

Yeshua our Pesach

Thoughts on the Resurrection of Our Messiah

by Tim Hegg

Each year at Beit Hallel, usually a month or so before the coming festival of Pesach and Unleavened Bread, the discussions begin once again regarding the chronology of Yeshua's last Pesach. Did He eat the Pesach meal at the end of the 14th, or was it some other kind of meal eaten on the 13th? Was He crucified on a Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday? Was He in the tomb 72 hours, or just parts of days that count as a whole? And when did He raise from the dead? Was it late on Shabbat, or just as the first day was beginning? or after the sun was up on the first day of the week? And how does the counting of the omer that ties Pesach to Shavuot help us understand the work of Yeshua? Do we start counting on the second day of Unleavened Bread, or should we wait until the first day of the week within the Festival week? Or maybe we should wait until the Festival is over and then begin counting the omer.

All of these “puzzles” are important for us to discuss, research, and attempt to solve. But there is always the danger that in the attempt to solve these problems we could miss the obvious: that regardless of how the chronology works out, or when we are to begin counting the omer, the whole drama of Pesach and the feast of Unleavened Bread has a primary focus: the work of Yeshua in His redemptive victory on our behalf. In the midst of the minutiae, we dare not miss this all-important reality.

The Gospels tell us the story of Yeshua's last Pesach beginning a week before the Festival begins (John 12:1). He is in Jerusalem, and He is walking and talking with His disciples as the city prepares itself for the massive influx of people for the Festival. He spends time with Lazarus, Mary and Martha. Then, if we can reckon the time, on the 10th of Nisan He enters the city, riding on a donkey—a blatant statement of His Messiahship. It is the exact same day that the procession of the lamb is taking place. According to Torah, the selected lamb for the Pesach sacrifice was to be chosen on the 10th of the month. Tradition has it that the symbolic lamb would be paraded to the Temple so that all could view it. Then it was tied to the horns of the altar so that all could inspect it and see that it was without blemish. For four days the lamb would be there, cared for, inspected, anticipating the time of slaughter. This paralleled the ancient ritual of bringing the lamb into the home on the 10th of the month (Ex 12:3ff) and keeping it in the home until the time of slaughter.

Yeshua, our Pesach Lamb, follows the pattern as well. Entering the city on the 10th of Nisan to shouts of “baruch haba b'Shem Adonai,” “blessed is He who comes in the Name of the L-rd,” He presents Himself for scrutiny as the perfect Lamb of G-d. Bound to the “altar” by His perfect obedience, He has come to be sacrificed. Even the perfume put upon Him in the home of Simon the leper (a man healed of his leprosy and pronounced clean by the High Priest—was he healed by Yeshua?) is understood as preparation for His burial.

When the disciples come to Yeshua and ask where they should prepare the Pesach to be eaten, we miss something significant if we are only concerned about which day they are doing this! They ask about preparing the Pesach lamb to be slaughtered, and the very Messiah—the eternal Pesach offering, prepared before the foundations of the world, stands in their midst, Himself prepared to die for our sins.

Then the time arrives—the leaven has been removed, and the eve of redemption comes. The disciples gather around the table for the seder, with Yeshua conducting the well rehearsed *hagadah*. The story of redemption from Egypt is told and retold, and the symbols of slavery and freedom are eaten.

The wine has filled the cups already once, and now the second cup is being prepared—the cup of deliverance. While the minds of the disciples are considering their own participation as though they were themselves in Egypt, Yeshua’s perspective is forward—toward the coming hours when He would undergo the wrath of the Almighty and become the sin offering for the Am Segulah chosen by His Father.

The matzah is piled on the table: striped, having been beaten with the blunt edge of a knife; pierced to assure no trapped air would cause it to rise in the baking process. Yeshua holds the matzah up as Hillel had instructed, breaks it, and distributes it to each one at the seder. Then he adds something new to well known ritual: this is My body broken for you. For thousands of years the matzah was baked, broken, and eaten. Now, in Yeshua, it would find its ultimate meaning. The beaten, pierced body of Messiah Himself would be the eternal sacrifice, foreshadowed in every Temple sacrifice, and anticipated by the faithful in every generation. G-d’s answer to the sin problem, His fulfilment of the promise made to Eve in the garden, was now placed entirely upon the person of Yeshua. Even as He willingly broke the matzah so that each could eat, so He willingly was to give Himself to be broken as payment for our sins.

The meal is eaten, and the lamb, the sacrifice, became the main course for all. The joy of freedom comes at the price of the lamb’s life. The roasted flesh, symbolic of the *‘olah*, or whole-burnt offering, becomes the life-giving meal for all. Then following the meal the cups are once again filled, for the third time. This is the cup of redemption—the necessary price that must be paid. Helpless to affect our own redemption from slavery, the death of the lamb with its blood upon our doorposts is our only salvation from the death Angel. Yeshua raises the glass after the *berachah*, and once again adds something significant to the seder: “this is My blood of the covenant shed for the cleansing of sins.”

