



ISRAEL BIBLE CENTER
מכון התנ"ך בישראל

Passover & Easter

— Through Biblical Eyes —





Shalom, my dear friends!

What a joy it is to celebrate the day of Yeshua's resurrection with you. Easter (or Pascha in Jewish-Greek) is a time to remember when Jesus was raised from his tomb and to look forward to the day of our own resurrections in him! Since a treasure of ancient Jewish texts and traditions anticipate and undergird the third day after the Messiah's death, it's so important for Jesus' followers to learn about resurrection in its original, Jewish context.

It is my great pleasure to share this Easter eBook with you in the hopes that you will be enriched and encouraged to keep exploring Scripture's true Jewish content and character. Blessings to you on this Resurrection Day!

Warmest wishes,

Dr. Eli Vizorkin-Eyzenberg

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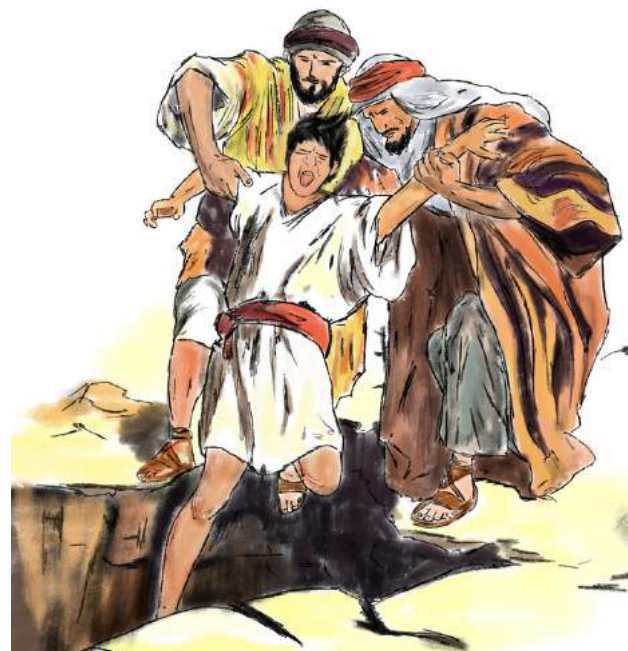


CHAPTER ONE

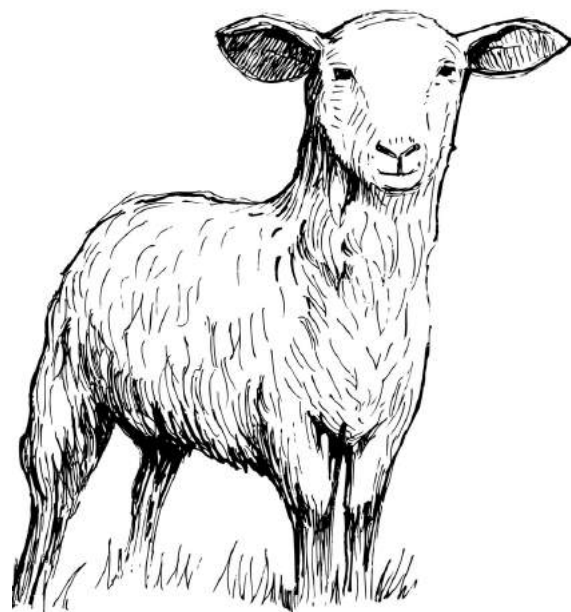
Does Joseph Point to Passover?



When Joseph reunites with his brothers in Egypt, he recalls their initial attempt to dispose of him in the well, saying, “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to do as it is this day: to make many people live” (Genesis 50:20). In other words, whereas Joseph’s brothers committed an evil act against him, God worked through the misfortune of one person to bring about salvation for many. This will not be the last time that God works in this way to effect corporate deliverance. The brothers’ activity against Joseph, and the eventual salvation that comes from it, alludes to the Passover sacrifice that leads to the exodus from Egypt.



In an effort to deceive Jacob into thinking that Joseph had been eaten by an animal, Joseph’s brothers “took (laqach) Joseph’s garment and they slaughtered (shachat) a goat and dipped (taval) the garment in blood (dam)” (Genesis 37:31).



