

## *Looking Back & Looking Forward*

# *Passover*

There are various times in your life when it is wise to step back and look at yourself. These are the moments to reflect, consider where you have been and where you are trying to go with your life. Taking stock of your-self gives you a chance to make changes or to commit yourself to your desired goals. It can be compared to the man who stands at the edge of a great canyon looking down at the river with its winding bends and rushing rapids, while appreciating the serenity. He is able to understand the long journey, where he has been, and what lies before him.

As the springtime comes with the Hebrew month of Nisan (Aviv), we are asked to do something similar as we begin to keep the Passover. Nisan is the “beginning of months,” and Passover is a call to memorialize (look back at) what God did with our ancestors, redeeming them out of Egypt and slavery. And Passover is only the beginning. It is followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of First Fruits, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and finally the Feast of Tabernacles. There are seven appointed times in the seven months from spring through fall.

Standing up above and looking down on them all, we can see the great plan of God. We can see what He was doing with our ancestors and what He will do with us. For example, *Passover* is about our redemption, the life of the Lamb passing us from death to life. *Unleavened Bread* speaks of a clean and pure life through removing the leaven from our homes and lives. *First Fruits* shows us how we are made new—the first fruits of men before God. *The Feast of Weeks* comes after the count of seven Sabbaths after First Fruits with a day of Proclamation. We proclaim who our God is and who we are with Him. Yeshua came and did the works that these feasts represent, resulting in the proclamation of our faith in Him today.

The remaining feasts speak of our future. *Trumpets* foreshadows our resurrection and transformation from mortal to immortal. Atonement shows us God’s day of reconciliation with the whole world and when we are truly made one with Him. Finally, *Tabernacles* speaks of the joy we will receive when God comes to dwell with us in His Kingdom.

It is a great picture and a glorious plan of God. We tell our children each year about what God has done and what He will do by observing the Passover **first**. We approach Passover each year with anticipation, looking forward to the opportunity to keep it and learn even more through the different stations (years) of our lives. In my earlier years, my anticipation for Passover was filled with excitement with my children. Now, I look forward to observing it with my grandchildren.

As we look back on Passover (remembering) and look forward (with anticipation), let’s consider a couple of particular elements about the observance that may help us to look back and look forward.

Passover is the **first** feast in the yearly cycle of keeping the feasts of the Lord, and the Lord places special emphasis on its observance. If you are going to observe the feasts of the Lord as a part of you keeping the Torah and the commandments of God, then you must place particular emphasis on Passover. There are a number of reasons that I will explain.

Consider this: The greatest commandment of the Lord is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all of your might. But actually it doesn’t stop there. The instruction says this matter must be foremost on your heart (to do it).

How do we do it? How do we keep the greatest commandment? The answer to this question is given immediately.

*You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you and when you lie down and when you rise up. Deuteronomy 6:7.*

If you really want to learn something, go teach it. The same is true for us. Our teaching our children is the means God uses to apply His instructions to our own hearts. This is also how we love our children, by raising them in the admonition of the Lord.

Here is the point I'm making about keeping Passover and getting started correctly. The instructions for Passover also include instructions for teaching our children.

*“And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for your and your children forever. When you enter the land which the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’” And the people bowed low and worshipped. **Exodus 12:24-27***

The goal and objective of the Passover memorial goes beyond remembering the past. A perpetual element is included: a father teaches his children. Those children are raised up and they teach their children. In fact, it is taught that when a father teaches his children he is to tell the child that he was in Egypt and God brought him out of Egypt.

Paul speaks to this very point of how to teach children about Passover.

*For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. **1 Corinthians 10:1-4***

Wait a moment. What is Paul saying? Paul is writing to a group of Gentile (Greek) believers in Corinth. Neither they nor their fathers were with the Hebrew children of Jacob when Moses brought Israel out of Egypt. So why does Paul say their fathers were the ones who came out of Egypt?

A leader of a Passover seder follows this same instruction when he begins to lead the seder. "You are to believe in your heart that you are coming out of Egypt this night as you eat the Passover." Therefore, you instruct your children in every generation.

Most of the brethren today in the Messianic movement have not experienced a Passover seder where their biological father has led it and said these things. Instead, the vast majority of brethren today have taken up the observance among other brethren rather than from the instruction of their childhood. Part of the great restoration that the Messiah is doing today is the reunification of fathers with the children. This is what Malachi speaks of when he foretells the latter day ministry of Elijah.

