

THE FEAST OF COVER-OVER

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I. AVIAN IMAGERY AND DEITY

The first metaphor we meet with in the Bible likens the Creator-Spirit to a bird hovering over the deep-and-darkness (Gen 1:2). This same avian image is also a key feature in the Exodus 12 account of the paschal event, but it has remained hidden behind the mistranslation of the crucial verb *pāsaḥ*. Not "pass over" but "hover over" is the meaning of this word, as the present essay hopes to demonstrate.

But before investigating *pāsaḥ*, as well as the noun *pesaḥ*, a bit more background on the use of avian imagery for deity. "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exod 19:4). So the Lord described his guidance of Israel by the Glory-cloud at the exodus. Moses used this figure of the eagle and its young when reviewing these same historical realities in Deut 32:10-11. Significantly, in this Song of Moses God's shepherding of Israel through the wilderness by the theophanic cloud is depicted in the distinctive language of Gen 1:2: as a birdlike hovering (*rāḥap*) over the unstructured world (*tōḥû*).¹

Bird imagery suggested itself naturally for this Glory theophany. First, it was a cloud formation, and clouds and birds belong to the same sphere of the sky, across which they fly. Isaiah parallels the two: "Who are these that fly as a cloud and as doves to their windows?" (Isa 60:8). Also, protective overshadowing is provided alike by the outspread wings of birds (cf. Deut 32:11; Pss 17:8; 91:4) and by clouds (cf. Ps 105:39; Exod 40:35 [LXX]).

Second, an angelic retinue is integral to the Glory-cloud theophany, and angels also share in the celestial realm of clouds and birds, through which they too are said to fly (Isa 6:6; Dan 9:21; Rev 14:6). Hence in symbolic representation angelic beings are winged. Most relevant here are the figures of the cherubim guardians of the Glory-Presence in the Holy of Holies (Exod 25:20; 37:9; 1 Kgs 6:24, 27; 8:6-7) and the hosts of winged heavenly creatures seen attending the divine Glory in visionary revelations (Isa 6:2; Ezek 1:6 ff.; 3:13; 10:4 ff.; 11:22). It is on cherub wings that the Lord soars

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¹ This is one of numerous indications that the Glory-cloud is a manifestation of the Spirit in particular. For a full discussion of the Glory-Spirit theophany see M. G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980)

(Ps 18:10 [11]; cf. 2 Sam 22:11). Understandably, then, it is especially the Glory-cloud theophany that attracts avian imagery in the Bible.

Outside the Bible, depiction of deity in avian fashion was common in ancient Near Eastern iconography and literature. Familiar is the use of bird emblems for gods in Egyptian religion. Indeed the hieroglyphic sign of the falcon of Horus on a standard was used as a determinative of gods. An important parallel to the Glory-theophany phenomena in the Bible is the widely attested motif of the winged sun-disk used to represent the divine majesty.² Of special significance for the interpretation of the paschal event in Exodus 12 is the appearance of this winged symbol of divine glory on door lintels.³ The entryway formed by such lintels together with their sideposts parallels the Biblical gate-of-heaven formation constituted by the Glory-cloud canopy with its two columns (of smoke and fire) and by the cherubim-flanked Glory in the Holy of Holies.⁴

It is within this world of avian and portal symbolism that the meaning of the Lord's paschal act of salvation is to be sought.

II. THE LORD AS AVIAN SHIELD

1. *Lexical facts.* Two Hebrew verbs, denoting totally different actions, tend to be confusingly blended in the current popular understanding of the Exodus 12 event, the meaning of both being expressed as "pass over." The first step in apprehending the true nature of the event is to distinguish these two actions from each other and clarify their relation to one another.

One verb is *‘ābar*. "Pass over" is an acceptable translation for it. It is the word used when the Lord says he is going to go throughout (pass over or through) the land on a mission of judgment (Exod 12:12). Although God is in an ultimate sense the subject of this judicial passing over the land, the immediate execution of judgment—the entering into the Egyptian houses and slaying of the firstborn—is attributed to a "destroyer." It is this figure, distinguishable from God (Exod 12:23b; cf. v. 13b), who passes over (*‘ābar*) Egypt. This destroyer would be an angelic agent of God, or even the messianic angel of the Lord himself.⁵ If the destroyer is the angel of the Lord, the statements that God is the executor of the destructive blows (Exod 12:12, 13c, 23a, 29) find their explanation in the nature of this angel as one who, though distinguishable from God, is identified as God.

The Exodus 12 narrative speaks of another action of God that stands in contrast to the destructive passing over the land. This other action is denoted by the second verb traditionally rendered "pass over"—namely, *pāsaḥ* (vv. 13b, 23b, 27b). What is clear is that the action denoted by *pāsaḥ* results in the sparing of the blood-marked Israelite homes from the curse of the

² Cf G E Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore Johns Hopkins, 1974) 32–56

³ Cf *ibid* 49, figure 14

⁴ Cf Kline, *Images* 40

⁵ Cf 2 Sam 24 16–17, 2 Kgs 19 35, Isa 37 36, 1 Chr 21 12 ff, 2 Chr 32 21, Ps 35 5–6

tenth plague. The question is: What is the specific nature of this action? Is "pass over" an accurate translation of *pāsaḥ*?

