing pagan practices as a part of the official governmental policy instituted under him.

What Jeroboam was doing was not just setting up a rival kingdom against Judah, but rather a full-fledged Babylonian religious and governmental system. Once he made the jump into the religious area, it was now set to become part of everyday life. So he had built a new temple, altar, priesthood (with himself as high priest); and, on top of that, he was king. It was dedicated on the very day that the pagan kings designated as a day of homage and sacrifice to

their god-kings.

I want to interject, at this point, that it would not be good to think that what Jeroboam established in northern Israel was a monolithic structure—in which everybody participated in exactly the same religion. No. It was just the one that had the official government sanction. And researchers in the Bible are very quick to see that there were many religions going on in northern Israel.

That ought to ring a bell with you that, since Manasseh is part of the descendants of ancient Israel, pray tell brethren, how many religions are going on in "Manasseh?" And how many of them are "pagan?" In other words, what I am telling you is that never—in the history of Israel or Judah—was there such a monolithic structure of religion that everybody was following exactly the same religion. It just will not happen with carnal Israelites. We are too proudly independent.

Now, back to I Kings. Understanding what Jeroboam has just done, and that God is watching what is going on:

I Kings 13:1-6 And behold, a man of God went from Judah to Bethel by the word of the LORD, and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. Then he [the man of God] cried out against the altar by the word of the LORD, and said, "O altar, altar! Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, a child, Josiah by name, shall be born to the house of David; and on you he shall sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn incense on you, and men's bones shall be burned on you.'" And he gave a sign the same day, saying, "This is the sign which the LORD has spoken: Surely the altar shall split apart, and the ashes on it shall be poured out." So it came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, who cried out against the altar in Bethel, that he stretched out his hand from the altar, saying, "Arrest him!" Then his hand, which he stretched out toward him, withered, so that he could not pull it back to himself. The altar also was split apart, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the LORD. Then the king answered and said to the man of God, "Please entreat the favor of the LORD your God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored to me." So the man of God entreated the LORD, and the king's hand was restored to him, and became as before.

So God gave a warning, as He always does. God treats us more than fair. God goes above and beyond. God gives us grace. He gives us ample opportunity to repent. Even someone as wicked as Jeroboam, God gave every opportunity to repent.

I Kings 13:33-34 After this event Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again he made priests from every class of people from the high places; whoever wished, he consecrated him, and he became one of the priests of the high places. And this thing was the sin of the house of Jeroboam, so as to exterminate and destroy it from the face of the earth.

So he did not repent. And here comes the curse.

I Kings 14:15-16 For the LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter

them beyond the River, because they have made their wooden images, provoking the LORD to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.

What were these pagan religions into which Israel kept backsliding? All of them had their roots in ancient Babylon! However, Israel borrowed, or absorbed, the Canaanite and Egyptian *adaptations*. Baal and Asherah were the two most frequently worshipped deities in Israel and Judah. Asherah is the same as Asheroth, Asherim, Athirat, Astarte [Easter], Artemis, Diana, Ishtar, Isis, Semiramis, and many others besides.

From the book, *The Two Babylons*, Alexander Hislop writes on page 45: "The ordinary way in which the favorite Egyptian divinity Osiris [Nimrod] was mystically represented was under the form of a young bull or calf—the calf Apis—from which the golden calf of the Israelites was borrowed."

Another quote, from page 26: "While the Greek name Belus represented both Baal and Bel of the Chaldees, these were nevertheless two entirely distinct titles. These titles were both alike often given to the same god, but they had totally different meanings. Baal, as we have already seen, signified 'The Lord.'"

Page 30: "Semiramis, then, the first deified queen of that city and tower whose top was intended to reach to heaven, must have been the prototype of the goddess who 'first made towers in cities.' When we look at the Ephesian Diana, we find evidence to the very same effect."

Remember from the book of Acts—"Great is Diana of the Ephesians." And that beautiful temple was built in honor of her. (Continuing the quote...) "In general, Diana was depicted as a virgin, and the patroness of virginity; but the Ephesian Diana was quite different. She was represented with all the attributes of the Mother of the gods. . . and, as the Mother of the gods, she wore a turreted crown, such as no one can contemplate without being forcibly reminded of the tower of Babel. Now this tower-bearing Diana is by an ancient scholiast expressly identified with Semiramis." (Asherim, Ashtoreth, Astarte [Easter], and a host of other names that you and I are reading in God's Word.)

Now, turn with me to Jeremiah 19. A particularly sickening thing is mentioned here.

Jeremiah 19:4a Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place. . .

God's own temple became "alien" to Him. God's nation, Judah, (as He is talking about here) became an alien place for Him.

Jeremiah 19:4b-5. . .because they have burned incense in it [in the temple] to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of the innocents. (They have also built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for bunt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come into My mind.)

