



*Passover begins
on the eve of
April 19, 2008*

Greetings in the Risen Lamb!

The Resurrection—at Passover

We have seen the tomb in Jerusalem. It is empty. No body. No bones. Yeshua of Nazareth was raised from the dead over 2,000 years ago, just as the Hebrew prophets had predicted. His resurrection occurred during the Passover holiday. He was The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the same Lamb spoken of in the final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation—the One who is alive and whose great Marriage Supper we look forward to!

If the Messiah was raised from the dead during Passover, why did the majority of believers in Yeshua (Jesus) celebrate His resurrection last month at “Easter”? Good question! The answer is historical, political and anti-Semitic. But before examining the answer, let’s consider the facts of the Messiah’s resurrection. Yeshua followed the Jewish custom of going up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover each year (remember when He was 12?). Before His final ascent, He said to His twelve talmidim: *“...Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. And they will scourge Him and put him to death. And the third day He will rise again”* (Luke 18:31-33). In Jerusalem, on the night of His betrayal, Yeshua celebrated His final Passover with His followers: *“When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘with fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’ ”* (Luke 22:14-15). While the exact day of the week of this final seder is controversial, we know that Yeshua’s resurrection occurred on the “third day” of the Feast, which in the year Yeshua died was the first day of the week (Sunday). Early that Sunday morning, two Marys went to the tomb and were met by an angel who said to them, *“...Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus [Yeshua] who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said...”* (Matthew 28:5-6).

The “third day” of the Passover has a special name. It can be found in Leviticus 23:5-6: *“On the fourteenth day of the first month at twilight is the Lord’s Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord, seven days you must eat unleavened bread.”* Continuing in verses 10 & 11 we find, *“...When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest...on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.”* That day after the Sabbath of Passover is called “Bikkurim” or “Firstfruits.” Yeshua was raised from the dead on *Yom Habikkurim*, the day of Firstfruits. That is what is being referred to in the *Brit Hadasha* in I Corinthians 15:20-23: *“But now Christ [Messiah] is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Messiah all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Messiah the **firstfruits** (Bikkurim), afterward those who are Messiah’s at His coming.”*

Return to your Roots!

While originally the Messiah’s resurrection was connected with the Jewish Passover, in time, a serious difference over the date of the resurrection arose among Christians. Jewish believers celebrated

the resurrection immediately following the Passover (at Firstfruits), according to their lunar calendar. Passover, from year to year, would then fall on different days of the week. Christians of Gentile origin, however, wishing to commemorate the resurrection on the first day of the week, Sunday, had as their advocate the Roman emperor Constantine I. At the Council of Nicaea in the year 325 A.D., it was unanimously ruled that the "Easter" festival should be celebrated throughout the Christian world on the first Sunday after the full moon following the spring or Vernal Equinox. If the full moon should occur on a Sunday and thereby coincide with the Passover festival, Easter should be commemorated on the Sunday following. For Constantine, it was not just a question of a Sunday observance. He deliberately sought to separate the resurrection of Yeshua from its Jewish root!

The spring or Vernal Equinox, used in this dating, was the time of the celebration of Eastre, an Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility. That is where the name Easter originated. It is not in the Bible. While many assert that the origin of the name "Easter" and the goddess herself actually go all the way back to the Tower of Babel, Nimrod and his wife Semiramis (aka Ishtar), the common thread is the relationship to a "Mother goddess of fertility." Easter traditions such as rabbits and colored eggs also originated as pagan fertility symbols. Thus, "Easter" replaced "Passover" as the time of Messiah's resurrection. For us, the important issue is THE REALITY OF THE RESURRECTION. Whenever you celebrate the Messiah's rising from the dead, please make sure that THE RISEN LAMB replaces the bunnies and the chicks!! Remember what the Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 5:7: *"...For indeed Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."* (This "feast," by the way, could only refer to Passover, not "Easter.")

We encourage you to attend a Passover Seder in your local area this month, and rejoice with us in Yeshua, our "Firstfruits," our "Risen Lamb."

