

PASSOVER (Pesach פסח) First Day

A Celebration of Freedom and Redemption

Ta'anit Bechorot תענית בכורות - Fast Day [for the Firstborn]

Exodus 12:21-51, Joshua 5:2-15, 6:1 & 27, John 1:29-31

Additional Readings: Numbers 28:16-25

Messianic Jewish Commentary by Hannah Neshet

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In today's Scripture reading, we recall the institution of the very first Passover, not as 'victims'; but as a joyful people of freedom who celebrate our mighty God's deliverance for all generations to come! **“Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come.”** (Exodus 12:42)

The haftarah (Prophetic portion) also recalls the historic Passover which the Israelites observed at Gilgal after crossing the Jordan. This was the very first celebration of the great Festival of Passover in the Promised Land.

“On the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, while camped at Gilgal on the plains of Jericho, the Israelites celebrated the Passover.” (Joshua 5:10)



Table set for the Passover Seder

The Passover Seder

The Biblical festival of Passover (called Pesach פסח in Hebrew) will be celebrated by Jewish people (and Messianic Jews and Gentiles) all over the world with a traditional meal called a Seder. At this festive meal, the story of our exodus from Egypt is re-told, reminding every generation of how God delivered us from Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

“To him who struck down Egypt's firstborn, for his grace continues forever; and brought Israel out from among them, for his grace continues forever; with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, for his grace continues forever;” (Psalm 136:10-12)

The Seder is a 'hands-on' teaching tool to pass on the account of The Exodus to the next generation.

“When you come to the land which *ADONAI* will give you, as he has promised, you are to observe this ceremony. When your children ask you, ‘What do you mean by this ceremony?’ say, ‘It is the sacrifice of *ADONAI*’s *Pesach*[Passover], because [*ADONAI*] passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he killed the Egyptians but spared our houses.” (Exodus 12:26 -27)

Passover is not only a great celebration of freedom and deliverance for the Jewish people; but it is also the foundation of the Christian faith. It is on this very day of Passover that Yeshua the Messiah was slain, as the Passover Lamb of God, so that we may be set free from the bondage of sin and redeemed from power of the Kingdom of darkness.

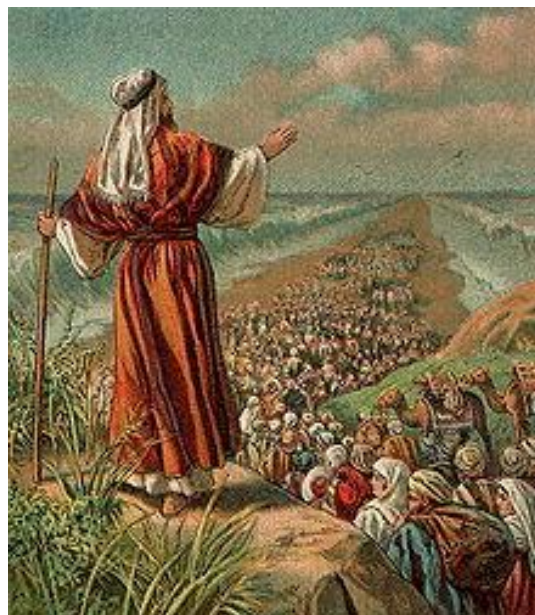


Illustration of [The Exodus](#) from Egypt, 1907

Therefore it is not only the Israelites who rejoice at being rescued from slavery at this special time of the year; but also all those of us who have received forgiveness through the atoning sacrifice of the Jewish Messiah who may celebrate our freedom and redemption on Passover.

“For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Messiah Yeshua from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2)

Ta’anit Bechorot תענית בכורות - Fast Day [for the Firstborn]

Because the Israelite firstborns were spared during the last of the Ten Plagues upon Egypt - the Plague of the Firstborn) - Jewish firstborns traditionally fast on the day before Passover. This Jewish custom, called Ta’anit Bechorot (Fast of the Firstborn), is almost universally observed in the Orthodox Ashkenazi communities but the Eastern Sefardic communities are less likely to observe the custom; and its practice was even discouraged by former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Haifa, R. Yosef Messas.¹



Lamentations over the Death of the First-Born of Egypt by [Charles Sprague Pearce](#) (1877), [Smithsonian American Art Museum](#).