According to the customary approach that renders *pāsaḥ* "pass over," God is viewed as himself the destroyer, and *pāsaḥ* pictures him as not descending in judgment on the houses of the Israelites but as passing over them, as moving harmlessly over and past them. Support for this rendering has been found in the existence of a Hebrew verb *pāsaḥ* that means "limp" (see 2 Sam 4:4),⁶ with its related adjective meaning "lame" (see e.g. 2 Sam 9:13; 19:26; Deut 15:21). On the assumption that *pāsaḥ* in Exodus 12 represents this same verbal root, it is suggested that the picture there is of God hobbling or hopping over the spared houses.

That would be a lame metaphor indeed, and there is evidence of (not just another meaning of this verb but probably) another root *pāsaḥ* that yields a far more apt image for the Exodus 12 context. To this I shall turn presently, after noting some further problems that beset the traditional interpretation.

One such difficulty is the equating of the destroyer, who passes through (*ābar*) the land, with the one who "passes over" (*pāsaḥ*) the Israelite houses. For though, as previously observed, the Lord God is referred to as the subject of the destructive passing through Egypt (either in terms of his being the ultimate author of this judgment or in terms of the divine identity of the destroying angel), nevertheless Exod 12:23 clearly distinguishes Yahweh as the one who performs the *pāsaḥ*-act from the destroyer. Explaining the *pāsaḥ*-act this verse says: "(Yahweh) will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you." Whatever the precise meaning of *pāsaḥ*, the destroyer is plainly not the subject of the *pāsaḥ*-act.

Another problem for the traditional view is that the *pāsaḥ*-act relates specifically to the door of the house (Exod 12:23b; cf. vv. 13, 27), the door on whose lintel and posts the blood had been daubed. The precise purpose and effect of the Lord's *pāsaḥ*-act is to deny the destroyer access to that blood-marked entryway. *Pāsaḥ* does not denote the taking of a detour but the establishing of a deterrent, not God's bypassing of the house or hopping over the lintel but, on the contrary, his stationing himself squarely and immovably at the door. What the imagery demands is a shielding action—not a separating or distancing of God from the house but an abiding divine Presence, a divine encamping like a guardian at the gate.

A second root *pāsaḥ*, with a meaning that meets the contextual demands of Exodus 12, is attested in Isa 31:5. *Pāsaḥ* plainly signifies there a protective action of some kind. Agreeably, "protect" was one of the ancient Jewish interpretations of *pāsaḥ* in Exodus 12.⁷

⁶ 1 Kgs 18:21, 26 is usually regarded as another instance, but on this see below

⁷ In the LXX two of the three instances of *pāsaḥ* in Exodus 12 are translated "shelter" (*skēpazō*, a verb used for a tree shading the earth), and evidence to the same effect is found in the targums and OL. Occasionally, modern commentators have also challenged the now long-entrenched rendering of "pass over." Cf. T. E. Glasson, "The 'Passover', a Misnomer: The Meaning of the Verb *Pasach*," *JTS* 10 (1959) 79–84. Glasson addresses the question of when and how the "pass over" rendering (found in the Vulgate) took hold.

The indications in Isa 31:5 are that *pāsaḥ* denotes, more specifically, a sheltering action. In the perfectly balanced structure of the second half of the verse, *pāsaḥ* is one of a pair of infinitive absolutes and its parallel is *gānan*, "cover, shield." Still more precisely, this covering is likened to an action of birds. For the verb *gānan* that is paired with *pāsaḥ* in the second half of the verse resumes the *gānan* in the first half, where it is illustrated by the fluttering or hovering (^ʿ*ûp*) of mother birds over their nests. *Pāsaḥ* is even more directly connected to this avian image if the verse overall is analyzed as a chiasm, with each of the two central lines containing the verb *gānan* and with ^ʿ*ûp* and *pāsaḥ* as counterparts in the matching outside lines:

As birds hovering (^ʿ*ûp*),
 so Yahweh of hosts will cover (*gānan*) Jerusalem;
 covering (*gānan*), he will deliver it,
 hovering (*pāsaḥ*), he will save it.

Isaiah 31:5 may well yield something more than evidence of a root *pāsaḥ* meaning "cover/hover over," for it seems to contain an allusion to the original paschal event. The context presents the irony of Israel's looking for help against the Assyrians not to the Lord but to Egypt, the house of bondage from which the Lord had of old redeemed them (vv. 1–3). In v. 4 there is the same aerial perspective as in the judicial passage over Egypt in the tenth plague: God descends from heaven and alights on Zion, encamping over the city for warfare against the attacker. The divine hovering mentioned in v. 5 would thus provide an explanation of God's *pāsaḥ*-action in the paschal episode of Exodus 12, interpreting it as a birdlike shielding of his threatened people.

