

Church of God, The Eternal

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When Did Israel Cross the Red Sea?

April 2005

Dear Brethren:

As the Passover draws very near again, this is the season we always focus on the recorded history of ancient Israel, who became a nation only after God saved them miraculously from the bitter bondage of Egypt. That story of a family of helpless slaves—blessed to become the mighty and beloved children of God—was recorded as a direct type of the calling we have received, and the hope of glory and majesty awaiting those who will learn from those critical lessons.

Over the seventy-year history of God's church in this age, we have learned much about the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt. In keeping the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, we have rehearsed many times the succession of events picturing our escape from sin through the divine intervention of God and His Spirit. During the early years, the Radio Church of God always provided articles and sermons comparing the type of that physical exodus with the antitype of our struggle to escape the pollutions of this world. Likewise, since the apostasy of that last-day church in the early 1970s, this remnant body has continued to provide that same meat in due season for our scattered members.

Mr. Raymond Cole recorded many sermons and *Monthly Letters* in the '70s, '80s, and '90s expounding the spiritual significance of those trials faced by Israel during the Exodus. This author is one of many who learned much from those sermons, as they shaped our perspectives about the phenomenal events of Israel's salvation.

About five years ago, while Mr. Cole was still alive, I pulled out an old copy of Lesson 34 of the *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, explaining the Days of Unleavened Bread and Israel's exodus from Egypt. I was surprised to find a two-page chart detailing the chronology of ancient Israel's movements during that first seven-day Feast. Why was it a surprise? Because the chronology shown on this chart was inconsistent with what I had heard Mr. Raymond Cole explain many times about the Exodus. The chart showed that it took all seven days of the spring Feast for Israel to get out of Egyptian territory, culminating in their passage

through the Red Sea on the last High Day of Unleavened Bread. Yet Mr. Cole had always explained that the Israelites probably passed through the Red Sea on the fourth day of the Feast. When I asked him about this, he was actually surprised to see the chart in Lesson 34. He did not remember this being a reflection of Mr. Armstrong's original teaching, and was still convinced Israel passed through the Red Sea in the middle of the Feast, not at the end of it. It was a few years later that this author finally decided to research the history of the Exodus chronology as taught by the Radio Church of God. What is the truth about the timing of Israel's liberation from Egypt? Was Raymond Cole mistaken all those years? The purpose of this month's letter will be to clarify what we can know for sure about that Exodus week, *but even more importantly*, to provide context for the history of this and many other teachings of the Radio Church of God.

Passover and the Night to Be Much Observed

What is not in dispute is the date of the Passover and the night Israel began to walk out of Egypt. In spite of many who now contend with Mr. Armstrong's original teaching about the Passover, we accept that Israel was commanded to stay in their homes the night the Death Angel passed through Egypt, and that they were not to come out until the morning (Exodus 12:22). Israel kept the Passover after sunset on the *beginning* of the fourteenth day of the first month, and then after spoiling the Egyptians the next day and hurriedly preparing to leave, they walked out the following night—the beginning of the fifteenth day—the start of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Exodus 12:33–37; Deuteronomy 16:1). What also is not in dispute is how the days of the week fell that year. We believe that first Passover was on Tuesday night, and the Exodus on Wednesday night, just as it fell in the year Jesus was crucified. For more evidence of these facts, please see our March 2001 *Monthly Letter* entitled, *The Passover Controversy Unraveled* (available at www.cogeternal.org/2001/01009_0301passovercontroversy.htm).

But what we want to evaluate is whether it really took Israel all seven days of the Feast to get through the Red Sea, and if not, how do we reconcile this teaching prominently manifested in the *Ambassador College Bible Correspondence Course*, published in 1965. If this assertion was confirmed by the church in 1965 and sent to thousands of new members over several years, is this not proof it was part of the faith once delivered? That we shall soon see.

Origin of the 1965 Chart

Before analyzing the actual Biblical evidence concerning the day Israel passed through the Red Sea, let us begin by explaining the history of the very chart that was published in Lesson 34 in 1965. Did the assertion of a last Day of Unleavened Bread/ Red Sea crossing originate with Mr. Herbert Armstrong? No, it did not.