All of this Hebrew language reappears at the first Passover when Moses tells the elders of Israel, “Go and choose a lamb for yourselves according to your clans, and slaughter (shachat) the Passover lamb. Take (laqach) a bunch of hyssop and dip (taval) it in the blood (dam) that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood” (Exodus 12:21-22).

In Genesis, the brothers slaughter a goat, take Joseph’s garment, and dip it in the animal’s blood; in Exodus, the elders slaughter a lamb, take hyssop, and dip it in the blood. Joseph’s brothers partake in a kind of perverse Passover ritual against their brother, but God will respond by saving many lives through Joseph’s acts in Egypt.

The intertextual links between Genesis 37:31 and Exodus 12:21-22 make a major theological impact with just a few parallel words. The slaughtered goat in Genesis is a representation of Joseph’s own personal sacrifice as someone who would be abandoned, sold, and imprisoned. His brothers take his garment and dip it in blood in order to commit an evil act against their younger brother. However, God works through that act in order to “make many people live” when Joseph saves them from famine (Genesis 50:20). Similarly, God gives life to the many imprisoned Hebrews through the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

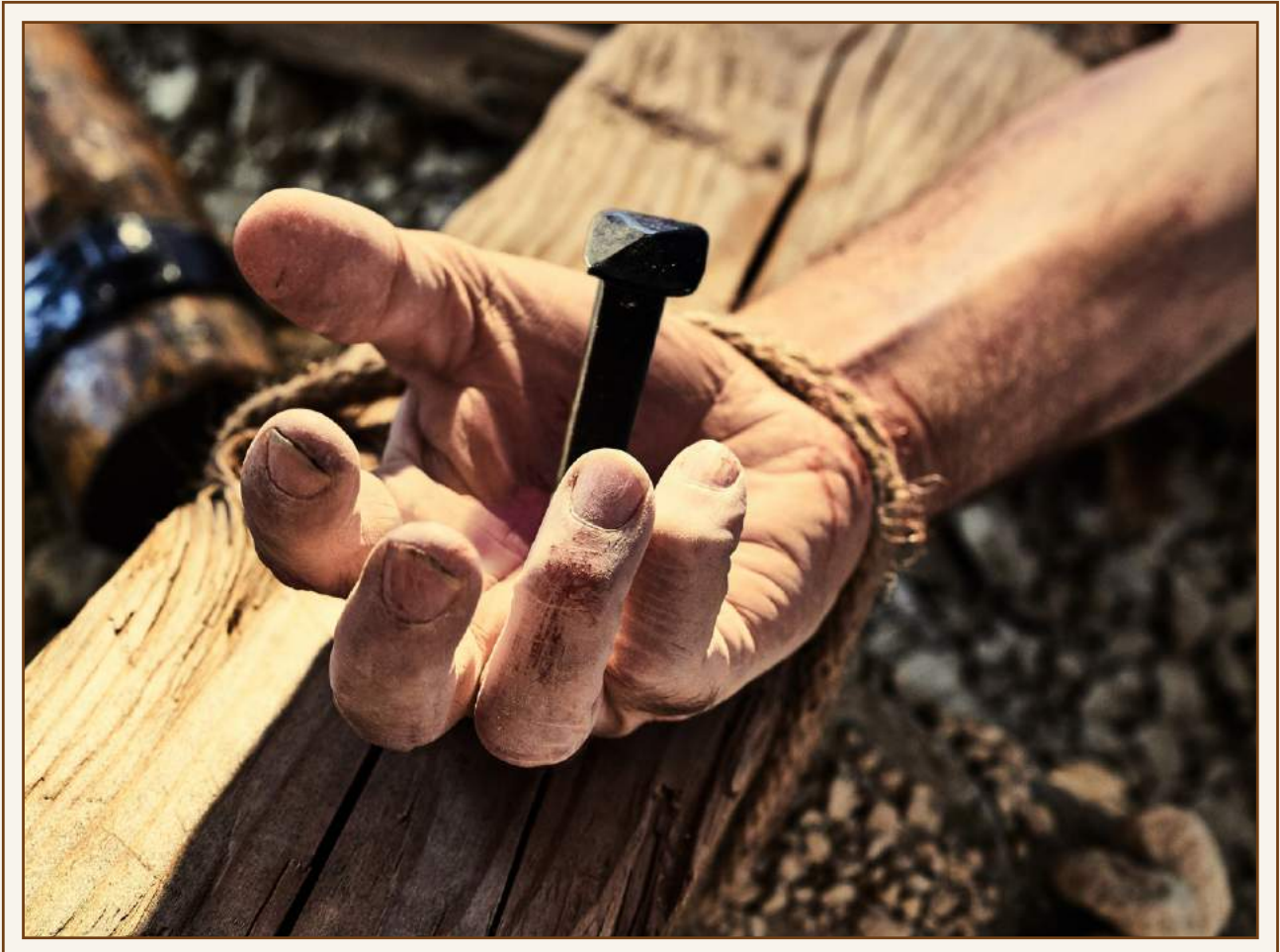
This theological theme of sacrifice for the good of the many is also foundational to the Gospels’ portrayal of Jesus as one who “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). Joseph’s experience points to the notion of sacrifice for salvation that runs throughout Israel’s story.