Further evidence of the root *pāsaḥ* meaning "hover over" may be found in one of the passages usually cited under *pāsaḥ*, "limp." Elijah's challenge to the people in 1 Kgs 18:21 has been translated: "How long go ye limping between the two sides?" (ASV) and "How long will you waver between two opinions?" (NIV). The preposition ^ʿ*al*, "on, over," is problematic for translations of this verse requiring "between." Recognizing the difficulty, RSV translates, "How long will you go limping with two opinions?" Though "with" is attested for ^ʿ*al*, the resultant picture is awkward at best. The noun rendered "opinions" is one of a cluster of derivatives from an assumed *sʿp*, "cleave, divide." For the most part the derivatives refer to branches of trees. In Ezek 31:6 the boughs are the nesting place of the birds of heaven. Once we give the verb *pāsaḥ* in 1 Kgs 18:21 its meaning of "hover, flutter," the better-attested meanings of the noun ("branches") and the preposition ("over" or "at")⁸ fit perfectly and a convincingly appropriate metaphor is obtained: "How long will you go on hovering like a bird fluttering over two branches? Land on one bough or the other!"⁹

⁸ On the use of the preposition ^ʿ*al* with a door (Exod 12 23) cf Job 31 9, Ezek 46 2

⁹ This image of the fluttering bird that does not alight is also in Prov 26 2

A compatible explanation may be suggested for the *pāsah* in 1 Kgs 18:26. It is usually taken as *pāsah*, “limp,” and understood as describing the Baal prophets as engaged in a conjectured limping dance alongside the altar. It is possible, however, that the mob of false prophets is pictured as fluttering in a frenzy all over the Baal altar—like the gods in the pagan Babylonian flood tradition who were attracted by the sweet aroma of the offering the flood hero was preparing in thanksgiving for his deliverance and who are said to have swarmed “like flies” over the sacrifice.¹⁰

2. *Contextual factors.* In the light of our findings concerning the verb *pāsah*, the picture in Exodus 12 is not one of God’s passing over his people but of his coming to them and abiding with them through the dark night of judgment on Egypt. Like a hovering bird spreading its protective wings over its young, the Lord covered the Israelite houses, keeping watch over them. He was their gatekeeper, their guardian against the entrance of the angel of death.

This interpretation of the *pāsah*-action is reinforced by certain contextual considerations. One has to do with the relationship between the act of deliverance from the destroyer and the prior act of expiation. The narrative spotlights the specific place where the sacrificial blood was to be smeared: doorframe, sideposts, lintel (Exod 12:7, 22–23). On the traditional view, no particular connection obtains between the *pāsah*-action and the application of the expiatory blood to this specific location. But the selection of the door-frame as the locus of expiation finds its ready explanation when it is recognized that the *pāsah*-act involved a divine protective presence at that very spot and consisted in a guardianship over that door (12:23). It speaks strongly in favor of the present interpretation that it provides for this mutually illuminating relationship between the saving *pāsah*-action and the specific orientation of the sacrificial act that constituted its forensic basis.

There is another contextual factor that corroborates the shielding nature of the paschal action and its avian portrayal as well. It has to do with the Glory-cloud and specifically with the particular juncture in redemptive history where this form of Spirit-theophany emerged. The Glory-Spirit was present as a feature of the original theocratic order in Eden but withdrew from the fallen world. Then in the days of Moses this form of theophany reappeared, marking the coming of God’s theocratic kingdom on earth after its long abeyance during the patriarchal ages.¹¹ It is at the exodus episode that the Biblical narrative introduces the pillars of cloud and fire, the supernatural means by which God led Israel by the way of the wilderness by the Red Sea (Exod 13:21–22; cf. vv. 17–20). Coming immediately before this departure of Israel and serving as a prelude and preparation for it, the paschal event of Exodus 12 will most naturally have involved this same divine Presence.

¹⁰ Cf. Gilgamesh Epic 11 161, *Atrahasis* 3 5 35

¹¹ See further M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (privately published, 1993) 225–226

Now if the Glory-Spirit, so congenial to avian metaphor,¹² is the divine Presence in the paschal event, this will be what prompted¹³ the narrator's use of *pāsah*, "hover over." Also, in view of the fact that overshadowing is a characteristic function of the Glory-cloud,¹⁴ the interpretation of the paschal action as such a protective covering is strengthened by the identification of the Glory-Spirit as the subject of that action.

Moreover, if the Glory-Spirit is the divine actor as early in the exodus history as Exodus 12, further credence is lent to our understanding of the *pāsah*-action as a divine guardianship against the destroyer by the strikingly similar role played by the Glory-Spirit in the sequel recorded in Exodus 14. It is another night scene, and again the Israelites are under threat of destruction, this time by the pharaoh's pursuing forces. But the pillar of cloud takes up a position behind them, coming between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel so that the one does not come near the other all night (vv. 19-20).¹⁵ In this episode, as in the paschal event, the Lord takes his place with his people, stationing himself in such a way as to block the approach of the destroying power. If the Glory-Spirit we see guarding Israel in Exodus 14 is the divine actor in Exodus 12, it is quite natural that we should find him performing the same function there, as is the case on our interpretation of the paschal event.