The *Bible Correspondence Course* was written by a faithful evangelist named C. Paul Meredith. Dr. Meredith had been a very early student at Ambassador College and among the initial group of men ordained by Mr. Armstrong as Evangelists (along with Mr. Raymond Cole) in December, 1952. He remained faithful to the original teachings of the church until his death in 1968. It is possible he could have been another one of those God took out of the way to facilitate the rise of those who would fulfill prophecy to take the church into apostasy. Here is an excerpt from the eulogy written for Dr. Meredith in the April, 1968 issue of *The Good News* magazine:

Because of Mr. Armstrong's growing concern for the need of a well-planned, comprehensive Bible Correspondence Course to aid our *thousands* of scattered members and co-workers—*at that time we had very few Churches anywhere*— Dr. Meredith volunteered his services to this vast undertaking. Working with Mr. Armstrong and others, he began outlining, planning and finally writing and producing the Ambassador College Correspondence Course in 1954. The copious notes he had taken on Mr. Armstrong's broadcasts, sermons and lectures for years provided a broad basis to help Dr. Meredith produce the early lessons of the Correspondence Course.

So Dr. Meredith drew upon all of Mr. Armstrong's personal teachings for the material that went into those Correspondence Course lessons. Would that not infer that the Lesson 34 Exodus chart was likewise part of that teaching? It might, except that the 1965 issue of that lesson was *not* the original work compiled by Dr. Meredith!

The lessons were written and published one at a time, beginning with Lesson 1 in 1954. It was ten years before Dr. Meredith produced and published Lesson 34, in 1964. Therefore, the version of that lesson published in 1965 was actually a revision! But why would there need to be a revision to a lesson that was less than one year old? During 1965, two major changes took place which affected the Correspondence Course program. First was the move to incorporate photographs and illustrations into each lesson. It appears that Lesson 40 was the first new issue to go out with this revised format. In a letter dated September 24, 1965, entitled *Headquarters Report on Correspondence Course*, we read:

Plans are already under way to revise every lesson to pictures making as few changes as possible in the text to keep it up-to-date with world events. Lessons 1, 2, 3, 4, and Test 1 as well as Lessons 39, 38 and 37 are already expanded to 16 pages—the new illustrated size. *Work is continuing on Lessons 5, 6 and 7 as well as Lessons 36, 35, 34 and 33* [emphasis mine].

So as of September, 1965, revisions were already being prepared for Lesson 34. But there was a more critical change which happened a few months prior to this time. The second change

was the addition of Dr. Herman L. Hoeh to the publishing staff. In the original release of Lesson 34 in 1964, Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong is listed as "publisher and editor." Dr. C. Paul Meredith is listed as "director." There are no other men listed on the publishing staff. But in the 1965 revised version, this is how the staff is credited: Editor—Herbert W. Armstrong, Director—C. Paul Meredith, and Co-Ordinator—Herman L. Hoeh. Why was Dr. Hoeh added to the staff? An excerpt from a letter written by Dr. Hoeh addressing all Correspondence Course recipients sometime in 1964 answers that:

Dr. C. Paul Meredith and his staff are streamlining the Correspondence Course. Shortening it wherever possible to make it more effective as this age of human history draws quickly to a close!

Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong has asked me to assist. Because of the pace of world events, the Correspondence Course will be more closely linked with the PLAIN TRUTH magazine, yet it will still provide the "in-depth" study of your Bible you all enjoy so much and NEED in these LAST DAYS! I will be coordinating this program for Mr. Armstrong.

So what began basically as a one-man project under Dr. Meredith in 1954 expanded ten years later to become part of a larger, sophisticated endeavor taken over in large part by Herman Hoeh. And as we shall see momentarily, it was Herman Hoeh who was directly responsible for revising Lesson 34 to include a chart diagraming Israel's movements during that first Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Defining the Faith Once Delivered

What does all of this really have to do with Israel's exodus from Egypt? Remember, we are answering the question, was belief that Israel passed through the Red Sea on the last Day of Unleavened Bread part of the faith once delivered? The answer is no. That teaching was one of many pet theories which came from Herman Hoeh, not from Herbert Armstrong. But if Mr. Armstrong accepted it and allowed it to become part of church teaching, did not his "blessing" then make it part of Christ's revealed doctrine? Not at all! It is Herbert Armstrong whom God used as an apostle—one sent as an instrument to deliver God's inspired message to the last-day church. We accept that God inspired Mr. Armstrong with divine revelation of foundational truth, not any of those other men who were later ordained. Those other men, including Raymond Cole, Herman Hoeh, and C. Paul Meredith, were authorized by God to proclaim and defend that truth they *had learned through Mr. Armstrong* and assist him in shepherding the church being raised. But there is no evidence God ever used those evangelists to reveal new truth in the way He worked through Mr. Armstrong. Raymond Cole certainly did not presume it. He was very content to fulfill his role as a helper to Mr. Armstrong in the work God was inspiring through that apostle.

