

“Messiah Our Pesach Has also Been Sacrificed”

Thoughts on Pesach

by Tim Hegg

Each year, usually a month or so before the coming festival of Pesach and Unleavened Bread, people begin, once again, to discuss the chronology of Yeshua’s last Pesach and the week of His crucifixion and resurrection. At TorahResource, we start getting emails and phone calls with all manner of questions about the Pesach that Yeshua and His disciples celebrated just prior to His crucifixion. 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 rise 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 what about the counting of the omer? When do we start counting?

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 Lord,” He presents Himself for scrutiny

as the perfect Lamb of God. 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 the 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. God’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 effect 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 thousands of lambs slain for the masses who were there to celebrate. Life taken so that life could be given—a divine mystery in the whole economy of God’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 God’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 to which He has committed Himself. 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. Even with all of our unanswered questions, these facts remain sure. And it is the reality of these truths that we celebrate today. This, above all else, is the heart of our faith.

The Seven Sayings from the Cross

According to the four Gospels, Yeshua spoke seven times during the three hours He was on the cross. Not any one of the Gospels record all seven but reading all four of the Gospel gives the following list:

But Yeshua was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves. (Luke 23:34)

This first saying of Yeshua, contained in some manuscripts of Luke, is missing in many of the earliest manuscripts and it is therefore debated as to whether this is an authentic saying of our Savior. Some think it was added by scribes on the basis of Stephen's words in Acts 7:60.

If this is an authentic saying of our Lord, then it highlights the very heart of His suffering and death, that is, He died in order to bring about forgiveness of sins. In this specific case, however, it may be that the forgiveness of which He spoke had more of a temporal, “this-world” quality rather than forgiveness of sin in terms of eternal salvation. It appears that He was pleading with the Father to forgive the chosen nation as a whole, even as Moses interceded on behalf of Israel at the golden calf incident. If this is a worthy parallel, then Yeshua's request that they be forgiven would be like Moses' request, appealing to God's faithfulness to the covenant promises which precluded destroying the nation for their sin of idolatry (Ex 32:10ff).

And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” (Lk 23:43)

This second saying from the cross was addressed to one of the two thieves crucified at the same time. He was rebuking the other thief who was “hurling abuse” at Yeshua, saying “Are You not the Messiah? Save Yourself and us! (Lk 23:39), reminding him that they both were being executed for crimes they had actually committed, but that Yeshua had done nothing wrong and had therefore been condemned unjustly. He then makes the

request to Yeshua, "... remember me when You come in Your kingdom!", to which Yeshua responds "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

From this saying we learn several things. First, that simple faith in Yeshua secures forgiveness of sins and eternal life in His presence. The unnamed thief undergoes no religious ritual or prolonged conversion process but by simple expression of faith in Yeshua receives the promise of sins forgiven and life after death with his Savior.

While the word "Paradise" speaks to the reality of the intermediate state for believers, it gives us only a mere glimpse without much explanation. But what we do learn from this saying of Yeshua is that following the death of one who has believed in Yeshua, the conscious soul of that person resides in a state of peace, tranquility, beauty and comfort, which is the picture given by the word "Paradise," for it reflects the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world. [The Greek word *παράδεισος* (*paradeisos*) is used in the Lxx of Genesis to describe the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8–10, 15–16, etc.).]

Moreover, the bliss and shalom of this place is secured by the very presence of Yeshua Himself, for He says to the believing thief "...you shall be *with Me* in Paradise." Thus we learn that the abode of our loved ones who have died in the Lord is one of final shalom and joy, for they live with Yeshua, their risen and glorified Savior.

When Yeshua then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then He said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour the disciple took her into his own household. (Jn 19:26–27)

This third saying of our Lord highlights His true humanity and particularly the familial relationships He had. Even in His agony upon the cross He takes responsibility for His mother, Miriam, and for her welfare following His death. He entrusts her physical care into the hands of the "disciple whom He loved," which we presume to be John, and from that time on, he took care of her as one of his own family. (Most presume that Joseph had died, leaving Miriam as a widow.)

