

Passover- Why celebrate?

By Yvonne Evans

For many years now, at Passover, we have come together with family and friends to observe, in measure, a special Seder¹ meal. It is something I always look forward to because as well as being a time for fun, I find it moving and generally enlightening on some particular point of God's redemption plan, not just for the Jews, but for all mankind.

During my student years, my main secular love was literature. There was nothing I enjoyed more than exploring an author's work for recurrent symbols or themes that expressed their thoughts and ideas. Passover is very rich in Messianic symbolism- pictures that point to a Saviour and all He was to fulfil during a special Passover over two thousand years ago, the one in which he gave His life.

Passover is one of the annual appointments God made with the people of Israel (see Deuteronomy 16v16 and Leviticus 23v4-8) and He ordained the festival to be observed by Jews throughout all their generations, every year on the 14th of Nisan², as a memorial to his exploits in delivering them from the hand of Pharaoh. (Exodus 12:1-14) I am sure you are familiar with the historical background: against a backdrop of slavery under a wicked taskmaster, Moses was to lead Israel to freedom and eventually the Promised Land. Four days before the first Passover, on the 10th Nisan, each family was instructed to select a lamb, a first born male. It was to live with them for four days of "scrutiny" to check it for any blemish. At twilight on the 14th, it was slaughtered and its blood daubed on the lintel of the doorposts of their homes. The blood was to act as security against God's wrath and the Angel of death.

Centuries later, on 10th Nisan, as the shepherds were leading the sacrificial lambs that had been bred for slaughter on the mountain slopes in Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus also entered Jerusalem on a donkey. For the next four days he was subject to scrutiny by the temple authorities who did their utmost to trap him theologically into giving what they considered to be a "wrong" answer. They failed, and were unable to find fault with him. He silenced them by his wisdom and Pilate found him blameless- "spotless."

On 14th Nisan God's first born unblemished "Lamb" was slaughtered. His blood too was spattered on wooden beams; this time, not just to afford protection from death and God's wrath for a household, but for all mankind. "Behold the lamb of God that

¹ Seder means "order" and is the name given in Hebrew to the Passover meal.

² Nisan(also known as Abib) was to be the first month in the new Theocracy; God governing Israel. Exodus 12:2

takes away the sin of the world.” John 1:29. Jesus’ blood purchased for us freedom from slavery to sin and release from the harshest task master of all- Satan.

So, here we see one analogy that helps us to understand how Jesus came to fulfil or complete the Mosaic sacrificial system (Matthew 5v17.) Analogy was Jesus’ favourite teaching method whilst he was alive, hence all the parables, and it is true that educationally, celebrating Passover is an effective audio -visual teaching aid when it comes to instructing children about the roots of their faith.

That is not the only reason I love it though. It’s not just about Jesus fulfilling the previous sacrificial system and deliverance from slavery to sin . On the night before he died Jesus celebrated a Seder meal with his disciples. It was during this meal that He says he is about to institute the New Covenant with his blood. Jewish days begin at sundown, so it was in fact the beginning of the same day he died. For the apostle John it was such an important event that he devoted a quarter of his gospel to telling us all about what Jesus wanted to impart to those closest to him on the eve of His suffering. It was an intimate time of revelation and instruction. We too can experience something of that intimacy as we commemorate the anniversary of Jesus death. He took the cup after supper (called the cup of Redemption interestingly enough) and said, “This do in remembrance of me.” Luke 22:19.

Yes, we can remember His sacrifice around the communion table (although in Jewish tradition bread would only usually have been broken in the context of a meal) but on the anniversary of His death He knew that for his Jewish disciples and the early church, celebrating the Passover would be a way of calling to mind all He had said and done on that fateful day.

So, in the words of Paul the apostle, “For indeed, Christ, our Passover was sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” 1 Cor 5;7,8.

The title of this article is “Why celebrate?” I think the question we should be asking is, “Why not?”

Bibliography.

Zimmerman, Martha 1981, Bethany Fellowship Inc, Minnesota, Celebrate the Feasts.