Unfortunately, not all of those evangelists had the same view about their roles. Herman Hoeh seemed to be one who had a desire to come up with "new knowledge" through his own personal research. And it appears Mr. Armstrong may have assumed that once ordained by his hand, these other men would likewise become inspired with new truth directly from God, even as he had been. But as we look retrospectively at the difference between teachings that came directly from Mr. Armstrong vs. other men, it seems that only the ones God inspired personally through Mr. Armstrong had any lasting value. This gets to the root of how and why we define the faith once delivered very differently than every other group who came out of our parent organization.

Several years ago we had a minister separate from our fellowship over this issue of defining the faith once delivered. Even though he still professed most of the same doctrines we value—like Monday Pentecost and the sanctity of marriage—he began to contend with Mr. Cole over the definition of the faith once delivered. This man wanted to define Christ's approved teachings according to "the corpus of doctrine" most widely published by the Worldwide Church of God in the heyday of the church, just prior to the change in Pentecost in 1974. According to this definition, any doctrine Mr. Armstrong *allowed to be approved* prior to the 1970s was part of that faith. Yet Raymond Cole—as the founder of Church of God, The Eternal—had *never* used this as a measure of his own faith in Christ's revelation. Mr. Cole had only ever accepted those teachings coming directly from Christ *through Herbert Armstrong* as part of that faith.

Therefore, in 1953 (for example), when Mr. Armstrong allowed a reversal of his earlier declaration that duck meat was not fit to eat—based upon a technical paper submitted by Herman Hoeh on behalf of an influential lay member of the church—Raymond Cole did not accept this personally. Even though Mr. Armstrong himself changed based on a scholarly argument—even as far back as 1953—Mr. Cole became convinced the real truth had already come directly from Christ through Mr. Armstrong on that subject. Likewise, when the teaching on a number of tithing issues like the land sabbath was altered around 1971, Raymond Cole did not accept them either.

A History of Two Evangelists

Very few people in the church know about certain revealing statements recorded by Mr. Armstrong concerning Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh during their time as students at Ambassador College. Why? Even though these statements were published in the first issue of his autobiography—released in serial form in *The Plain Truth* magazine—they were eventually edited out of the compiled book version most brethren received later on. But notice these excerpts from *The Autobiography of Herbert W. Armstrong*, beginning with the July, 1963 *Plain Truth* issue, Installment 57, page 14, describing a challenge that arose in the first year of Ambassador College in 1947, due to the influence of a worldly English professor:

There was a woman professor of English. She had at least two Ph. Ds.—some eight degrees altogether. This surely sounded like the best. She had taught many years in India. I did not know, when Mr. Dillon and I employed her, that she was filled and saturated with Hindu philosophies, occultism, and eastern beliefs. . . . Soon I found that our English professor was introducing all kinds of Hindu or Indian expressions and philosophies into her teaching. Now it so happened that the 18-year-old Herman Hoeh had begun, prior to coming to college, to delve into occultism. It had pricked his curiosity. And he had a scholarly mind with a good degree of intellectual curiosity. This interest in the direction of occultism disturbed me greatly. I realized at once that this young man was a very important potential, but still immature and inclined to get off balance on some tangent, unless taught the necessity of sound balance. . . . I had a very serious talk with Mr. Hoeh. I did not try to refute or even discredit occultism or mystic Indian teachings. I was afraid this might drive him to it the more. Instead I reasoned that it was better to take up one field of study at a time. . . .

In other words, I did not ask him not to delve into this thought, but tried to persuade him to arrange a time-order system in his study.

"And since you have now enrolled at Ambassador College," I reasoned, "why not put this first, now you are here, and then take that up *later*?"

He agreed. And thus, instead of getting off balance prior to full mental maturity, I was able to steer Herman Hoeh on the track of intellectual BALANCE and sound-mindedness. . . . As time went on, it became evident to both Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh that our English professor was not at all in harmony with the real objectives of Ambassador College. She expressed later in the year that she felt there was some hope for Mr. Hoeh, but she had given Mr. Cole up as hopeless.

