

20 - Passover 2023 - Outline

- Passover “season” includes Passover (Pesach), Unleavened Bread (Matzah), and Firstfruits
 - Passover is a preparation day that concludes with the seder
 - Unleavened Bread is 7 days long and begins at the seder
 - Firstfruits begins the night after the seder
- The proximity of these 3 in time indicates that what is moving beneath the surface is very spiritual
 - shortness and time and smallness in size indicate a higher spirituality, less “grounding” in the physical realm
- Themes: Remember, But Also Receive a New Work in You
 - with any mo’ed, we remember, but we also expect to meet with God and to come away changed
 - God does the same type of work in us that He did in Israel historically on that day
 - it is the date that are shaping the events, not the other way around
 - ex: God decided to make the 15th of Nissan a date for breaking the hegemony of darkness, and so it was and so it is
 - however, God’s way is to give a dramatic picture of salvation at the beginning to be a touchstone for us and a seed
 - the first Passover was dramatic and clear
 - the picture is a free gift – we don’t have much of a part to play in it
 - the picture is a seed that we internalize
 - through the picture, God builds our faith
 - when the way grows darker, we think back to the picture of salvation He gave us at the beginning
 - thus, we read over and over again in Scripture writers going back to the “touchstone” of God bringing Israel up out of Egypt to be their God
 - we should expect this kind of seed every year in this season
 - it’s like the flower before the fruit; the flower is where the DNA gets determined, but it is not the fruit to come, which is much more substantive but requires a long journey (not a free gift)
 - remembering is important, too; here are some related points about remembering as we do
 - the mo’edim are community-building times
 - the mo’edim are joyful times
 - add to the joy of your seder by dedicating a short time to speaking out what God has done for you and your family, past or present
 - helps to pass faith on to others, including children
 - in remembering Israel’s humble beginnings in slavery, we are humbled

- humility is the key attitude to cultivate in this season, the humility of the lamb led to the slaughter; we focus on being led by the Good Shepherd
- Themes: God's Strong Arm
 - God is strong and obvious in every way in the exodus story
 - many miracles
 - Nissan related to "nes," miracle
 - God invests the blood of the lowly, timid, vulnerable lamb with the power to save and birth a nation from another nation
 - an unlikely salvation
 - beyond human reasoning, human design, human ability
 - God acts through Yeshua, the basis of this salvation
 - the lambs picture Yeshua
 - Yeshua was crucified on the preparation day, when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered
 - most of these lambs were raised around Bethlehem
 - more than with the other moe'dim, in the Passover season, we focus on what God does for us in salvation – when we are lowest and weakest, a newborn
- Themes: Rebirth
 - any step of salvation requires death and rebirth; He recreates us
 - but we carry our growth with us; it's not like a hamster spinning uselessly on a wheel; we spiral upward
 - moments of formation are critical
 - an adult getting a scratch is different than an embryo getting a scratch
 - God is strict with moments of formation
 - He is strict in the wilderness
 - He is strict with the early Believers (Ananias and Saphira)
 - we should rise up to the moment
 - resist the temptation to get bogged down in physicality, especially now
 - be quick, don't take more than you need
 - "Pesach" means "to leap over;" we don't want to be dragged down to earth when God is making transcendence possible
 - the mode of a newborn is not primarily that of understanding but simple receiving
 - what is happening now is not necessarily accessible to our understanding; it is very spiritual
 - the transfer from the kingdom of darkness to light is spiritual
 - the reflection is very low (this is how reflections work)
 - leaving Egypt is a change of physical location, but it hasn't touched their souls much yet, so it is "low"

- neither transfer of spiritual kingdom nor change of location touch the domain of the mind, the understanding
 - leave understanding for later; focus on moving when He says “Move!”
- Themes: Freedom
 - What are we being set free from?
 - Egypt represents the physical world, but we are not being set free from the physical, which is good; we are being set free from the rulership of the physical
 - why does God have us wake up into life as babies with the physical in control?
 - like Israel forms in the darkness of Egypt
 - Answer: because it is in overcoming the flesh that we grow in our relationship with God; it is in the battle to master the flesh that we grow up into the mature bride
 - freedom is not found in destroying the darkness but in turning the darkness to light
- Unleavened Bread
 - Unleavened Bread speaks to us of a kind of death that is happening
 - matzah is bread that has had the air removed; the air is like the spirit that gives life; it is “dead bread,” an emptied-out vessel
 - over the counting of the omer, the matzah is filled with new life; so it is that two leavened loaves are offered on the altar at Shavuot
 - we need humility to say to God, “Empty me out of that which needs to go.”
 - sin
 - mental and emotional prisons we build for ourselves built on lies
 - whole sets of teachings that miss the mark (as from a religious tradition, for example)
 - Yeshua chose “unlearned” men to be His closest disciples, men who were not already filled with another rabbi’s teachings; they were “fillable”
 - we need to be asking God now to reveal the lies we have believed that are blocking the fullness of truth from flooding in
 - releasing the lies and behaviors feels like death
 - it is separation (death) from the half-life, the zombie life
 - we learn to cope in Egypt; we even can become comfortable there and can’t imagine another way
 - truly it requires a miracle to be delivered from that place
 - we have to trust Him
 - Yeshua’s role precedes ours
 - Day 1 of Unleavened Bread was the only full day that Yeshua’s body and spirit would have been separated, when Yeshua was dead