Or, turning the matter around, to the extent that it can be shown independently of the evidence for the presence of the Glory-Spirit that the paschal event was a divine guarding of Israel, the resultant twin character of the Exodus 12 and 14 events argues compellingly that the Glory-Spirit is indeed the divine actor in Exodus 12 as he is explicitly in Exodus 14.

There is an important difference between these two formally matching events, which, however, brings out a deeper connection between them. Exodus 12 records a deliverance from the wrath of God; Exodus 14, from the enmity of the pharaoh, the dragon figure representative of Satan's cause. From the efficacy of the divine shielding against the death angel, agent of the divine wrath, the Israelites were to draw assurance that this same divine guardianship would keep them safe in the hour of the pharaoh's terrible assault.

Jesus, as the paschal lamb who interposes himself between the wrath of God and those who are his own, who while on earth was their Paraclete guardian from the evil one (John 17:12, 15), promised during his last paschal commemoration with them that he would send them another Paraclete

¹² See section I above, and note the dove manifestation of the Spirit at Jesus' baptism (Matt 3 16, Mark 1 10, Luke 3 22, John 1 32)

¹³ If, as will be maintained below, the choice of *pāsah* was a consequence of the desire to pun on the noun *pesah*, it might be better to say the presence of the Glory-Spirit contributed to rather than prompted the use of *pāsah*

¹⁴ Again see section I, noting also Isa 4 5-6 and the episodes of Jesus' conception (Luke 1 35) and transfiguration (Matt 17 5, Mark 9 7, Luke 9 34)

¹⁵ On this occasion the angel of the Lord does not pose the threat against which the Glory-Presence guards but rather acts in concert with the cloud theopany (Exod 14 19) Together, the angel and Glory-Spirit perform the dual functions of delivering God's people and destroying the Egyptians (Exod 14 21 ff, esp v 24)

defender to be present with them forever (John 14:16), even the Spirit, the one was who the Paraclete presence and covering guardian of God's people in the original paschal event. And if God be thus for us, who can be against us? (Rom 8:31).

III. THE LORD AS ARBOREAL SHELTER

1. *Pāsaḥ and pesaḥ: paronomasia.* Along with the verb *pāsaḥ*, the noun *pesaḥ* first appears in the Exodus 12 narrative. It is customarily assumed that this noun, used only with reference to the paschal event and its commemorative feast, stems from the verbal root *pāsaḥ*. Thus, on the further assumption that *pāsaḥ* means "pass over," *pesaḥ* is usually rendered "pass-over." On the view of the verb adopted here, the noun would mean "a covering" or (more abstractly) "protection."

If the noun and verb are cognate, it is certainly better to regard the noun as derived from the verb rather than to regard the verb as a denominative from a noun not known apart from the paschal context. Exodus 12:27 supports this conclusion, for whether the ²*āšer* in this verse is taken as "who" or "because," it is Yahweh's *pāsaḥ*-act that is immediately cited in explication of the *pesaḥ*-sacrifice. Likewise it is the *pāsaḥ*-act in Exod 12:13 that explains the term *pesaḥ* in v. 11c.

But though Exod 12:13, 27 explain *pesaḥ* in terms of *pāsaḥ*, that does not necessarily mean that the two words are cognate. There is also the possibility that this is a play on words. An obscure word may be introduced into an account and be explained by a pun, using a known word with similar sound and appropriate meaning. A familiar example is Gen 11:9. It tells us that the Shinar tower site bore the name Babel because the Lord there "confounded" (*bālal*) the language of the builders. But according to cuneiform renderings (themselves possibly popular etymology) *bābel* means "gate of god." So in Exodus 12 it is possible that a non-Hebrew noun, *pesaḥ*, was chosen to designate the event (and its memorial feast) and that its significance was conveyed by use of the similar-sounding Hebrew verb *pāsaḥ*.

Favoring the paronomasia rather than cognate view is the unlikelihood that a noun would be created from so uncommon a verb as *pāsaḥ* to serve as the name of a notable festival. It is more likely that the unusual verb would have suggested itself in the search for a word that would qualify as a pun on the previously adopted noun *pesaḥ*. Admittedly, it might not be thought much more probable that a foreign term would be chosen as the designation for this Israelite festival in the first place. But on balance that seems to be the more plausible option, at least if a foreign word can be found that fits just right.¹⁶

2. *Egyptian etymology.* The historical situation of Exodus 12 points to Egypt as the most promising source for such an investigation. Various

¹⁶ If the meaning of the noun *pesaḥ* can be discovered independently of *pāsaḥ*, this will elucidate the meaning of the verb, even though in Exodus 12 their functional relationship is the reverse

possibilities from the Egyptian lexicon have in fact been proposed. They have in common the understanding that the first syllable in *pesah* represents the Egyptian definite article *p³* (attested in the Eighteenth Dynasty and regularly from Late Egyptian on). Noteworthy among such studies is that of B. Couroyer.¹⁷ He discusses several Egyptian words that would satisfy the transcriptional parameters, deciding in favor of *sh*, "blow," seen as a reference to the tenth plague, the context of Israel's deliverance. One obvious objection preventing popular acceptance of this proposal is that we expect that the festival commemorating the great paschal salvation would be named after the act of deliverance itself rather than the circumstance that occasioned it.