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fast_of_the_Firstborn

Selection of the Lamb of Sacrifice

“Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb.” (Exodus 12:21)

Each family was required to choose a lamb, slaughter it, and place its blood on the top and sides of the doorframe.

“Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe.” (Exodus 12:22)

The parallels between this Passover Lamb and Yeshua are striking: both were scrupulously inspected for four days, from the tenth to the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan to ensure the lamb was unblemished. (Exodus 12:3, 5&6)



Yeshua rode into Jerusalem on the tenth day of the month of Nisan and was scrutinized in the Temple where he appeared and taught publicly until his arrest and execution on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan – the Passover! (Matthew 21:5) Yeshua was the chosen lamb.

When Yeshua was brought to Pilate, he clearly pronounced Yeshua without any guilt, fault or blame: **“I find no fault in Him.”** (John 18:38)

The New Testament affirms that we are redeemed by the precious blood of the Messiah, the Lamb without blemish. **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Messiah, a lamb without blemish or defect.”** (1 Peter 1: 18-19)

As the Hebrew prophet, Isaiah, prophesied of the Messiah (Isaiah 53:7), like a lamb led to the slaughter, Yeshua did not open his mouth: **“Yeshua remained silent and gave no answer.”** (Mark 14:61)

In perfect fulfillment of Messianic Prophecy, at the exact moment that the lambs were being slaughtered, Yeshua was crucified as the Lamb of God to take away our sins.

When Yochanan (John) saw Yeshua coming to the Jordan River, he said, **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”** (John 1:29) No bones of the lamb were to be broken. None of Yeshua’s bones were broken even though it was the custom to do so.²

² John 19:31,33

Saved by Grace

It was not the good deeds or righteousness of the people that saved them from the judgment of God in the final plague upon Egypt – the slaying of the firstborn; only the sign of the blood saved them.

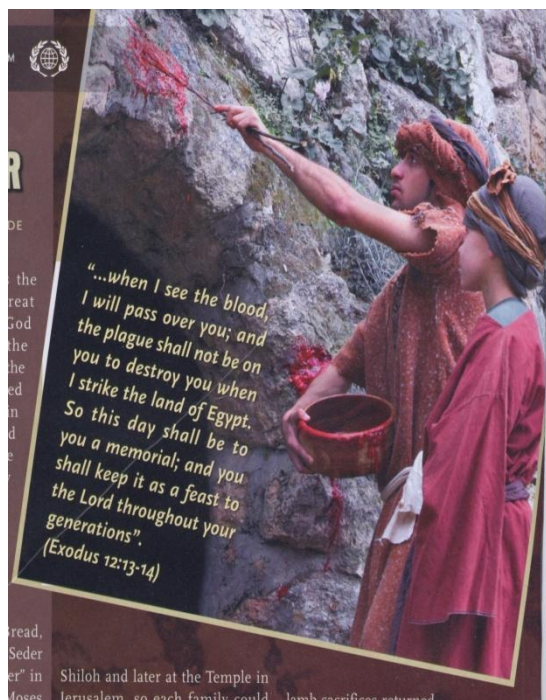
“When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.”

(Exodus 12:23)

We, also, are not saved by works but only by grace through faith in the blood sacrifice of Yeshua Hamashiach (The Messiah).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;”

(Ephesians 2:8)



The most important question that each person needs to ask him or herself is,

“How will Adonai pass over me to save me from judgment?”

Adonai struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, but He passed over the Hebrews who had, in faithfulness and obedience to His word, applied the blood of the Passover lamb to their doorposts.

“At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well.” (Exodus 12:29)

But how do we apply the blood of the Passover lamb today?

Yeshua (Jesus), the Passover lamb, was sacrificed to make atonement (a covering) for our sins. When we receive Him as our Savior and Messiah, we can symbolically apply the blood of the Passover Lamb by faith over ourselves and our households. Yeshua gave us the assurance that the destroyer would ‘pass over’ us when Adonai judges the world - if we put our full faith in Him and His atoning blood. Yeshua said,

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” (John 11:25-26).

