

The Significance of the Term, " The SELFSAME DAY "?

*A Unique and Distinct Expression Found in the Old Testament,
One Which Has Not Been Fully Understood, and Yet Has Affected a Number
of Important Doctrines Having Bearings on New Testament Theology!*

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In Exodus 12, and elsewhere, there is a term used which is rendered in our translations as: "the Selfsame Day". Key places where this specific term is used involves the date on which Abraham formally committed himself to the Covenant, by undergoing circumcision,¹ the beginning date of the Exodus,² and the very first harvest taken from the Promised Land,³ to name a few. Each of these occasions was given as having taken place on a "Selfsame Day".

In the case of the Exodus, many have understood the expression to mean that two things happened within the same 24 hour day. Another take on the term is to conclude that two different things happened on the same calendar date, but in a subsequent year. This can make a significant difference. Actually, there is an overlooked aspect of this term with many Bible students.

Checking Our Concordances.

In some places, we find a similar term used, that being, "the same day", and yet in other places a different term is used, that being "the selfsame day". Some examples are Ex.19:1, as compared to Ex.12:17, 41, & 51. In Exodus 19:1, we find the Children of Israel coming into the Wilderness of Sinai on the **same day** that they left the land of Egypt. This is Strong's #1931. In Exodus 12:17 are instructions to observe the Days of Unleavened Bread perpetually, beginning on the same day the Exodus would begin. Verses 41 & 51 refer to the Exodus as having begun on "the **selfsame day**",

(The NKJ renders it "that very same day", but in the KJV it is "selfsame day"). When you look for the Strong's number for the original Hebrew word "Selfsame", it lists two words! In an older Strong's, it gives #2088 / 6106. A more modern version of Strong's, without explanation, lists NO NUMBER AT ALL! (Nelson Publishers, 1984)

What Is Being Missed?

A better source, an Englishman's Hebrew Concordance,⁴ reveals something quite perplexing. The word translated "selfsame" in the overwhelming majority of cases, is rendered as "bones", rather than "selfsame"! The word there is found on pages 972-973, showing eleven places where the word "**geh-tzem**" is rendered "selfsame" where in 102 other places it is rendered "**bones**"! Strong's has the same 11 places having "selfsame", and gives 89 instances⁵ where "**eh-tsem**" is translated "bones". Why would this word be translated "selfsame" only ten percent of the time? And what possible meaning could be drawn from a word normally rendered as "bones" that would apply to these exceptions?

There is a sense in this Hebrew word that comes out in a few places. Ezekiel 37 uses this same word 7 times. This is the famous prophecy of the Valley of Dry Bones. God uses this picture to represent an enduring substance of the whole House of Israel⁶. Other places that convey the sense is Job 21:23, "*One dies in his full strength..*", and Job 7:15,

¹ Genesis 17: 23 & 26

² Exodus 12:41 & 51

³ Joshua 5:11.

⁴ Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance, Zondervan, 1973.

⁵ The EHC picks up the marginal references, giving a higher total count.

⁶ Ezekiel 37:11

*“My soul chooses strangling and death, rather than **my body**” (bones) . Here, Job is referring to his continuing existence. We see that this word refers to something that endures, a physical remnant, giving evidence that something once existed! Nothing physical endures longer than our skeletal remains to give evidence of our having existed. When the word **“geh-tzem”**, (normally “bones”) is rendered “selfsame”, it suggests a historical remnant of something that previously was. When the application is to a calendar date, we are being given evidence suggesting a reference to an event that happened in the past.*

The Selfsame Day As What?

This is what many are unaware of, that the use of this term suggests a reference to something from the past. When we see the words, “the selfsame day”, we ought to ask ourselves, the self-same day as what? The use of this term suggests the anniversary of some event. This NEW event, happening on the selfsame day, occurred on the anniversary of some prior (and related?) occurrence. That realization enhances the significance of the statement for us. This is evident in places, such as Exodus 12:41, which reveals that the Exodus from Egypt began on the very anniversary of when God formally and irrevocably⁷ confirmed the Covenant by oath with Abram, the same occasion in which a prophecy of the Exodus was given, four centuries earlier! Many have assumed this reference in Exodus 12:41 suggests the Children of Israel left Egypt ON the same day they ate the Passover. Though these two things were in close proximity, that **wasn’t the point** at all!

Looking For An Anniversary.

When we see the term “selfsame day” used, we ought to be looking for some sort of anniversary. Leviticus 23:21 exposes this characteristic clearly, to give one example. *“And you shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: you shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute forever...”* This is not

⁷ Galatians 3:29. Hebrews 6:18

talking about a one-time observance, but a reoccurring annual one. In fact, as it turns out, the use of the term “selfsame day” in Exodus 12:41 puts us on the path to a very interesting connection. The reference in Ex.12:41 ties the beginning of the Exodus to the precise day on which God made the Covenant Oath with Abram, 430 years earlier.