Omitted in Couroyer's survey is an option for which a more convincing case can be made. It is a word that satisfies the semantic qualifications for a pun relationship to the verb *pāsaḥ*, as required by Exod 12:11, 13, 27. Hence to demonstrate that Hebrew *pesah* represents this Egyptian noun will do two things: It will yield the meaning of *pesah*, and it will at the same time confirm the "cover/hover over" meaning of the verb *pāsaḥ*, used to explain *pesah*.

The Egyptian word is *sh*, "arbor, booth," and with the definite article, *p³ sh*, "the booth." Its determinative sign (which may also serve as an ideogram without the phonetic symbols) delineates the front face or entry of a simple overarching structure with a central supporting pole. Such a covert is the perfect nominal equivalent of the kind of protective covering action denoted by the verb *pāsaḥ*. Arboreal booth connotes the overshadowing function attributed to the Glory-cloud, which was the particular divine Presence in the paschal event. It suggests too the avian image of the overspreading wings of the cherubim guardians of the Glory-Presence.¹⁸ Here then in the *sh*-booth of the paschal story would be the model for Scripture's familiar and favorite concept of the Lord God as our refuge, our dwelling place in all generations. So central was this to covenant religion that, as it would now appear, Israel's cycle of feasts was bracketed, spring and autumn, by feasts of booths.¹⁹

The determinative sign of *sh* provides a point of contact with another key feature of the paschal episode in that it portrays not just a booth but the entry face of the structure. For this corresponds to the focal paschal motif of the smearing of the expiatory blood on the entryway. Inclusion of the tent-pole in the determinative sign takes on interest in view of the observation by R. de Vaux that in a springtime sacrifice offered by seminomads (with which commentators have compared various details of the paschal ritual in Exodus 12) the blood was put on the tent-poles and later on doorposts.²⁰

¹⁷ B. Couroyer, "L'origine égyptienne du mot 'Pâque'," *RB* 72 (1955) 481-496

¹⁸ Especially the "arbor" meaning of *sh* would carry avian associations

¹⁹ Curiously, their designations, *sh* and *skwt*, would exhibit assonance

²⁰ R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel Its Life and Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961) 489

T. H. Gaster notes the widespread custom of the erection of sacred trees, sometimes with apo-

A further link between *pesah* and Egyptian *sh* is that both are used in combination with a term for deity. On the Egyptian side is the lexical item *sh-ntr*, "booth of deity, shrine." This is written with the sign (used as either ideogram or determinative) depicting the front elevation of a shrine plus the emblem of divinity. On the Biblical side, *pesah* is described repeatedly in Exodus 12 as belonging to Yahweh (vv. 11, 27, 48) and is explained in terms of Yahweh's *pāsah*-action (vv. 11–13, 27). The precise force of *lyhwh* depends on whether *pesah* refers to the original event, the feat of covering, or to the subsequent commemorative feast. *Pesah* as an accomplishment is attributed to Yahweh as author, whether the covering is viewed as that which he performs by his personal Presence (vv. 13, 27) or that which he provides by sovereign appointment (i.e. the sacrificial lamb whose blood covers the door, v. 21). Indeed, insofar as Yahweh performs the covering feat by sheltering over the houses himself the *pesah* belongs to him in the sense that he virtually is the *pesah*. When *pesah* refers to the ordinance that is to be kept in perpetuity (vv. 43, 48) *lyhwh* indicates that the feast with its offerings belongs to Yahweh as a remembrance of him to be observed in his honor (see e.g. Lev 23:5; 2 Chr 30:1, 5; cf. Exod 13:6; Lev 23:6, 34; Deut 16:10). There are aspects of this complex of ideas that we shall want to reflect on further below, but the point at present is simply that the recurring combination of *pesah* with *lyhwh* appears to be a reflection of *sh-ntr* and so supports the proposed Egyptian etymology of *pesah*.

Additional correspondences appear between *sh-ntr* and important elements in the paschal narrative. Above we remarked on the Biblical account's emphatic focus on the doorframe as the place of expiatory covering and as the station of the divine Coverer. While the determinative of *sh* does depict the front face of the booth, the entry area, the determinative of *sh-ntr* reflects the architectural focus on the Exodus account more specifically, for prominent in the shrine façade (its hieroglyphic sign) is the actual doorframe. In fact the façade is essentially an expanded doorframe.