Notice another excerpt—cut from the final book—from Installment 60 of the November, 1963 *Plain Truth*, page 15, describing Mr. Raymond Cole's important role in the fourth year of the college in 1950/51:

That school year Raymond Cole, one of the four pioneer students, was student-body president. However, the local churches I had left up in Oregon, at Eugene and Portland, these years without a Pastor, were in serious need of leadership. And so in February, 1951, we sent Mr. Cole to Oregon to pastor and revive the flock. This was the very first beginning of a ministry produced by Ambassador College. After three and a half years at Ambassador College, Mr. Cole was able to repair the situation in Oregon, and start building up again.

Next notice an excerpt from Installment 61 of the January, 1964 *Plain Truth*, page 9—also cut from the final book—describing Herman Hoeh and other events in 1951:

In April of that year we began the first activity toward an enlarged PLAIN TRUTH. I was still unwilling to publish in The PLAIN TRUTH, articles written by students. Yet something had to be done. Herman Hoeh had submitted a few articles for The PLAIN TRUTH, but none had been used. They were not written in what I termed "Plain Truth STYLE." Yet young Mr. Hoeh did not give up. Every month or so another manuscript was handed to me.

What do all of these statements of Mr. Armstrong reveal? It provides a small window into the characteristics of both Raymond Cole and Herman Hoeh that would ultimately reflect their very different choices when the church became faced with critical challenges years later. Although ordained together as Evangelists in 1952, their distinct gifts caused Mr. Armstrong to use them in very different ways. Mr. Cole spent most of his years as a minister "in the trenches"—with the people—shepherding congregations around the country and building up those churches that were distressed and needing help. Even though he was an anchor in the church over all those years, you did not see many articles from him in *The Plain Truth* or *Good News* magazines. He was content to serve without the spotlight.

By comparison, Herman Hoeh used his intellectual prowess to become the church scholar, completing his doctorate degree in 1963, and writing many articles for the church on a variety of historical topics. After ordination, Mr. Armstrong eventually accepted his gifts as being directly inspired by God, setting the stage for him to gain much latitude in authoring new theories which would make their way into church doctrine. His theory about the Red Sea crossing was only one very minor example of a teaching introduced through other than God's inspired apostle.

Source of the 1965 Revision

As mentioned previously, the assertion about the Red Sea crossing in the 1965 revision of Lesson 34 was not of Dr. C. Paul Meredith's personal writing. The original version Dr. Meredith released in 1964—based upon his personal notes of Mr. Armstrong's teachings—contained no assertions or conclusions about the Israelite's day-to-day passage during that initial seven-day Feast. He stuck to the fundamental teachings that were truly important for new members to understand.

How do we know for sure this revised Lesson 34 from 1965 with the Red Sea crossing timeline came from Herman Hoeh? Because that material was an *exact* restatement of assertions from his July, 1959 *Plain Truth* article entitled, *Is the Bible True?*, using a technical analysis of the Exodus story to demonstrate that the Bible account is believable. In this article he wrote,

"Pharaoh overtook them camping by the Red Sea on what *probably* was the sixth day of Unleavened Bread [emphasis mine]." The same full-page map of the Exodus route from page 7 of this 1959 article was also reproduced *exactly* in the 1965 revision of Lesson 34. Ironically, this very same material was part of Herman Hoeh's doctoral thesis published in 1963, entitled *Compendium of World History*. The evidence is clear that once he was added to the Correspondence Course staff in 1964, he made sure to get his original material incorporated into the curriculum for new members. However, in the interim between 1959 and 1965, that *theory* first couched with "probably" had turned into *fact*.

Analyzing the Biblical Record

What does the Bible actually tell us about the week Israel walked out of Egypt and passed through the Red Sea? How much can we know specifically about those events? Here are the crucial texts:

And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual. . . . 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 (Exodus 12:37–39, 42).

But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel went up harnessed out of the land of Egypt. . . . And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in (Exodus 13:18, 20–22; 14:1–3).

And they departed from Rameses in the first 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. For the Egyptians buried all their

firstborn, which the LORD had smitten among them: upon their gods also the LORD executed judgments. And the children of Israel removed from Rameses, and pitched in Succoth. And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness. And they removed from Etham, and turned again unto Pihahiroth, which is before Baalzephon: and they pitched before Migdol. And they departed from before Pihahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and pitched in Marah (Numbers 33:3–8).