By Dr. Nicholas Schaser



CHAPTER TWO

Rethinking Jesus' Words From the Hebrew Original





The Jewish morning begins with the “Modeh Ani” (“I thank”) prayer, which expresses the worshiper’s gratitude for another day of life.

מוֹדָה אֲנִי לְפָנֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ חַי וְקַיִם, שֶׁהַחַזְרַת בִּי נִשְׁמַתִּי
בְּחַמְלָה. רַבָּה אֱמוּנָתְךָ

(Modeh anee lefanecha melech chai vekayam, she-he-chezarta bee nishmatee b’chemla, raba emunatecha).

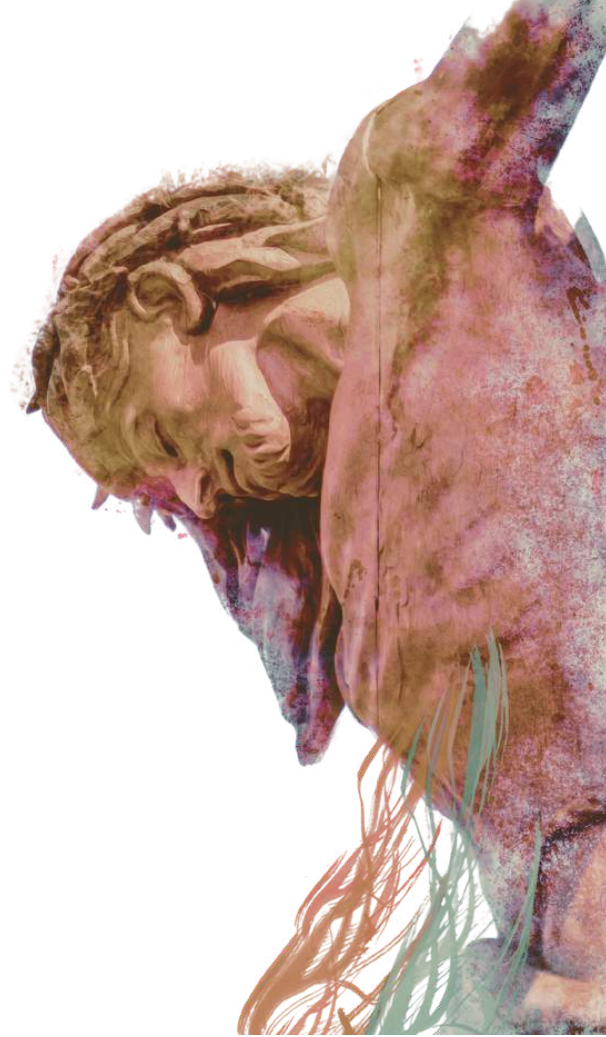
Translation: “I thank Thee, living and eternal King, for Thou hast mercifully restored my soul within me; Great is Thy faithfulness.”