The correspondence of these Egyptian and Israelite "booths of deity" extends beyond their shared focus on the doorway to the fact that this entrance is in each case the site of cultic ritual. In Exodus 12 it is precisely the cultic act of daubing the blood of the *pesah* sacrifice on the doorposts and lintel that sets the entrance door in the center focus of the event. Similarly there are Egyptian offering texts that speak of the offerings being presented at the face or front (*hnty*) of the *sh-ntr*. Indeed it was on the doors and lintels of *sh-ntr* structures that these formulaic offering texts were written.²¹

Still another feature of the paschal situation parallels the doorframe motif of the *sh-ntr*. As observed above, the cherubim-flanked Glory formation

tropaic fleeces attached, in spring rituals celebrating the resurrection of the year. One example is the Egyptian festival in which the *djed*-column was raised, representing the resurrection of Osiris (*Thespis Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East* [Garden City: Doubleday, 1961] 313).

²¹ A. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar* (London: Oxford University, 1964) 170–171.

of the paschal Presence was conceptualized as a doorframe, more specifically as the gate of heaven.

The parallelism with the *sh-ntr* goes beyond a correspondence in various details and involves a formal equivalence in overall structural identity. For inasmuch as the divine Presence was itself the *pesah*-covering, this *pesah* was a divine *pesah*, a booth of God, a *sh-ntr*. And so too each Israelite house, sanctified by the enveloping divine covering, was a *sh-ntr*, a divine sanctuary-booth.

Along such lines the case can be made to explain the Biblical *pesah* as Egyptian *p³ sh*. But why this *ad hoc* appropriation of an Egyptian term? Would no Hebrew word do? Perhaps *sh* was more suitable than Hebrew *sukkâ*, "booth," because the Egyptian term, especially in the form *sh-ntr*, could refer to the more substantial structures involved in the original paschal event—that is, the Israelite houses transformed into shrines. Another advantage of *sh-ntr* over *sukkâ* is that it connoted, particularly through its hieroglyphic determinative, the doorframe in the front elevation, which was so prominent in the Exodus 12 episode.²² A Hebrew term that would denote that front façade is *pānîm*, "face." It is used in the description of Ezekiel's temple (Ezek 41:14; cf. v. 21), which mentions as part of "the face of the house" the doorposts (41:21) and as part of the entrance of the house "the lintel" (47:1).²³ But façade was a secondary meaning of *pānîm*. Moreover *pānîm* would not convey the requisite basic idea of covering. In the last analysis, however, the strength of the case for the Egyptian etymology is not the lack of a fully satisfactory Hebrew term but the compelling character of the remarkable reverberations and resonances between the Egyptian *sh-ntr* and the whole complex of phenomena in the paschal event.

3. *Sepulchral sanctuary.* There is another point of correspondence that supplements the evidence for our proposed etymology of *pesah*. But it is adduced here primarily by way of indicating how awareness of the Egyptian source may sharpen our perception of the paschal event.

The Egyptian offering formulae in which the *sh-ntr* was mentioned as the site of the ritual were funerary texts. The doors and lintels on which they were written were in mortuary structures. The gods who are referred to in the texts as the givers of the boon or (later) as recipients thereof are chthonic deities.²⁴ The *sh-ntr* was thus a tomb shrine.

Correspondingly, houses of death fill the scene in the drama of the *pesah lyhwh* in Exodus 12. Every house in Egypt was turned into a house of death that night (12:30, 33). Most literally, the house of the pharaoh, residence of a divine king according to Egyptian ideology, became a funerary *sh-ntr*. And is that not what the Israelite houses became also, marked as they were with

²² If *sh* figured in the name of an Egyptian spring festival familiar to the Israelites during their long sojourn there, that would help to account for the adoption of the foreign term for their paschal feast

²³ For this translation of *mīptān* see Kline, *Images* 40 n 32

²⁴ Cf Gardiner, *Grammar* 171

the blood of the lamb? The verb used to denote the destroyer (*šāhat*) is the one used for the killing of the lamb (12:21). Its death was the equivalent of the judgment death inflicted on the Egyptian firstborn. By the striking²⁵ of the lamb's blood on the Israelite houses they were stamped with the sign of death. They were rendered houses of death, houses that had experienced the divine judgment. Each such house was, like the Egyptian *sh-ntr*, a tomb shrine—but with an extraordinary redemptive twist.

This death-signifying blood—that is, the lamb slain—was at the same time the *pesah*, the covering that protected from the death stroke. The antecedent of *pesah* in Exod 12:11a is the lamb, the subject of vv. 3–10. And again, the reference in the command to “kill the *pesah*” (v. 21) is clearly to the lamb. To ask how the slain lamb can represent at once the death judgment of God inflicted and a protective shielding from that blow is to inquire into the judicial heart of the gospel of justification by grace. The answer lies in the nature of the death judgment suffered by the lamb. It was a vicarious, expiatory act of sacrifice, a suffering of divine wrath in the stead of others, so providing them with a place of refuge from that wrath passing over the world.