What can we safely conclude from these accounts? From the time they left Rameses, three specific camps are noted for Israel on the west side of the Red Sea: Succoth, Etham, and Pihahiroth. (We have already acknowledged they departed on Wednesday night—the beginning of the first High Day of Unleavened Bread.) They passed through the Red Sea after breaking camp from Pihahiroth, and then went three days' journey into the wilderness before camping again in Marah.

The question is: Did God record every stop Israel made before reaching the Red Sea, or did He leave any out? Were Succoth, Etham, and Pihahiroth the only three places they camped?

The 1965 Exodus Chart Theory

According to the chart and explanations included in the revised version of Lesson 34, Israel first camped at Succoth after traveling all night Wednesday and all day Thursday. They finally stopped Thursday evening, as the first High Day of Unleavened Bread was ending. On Friday they traveled again and camped Friday night at Etham, where they kept the weekly Sabbath. On Sunday morning, they turned south and headed into the wilderness that would lead them into the trap, but they would camp in two *unidentified places* Sunday and Monday nights before reaching Pihahiroth late in the afternoon Tuesday. It was on Tuesday evening—the beginning of the last Day of Unleavened Bread—that God protected Israel from the Egyptian army by putting the fiery cloud between them. God opens the Red Sea that same night, and then after drying the seabed with a strong wind, leads them through to the other side before daylight on the Holy Day. The Egyptians are destroyed in the sea early that morning, and then Israel celebrates the remainder of the Holy Day on the other bank.

Given the limited facts God chose to provide, this scenario is certainly plausible. However, here is an assumption you are asked to embrace in order to believe it:

We are asked to accept that Israel spent the weekly Sabbath in Etham. What is provided as proof for this? From Lesson 34 (1965 revision), page 11, we read:

5. What about the next day—the weekly Sabbath—the memorial of Creation and God's Creation rest? Did they travel on that day? Ex. 14:2; see comment.

COMMENT: Note that God gave Moses special instructions to pass on to Israel. How was Moses to pass on God's words to a congregation of excited ex-slaves? *By a Sabbath service!*

Exodus 14:2 states, "Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea." This theory requires you to accept that the only way Moses could effectively communicate God's command—to turn south and head for Pihahiroth—was in a Sabbath service. This logic implies that the unruly "ex-slaves" were not really organized with any real structure to facilitate effective communication day by day. Yet God said, "And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt *by their armies*" (Exodus 12:51) [emphasis mine]. This denotes structure and order. Notice also, "But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea: and the children of Israel *went up harnessed* out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 13:18) [emphasis mine]. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* interprets "harnessed" as meaning "to arrange, array, or set in order." Does it make sense that such structure would not have included the means for Moses to pass word through the ranks of each tribe to communicate God's intent for them? Besides that, they were following the cloud! If the cloud turned south, should there have been doubt about which way the Israelite army was to go?

Raymond Cole's Statements

By comparison to this theory, Raymond Cole always spoke about the Exodus timeline in a way that did not require major assumptions or great leaps of faith. He believed Israel made it all the way to the edge of the Red Sea for the weekly Sabbath (day three), and then passed through the sea before dawn Sunday morning (day four). He did so because he accepted the named encampments given in Numbers 33:5–7 as the exclusive number of stops they made before reaching the Red Sea. From the first day of the Feast in which they left Rameses, there were three camps—Succoth, Etham and Pihahiroth. Three stops equals three days. If so, this means God's miraculous intervention to protect Israel from Pharaoh's army occurred on the weekly Sabbath (Exodus 14:19–20). Mr. Cole then stated that Israel went three more days into the wilderness and camped at Marah, just as it says in Numbers 33:8. This would place Israel in Marah no later than the end of the last High Day of Unleavened Bread. He did not go further than that to address how long they celebrated on the bank of the Red Sea after the Egyptian army was destroyed (Exodus 15:1–21) before beginning the three days' journey into the wilderness. The Bible simply does not tell us.

It is certainly possible they were still traveling partially at night, since that pillar of fire gave them the unique opportunity to travel in the dark when other armies never could have. "And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; *to go by day and night*" (Exodus 13:21) [emphasis mine]. Israel always had light because of that miraculous pillar (symbolizing the light of God's way through Jesus Christ). And night travel—as on the Night to Be Much Observed—had already been established as a precedent. Therefore, it is certainly possible for Israel to have completed three days' journey after crossing the Red Sea in time to rest on at least part of the last Day of Unleavened Bread in Marah. Our intent is not to assert that as fact. Raymond Cole certainly never did. But it must be considered as one of the possibilities. God does not provide enough detail for us to know for sure, so all of those possibilities must remain open.