The presumption here is that the worshiper entrusted the spirit to the Almighty for safe-keeping the previous evening. Many observant Jews use the phrase, “Into your hands I commit my spirit” (Psalm 31:5) at the end of their evening prayers.

It is interesting that this ritual includes the same verse that Jesus cried out while dying on the cross (Luke 23:46). It is highly likely that Jesus, in his agony, was reciting this psalm from memory as he faced the greatest challenge of his incarnate life.

We read these fitting words in Psalm 31:1-5

**In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.
Turn your ear to me,
come quickly to my rescue;
Be my rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me.
Since you are my rock and my fortress,
for the sake of your name lead and guide
me.
Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,
for you are my refuge.
Into your hands I commit my spirit;
deliver me, Lord, my faithful God.**



I would like to focus on the text that is quoted in the Gospels (vs. 5). How does this beautiful verse sound in the original Hebrew? Is it possible that something essential about it has been lost in translation?

The Hebrew word translated, “I commit,” is "afkid." This word has a meaning that is much closer to “I deposit” – which necessarily signifies a future “reclaiming” of the thing deposited. A vivid image might be that of checking in a coat at a theater or restaurant, or even putting money into the bank with the definite intention of getting it back.

While the English word “commit” can also be used to describe giving something with the purpose of claiming it back at some point in the future, it might just as well mean the giving of something without stating any clear intentions for the future.

In Hebrew, on the other hand, the unequivocal meaning of this verse is the temporary submission of one's spirit into the hands of God – giving it into God's "custody" with the definite intention of receiving it back.

It makes perfect sense that Jesus would quote this particular psalm while hanging on a Roman cross.

This shows that if we take the time to compare the original verse that Jesus would have recited from Hebrew, a simple, but significant insight into the words of Jesus on the cross will emerge. The words Jesus uttered were nothing less than a declaration of his great Israelite faith. He was confident that as he deposited his spirit into the hands of his Heavenly Father, he would surely get it back at his resurrection. What happened three days later proved that Jesus did not hope in vain.

By Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg



CHAPTER THREE

No Calvary in Ancient Jerusalem





You might be surprised to find that there was no place called Calvary in ancient Jerusalem. You can search all over Israel’s Scriptures and you will not find it. You will not find it in any of the Gospel descriptions of Jesus’ crucifixion. Matthew, Mark, and John all mention Golgotha – a word which, according to the evangelists, translates as “the place of the skull.” Luke also mentions the “skull place,” but doesn’t use the original Semitic name. The Gospels say that Golgotha is a Hebrew word, though no one is certain if whether the title is Hebrew, Aramaic or some mixture of the two.

Golgotha was a real place situated somewhere outside the walls of first-century Jerusalem, not far from a garden with the tombs of Jerusalem’s elite. But the name Calvary comes from the Latin calvaria, which translates as “skull.” The term was not in use in Jesus’s day, and no one called the place where Christ died “Calvary.” Only when Jerome created the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible (late 4th century) did the word come into gradual Christian use. Today, people joyfully sing songs about Calvary, but it is not a biblical word. The first-century inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the Gospel writers themselves, would have never heard of Calvary, but they knew the place called Golgotha.

By Prof. Pinchas Shir

CHAPTER FOUR

Is Easter a Pagan Holiday?



There is a growing number of Christians who think that the celebration of “Easter” is rooted in pagan traditions. One of the basic assumptions is that the name “Easter” is a Christian appropriation of “Ishtar,” a Babylonian fertility goddess. Even though the words may sound similar, they probably have no etymological connection. The English word “Easter” likely comes from the Proto-Germanic “austron,” which means “sunrise” – arguably a fitting name for a celebration that commemorates Jesus’ rising from the dead.

It is important to understand that outside of the English-speaking world, “Easter” is known by its proper name “Pascha.” This means that the majority of Christians in the world celebrate “Pascha” – an Aramaic synonym of the Hebrew Pesach, which means “Passover,” rather than “Easter.”