The wonder of grace deepens when we recall that by reason of his personal Presence hovering (*pāsaḥ*) over the Israelite houses, the Lord himself was their shielding shelter (*pesah*). The lamb is the *pesah* and the Lord is the *pesah*. Both are true because the Lord becomes the lamb. And John bore witness to Jesus, the Word become flesh, the one who was before him, his Lord, and said, “Behold the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The Lord shielded his people from his own wrath by himself intercepting the death angel's thrust as he stood guard at the door of their dwellings.

By virtue of their Lord-lamb covering, the Israelite house tombs were sanctuary sepulchres, places of refuge in which those redeemed by the blood of the lamb were sealed until the night of judgment had passed. Though a sign of death, the blood on the doorframe was an emblem of salvation, for it was the blood of a triumphant sacrifice. The offerings that were the subject of the Egyptian notices on the mortuary lintels were imagined to be a contribution to the ongoing life of the deceased. In a formally similar fashion the paschal blood on the lintels of the *sh-ntr* dwellings of the Israelites also spoke of life beyond death, but this word of promise was the word of the living God, their God, he who is not the God of the dead but of the living. The lamb's blood on these sanctuary tombs presaged their becoming empty tombs in the morning. Their blood-covered doors would be opened and their redeemed occupants would emerge as the children of the resurrection day.

An unmistakable allusion to these paschal sanctuary tombs is found in Isaiah's celebration of God's resurrection victory over death. He prophesies of that day when the Lord will come to punish the inhabitants of the earth

²⁵ The application of the blood to the doorframe is described by the verb *naga^c*, from which is derived the noun *nega^c* used in Exod 11 1, 12 13 for the plague of slaying the firstborn. The noun is explicated in 12 13 by *šāhat*. On *naga^c* cf Gen 12 17, 32 25 (26), Isa 6 7, 53 4, 8

for their iniquity and to slay the leviathan, the monster in the sea—not Egypt's pharaoh this time, but the dragon with the power of death (Isa 26:21–27:1). In that day death itself, the last enemy, will be vanquished. The insatiable swallower will be swallowed (25:8). The covering shroud that covers all the nations (25:7) will be removed and no more cover the dead (26:21b). In light of that resurrection prospect the grave is transformed. For God's martyr-people it becomes a refuge into which they are welcomed: "Come, my people, enter into thy chambers and shut the doors about thee; hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation pass over (*‘ābar*)" (26:20).²⁶ Like the blood-smearred house tombs of the Israelites, the realm of death is for the saints of the Lord a safe sanctuary, a passage to heaven. For those who sleep in Jesus, the souls under the altar (Rev 6:9), the living Lord is their covering in death, their *pesah*-covert.

4. *Hover over and cover-over.* We have determined that the noun *pesah* means "the booth," and this corroborates our other conclusion that the verb *pāsah* in Exodus 12 means "hover/cover over." A question of English translation, however, arises with respect to the *pesah*-feast. If we translate "the Feast of the Booth," we fail to distinguish it clearly from the autumnal Feast of Booths. In the Hebrew text the use of two different terms for booth, *pesah* and *sukkâ*, obviates the problem. We might similarly use some synonym of booth, like hut, for the spring feast. But a truly successful translation will want to bring out, if possible, the paronomasia of *pesah* and *pāsah*. It would also be an advantage if a suggested new name for this feast would connect with, even while correcting, the traditional "Passover." "Feast of Cover-over," however odd its ring, would at least satisfy these desiderata. It shares the terminal "over" with "Passover." And it captures the *pesah-pāsah* pun, thus: The feast was called Cover-over because there the Lord hovered over his people.

IV. PASCHAL PARADIGM

Further confirmation of our conclusions concerning both *pāsah* and *pesah* is afforded by certain canonical echoes of the paschal event. These are later passages in which the paschal incident is used as a metaphorical model for subsequent redemptive realities and that include the motif of divine sheltering. To the extent that such a passage is distinctly allusive to the Exodus 12 record, its inclusion of the concept of God's overshadowing presence may be fairly regarded as an interpretive reflection of *pāsah/pesah* in the original paschal episode. A pair of such echoes, one from the OT and one from the NT, may serve as a suggestive sampling.²⁷

²⁶ Isaiah 26 20 also reflects God's sealing of the Noahic remnant in the ark, as in a sanctuary tomb that would be a refuge for them until the judgment passed over the earth and the covering of the ark was removed. For a discussion of the Isaiah context see M G Kline, "Death, Leviathan and the Martyrs Isaiah 24 1–27 1," *A Tribute to Gleason Archer* (ed W C Kaiser, Jr, and R F Youngblood, Chicago Moody, 1986) 229–249

²⁷ For other examples of such later illuminating allusions see the discussion of Isa 26 20 ff and 31 5 above

The use of avian imagery in Psalm 91 for God's watch care over his people (vv. 1, 4) is one of this psalm's similarities to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32, where, as noted above, that metaphor refers to the overshadowing Glory-cloud at the exodus.²⁸ The mention of angels as agents of the divine guardianship in vv. 11–12 reinforces the avian metaphor. This theme of God as a secure dwelling, refuge and shield opens and governs the psalm (vv. 1–2, 4, 9). The perils from which Yahweh protects his own (vv. 3–10) recall the plagues on Egypt, especially the last night of judgment: Ten thousand fall at the side of God's people, but the plague does not come near their dwelling, as the Lord sovereignly directs the activity of angels during the night of terror. Since Psalm 91 thus depicts the redemptive covenant relation as an extended paschal experience, its dominant motif—God's birdlike overshadowing presence—will be an expository reflection on the paschal role of the Lord denoted by *pāsaḥ/pesah*.