Messiah's Resurrection Prophesied

When the Apostle Paul preached the Risen Messiah, he referred back to the Jewish Scriptures, *"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures"* (I Corinthians 15:3-4). Which Jewish Scriptures?

Foremost among them is Isaiah 53 in which we see a picture of the Servant of God, Yeshua the Messiah, approximately 700 years before He was born, crushed for our iniquities according to the will and plan of His Father. This Divine Servant would one day be the *asham* or offering for sin—the sin of the world. He would die, but then be raised from the dead. In verse 10 of Isaiah 53 we read of this Servant of God, *"...He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days..."* The One who would pour out His soul unto death, and be buried, would then continue to live and would see His spiritual offspring, those redeemed by His sacrifice. This prediction of Messiah living after having died, agrees with other resurrection verses in the Tenach. For example, *"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption"* (Psalm 16:10). (This verse and others of Psalm 16 are directly related to the resurrection of Yeshua in Acts chapter 2 in the *Brit Hadasha*.) Psalm 22 also looks forward to the resurrection of Messiah. This prophetic psalm, written one thousand years before the time of Yeshua, graphically portraying death by crucifixion (a much later Roman invention!), also speaks of Messiah's resurrection. As noted in **The Prophets Still Speak: Messiah in Both Testaments**, an old classic by Fred John Meldau, *"This Messiah, so cruelly put to death, will be 'helped' (v. 19), 'delivered' (v. 20) and 'saved from the lion's mouth' (v.21). Verse 22 begins a new section; and Messiah now gloriously delivered, resurrected, says, 'I will declare Thy name to my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee'."*

Psalm 22 also contains a veiled, but dramatic picture of Yeshua's resurrection. In verse 6, the

suffering Messiah states, *"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people."* The Hebrew word for worm (*to-lah-ah*) is found thirty-one times in the Old Testament in various forms, and is often translated "scarlet" or "crimson." The scarlet dye of the Tabernacle or *mishkan* came from the crushed body of this worm. The color of sin in Isaiah 1:18 is *tolah*. When Yeshua said He was a *to-lah-ah*, this was a picture of His being crushed for our sin. However, just as the word scarlet literally means the splendor of a worm, the *tolah* can also be seen as a larva, a worm like creature, that goes through a lifeless looking pupa or chrysalis stage (like being wrapped in a burial shroud), then emerges as a glorious butterfly (an ancient picture of resurrection).

Resurrection in the New Covenant

The resurrection of Yeshua is mentioned over 100 times in the New Covenant Scriptures with all four Gospels recording the resurrection. T. Ernest Wilson in his book **The Messianic Psalms** calls the resurrection of Yeshua the "best authenticated and attested event in the history of salvation" and "the dominating testimony of the apostles." Certainly, the crucifixion would lose its meaning without the resurrection. Yeshua's resurrection from the dead is the cornerstone of our Messianic faith.

The Bible chronicles ten post resurrection appearances of Yeshua which took place in five different settings: a garden (John 20:11-18), on a highway (Luke 24:13-31), in the upper room (John 20:19-23), by the seaside (John 21:15-17), and on a mountaintop in Galilee (Matthew 28:18-20).

Following Yeshua's crucifixion, the frightened, scattered talmidim somehow became a fearless band of witnesses, willing to die for what they believed (and they all did!) Messiah's resurrection from the dead was the event that transformed their lives. Even Pinchas Lapide, an orthodox Jewish scholar, believes this. In his book **The Resurrection of Jesus, a Jewish Perspective**, we find Lapide's conclusion: "The resurrection of Jesus was a real historical occurrence, and not something first and foremost taking place in the hearts and minds of the first believers. The crucifixion of Jews by itself could not have motivated the courage of martyrdom and unquenchable hope for the cause of salvation which Jesus preached and embodied in his actions. Jesus' resurrection convinced his disciples that he would return soon as the Messiah of Israel, and in the power of this Easter hope they carried the gospel to the nations, aiming to convert them to the worship of the One God of Israel, Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But for the resurrection of Jesus, Christianity would never have left the environs of Jerusalem..."