*Remember the Law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse. **Malachi 4:4-6***

I believe that the prophet is referring to the patri-archs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It also includes Moses and those who came out of Egypt. It even descends down to our fathers in our day. It is a full restoration. Even further, and connecting this prophecy to Passover directly, we set a special cup for Elijah at the Passover. When we pour his cup, we send our children to the door to see if Elijah has come. Part of the fun at the seder is asking the child to shout down the street calling for Elijah to join the Passover. But there is a reality to this action that is serious: if Elijah has returned, or the representation of him is in the world, then we are in the days of the final judgment of God. When that is the case, the Passover we are eating will be the last one before the start of the Greater Exodus.

Getting Passover started correctly also includes the standards and conditions specified in the Scriptures. Passover is not a daytime observance; we observe it at night in our homes. We are not to be alone; we are to join with others or have others join with us. The date of the observance is also very important. We are commanded to observe it on the eve of the 14th day of the month. This is a point of much controversy in history and to this day.

Moses stated that Passover was on the 14<sup>th</sup> and that the Feast of Unleavened Bread followed on the 15<sup>th</sup> and continued for seven days.

*In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the LORD'S Passover. Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the LORD; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. Leviticus 23:5-6*

Pretty simple and straight forward, right? Not necessarily. Enter the Pharisees. They say that you eat unleavened bread on the Passover, so the two run together. They start Passover (Pesach) on the 15<sup>th</sup> and keep it for eight days.

If you are confused, you should be. This is why the Messiah warned us to "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." They add and take away things. If you don't get started correctly, how will you be successful? To this day, many Messianic believers can't get this instruction correctly. This is despite the Messiah eating the Passover (and calling it the Passover) the night before the Pharisees ate the Passover. Let me set this controversy aside for the moment by concluding that I am holding to the words of Moses and the Messiah on this matter.

Many Messianic brethren use a traditional Jewish *seder* (order) for the Passover or at least a version of it. I have found some who are opposed to something so "Jewish" and they customize their version of the observance. As a Messianic leader, one of the very first tasks I did more than 3 years ago was to develop a Messianic Passover seder that emphasized the "Messiah in the Passover" and followed the same pattern of the seder meal given in the Gospels, not that I was trying to avoid observing a "Jewish" feast day, but because I wanted to include the teachings of Yeshua.

Here is a surprising piece of evidence for all seder traditionalists. The oldest literature depicting the Jewish way to observe the seder is the Gospels. All of the other Jewish material, including the traditional Jewish seder, is dated after the Gospels were written. The description of the Passover seder in the Gospels includes the washings, the sequence of the four cups (including the cup of Redemption after the meal), the dipping in the bitter herbs, the dinner, the Afikoman bread after the dinner, and finally the Hallel Psalms sung last. Still further, the Passover night calls for everyone to remain awake until the dawn of the day. This is why Yeshua expected the disciples to remain awake that night with Him.

When I first learned of and kept the seder, I felt I had done the most Christian thing in my life. For many Christians, keeping the Passover opens doors of understanding about the Messiah and the need to listen to Moses to understand the Messiah. It is as Yeshua Himself said . . .

*For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words? John 5:46-47*

One of the most powerful examples of where Moses wrote about the Messiah was the promise of the Lamb of God by Abraham and the historical Passover coming out of Egypt. So powerful is the teaching about the Messiah in the Passover that Jews throughout history and to this day say, "Don't worry about when the Messiah comes; He comes at the Passover."

Perhaps you remember in Yeshua's ministry that He would often defer the direct question of Him being the Messiah by saying, "My time is not yet?" Here is one example.

*Go up to the feast yourselves; I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come. John 7:8.*

His time did come, however, and Yeshua presented Himself as the Messiah offering Himself as the Lamb of God on the Passover.

Not only is Passover essential to getting the observance of the feasts underway, it is essential in getting started with the Messiah correctly.

Many of our new Messianic brethren participate in a Passover seder first before coming to terms with the Torah, sabbath, kosher, and the rest.

This is the same pattern as in the ancient Exodus. When the children of Israel left Egypt, it directly related to Passover and the eating of unleavened bread. After crossing the Red Sea, they were introduced to a new kind of food—manna—and keeping sabbath. The children of Israel received the Torah later at Mount Sinai, but their walk as a new people all began with the Passover. This pattern has repeated itself more often than not for brethren transitioning from a church background to a Messianic understanding.