Listen to this. From *The Two Babylons*, page 232. "Hence, the priests of Nimrod or Baal were necessarily required to eat of the human sacrifices; and thus it has come to pass that 'Cahna-Bal,' [meaning] the 'Priests of Baal,' is the established work in our own tongue for the

devourer of human flesh."

Another deity that Israel worshipped was Tammuz. Turn with me to the book of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 8:14a (NRE) Next He brought me to the gateway of the north gate of the LORD's house.

"Me" is Ezekiel; and he was taken, in vision, right into Jerusalem—which faces north.

Ezekiel 8:14b-15. .and there sat women wailing for Tammuz. "Oh, man," God says. "Do you see that?" He asked me. "But you will see greater abominations than these."

Ezekiel 8:17 "Oh, man; did you see that? Do you think it a trifling matter for Judah to practice these abominations here? They have filled the land with violence and have provoked Me to anger again and again. Look at them, in their worship—holding twigs to their nose."

That verse has been corrupted. It reads in the Hebrew, "Holding twigs to My nose." Do you know what that *twig* was? It was the Asherah—an upright phallic symbol. It is interesting that, in this series of verses, God directly connects *idolatry* to *violence* in the land. IF people turn away from their God, THEN the land is going to erupt with violence—because when people turn away from the true God, they lose their respect for law and order. They lose their fear of God; and the only way that they can go is into violence.

Tammuz also (in other literature and other religions) goes under the name of Osiris. He was called Adonis by the Greeks. Also, Attis. And again, Sir James George Frazer, in *The Golden Bough*, page 379, says: "In the religious literature of Babylonia Tammuz appears as the youthful spouse or lover of Ishtar [Semiramis. And, in case you do not know, she was also his natural mother.], the great mother goddess, the embodiment of the reproductive energies of nature."

Judges 3:7 (NKJ) So the children of Israel did even in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.

In a book entitled *Strange Sects and Curious Cults*, by Marcus Bach, he describes the worship of Baal and Asherah:

In groves and fields throughout the land, the presence of Baal was marked by naked pillars or tree stems [as we just read about in Ezekiel 8] stuck upright into the ground. Because Baal impregnated the land by copulation, the ceremonies in his honor were often imitative sexual acts. . . Sometimes the god was shown astride a bull, an animal symbolic of procreative power. Sometimes the sun was a nimbus [halo], which enclosed him; at other times he was a phallus with the head of a god. Images of Astarte depicted her in the nude with her legs apart, holding two white doves in her hands, while at her feet a lion and a coiled serpent lay stretched out submissively.

These were the gods, and some of the practices, instituted by Jeroboam as *the state religion* for the ten tribes of Israel.

From the Bible, we have ascertained that the Passover occurred at the beginning of the

fourteenth day of the first month. And on the fifteenth began the first day of Unleavened Bread. These days are to be kept as festivals forever.

What is not widely known is that these days also held special meaning in various religions of the ancient Near East in Old Testament times. Again, a quote from the book, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, published in 1973, and this quote is from page 83:

Sacrificial meals were regularly set out for the deities every day. But there were special days which required extra sacrifices and special ceremonies. Every day was sacred to a particular god. Special lists, the so-called hemerologies, enumerate these, and mark the lucky and dangerous days. The seventh, fourteenth, nineteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth of each month were especially unlucky. . .but it should be noted that while men abstained from certain activities on these days, the cause was not the same as in the case of the Israelite sabbath: these days were evil and dangerous, while the sabbath had a positive value.

Now, I want you to think of those numbers in relation to the Egyptians, especially a couple of them. The fourteenth and the twenty-first were *terribly disastrous* and *unlucky* days to the Egyptians. On the fourteenth day, all of the firstborn of Egypt—including their animals—perished. And on the twenty-first Egypt lost the pride of its nation, when its army was drowned in the Red Sea.

What about the fifteenth—and, specifically, what about the fifteenth of Nisan? Again, quoting from *The Religions of the Ancient Near East*; this time on page 83: "Special feasts days in each month were, for instance the day of the new moon (the first [day of the month]), and the day of the full moon (the fifteenth [day of the month])."

Then from page 88 of the same book: "Finally, from Uruk [Uruk is a city that was excavated by archeologists.], we have a number of ritual texts for the two akitu festivals of Anu [Anu being a false god.], one in Nisan, the other in Tishri."

Do you know that both of those pagan festivals began on the fifteenth day of the month? They were scheduled at exactly the same time as God's festivals were—the *fifteenth of Nisan* and the *fifteenth of Tishri*. Do you think that Satan does not counterfeit what God has given in His Word? So God commanded the Days of Unleavened Bread for His people for seven days in Nisan and the Feast of Tabernacles in Tishri—and both of these Feasts begin with a full moon on the fifteenth day of the month.

