

Passover and Christianity

Restoring a Biblical Truth to the Church!

by Michael Rudolph

Delivered to La Cena del Señor April 17, 2011

Today is Palm Sunday, the day that Christianity commemorates *Jesus'* arrival in Jerusalem on a donkey, amidst the waving of Palm branches and shouts of "*Hoshanah!*" by His followers (John 12:12-15). Tomorrow is the 14th day of the first month on the biblical lunar calendar, the month of *Nissan*, which makes it the day preceding Passover – the evening of Yeshua's last supper with His disciples who were meeting to remember when God's final plague on Egypt slew Pharaoh's son who was heir to the throne and expected to become a god, chief among Egypt's many other deities.

It was an event of national birth and salvation for the children of Israel whose firstborn sons were not slain as were the Egyptians' sons, provided they trusted God and put the blood of a sacrificed lamb on and above the doors of their houses as Moses instructed them. The following day, the 15th of *Nissan*, the children of Israel, accompanied by Egyptians who believed in the God of Moses, began their exodus that was to lead them through the red sea and toward the Promised Land that we now call *Eretz Yisrael* – the Land of Israel. Here are some passages from the Bible that speak of this event:

Exodus 12:29-39

And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of livestock. So Pharaoh rose in the night, he, all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, "Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said. Also take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone; and bless me also." And the Egyptians urged the people, that they might send them out of the land in haste. For they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, having their kneading bowls bound up in their clothes on their shoulders. Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses, and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold, and clothing. And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. Then the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. A mixed multitude went up with them also, and flocks and herds-- a great deal of livestock. And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared provisions for themselves.

Leviticus 23:4-11

These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times. 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. On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. The seventh day shall be a holy convocation; you shall do no customary work on it. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: `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. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted on your behalf; on the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it.

So, through these Scriptures, we see the historic context of Passover that occurs on the evening of *Nissan* 14, followed by seven days of the "Feast of Unleavened Bread," and also the celebration of "Firstfruits," which Leviticus 23 says is on the day following the "Sabbath," which many take to mean the Sunday following the seventh-day Sabbath that falls within the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Now this is very prophetic, and points to Yeshua's last supper (which was a Passover meal), to his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God, and to his resurrection sometime during the night on Sunday, the Day of Firstfruits. That does not always fall on the day the Christian calendar calls Easter (the day assigned by the early Church as Yeshua's resurrection day), but it logically follows from the biblical account, and also from Yeshua being the "firstfruit" of resurrection of the saints.

1 Corinthians 15:20 says it this way:

But now Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Many of us here are familiar with most of this history and its connection to the bread and wine of La Cena del Señor, but I wonder how many of you here who are not Jewish, have considered that this connects you (as *Jesus*' modern-day disciples) to the Jewish people of the First Century, and therefore to the Jewish people of today! Perhaps you did not know it, but what is now called Christianity, was originally considered a sect of Judaism, mostly populated by Jews who believed that Yeshua was the Messiah. It was mainly after Yeshua's resurrection that non-Jews joined their Jewish brothers in the Faith.

This history, and the relevance of Passover to Christianity, should cause Christians to realize that their biblical history does not originate with Yeshua – it goes way back to at least the original Passover and exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt, and even further. Consider, for instance, what God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:4-7:

As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.

La Cena members come from some of the many nations to which God was referring when He gave that covenant to Abraham; so if you think of Abraham as your “Father Abraham,” you would be right. And here are verses of Scripture, from much later on that confirm it, and connect it to Yeshua’s sacrifice and resurrection; we read Paul’s letter to the Romans, chapter 4, verses 16-25:

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all (as it is written, "I have made you a father of many nations" ¹) in the presence of Him whom he believed-- God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Yeshua our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

So, if your history as a Christian goes back to your father Abraham, and Abraham is also the father of the Jewish people, then Christians and Jews have the same father in Abraham and are therefore brothers. Notice that I said “Jews” and not “Messianic Jews.” Your brotherhood that originates with Abraham is with all the children of Israel – not just with those of us who have come to faith in Yeshua. Although most of you in this room are probably not Jews you are, nevertheless, adopted members in God’s family along with the Jews; we are adopted through our births and you through your faith, but we are both adopted. In Romans 8:14-17, Paul describes the Christian’s adoption through faith, and then in Romans 9:3-7, his own adoption through being a Jew, but indicates that his physical adoption is not what ultimately counts; let’s read this:

Romans 8:14-17

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and joint heirs with Messiah, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 9:3-7

For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Messiah for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Messiah came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac

your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Romans 11 is too long for me to read in its entirety, but I will read verses 13-24 because it is so important:

For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? For if the firstfruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches. And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness¹, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

Romans 11 explains adoption in another way – as our being branches on an olive tree that is owned by physical Israel. Those who are born as Jews start off on the tree because it is their tree, but they are broken off if they lack faith. Those who are not born as Jews but come to faith in the Jewish Messiah (i.e. Christians) are grafted into the tree that belongs to Israel, and Jews who were earlier broken off, if they come to faith, are re-joined to their tree, also as grafted branches. In other words, while we are not all Jews, all who are of faith are part of a Jewish olive tree that Ephesians 2:11-22 refers to as the “Commonwealth of Israel:”

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Messiah, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Messiah. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Yeshua the Messiah Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined

together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

I started off by talking about Passover and seem to have digressed to explaining how Christians are in a family relationship with Jews. It was not accidental that I did this, just as it was not accidental that Yeshua chose a Passover meal to explain the bread and wine as symbols of His broken body and His blood poured out for our sins. Today, more than at any time in history since the First Century, Christians are re-acquainting themselves with the “appointed times” in Scripture – the Sabbaths and annual days of commemoration that God commanded to the Israelites – days that Jews have kept throughout the centuries, but that most in the Christian Church have not because they consider them “Jewish Holidays,” part of the Mosaic Law, and therefore not for Christians. Passover is one of them, but there are also the first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, the Spring harvest of Weeks (that the Church calls *Pentecost*), the Day of Blowing Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the first and eighth days of the Feast of Tabernacles – nine in all, and then, of course, there is the weekly Sabbath that most of the Church celebrates on Sunday. The Feast of Weeks has always been recognized by the Church as the day when the Holy Spirit first fell and, more recently, the Feast of Tabernacles and Passover have received attention. But all the commanded days in Scripture are relevant to us because 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, and I quote:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Christians don't have to celebrate these “appointed times” as Jews do, but neither should they be ignored.

Now I want you to know that much of what I have said about the Church at large does not apply to La Cena because your pastor leads you in a thoroughly biblical way and in an appreciation of these so-called “Jewish” days. The fact that he invited me here today to speak about Passover is evidence of that and so I am confident that, over time, more and more of these “appointed times” will be addressed. If I have added anything to your current appreciation of Passover, I hope it is that the celebration is not just for Jews, but for Christians as well.

Even so, what I am bringing you today is an even deeper message than the relevance of Passover or any other day on the calendar. It is that, through faith in Messiah Yeshua, all Christians are biblically related as brothers and sisters to all the Jewish people – not only to those of us who confess Yeshua – because Christians and Jews both trace their identities (whether covenantal or physical), to their common father, Abraham . Many in the Church today support the land and people of Israel because their prophetic significance for the end-times is understood. What is less appreciated though is that this is not an “us” and “them” relationship. According to Ephesians 2, all Christians are members in the Commonwealth of Israel, and so it is rather an “us” and “us” relationship that has to be better understood and deepened. My prayer for us today is that this message has helped in some small way to do that, and I pray it in Yeshua's glorious Name. Amen.