

Passover and Sukkot (the Feast of Booths) have in many ways become the “gateway” festivals of the Messianic walk. They are often the two festivals that those who are beginning the Hebraic ‘walk’ want to observe – in many cases, before they begin to observe the Sabbath. In many ways, this is good. I’ve known of a number of men who accompanied their wife to the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) and as a result of the camaraderie they had with other men who they met at the festival, decided to begin attending a Sabbath fellowship. There are also times when a person feels drawn to things “Jewish” and wants to take part in a traditional Jewish seder<sup>1</sup>, and if they do so in a Messianic setting, they discover how Judaism has long celebrated the Messiah in the Passover without even knowing, or at least *acknowledging* it.

Yes, it’s good to observe these, as well as the other Biblical festivals, but it’s also important to know what you’re observing and why. In this message, I want to touch on what Passover is, and what lessons we who strive to walk in the footsteps of the Messiah, can learn by observing it.

Passover is the first festival in the yearly 7-festival cycle listed in Leviticus 23<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Leviticus 23:1-2** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'The feasts of the LORD, which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, these are My feasts.

In this passage, the word ‘feasts’ appears twice, and in each case, ‘feasts’ is translated from the Hebrew word “moed” (מוֹעֵד - Strong’s 4150) which means “appointed time” or “meeting”. *Moed* is rooted in the Hebrew word *ya’ad* (יָאָד - Strong’s 3259) – which means *to appoint, assemble, and betroth*. Thus the sense of the festivals is that they are appointed meetings, and in some cases pertain to being betrothed – which in the Hebrew culture was marked by a specific ceremony for which you would invite witnesses.

In the same passage, the phrase “holy convocations” comes from the Hebrew words “miqra kodesh” (מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ – Strong’s 4744 & 6944). “Kodesh” means holy and “miqra” means *a reading, a calling together, or an assembly*. “Miqra” comes from the root word “qara” (קָרָא – Strong’s 71721) which means *to call, to proclaim, or to recite*. The sense of the word “miqra” is that you’re reciting something out of a book or scroll in the presence of the assembly. In other words, you’re rehearsing something that has happened or something that will be happening, and thus Strong’s also includes the word “rehearsal” as one of its meanings.

The festivals roughly match the journey of the children of Israel as they prepare to leave Egypt and head for the promised land. The *Passover* and accompanying 7 Days of Unleavened Bread (*Chag HaMatza*), as well as *Shavuot* (Pentecost/Feast of Weeks) mark specific events in Israel’s journey and thus have seen a partial fulfillment. According to tradition, the Red Sea crossing took place on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of *Chag HaMatza*<sup>3</sup> and the betrothal of Israel and subsequent giving of the Ten Commandments happened on the Feast of Weeks.

The fall festivals – Yom Teruah (Feast of Trumpets), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Sukkot (Feast of Tabernacles), and Shemini Atzereth (the Eighth Day Assembly) are all staged in the future, though both

<sup>1</sup> Literally ‘set order’

<sup>2</sup> The Sabbath is listed first, but it’s not part of the *yearly* cycle, but rather the *weekly* cycle.

<sup>3</sup> Ex. 13:6 indicates that the last day of the 7-day period of unleavened bread is a festival (Hebrew - *chag*), yet Ex. 23:14-15 indicate the entire 7-day period is a *chag*.

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Yom Kippur and Tabernacles have connections to ancient Israel's journey as well. The fall festivals will begin to see their ultimate fulfillment as the return of Messiah Yeshua draws near.

When you combine the cycle of the festivals with the events that happened on those days, you come up with a pretty clear picture of what God is doing and how He intends to bring His people to the Promised Land and beyond.

The festival cycle begins with Passover, and Passover came as a result of a prophecy God made to Abraham. Even before he was born, YHWH told Abraham that his son's descendants would become slaves and that He would deliver them by a great miracle. We read about this in Genesis 15.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 15:13,14,16** Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup>But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions . . . <sup>16</sup>And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

This promise was given at an event that's traditionally called the "cutting of the covenant". Years later, God remembered that covenant and began the process of bringing them out of Egypt and joining them to himself.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 2:23-24** Now it happened in the process of time that the king of Egypt died. Then the children of Israel groaned because of the bondage, and they cried out; and their cry came up to God because of the bondage. So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

YHWH began to put the festivals in motion when He heard the cries of His people which brought to mind His covenant with Abraham. Being in covenant with God is a key part of understanding his festivals and being a beneficiary of His blessings. YHWH wants to shower blessings on those who want to be joined in covenant with Him. It's for that reason that YHWH makes this one restriction when it comes to observing Passover.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 12:43** And the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "This *is* the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner ( "ben nekar" – *son of a stranger*) shall eat it . . . <sup>45</sup> "A sojourner ("towshab" – *resident alien*) and a hired servant ("sakiyr" – *a person hired from another nation*<sup>4</sup>) shall not eat it.