This is the timeline he spoke about in several sermons over the years, including the messages recorded on tape for the spring Feast of 1982. It should be noted, however, that Raymond Cole never spoke of this timeline as the primary focus of any sermon, as if he were advancing some new theory about the Exodus and then seeking to prove it. His reference to Israel passing through the Red Sea on day four of the Feast was always asserted as if it were commonly accepted in the church, and he referenced it only to give context to the spiritual lessons he was really trying to get to in his message. As mentioned before, he did not even remember that a different theory had been advanced as fact in the old Correspondence Course.

What Can We Know for Sure?

What we have not yet found is any evidence of Mr. Armstrong's personal teaching on this issue prior to 1959 to confirm how he may have interpreted Numbers 33. Without having evidence that he proclaimed a particular Exodus timeline as being revealed to him by God, we do not intend to be dogmatic about it. There is no reason to do so, since it is certainly not a salvational issue. But since we do not accept the 1965 theory as being necessarily inspired, is there other Biblical evidence that might have a bearing on the issue? There certainly is.

There is one key aspect which was never addressed in the 1965 theory. Notice what God told Moses to proclaim to Pharaoh when he went to Egypt as His spokesman:

. . . and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The LORD God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now *let us go, we beseech thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God* (Exodus 3:18) [emphasis mine].

And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go. And they said, The God of the

Hebrews hath met with us: *let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword* (Exodus 5:2–3) [emphasis mine].

And Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land. And Moses said, It is not meet so to do; for we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians to the LORD our God: lo, shall we sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us? *We will go three days' journey into the wilderness, and sacrifice to the LORD our God, as he shall command us* (Exodus 8:25–27) [emphasis mine].

Have you ever stopped to wonder why God specifically commanded a special sacrifice after three days' journey out of Egypt? It almost sounds as if at this point God only wanted Israel to make a *temporary* journey for this special sacrifice, and then return to Egypt after it was completed. But we know God had no intention of allowing the Israelites to return to bondage. Why then so much emphasis on this one particular sacrifice after three days' journey, rather than simply telling Pharaoh, "We are leaving and never coming back"? We may not have the answer to that question, but it certainly shows there was something very special to God about this sacrifice they were to perform.

Is it possible this was a Holy Day offering to be made on the last Day of Unleavened Bread? We will not be dogmatic on that point. But if it is so, it would certainly explain why God laid emphasis on the fact Israel went three days' journey into the wilderness after crossing the Red Sea.

And they departed from before Pihahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness, and went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and pitched in Marah (Numbers 33:8).

The special sacrifice to follow is not mentioned again. But if it was a key element of God's original command to Pharaoh, it is sure to have been carried out. If one accepts the theory there were other nights of camping during the Feast not disclosed in Numbers 33:1–7—leaving Israel on the bank of the Red Sea on the last High Day—then that special sacrifice three days later in Marah is still a mystery. But if the Marah sacrifice was actually part of the Holy Day offering in conclusion of the great Feast, it would certainly make all of those pieces fit together.

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto the LORD; and the LORD showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet: there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them . . . (Exodus 15:23–25).

It certainly seems this proving at Marah is very consistent with the meaning of the Days of Unleavened Bread—the requirement to examine the self, admit our failings, and then purge out those sins. It might also seem that God's promise to them immediately following has significance for the conclusion of that trek out of sin:

And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee (Exodus 15:26).

Again, it is not our intent to advance our own speculative theories as fact. But a simple acceptance of Numbers 33:1–8 as showing the literal number of days they traveled and camped during the Days of Unleavened Bread would fit with all other facts God recorded in the story at least as well if not better than the 1965 theory.

In time we are likely to re-release one or more of Mr. Raymond Cole's sermons in which he speaks about Israel crossing the Red Sea on day four of the spring Feast. For those of you who are familiar with the 1965 version of Lesson 34 of the *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, you should now have a context by which to resolve any confusion or perception of contradiction. But more important than the technical issue of the Exodus timeline itself, is the history of how certain teachings came to be in the Radio Church of God, and the means to evaluate what is truly part of the faith once delivered.

Thank God He provided a way for us to have absolute confidence in the doctrines truly revealed by Jesus Christ through His chosen servant of the last days.

With love and devotion in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

Jon W. Brisby