We, Too, Shall be Raised!

Pinchas Lapide and most other Orthodox Jews believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead (called *tehiyat hametim* in Hebrew). These are the modern-day Pharisees, as opposed to the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6-8). There are at least seven passages in the Tenach that clearly teach the resurrection of the body: Psalm 49:15 (the soul rescued from the power of the grave), Job 19:23-27 (Job's eyes will behold his Redeemer after death), Psalm 16:11 (joy in God's presence after death), Psalm 17:14-15 (awakening in God's "likeness"), Daniel 12:2-3,13 (*"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt."*), Isaiah 26:19 (*"Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust..."*) and Hosea 13:14 (*"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death..."*).

This belief in a bodily resurrection is also seen in the New Covenant. When Lazarus died, Martha said to Yeshua, *"...I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"* (John 11:24). When Paul was called before governor Felix on charges of sedition, he answered, *"I have hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust"* (Acts 24:15).

Yeshua's statement to Lazarus' sister Martha summarizes the New Covenant's position on

resurrection: "...I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die..." (John 11:25-26).

Resurrection in the Passover Seder

Just as the angel of death passed over the homes of the early Hebrews who had placed the blood of a perfect lamb on the lintels and doorposts of their homes, the angel of death passes over those who apply the blood of God's perfect Lamb, Yeshua, by faith, to the lintels and doorposts of **their heart**. When we place our trust in Yeshua's sacrificial death, we pass from death to life.

What about Yeshua's resurrection? The three matzot on the Passover table speak of Messiah's resurrection from the dead—especially the middle matzah called the *afikoman*. Actually, every time we say the traditional Jewish blessing over bread, we recall the resurrection: "*Baruch atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Haolam hamotzi lechem min haaretz.*" (Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.) God did, indeed, bring forth Yeshua, The Bread of Life, from the earth (the grave). If we look at the three matzot in the *tash* (pocket) at the seder, the middle one is always broken, wrapped in a white cloth (burial clothes?) and hidden (buried?). The matzah we use at seders today is unleavened, striped and pierced (a perfect picture of Messiah's broken, stripped and pierced body). Yeshua called Himself "*the bread of life*" (John 6:35). He was unleavened (without sin). His body was wrapped in white linen (Matthew 27:59) and put in a rich man's tomb (Matthew 27:60). Like the middle matzah, it was buried, but in order for our redemption to be complete, or for the Passover Seder to be finished, the middle matzah must be "resurrected" from its hiding place.

Today, the *afikoman* is used to represent the nation of Israel, or sometimes Isaac, who were symbolically "broken." But, *afikoman*, the only Greek word in the entire Passover Seder, literally means "I came," and in ancient times it symbolized the Passover sacrifice. Yeshua took a piece of the *afikoman* and related it to His own body, saying, "...*This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19).

What are we to remember at Passover? Yeshua's death and resurrection. He died to deliver us all from spiritual Egypt—from bondage to sin. He rose again to save us, justify us, heal us, give us eternal life, and ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

As Neil breaks the *afikoman* at our Temple Seder this year (evening of April 20th), *Yom Habikkurim*, the Day of Firstfruits begins. We will greatly rejoice in the One whom God brought forth from the earth: the Risen Messiah, the Lamb of God—Yeshua—who says to each one of us this month: "...*Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen...*" (Revelation 1:17-18).

May your Passover blessings be greatly multiplied this year!

Love in Yeshua, our Passover,



This Month's Offers:

The Prophets Still Speak: Messiah in Both Testaments: a classic book about fulfilled prophecy.

Evidence for the Resurrection (Answers to skeptics' questions): a valuable witnessing tool.

Never Forget: Messianic music CD by the Liberated Wailing Wall that lifts up the Lamb of God and His VICTORY OVER SIN AND DEATH! Great new songs including "Dayenu" and "Isaiah 53."