- Firstfruits
 - unlike Pesach and Matzah, Firstfruits is done by the priesthood on behalf of the people
 - Israel may not eat of the new year of crops until this offering is brought, so it's a weighty day, though little discussed
 - first-to-ripen is the barley; an omer is offered (about 3.5 lbs)
 - through this offering, Israel acknowledges that all of the harvest to come depends on God alone
 - while Matzah is an emptying, Firstfruits is more like a filling, but the emphasis of the season is on Matzah, which is 7 days
 - God completes the picture of salvation with Firstfruits, but Matzah is the emphasis of the season
 - Yeshua
 - on the third day, His body and spirit were reunited, and He rose from the grave, the firstfruits from the dead
 - the barley seed is a picture of Yeshua
 - we are to ingest His story, His life, internalize it, and it will sprout and bear all good fruit in our lives
- The Seed (of the Year): Connected to the Harvest and Day 3
 - we are to see the whole of the Passover season from Pesach to Firstfruits as the seed of salvation for the year – it contains the DNA of the year's salvation, the whole picture
 - the agricultural context for Israel is the beginning of the grain harvest
 - "seed" is emphasized on Day 3 of creation:
 - "And God said, 'Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.' And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:11-12)
 - notice that there are 2 kinds of seed – the more purely spiritual seed of the spring, and the seed that includes salvation of the flesh in the fall
 - Days 1-3 are a mini picture of salvation, and the goal is the seed of Day 3
- The Seed: Parts of a Seed and Salvation of the Whole Person
 - Parts of the seed:
 - embryo – the living part, like a tiny white shoot
 - food storage – takes up most of the space, the starchy part
 - seed coat – hardest, darkest part; outer layer that protects, gives shape
 - The 3 parts of the seed are like the spirit (embryo), soul (food storage), and body (seed coat)
 - Pesach, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits are like the seed of salvation for us that we can identify with the more spiritual side of salvation, the soulish aspect, and the physical aspect

- salvation will play out in these three realms throughout the course of a year
 - the seed composed of these three mo'edim will sprout and bear fruit that touches every part of us
- Pesach – spiritual
 - quick, almost outside of time (“between the evenings”)
 - a time of transferring faith and for getting “the big picture”
 - a time for unity within the family
- Unleavened Bread – soulish
 - matzah touches both the spiritual and the physical
 - spiritual: empty the air, the life
 - physical: it is bread
 - matzah connects to both the seder (eaten at the seder) and Firstfruits in that Firstfruits is also concerned with the ingredients of bread
- Firstfruits—physical
 - it has a strong physical component in that it deals with the physical components of bread (flour, oil, frankincense)
 - it also has a strong spiritual component (it is an act of worship); this shows that as salvation progresses, the rectification of the physical is a springboard for greater spiritual expression, more flow of the spirit
- The Seed: The 4 Cups of the Seder
 - zooming in, the seder, by itself, also contains the whole picture
 - every level of the salvation pattern contains the whole picture
 - Exodus 6:6-7 provides the structure of the seder:
 - “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exodus 6:6-7)
 - notice that it’s circular, like the cycle of salvation, beginning and ending with the idea of “bringing out from the burdens of the Egyptians”
 - rephrasing the 4 steps (notice the story of salvation here):
 - I will take off the burden of the death from you
 - I will break the mastery of sin over you
 - I will marry you like a kinsman redeemer
 - I will establish an intimate relationship of deep knowing with you
 - the seder is a remarkable legacy of ancient wisdom in a meaningful, practical package, a real blessing

20 - Passover 2023 Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun. In this series of teachings called Spiritual Seasons, we're exploring the weekly Torah portions through the lens of the pattern of salvation that emerges from the calendar. This week, the weekly readings are all connected to Passover. Today we'll go over some of the main themes of the Passover season with one eye toward God's pattern of salvation and the spiritual season we're in. What I'm calling the "Passover season" includes the mo'edim of Passover (which I sometimes call Pesach), Unleavened Bread (or "Matzah), and Firstfruits, as well as the beginning of the counting of the omer.

The way these various mo'edim actually fit together chronologically can be a bit difficult to understand when you're looking at a calendar. They actually come right on top of each other, as close together as possible. This year, the seder is Wednesday night. Unleavened Bread begins with the seder. So the seder of Pesach and the first day of Unleavened Bread are starting together. THE VERY NEXT NIGHT, Firstfruits begins and we count the first day of the omer. So these days are all happening or beginning within a tiny window of time of a couple of days. Now, Unleavened Bread continues for 7 days and the omer count continues for 50 days. But all of them are happening or beginning on two consecutive evenings. So you can see why you seldom see Jewish sources making a strong distinction between these mo'edim of Pesach, Matzah, and Firstfruits, though they are consistently treated distinctly in the Torah.