During this feast, traditional Christians celebrate the work of Christ’s redemption, believing that only in His resurrection is God’s forgiveness truly sealed. Because of Jesus’ resurrection, the judgment of God passes over believers just as the Angel of Death passed over the Israelite homes marked by the blood of the lamb during their captivity in Egypt.



However, an average, English-speaking Christian often fails to see the direct connection between “Easter/Pascha” and “Passover/Pesach.” Many of the rituals and customs appear to be different. Also, in order to ensure that no one connected (and therefore confused) the two, it was decided at the Council of Nicea (325 CE) that the feast of Easter/Pascha would be celebrated according to a different calendar: not on the 14th of Nisan as was originally decreed in the Torah of Moses.

Is Easter a Pagan holiday?

Not quite.

It is fundamentally a biblical holiday, albeit one that has been robbed of its true Jewish character and taken out of its original Israelite setting.

By Dr. Eli Lizorkin-Eyzenberg



CHAPTER FIVE

Why was Peter Imprisoned on Passover?





At the beginning of Acts 12, Herod arrests Peter and puts him in jail during the Passover festival (12:3-4). Just as the first Passover in Egypt led to Israel’s liberation from slavery, God replicates that initial Passover night when an angel releases Peter from prison. The disciple’s individual Passover and exodus underscore the continued presence of the God of Israel with the first Jewish followers of Jesus.

While Peter sleeps in prison, an angel of the Lord appears during the night, and tells him, “Gird yourself and bind on your sandals” (Acts 12:8). The angel’s directions to Peter on this night echo God’s words to the Hebrews on the night they eat the Passover lamb: “Thus you shall eat it with your belt girded around, and your sandals on your feet” (Exodus 12:11 LXX).

These similar instructions to Israel and Peter both precede a miraculous release from bondage. More, when Peter and the angel come to the boundary of the prison grounds, a gate of “iron” opens for them and they escape into the city (Acts 12:10). Luke’s attention to gate’s metal recalls Israel’s liberation from Egypt, the “furnace of iron” (cf. Deut 4:20; Jer 11:4 LXX).

Alongside these similarities, there is also a striking difference between the two Passovers. In order to liberate the Hebrews from slavery, God slays the firstborn: “I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike ll the firstborn of Egypt” (Exodus 12:12 LXX).



In Acts, instead of striking Peter’s captors, God’s messenger strikes Peter to enact his exodus: “The angel of the Lord... struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, ‘Get up quickly!’ And the chains fell off his hands” (Acts 12:7).

Whereas God had once passed over the homes in which the Hebrews slept, the angel enters a sleeping Peter’s cell and strikes him! Though the “striking” of Peter is nowhere near as severe as the divine strike against Egypt, Luke’s use of Exodus language reruns the original Passover event and reminds us that the God who enacted the exodus also guides the early Jesus movement.

By Dr. Nicholas Schaser

CHAPTER SIX

Jewish Passover in Corinth?



Paul spoke to the Corinthians in a very Jewish way: “For Christ, our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Cor 5:7-8).

Did the Corinthians celebrate Passover?

Did they even understand what Paul was trying to say by calling Jesus a Passover offering?

The assembly of Christ-followers at Corinth included many former pagans, but many were God-fearers of Israel’s God. It appears they knew about Passover and its meaning. Otherwise, the apostle’s words would have made no sense to them.





Corinthian believers were most likely familiar with the Exodus story and understood how Messiah's sacrifice provided Exodus-like redemption. Paul's words were not intended to encourage them to celebrate Passover as other Jews did in a literal way (at least this was Paul's the point!). Rather, he used Passover as a symbol, as an illustration, of how purity was a serious and crucial concern that the Corinthians neglected.

In a broader context, Paul told his listeners to expel those who sinned continually from their midst. Just as Jews removed leaven before Passover and mixed a new batch of dough without fermentation for the feast, so should the Corinthians seek to be a new and unleavened (or sinless) lump. They should clean out their leaven and expel sin from their gatherings.

In Paul's Jewish view, partaking of Christ is like eating the Passover offering in Jerusalem. It can be done only in purity or not at all.

By Prof. Pinchas Shir



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