Josephus tells us that on the 14th of Nisan so many lambs were slain for the Pesach meal that the Kidron valley ran like a river of blood as the Temple mount was constantly cleansed of the hundreds of thousands of lambs slain for the millions who were there to celebrate. Life taken so that life could be given—a divine mystery in the whole economy of G-d’s infinite holiness.

Finally, the last cup is raised. Yeshua notes that it represents the future—the victorious reign of Messiah, and so He announces that He would not be drinking it again with them until He actually was celebrating this final kingdom and His ultimate reign. The seder which, from ancient times had been primarily an exercise in looking back, had taken on new importance as a festival looking forward. We therefore celebrate with an eye to His return.

Having finished the seder, Yeshua and His disciples sang the Hillel Psalms, Psalms 113-118. Here they rejoiced in the glory of G-d’s salvation, and the anticipation of His ultimate victory and reign. The King Himself, soon to die as a criminal, sings and rejoices in the ultimate and sure victory.

Then, before midnight, the meal is finished and Yeshua and His disciples cross the Kidron to the Mount of Olives. Here Yeshua begins the soul work of preparing to die. The Man Yeshua faces the human dilemma—the strong will to live in a world dominated by death. His soul is breaking as He considers the terrible work He has committed Himself to. Here, in the deepest struggle of His human soul, His disciples doze off. No one can help Him but the Almighty. Struggling to know if the horrific experience of death is the only way, He asks for the “cup” to be removed—that third cup which spoke of the price of redemption—the shedding of His own blood. But it is not His will but the Father’s that must prevail. Nothing else could work—nothing else could pay the price. Yeshua resolves Himself to the inevitable sacrifice for which He had come.

Suddenly the stillness of the early morning hours is broken: they have come, soldiers with clubs and swords, to take the Lamb to the altar. Stopping first at Caiaphas’ house to see if some legal stamp of approval could be obtained, they realize that such a political ploy would only cause the people to riot. Rome was their only hope. So accusing Yeshua of treason, they take Him to Pilate. Shortly

before noon He is sentenced to the whim of the people. The Lamb will be put on the altar.

Scourging Him, mocking Him, they parade Him to Golgatha where the hole for the execution stake has already been dug. Laying His torn back upon the rugged pole, they impale His hands and feet. Then lifting the stake, they drag it to the hole, erect it vertically, and let it drop into its place, pulling and tearing the muscles and joints of the Lamb.

Here, finally and inevitably, the One promised from the beginning is sacrificed—is paying the price that no one else could have paid. Here, in a moment of time, the eternal One is subject to His own creation. Crying out in agony He forgives, He prays, He commits Himself to the One who judges righteously. “Having loved His own, He loved them to the end.”

Darkness comes early—even the heavens are aware that this is no ordinary execution. We can hear their darkness exclaim with the Centurion, “surely this was the Son of God.” Then it is over—the last breath is drawn, and Yeshua has died. The hope of all Israel has breathed His last.

Lovingly taken from the executioner’s pole, He is laid in a tomb. And the people go on with their Festival. The religious leaders can now celebrate—their “thorn in the flesh” is gone—they will not have to put up with Him any longer, or so they think. The disciples are bewildered, lost, hopeless: the One they thought was the Messiah is gone. He has failed—all is lost.

The next three days must have been difficult. How could the disciples rejoice in Temple services with all of the throngs? Their Messiah had failed. Their expectations were false. They had been wrong! Could the Priests have been right? How could they have been!? Confused and bewildered, the disciples gathered together to try to make sense of it all. Some headed off to other cities, leaving the Festival city before the week was up. The women, however, remained to do the proper thing: anoint His body with spices as was befitting for any Jew who had died. Carefully waiting until the Sabbath was completed, the women went to the tomb, wondering how they would roll the inclined stone away. Oy! The timing of His execution could not have been worse: hurrying to get Him off of the execution stake and into a tomb had made it impossible to prepare the body as it should have been prepared. And now, perhaps it would be impossible. To think! This One, so dear, so loved, executed as a common criminal, and never to have a proper burial. Then coming upon the tomb they see the stone is already out of its place. Looking in they are stunned to find an angel there and Yeshua gone. The words He had spoken were not symbolic: He actually had risen from the dead—He was alive. Having gone into the Most Holy Place with the blood, He had returned to prove that His sacrifice had been accepted.

And then He was there—in their midst, talking with them, instructing them once again—“go, tell the disciples what you have seen.” Yeshua lives; Yeshua reigns; Yeshua is Messiah, and Yeshua is returning. In all of our studies, let’s not miss this!