All of these peoples were those who really had no regard for the God of Israel and His way of life, but were simply dwelling with the Israelites or passing through. YHWH was getting ready to do an awesome thing for His covenant people. He was going to allow the death of thousands of firstborn Egyptians, and He was going to symbolically take the life of His own firstborn son in order to secure their release from bondage. The symbol of that life was an innocent lamb. All future generations were to remember that life by sharing a lamb for dinner on the anniversary of that event, and God never wanted that event to be taken lightly. He didn't want those who had no regard for Him or for the covenant He'd made with Abraham, to eat of the lamb that was symbolically killed in order to bring the covenant to fulfillment.

Yet on the other hand, anyone who wanted to join with Him (and all that entails) was free to do so if he took on the sign of the covenant – circumcision.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 12:48** "And when a stranger ("ger" – *newcomer without inheritance rights*<sup>5</sup>) dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then

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<sup>4</sup> i.e. – outside the Hebrew culture

<sup>5</sup> i.e. – a non-Israelite who wants to join in with Israel and her God

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let him come near (“qarav” – to draw near<sup>6</sup>) and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land.  
For no uncircumcised person shall eat it.

In effect YHVH was saying, if you want to take part in the covenant of freedom and security I can provide for you, then you must honor the sacrifice that was made because of that covenant and honor it with the sign of the covenant.

You'll note that even though the Israelites were part of the covenant by birth, that doesn't necessarily mean they were walking in His ways. In fact, I submit that almost all Israel was steeped in Egyptian paganism at the same time YHVH was securing their freedom. Though they had a special relationship with YHVH as a result of being Abraham's seed, they had yet to begin walking in the footsteps of Abraham – a man who diligently followed God. Speaking of Abraham, God said -

<sup>LXE</sup> **Genesis 18:19** For I know that he will order his sons, and his house after him, and they will keep the ways of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham all things whatsoever he has spoken to him.

So the first lesson of Passover is that it's for His covenant people . . . anyone who truly wants to walk in the ways of YHVH as shown by the one SEED of Abraham, Messiah Yeshua.

Passover's role in the festival cycle is that of redemption that leads to salvation. The concept of redemption is centered on a person that the scriptures call the “go'el” (גֹּאֵל)<sup>7</sup> – the “kinsman redeemer”. He is the person who is supposed to buy you back if you or someone else has sold you into slavery<sup>8</sup>. He's also the one who is to avenge the blood of your brother.<sup>9</sup> In the Passover story, the Israelites (God's children through covenant) had sold themselves into bondage. When that bondage became severe, they began to cry out. YHVH heard their cry and set out to redeem them from their slavery in Egypt.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 6:6** "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem (*ga'al*) you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.

YHVH redeemed His people by making a distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites. He first did this by sparing the Israelites from the last seven plagues, but the ultimate distinction was that those who grew in faith in God and Moses, and showed it by covering the entrance to their home with the blood of a lamb, were spared from the death of their firstborn.

Thus the next lesson we learn from Passover is that he has “qara – ed” us (called us) to be separate from the “Egyptians” and to trust in the God of Israel as well as in His sent one.

As part of his instructions to the elders in regards to the upcoming Passover events, YHVH instructed Moses to make it very clear that the children are thoroughly taught about those events and reminded of them every year thereafter. This is what he said -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 12:24-27** "And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever . . . <sup>26</sup> "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' <sup>27</sup> "that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' "

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<sup>6</sup> Qarav (Strong's 7126) is the root of “qorban” (Strong's 7133) which means *offerings*.

<sup>7</sup> From “ga-al” (גֹּאֵל - 1350)

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 25:47-49

<sup>9</sup> Numbers 35:12-19

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The entire story of the Passover, especially that part dealing with taking the lamb, slaughtering it and putting the blood on the doorpost, as well as the subsequent 7 days of unleavened bread, were to be taught to the Israelite children year after year.

This admonition is expanded to include telling the children why the firstborn of both man and the animals is important to God. Speaking of the consecration of the firstborn, Moses said -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 13:8-10** "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, '*This is done* because of what the LORD did for me when I came up from Egypt.' <sup>9</sup> "It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD's law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt. <sup>10</sup> "You shall therefore keep this ordinance in its season from year to year.

Moses went on to say –

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 13:14-15** "So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. <sup>15</sup> 'And it came to pass, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all males that open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

Going back to the previous passage, notice that the reason for these constant reminders is so that “the LORD's law<sup>10</sup> may be in your mouth”. By being constantly reminded of how we became free from bondage and our enemies, we learn to love and appreciate the Torah, the words that will preserve our freedom.