This saying therefore highlights not only the careful responsibility that Yeshua maintained as a son honoring His mother as the Torah commands, but also an extreme expression of love. For at a time when one would have expected Yeshua to be rightly consumed with His own agony, He nonetheless turns His attention away from Himself to the needs and care of His mother. This likewise highlights the fact that Yeshua is concerned about

our physical as well as our spiritual needs and He does not despise one in favor of the other.

About the ninth hour Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, saying, “ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” that is, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?” (Matt. 27:46; cf. Mk 15:34)

The fourth saying of our Lord from the cross is addressed directly to the Father as was the first saying. We recognize these words to be a quote from Ps 22:1, and in that sense, expressing the fulfillment of the words of that Psalm as a whole. So rather than expressing defeat or a loss of faith, this cry is the deep and real expression of the Son of God experiencing, in infinite dimensions, the separation from God which condemned sinners will experience when the final judgment falls upon them. Moreover, it was the anticipation of this unspeakable abandonment by the Father that moved Him in the garden to seek from His Father if there was, in fact, any other way to accomplish His saving work.

The well-known hymn written by Bernard of Clairvaux expresses this.

O sacred Head, now wounded,
with grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded with thorns, Thine only crown;
O sacred Head, what glory, what bliss till now was Thine!
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered, was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression, but Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior! 'Tis I deserve Thy place;
Look on me with Thy favor, vouchsafe to me Thy grace.

After this, Yeshua, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, “I am thirsty.” (Jn 19:28)

This 5th saying from the cross tells us of Yeshua's true humanity by which He became the very promised Messiah foretold by Israel's prophets. For in the cry “I am thirsty,” we are once again confronted with the agony and desolation which our Savior underwent to be our sacrifice for sin. Death by crucifixion was the cruelest, for it prolonged the death through hours of excruciating pain. In the simply cry “I am thirsty,” we are reminded of the mystery of the incarnation, that the very Creator, the Eternal One, has taken upon Himself the very humanity of which we are members. He knows our weaknesses and He understands our pain, not only because He is the all-knowing One, but because He likewise experienced the woes of death in this, our fallen world.

But this cry, according to John, was offered in order to fulfill Scripture, and particularly Ps 69:21, “They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” In this section of the Psalm, the psalmist expresses his feeling of being abandoned by God and tormented by his enemies. Thus, this 5th saying from the cross continues to express what our Lord endured as our sin offering.

Therefore when Yeshua had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. (Jn 19:30)

The cry, “it is finished,” was a victory cry, not an admission of defeat. This was typically the cry of the athlete as he came across the finish line. So Yeshua, in uttering “it is finished,” gave expression that His death as the substitute for sinners was all that would ever be needed for the Father to be both just and the justifier of those who believe in His Son. Nothing more needed to be added to the finished, complete sacrifice given by Yeshua.

And Yeshua, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” Having said this, He breathed His last. (Lk 23:46)

Having undergone the penalty for sin on behalf of His people, Yeshua experiences that which is utterly contrary to His very being, yet that which is the destiny of all of mankind save those believers alive at Yeshua’s return, for “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Heb 9:27). Once again, however, we see Yeshua quoting the Scriptures in the last gasp of breath before He dies. In committing His spirit to the Father, He quotes Ps 31:5, the triumphant conclusion of the Psalmist’s prayer:

In You, ADONAI, I have taken refuge; Let me never be ashamed; In Your righteousness deliver me. Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly; Be to me a rock of strength, A stronghold to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress; For Your name’s sake You will lead me and guide me. You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me, For You are my strength. Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have ransomed me, ADONAI, God of truth. (Ps 31:1–5)

This final utterance, then, is likewise our own victory cry, for in Yeshua, we too are secure in the hands of God.