As is generally recognized, the disasters threatened in the various judgment series in the Book of Revelation are adaptations of the ten plagues on Egypt. The diptych vision of Revelation 7 presents, first, the protection of God's elect in the midst of earthly calamities (vv. 1–8), and then the continuation of this condition of security into the eternal state (vv. 9–17). As in the paschal-exodus history, the plagues are inflicted through angelic agency (vv. 1–3). The Church is delineated under the form of the covenant community in Egypt, the twelve tribes of Israel (vv. 4–8; cf. Exod 1:1–5). Moreover the muster of the tribes in Revelation 7 echoes the military imagery of Exodus 12, which speaks of the twelve tribes setting out on their journey as armies (vv. 17, 41, 51).²⁹ Identification of the Church in glory as those who have experienced an exodus³⁰ out of great tribulation (v. 14a) recalls Israel's severe oppression in the Egyptian house of bondage.³¹ By the application of the paschal blood as a seal to the lintels and doorposts, the Israelites were marked off as exempt from judgment. Likewise the putting of the seal of God on the foreheads³² of the 144,000 preserves them from the four angels with power to harm land and sea (Rev 7:2–3; cf. 9:4). As a result of the paschal presence of God, forensically grounded in the expiation accomplished by the lamb, the Israelite *pesah*-house was transformed from tomb shrine to sanctuary from wrath, with promise of resurrection victory over the grave. Similarly the redeemed of the Lamb in Revelation 7 are assured that the Lord will wipe away all tears from their eyes (v. 17), a prospect always associated with the elimination of death (cf. 21:4; Isa 25:8; 65:19). Otherwise stated, the Lamb-shepherd will guide them to the

²⁸ Book 4 of the Psalter, especially Psalms 90–100, has been identified as a "Moses book" reflective of the exodus and wilderness experiences. Cf. M. E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20, Dallas Word, 1990) xxvi.

²⁹ The listing of Judah first in Rev 7:5 might be due, at least in part, to the lead position of the tribe of Judah in the march of conquest (Num 10:14).

³⁰ The verb in Rev 7:14a, *erchomai ek*, reflects the use of *exerchomai* in the climactic summation of the paschal triumph (Exod 12:41 LXX).

³¹ Cf. Exod 4:31 (LXX), which, like Rev 7:14a, uses *thlipsis*.

³² For the symbolic equivalence of forehead and lintel in the matching models of the tabernacle/temple architecture and the high priest's vestments see Kline, *Images* 44–45.

waters of life in the heavenly paradise (v. 17a; cf. 21:6; 22:1–2, 17) as he, the angel of the Presence, led the exodus generation on to the earthly paradise of Canaan.

In short, Revelation 7 represents a remarkably comprehensive and detailed echo of the paschal episode.³³ And inevitably at the heart of it is the declaration that God spreads his tent over the white-robed multitude (v. 15; cf. Rev 21:3; Isa 4:5). Covered by the cosmic canopy of Glory, they are the fulfillment of the typological pattern of the Israelites under the overshadowing theophanic cloud (Rev 7:16; cf. Isa 4:6). The covering presence of God in Rev 7:15 is the eschatological antitype of the central reality of the paschal event, the Lord's *pāsah*-act of spreading his wings as a sheltering cover (*pesah*) over those sealed by the blood of the lamb.

At Golgotha, where the true paschal Lamb was slain, the sovereign ordering of God arranged a reproduction of the typological paschal scene of the doorway smeared with the blood of the lamb. This new doorway involved a great redemptive irony. To Jesus belonged the Glory of the Father. His proper place was the throne above the ark, above the lintel of that gate of heaven, with the holy cherubim on either side framing the entrance with golden splendor. At Golgotha the cherubim were replaced by two criminals crucified with him, on either side one, the vertical posts of their crosses the sideposts of this new paschal doorframe. And in the center, on the horizontal beam of Jesus' cross, the lintel of this doorway, was posted his indictment. No epiphany of glory for him here—rather, the epitome of scorn.

Yet even the indictment on the lintel proclaimed in spite of itself the proper majesty of the Lord-lamb: "King of the Jews." Though the Golgotha entryframe, stained by his blood, was a place of death, a sepulchral entryway, the tomb of the paschal victim was opened. And he came forth as the paschal firstfruits from the dead, the Easter victor, the Lord of life. The paschal door of Calvary proves to be the very gate of heaven. All who are called and come are welcomed there into the true and heavenly *sh-ntr* to abide forever under the shadow of the Almighty.

³³ It is understandable that features from the twin autumnal feast of booths should be interwoven (Rev 7 9)