When we begin to gather information like this, we can begin to see some of the magnitude of what Jeroboam did—and some of the thought that was behind his choosing of the fifteenth day of the eighth month. Here is a description of the seven-day feast of Baal that coincided *exactly* with the Days of Unleavened Bread. This, again, comes from *The Religions of the Ancient Near East*:

The spring festivals reached their climaxes in sexual acts performed on housetops where the participants felt they were nearer the sun god's power, and in the groves [We see a long section about 'groves' in the Bible.] where, it was believed, Baal himself would join them in their worship. There were those who spawned their human seed upon the

ground, sincerely trusting that this invoked a special heavenly blessing. At the temple feast, proxies for the invisible god and goddess gorged themselves and, in wanton dances, called upon the 'bull god' to appear. Women, intoxicated by concoctions of herbs and wine, lay naked upon newly planted fields in adulation of Astarte. There were the occasions when the fathers gave their daughters to their own sons for harlotry or took their own daughters to play the role of wife. . . For seven days and nights the demonstrations continued.

The parallels are obvious. A seven-day pagan celebration taking place *at the same time* that God established a festival for Israel. Undoubtedly, because of that close proximity in time, the Israelite felt that he was serving the true God—all the while he was serving Baal. How can we make a statement like that? Because, brethren, it is going on today! I do not mean the exact celebrations. But people in all sincerity are keeping Christmas, Easter, Halloween, and all kinds of days "devoted to the Eternal God of heaven"—and all the while it has nothing at all to do with the God of heaven. We are no different. Some of the forms, some of the rituals, some of the things done, some of the words have changed; but, in principle, they are the same.

Jeremiah 7:1-2 (NRE) This word came from the LORD to Jeremiah, "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house, and there make this proclamation: 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who come in through these gates to worship Him.'"

Remember that they are going right to the temple. We are describing to you some of the things these people were involved in. And, as we continue in this sermon (and the next sermon), we are going to transfer our reading from Israel to Judah.

Jeremiah 7:3-7 These are the words of the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your deeds, that you may live in this place. You keep saying, 'This place is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.' This slogan of yours is a lie! Put no trust in it. If you amend your ways and your deeds, deal fairly [that is, in justice] with one another. Cease to oppress the alien, the fatherless, and the widow. If you shed no innocent blood in this place, and do not run after other gods to your own ruin; then I shall let you live in this place, in the land which long ago I gave to your forefathers for all time."

And again if you can perceive it, in verses 5 and 6, there is a direct relationship between idolatry and the things that are happening in the streets, the things that are happening in people's families.

Jeremiah 7:8-9a "You gain nothing by putting your trust in this lie [The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.]. You steal; you murder; you commit adultery and perjury; you burn sacrifices to Baal."

There it is again—the direct connection between idolatry and the things that are happening in the streets.

Jeremiah 7:9a-11 "And you run after other gods, whom you have not known. Will you then come and stand before Me in this house, which bears My name, and say, 'We are safe.' ["Nothing is going to happen to us."] Safe, you think, to indulge in all these

abominations. Do you regard this house, which bears My name, as a bandit's cave? I warn you: I, Myself, have seen all this," says the Eternal.

God will bear with things a long time. But, brethren, we ought to be able to see that He is watching what is going on. He is aware of what is going on.

Isaiah 1:13b-14 (NKJ) "[Cease from] your New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meetings. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates. They are a trouble to Me, and I am weary of bearing them."

Again, spoken to Judah.

Now, brethren, we will conclude for today in II Kings 17. I think that this is a good place to break, because it summarizes why Israel went into captivity. And then, next week, we will begin to concentrate on Judah, because it was the Jews, from God's Word, who are the ones who changed things in regards to the Passover. But I have gone through what I have in order to lay a foundation to help you to understand *why* and *how* it got changed.

You can see, from what we are seeing regarding the religious practices of these people, that there was fertile ground for it to be change. And it was not changed in a vacuum. God, in His mercy, has given the end time generation a record of how it was changed. It is here, for those who will believe.

II Kings 17:7-19 For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And they had feared other gods, and had walked in the statutes of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made. Also the children of Israel secretly did against the LORD their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars [the phallus] and wooden images [the idols] on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense [a form of prayer] on all the high places, as the nations whom the LORD had carried away before them. And they did wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger, for they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, "You shall not do this thing." Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of the prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets." Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant [And the Passover right with it.] that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them. They followed idols, became idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them. So they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, made for themselves a molded image and two calves, made a wooden image and worshiped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. They caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire,

practiced witchcraft and soothsaying, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger. Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight. There was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the statutes of Israel, which they had made.

That verse is a good bridge into next week's sermon. Now that we have gone through Israel [its history], we have to begin to see what Judah did. It was the Jews that God used to write His Word (at least, from this time on) and to protect His Word. Indeed, God made sure that a record was left to us so we could see what happened in regards even to things like Passover.