This is why it is important for your family and friends to be invited to your Passover seder. When they see for themselves, eat the bread, and drink the cup with the Messiah, it begins to sink in how significant and profound the Passover is. When brethren ask me how to share their faith with family and friends who think they have lost their minds (or have *gone Jewish*), I recommend the Passover with the Messiah.

Conversely, if you are a Messianic believer and you fail to observe the feasts of the LORD (beginning with the Passover), then you essentially have no testimony as a Messianic. Keeping the weekly Sabbath, yet ignoring the feasts is no defense. Sabbath is embedded in the feasts saying that you keep the weekly sabbaths but not the feasts is denying the High Sabbaths that occur throughout the year as a commandment of God.

The Messiah Himself expressed a great desire to keep the Passover with His disciples, and it sets an example for us as well.

*And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Luke 22:15-16*

This is a profound statement by the Messiah. Some have suggested that the disciples did not understand this statement while they were keeping the Passover with Yeshua. First, they didn't understand how the Messiah would give up His life as the Passover Lamb — that He would be arrested that night and die that day. They probably had no idea that the Messiah would institute the New Covenant at that seder meal by declaring that the Passover elements represented Himself. This brings a whole new dimension for our observance and anticipation of the Passover.

As Messianics, we observe "communion" when we keep the Passover. Historically, the church has deleted the entire Passover from the observance of communing with God using the bread and the cup.

But for Messianics, we come to the Passover table to remember the past of the exodus but also the last supper of Yeshua with His disciples. If we are to consider ourselves as having left Egypt that night, then surely we are to sit ourselves in the presence of the disciples and eat the Passover in the most worthy and worshipful manner with our Messiah.

Paul warned us that eating the Passover (the LORD'S Supper) in an unworthy manner brings dire consequences.

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Yeshua in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 1 Corinthians 11:23-30*

The reasons to keep the Passover are significant and important to our faith. We are commanded to keep it as instructed by God in the Torah. We remember God's great work of redemption for Israel out of Egypt. We remember the redemption of our Messiah as the promised Lamb of God as central to our most holy worship. However, there is yet another reason for us to look back and look forward to Passover.

There is a future dimension to the Passover. First, the Messiah Himself spoke of His not keeping the Passover with us until we are together in the kingdom. That means that the Passover will be in the kingdom. Furthermore, prophetically, the Passover is part of the prophesied Final Restoration and Great Tribulation at the end of the ages. God intends to gather the scattered of Israel and bring them back to the Promised Land. This is the major reason why religious Jews reject the Messiahship of Yeshua: He hasn't yet accomplished that. The Jews refer to this as the Final Redemption-that a future Passover will initiate an even greater exodus than was seen from Egypt. The prophet Jeremiah speaks directly of this comparison.

*"Therefore behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.' For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers. **Jeremiah 16:14-15***

This comparison is repeated again in chapter 23 emphasizing that the Messiah will be part of the redemption, which the Jews call the *Final Redemption*.

If there is to be a "greater exodus," when does it begin? We don't know the year but we do know the time of the year for this future Passover. That is when the exodus begins. It will be the Passover when Elijah has appeared and it will occur right after the Abomination of Desolation, which begins the Great Tribulation.

As you read this article with springtime approaching, knowing that the Passover occurs on the evening of the 14th of Nisan, I pray that your table will be set in splendor for the Feast of Redemption. I hope that you will join with your fellow brethren. If you are able, I hope you have the joy of sitting with your children and grandchildren. As you set that meal apart from all other meals, with the cup of Sanctification, I hope your spirit will fellowship with Yeshua and the disciples, and that as you tell the story to your children of how God passed over you from death to life with the cup of Instruction, they will become the next generation of believers. After your delicious meal, relaxing as a freed people from slavery, I hope that the dessert of the Afikoman and the Cup of Redemption will stir you to remember the death, burial, and resurrection of our Messiah. And then as you check for Elijah and sing your final songs of joy, I pray that you will have been renewed and prepared to complete the remaining feasts for the year.

I pray that God will grant you sight to see things that eyes can't see, to hear things that ears can't hear, and to understand things that go beyond your imagination.

Happy Passover!. "Monte Judah"

\*All Scripture references from the NASB.