Thus another lesson we learn is that by continually teaching our children about Passover and freedom, we help them preserve their freedom.

After Israel was driven out of their homes in and around Ramses and Goshen, they didn't head directly for the Promised Land, but rather made a side trip to Sukkot to gather the bones of Joseph.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 12:37** Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Exodus 13:19** And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had placed the children of Israel under solemn oath, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here with you."

It's interesting that just after their redemption, but before they were finally delivered from Pharaoh and his army, they went to a place that means “booths”, which of course, is the name for the fall festival that pictures the Messianic Kingdom. Could Sukkot have been a mini “utopia” within the nation of Egypt? Who knows . . . but it's interesting that what drives many who are turning to the Hebrew walk is their new understanding of the Kingdom of God on earth. It's for that reason that they begin to change - removing the “leaven of malice and lawlessness” from their lives, and really reaching out to the one who can save them.

Thus the fourth lesson of Passover is that it gets you focused on the Promised Land, the Messianic Kingdom. Maybe that's why the cup of Elijah<sup>11</sup> has become a part of the Passover seder.

Though there are so many lessons we can learn from the Passover story, the last point I want to make at this time is in regards to *Chag HaMatza*, the Days of Unleavened Bread. The scripture indicates that the

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<sup>10</sup> *Torah* ( תּוֹרָה – Strong's 8451)

<sup>11</sup> Malachi 4:5

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Israelites left their homes on the morning after the Passover meal was eaten. They journeyed a number of days, and according to tradition, ended up at the Red Sea sometime during the sixth day. They had come out with a *high hand* . . . some translations say “defiantly” or “boldly”. They had outsmarted the Egyptians and had escaped their bonds, but now just 6 days later they found themselves trapped – the sea before them, mountains on each side, and a fast moving Egyptian army bearing down upon them. Their hopes of freedom and the memory of their miraculous redemption were quickly fading away. In the face of the enemy they were desperate and would have willingly traded their freedom for bondage in order to save their lives . . . except for Moses.<sup>12</sup> At the height of their despair Moses said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 14:13** . . . "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.

Though the Israelites had been redeemed, they had not been saved . . . at least not in the Hebrew sense of the word. Their enemy was still alive and well, and he had them in his sites.

Unlike what is often taught in Christian circles, the Hebrew concept of salvation is to be rescued from your enemy, and then adoring and trusting the one who rescued you.<sup>13</sup> In the Biblical picture, salvation leads to marriage as in the case of Jacob and Rachael as well as the case of Moses and Zipporah.

Even though YHVH had set the Israelites apart from the Egyptians during the plagues, and even though He had spared their firstborn while allowing the death of the Egyptian firstborn, the Israelites still didn't believe He had their best interest in heart. To them, YHVH could have been just like the Egyptian gods, gods that couldn't be counted on. So they were ready to turn back – back to bondage and slavery.

But Moses wasn't ready to turn back. God had spoken to him out of a burning bush, telling him what was going to take place, and up to this point it happened just as YHVH had said. Moses knew that Mount Sinai was the goal<sup>14</sup>, and that the sea ahead of them was just an obstacle that had to be overcome. Not knowing how God would do it, but knowing that He surely would, Moses said –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 14:14** The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to be silent."

As we know, YHVH did fight for them in a very unusual way . . . Pharaoh and his army drowned in the sea. YHVH had delivered Israel from her enemy, just as the scripture says –

<sup>ESV</sup> **Exodus 14:30-31** Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

So the fifth and last lesson of Passover that I want to share today is that YHVH has redeemed many, but fewer have really been saved. It often takes a crisis for us to learn to trust in YHVH, and some never do trust in Him, but instead return to Egypt. Our redemption should lead us to – hear what God has said, see what God has done, and trust that He will continue to do what He's already done.

To recap these lessons from Passover –

- Passover is a set-apart time and a rehearsal of things that have happened or will happen in the future
- It's a festival for his covenant people, those who want to join to Him.
- His covenant people will be distinct and different from the “Egyptians”
- We must continually teach our children about the Passover so they can preserve their freedom
- Passover should keep us focused on the Promised Land

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<sup>12</sup> We can assume Joshua, Caleb, and a few of the other Israelites share Moses' confidence

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.amiyisrael.org/articles/SalvationCycles%20-%20P4%20-%20Salvation.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 3:12

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- As His people, we may have been redeemed, but our redemption must lead us to salvation.

As part of His redeemed people, we should observe Passover, Unleavened Bread, and all YHVH's festivals in order to truly understand how YHVH intends to join us to Him in Jerusalem – in the Promised Land.

Shalom Alecheim