Remaining under the Blood

The children of Israel were commanded not to leave their dwelling places until morning; it was critical to their survival that they stayed under the covering of the blood of the lamb while God's judgment was striking the Egyptians.

Anyone who failed to apply the blood as an act of faith and obedience, or who went out from under this covering, would have been subject to the same judgment as came upon the Egyptians that night of terror.

So too do we need to remain under the protective covering of the blood of the Passover Lamb, Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah) and not walk the streets of Egypt – the ways of the world. We may be saved by the blood of the Lamb but we must remain in faith and obedience.

We are reminded at each celebration of Passover of God's mighty power to save His people; by His mighty hand and outstretched arm, the Lord delivered the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt.

What is often overlooked, however, is that after being delivered from Egypt, this entire generation, except for two men – Joshua and Calev – never reached the Promised Land. They all perished in the wilderness – their carcasses scattered throughout the desert due to their unbelief.

Even after seeing all the signs and wonders and miracles that God performed on their behalf, they still doubted God. They grumbled against Moses and longed for the 'comforts of Egypt' rather than trust God to bring them to the place He was leading them.

True freedom for the people of God only comes to those who believe His word and surrender to His will. Many Jewish people today, at the end of their Passover Seder (ceremonial meal), say, "Next Year in Jerusalem" (L'shana haba'ah b'Yirushalayim), but they prefer the comforts of life in exile rather than risk the journey home to the Promised Land.

Rolling Away the Reproach of Egypt

In the Passover haftorah (Prophetic portion), after leading the children of Israel across the Jordan into the Promised Land, Joshua circumcised those who had not been circumcised along the way in the wilderness.

“At that time the LORD said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the Israelites again.” So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the Israelites at Givat Ha'aralot.”
(Joshua 5:2-3)

By this act of covenant, it is written that he *“rolled away the reproach of Egypt.”*

Then the LORD said to Joshua, **“Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.”**
So the place has been called Gilgal to this day.” (Joshua 5:9)

Gilgal גלגל comes from the Hebrew word **gol** גל which means ‘to roll’. **“Roll (gol) your works upon the Lord; so shall your plans be established and succeed.”** (Proverbs 16:3)

Omission of the practice of circumcision in the wilderness may have signified God’s rejection of that generation, since circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and His people (Genesis 17:10).

Thus, when Joshua circumcised the children of Israel upon entering the Promised Land, this represented their restoration to God’s favor and a renewal of the eternal covenant. It removed the stigma – the shame and disgrace of being slaves in Egypt.

The Hebrew word for ‘reproach’ is ‘**harfat**’, which means shame, or disgrace. The children of Israel were now free to celebrate the Passover in their own Land.

Another derivative of the root, gol, is ‘**galut**’, the word used for exile, banishment, or the Diaspora – Jewish people living outside the Land of Israel. The prophet Ezekiel said that for the Jewish people to be living in the ‘Galut’ (exile) brings a ‘reproach’ on the very name of God.

“And wherever they went among the nations they profaned My holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave His land.’” (Ezekiel 36:20)

Once again in Jewish history, however, in our very day, the reproach has been rolled away, as the exiles of Israel have returned to their Land – free to celebrate Passover in Zion and Jerusalem at last.

For followers of Yeshua, there has taken place an even greater ‘rolling away of reproach’ at a place called **Gol-Gotha** גל-גותה. This is where Yeshua Hamashiach was crucified, where all of our sin, shame, and disgrace was nailed to the cross. **THIS IS SO POWERFUL!**



As we begin the first day of our celebration of Passover, may we once again be overcome with gratitude for all that Yeshua suffered and died for us, who are so undeserving of being called his friends.

“No greater love has a man that this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

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Y'VARECH'CHA ADONAI V'YISHM'RECHA

YA'ER ADONAI PANA V A LECHA VICHUNECHA

YISA ADONAI PANA V ALECHA

V'YASEM L'CHA SHALOM



MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU

MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU

MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON YOU

AND GIVE YOU PEACE

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Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada.

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She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, writing and teaching about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith.



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