A Specific Time of Day

The passage this refers back to is Genesis 15:8 to 18. Here is where Abram wants to establish the certainty of God’s promises. God has Abram set out several specific sacrifices. (My article on the Abrahamic Covenant explains the significance of these special and unique sacrifices, so I won’t take time to do that here.) God confirmed His Covenant just after the day had begun, but it was in the day just ending, that He uttered the specific prophecy concerning the escape of his descendants from Egypt. That escape was fully underway on that “selfsame day”, when his descendants, the children of his grandson Israel, realized their release from Egypt, exercising FAITH, by putting their feet on the road out of there! Was it the same hour that the Exodus began? It would be particularly relevant if it were. God makes such a point of it, it would be a logical conclusion. (The fact that Israel first began eating of the produce of the Promised Land on this same anniversary⁸ reinforces the conclusion.) The first steps toward the realization of God’s Covenant Promise began taking place on the very anniversary of when that Prophecy was confirmed! Israel began leaving Egypt as darkness had begun, just into the beginning hours of the fifteenth day of the first month.⁹

Hebrew scholars should be very familiar with the OATH that made the Abrahamic Covenant an unchangeable reality. Here again, they should be without excuse. This connection between Ex.12:41 and Gen.15:17 is made for them, and us, by God in the inspired texts of Scripture!

There’s another interesting parallel, that of Exodus 30:8. Here we see Aaron attending to the daily lighting of the lamps and burning of incense, in the

⁸ Joshua 5:11

⁹ Numbers 33:3, Deuteronomy 16:1

same timeframe: the onset of evening. The lamp and the 'smoking furnace' (incense burner?) passed through Abram's sacrifice about the same time of day; at the approach of full darkness!

After The Sun Had Set

The Complete Jewish Bible (an English version of the Tanakh by the Jewish New Testament Publications, 1988), renders these verses in Genesis 15:12 as follows: "*As the sun was about to set, a deep sleep fell upon Avram, horror and great darkness came over him. ADONAI said to Avram, 'Know this for certain: your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves and held in oppression there for four hundred years. But I will also judge that nation, the one that makes them slaves. Afterward, they will leave with many possessions'....After the sun had set, there was thick darkness, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch appeared, which passed between these animal parts. That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram: 'I have given this land to your descendants'...*" etc. So, we have here yet another correlation, of two related events, that establish when a particular event took place, explicitly placing it at the specific time of day: That interval between sunset and dark.

The Exodus began the day after Passover, as Numbers 33:3 indicates, and as Deuteronomy 16:1 adds, it happened by night! It couldn't have been the few dark hours of the SAME night, though this is a common perception, as there were insufficient hours remaining in Passover night, from midnight on, to accomplish such an undertaking. From the time word spread throughout the camp, that Pharaoh had let them go (yet again), less than four hours remained until the eastern sky began to lighten. If Israel left Egypt 'by night', then it had to be after sunset the following night! This is an inescapable conclusion, when you consider the number of things that had to be done and made ready before they could begin leaving. All together, it had to have taken several hours.

How Long Would it Have Taken?

Let us first consider the logistics. If Israel was the 2.5 to 3 million congregation that the two separate means given in scripture for estimating their numbers show us, a number of logistical dynamics are inescapable. Using the lesser figure, including the

'mixed multitude'¹⁰, and livestock, and allowing a 1000 foot wide column front, it would make a column of 500 files wide by 5000 ranks deep. If we allow a four foot interval for each rank, then the column would have to have been 3.8 miles long. If each rank stepped off one second behind the previous, then it would have taken 1.4 hours for the last in line to begin moving from the time the first in line did, and another 3.8 hours for the last to move forward to where the first had been. Thus, in just starting out, it would have taken 5.2 hours for the entire column to pass the starting point, and for the end of the column to be on the way. (Much longer if the column was less than 1000 feet wide!) This also disregards the fact that much additional time would have been necessary for them to form up after they had been made aware of their release, as they did leave in **ordered ranks**¹¹, suggesting they marshaled-out in a wide area outside the city where there was room to do so. (Ancient cities were crowded, especially servant areas.) Another fact was that they were told to **remain inside** their homes until morning light¹², which **they did**,¹³ and by morning, they had to **burn all remains** of their Paschal lambs¹⁴. All of this would have taken time! But, before marching out, they first had to:

- Wait for the midnight Passing-Over to be done,
- Wait for Pharaoh to come to realize what had happened, and to receive reports as to its extent,
- Wait for Pharaoh's servants to go locate Moses,
- Notify all 2.5 million that they were free to go,

¹⁰ Exodus 12:38

¹¹ Exodus 13:18

¹² Exodus 12:22 Deuteronomy 16:4

¹³ Exodus 12:28

¹⁴ Exodus 11:10

- Somehow convincing everyone that the order to ‘remain in their houses’ had been countermanded,
- Burn any uneaten remains of their Paschal lambs,
- Pack all the stuff they were to take, tents, clothing, food, valuables, etc, (doing all this in the dark!)
- Round up and move their livestock (in the dark!),
- Water their livestock, (at night – at the river!),
- Fill their own water jars and water pouches,
- Evacuate Joseph’s remains from entombment,
- Make and bake unleavened bread for the road,
- Assemble and form up (they left orderly!).¹⁵

Spoiling the Egyptians

In addition to all these, they had to find time to spoil the Egyptians, which was **not** done prior to Passover, as some claim!¹⁶ The Abrahamic prophecy¹⁷ suggests they would do so after God judged that nation. The placement of Exodus 12:35 suggests the same timeframe. (Also, note the timing of the ninth plague, the Plague of Darkness. The ninth plague fit exactly between the time after Israel selected their lambs the morning of the tenth and the afternoon of the thirteenth!)

Obviously, we’re looking at a monumental effort that would have taken them many hours time to accomplish. What a **cruel joke** it would have been for God to let them all spend more than half of the night with the understanding that they WERE NOT GOING, ordering them to remain in their dwellings until morning, then some time after midnight,¹⁸ demand a frantic breaking-down and packing-up of

¹⁵ Exodus 13:18

¹⁶ See my article on “*The Overlooked Plague*” which addresses this issue. For an even more comprehensive look at the timing of the Exodus, see “*Passover of the Exodus*”.

¹⁷ Genesis 15:14

¹⁸ Note: “Midnight” and “Morning” were two different times of day. Had God intended they leave immediately after midnight, He would not have instructed them to stay inside their houses til morning, or burn the Paschal remains by morning. The wording has them still there as morning dawned.

their households, requiring they be **gone out** within just those couple of hours remaining before dawn! This, some theologians pose as having been what God required them to do!

All of these could not possibly have been accomplished in the few remaining hours of the night after they ate the Passover and the Lord having passed-over at midnight. From the time they’d heard that Pharaoh finally relented, there would have been **less than 4 hours** remaining until dawn! By the most conservative estimate, all these would have consumed at least seven hours, just to get ready to depart, and then marching out would have required at least another five to six hours to accomplish. For the last to leave, it would have taken to at least fourteen hours past that midnight hour!

NOT On the Same Night.

No, the children of Israel did not leave Egypt in the remaining night hours of that same night in which they ate the Passover. They left the NEXT night! This being consistent with Numbers 33:3 and Deuteronomy 16:1. They ate the Passover on the 14th, they left Egypt on the 15th.

The terms “same day” and “selfsame day” do not both mean the same thing! The “selfsame day” is a specific term with a distinct meaning. It alludes to an anniversary.

Realizing that the term “the selfsame day” could NOT be referring to both the Passover and the Exodus having occurred within the **same** night-time, we are compelled to look for a better answer. That answer is in the realization that the term is not referring to two things having happened in the same 24 hour day, instead, it refers to two things that happened ON the same calendar date, but in different years. In this case, one important event occurring on the **430th anniversary** of the other. Not only are we being told of an anniversary event, but one which was the exact fulfillment of that prophecy given back on the original occasion. It also enlightens another occasion, occurring on the “selfsame day” forty years later. Israel first began eating of the produce of the Promised Land on the 470th anniversary of when God promised that they

would do so! Each of these three things occurred on the same calendar date. (The event in Genesis 17:23 may have been a fourth thing. We might note that Abraham's direct physical heir wasn't conceived until after Abraham formally committed himself and his house to the Covenant!)

The real issue with the "selfsame day"¹⁹ is our realization that God caused His Promises to Israel to be **fulfilled exactly on time**. He brought them to pass on the very same calendar date that the Promise was originally confirmed by oath! ○

¹⁹ The Eleven places where "geh-tzem" is translated as the "Selfsame Day": Genesis 7:3, 17:23 & 26, Ezekiel 40:1, Exodus 12:17, 41 & 51, Leviticus 23:14 & 21, Deut.32:48, Joshua 5:11.

Additional translations,
Joshua 10 :27 *"until this very day"*
Ezekiel 2 :3 *"unto this very day"*
Ezekiel 24 :2 *"of this same day"*
Leviticus 23 :28,29,30. *" in that same day"*