

Passover: From Memories to Messiah

I remember from childhood in New York City when my family would celebrate the annual Feast of Passover. Every year we would all crowd into the small apartment where my grandfather would lead our Passover Seder meal (Seder means “order”).

The fragrance of beef and chicken wafted through the air, the family squeezed in around the table, and grandpa donned a kittel (the white ceremonial robe worn by the leader of the evening). This was always a joyous occasion for my family!

Traditionally, Jewish people understand Passover as a time to reflect upon and appreciate our personal and political freedom. As we read from a Haggadah, a booklet that leads families through the Exodus account, we remember how God delivered our people from Egypt.

Though I grew up celebrating Passover every year, I would have never imagined that this foundational Feast might find its fulfillment in the spiritual freedom found in Israel’s Messiah, Yeshua. Yet in fact the New Covenant is built upon the foundation of Passover; hence Yeshua is declared to be the Passover “Lamb of God” (John 1:29).

Preparing the Home

When Messiah Yeshua celebrated Passover just before His death, He sent two of His followers to prepare the room for their Seder (Luke 22). Passover preparations, both then and now, center around the scrupulous removal of all chametz (foods made with yeast) from the home. During the eight days of Passover, only foods made without yeast may be eaten (Ex. 12:15). The most well-known unleavened food is matzah, a special bread made at Passover. There are two

reasons why matzah is the only bread to be eaten during Passover:

1. The historical reason: Thirty-four hundred years ago, when the Jewish people were about to be delivered by God's mighty arm from bondage in Egypt, God told them to be ready to move on a moment's notice. This is historically why we eat only matzah at Passover. Matzah is sometimes called the "bread of haste," because God says to Israel, "you came out of the land of Egypt in a hurry" (Deut. 16:3).

2. The scriptural reason: Unleavened bread is made without yeast. Even as leaven or yeast puffs up the bread to make it seem greater than it is, so also the Scripture consistently uses leaven as a picture of pride, sin, and unbelief. This is why yeast was not permitted as part of the normal meal offerings in the Tabernacle (Lev. 2:11). Thus, Messiah warns His followers regarding false teachers, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6).

Preparing the Heart

Today in homes where Passover is observed, celebration does not begin until all leavened products are removed. Simply cleansing the home, however, is not sufficient preparation. Believers in Yeshua understand that this removal of leaven from the home must reflect the state of the heart.

Paul details how this connection works:

"Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch? Therefore purge out the old yeast, that you may be a new batch, since you are unleavened. For even Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old yeast, nor with the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

When Yeshua sent His disciples to prepare the Passover, He knew, as Paul learned, that without proper preparation there could not be full participation in Passover's spiritual blessings. Why do more believers in Messiah not enjoy the new life He brings? Believers today, like the first century Corinthians, need to "clean out the old leaven," the unconfessed sin that hinders intimacy with the Lord.

Preparing for the Herald of the Lord

There is one other preparation traditionally recognized at Passover: the preparation for the coming "Herald of the Lord." An empty seat, along with cup and plate, is left at the table for Elijah the prophet. Elijah is expected to arrive at Passover preceding and proclaiming the Coming One, that is, the Messiah Himself. Where did such an idea originate? This tradition is taken from the third and fourth chapters of Malachi:

"I will send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. He is coming, says the Lord of Hosts" (Mal. 3:1; see also Mal. 4:5).

This prophecy was fulfilled when, in the New Covenant, John the Immerser (or Baptizer) came in the "spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17).

At the end of the Passover meal in traditional homes, Elijah's empty seat is recognized. By this they see that he has not come this year, and therefore Messiah (Who came in the spirit of David even as His forerunner came in the spirit of Elijah) will not come this year either. Therefore in these homes that know only tradition and ritual, the Seder ends not with praise but rather with a lament: "Next year in Jerusalem" (L'Shana Haba b' Yerushalayim).

This saying refers to the fact that those without redemption in Messiah wait yet another year uncertain whether hope will arrive. But for the redeemed who know the Lord, we end with rejoicing and praise. Messiah has come, fulfilled the requirements of the Law, fulfilled the need of the Passover Lamb and obtained eternal life for all who will believe in Him. Having eternal life now, we look forward with confidence for Messiah's return to bring us to the New Jerusalem. Therefore, let us go forth as God's heralds declaring the ultimate Passover message: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).{eoa}

Dr. Sam Nadler is a Jewish believer in Jesus who has been in Messianic Jewish ministry for over 40 years. Sam is the president of Word of Messiah Ministries, which is bringing the Good News to the Jew first but not to the Jew only, and planting Messianic Congregations in Jewish communities worldwide. To encourage and equip the Body of Messiah in our shared calling, Sam is invited to speak in churches across the country and has written multiple books on Jewish evangelism, discipleship and the Feasts of Israel. For more information and resources or to invite Sam to speak at your church, visit .