The very small time separating these three is an indication that what is moving beneath the surface here is very spiritual in nature, or we can say SEED-LIKE. This is because time is an element of the physical world. If something expands in time or in space, that is an expansion in the physical realm; that thing becomes very grounded in physicality, in the lowest realm. In contrast, if something is quick, or if it is small, these are qualities of things that are less physical and more spiritual. So, this very quick succession of mo'edim is a clue for us that this season has a deeply spiritual component moving beneath the surface. The night of the Passover seder, in particular, is an electric moment. It is a time to be inspired for the whole of the journey ahead in the year, a moment to be lifted up and empowered spiritually.

With this teaching, I'd like to sort of collect together many of the most important themes that are discussed in relation to this group of spring mo'edim, almost like a list; each of these themes could have many teachings devoted to it individually. But I won't go into much detail. Just let the ideas sort of wash over you and be called to mind again. You will have heard most of them many times before. At the end, though, we will also look at these special days briefly through one specific theme of the year and God's pattern for salvation, the theme of the seed.

Themes: Remember, But Also Receive a New Work in You

The first theme I'd like to talk about is really two – the idea that with any of the mo'edim, we're not just remembering something, some historical event, though remembering is very important. The mo'edim are also days to MEET with God! They are appointments with God in which He not only meets with us but also DOES A NEW WORK IN US; you don't meet God and come away the same person. God says, "Come meet with Me at my appointed times. I'll be there. Don't leave Me waiting on the park bench by Myself."

On these special days, God does the same types of work in us that He did in Israel over time on each of these days. If Israel is set free from Egypt on the 15th of Nissan, then we can expect that He will be doing that same kind of work for us on that day every year, too. It's the dates, themselves, that are shaping the events that happen on them, not the other way around. We think the 15th of Nissan gained significance because of what God did during the exodus, but that's only part of the story. Pharaoh broke when he did because God designed a day in the yearly calendar for that kind of breaking to happen. That is the day God designed for crushing the rulership of darkness every year. He looked through the days of the year, and He said, "The 15th of Nissan will be a day every year for shattering the domination of physicality that has run amok." And so it was for Israel back then, and so it is for us now.

And partly so that we can know what He has designed into the calendar, God gave us a very spectacular 15th of Nissan 3,300 years ago when He broke the power of Egypt over Israel and the exodus began. In some ways, this was the beginning of a whole new level of salvation for mankind, and God made that moment of new beginning about as dramatic and clear as was possible. And then He commanded us to remember it every year.

God's way is to give us a dramatic picture of salvation at the beginning, like He did with this beginning point of salvation for humanity, redemption from Egypt. The beginning of every cycle of salvation has this early complete picture of salvation. The picture is an outright gift, meaning that we don't have a big part to play in the salvation that is happening right there at the beginning. A baby doesn't have much to do with its birth process. The gift is a whole picture of salvation in miniature. It is like a seed that we are meant to internalize. And through the gift of the seed at the beginning, God builds up our faith in Him. And the memory of this early light is an encouragement to us especially when the path gets rougher and darker and when we are expected to PARTNER with God more in the process of salvation. WHEN THE WAY GROWS DARK, WE THINK BACK TO THE PICTURE OF SALVATION HE GAVE US AT THE BEGINNING. How many times do we read in Scripture that God is the God Who brought Israel up from the land of Egypt to be their God. We find these words not only coming from the mouth of God, Himself, but also the mouths of kings and prophets throughout the Word. Stephen, too, repeats this story just before he is stoned. And Paul repeats it to the synagogue at Antioch.

For us today, we are not only encouraged by the story of Israel's exodus from Egypt, which we very intentionally remember at this time of year according to God's instructions, but we can also expect that God will fashion a kind of seed of salvation each year for each of us at this time. We should be expecting this kind of a gift now. It's not only about remembering Israel's deliverance. It's about receiving a gift of deliverance now in our own lives that will be a touchstone for us moving forward. Again, this early picture, this early light, is a consistent element built into the beginning of each new cycle of growth. It is like the flowers that form on the trees in the spring. They indicate the life to come, the fruit. The fruit has much more substance and life in it than the flower does, but the flower is where the DNA for the coming fruit gets put together. The unfolding of that DNA into the fruit will require a long and rather difficult process, a kind of journey. So the flower is both the formation of the DNA and the

encouraging picture at the beginning. It's uplifting to see a flower. We're in a time now for the establishing of the DNA for the year to come.

Though much more is happening here than remembering, remembering is important! I'll add just a few more points here about the remembering of the exodus that we do now. The first is that the mo'edim are community-building times. We usually tell the story around our tables in our homes with family and friends. It is a festive time, and a joyful time. And the mo'edim are to be times of joy. And let me encourage you to add to your joy as you gather around your seder table by personalizing it a bit. Dedicate a short time to mentioning what God has done for you or your family, how He has led you recently or in the past. In speaking out what God has done for you, you help build up the faith of others, including any children listening. This is a great opportunity to help build and strengthen the family or the community, a way to pass on stories of what God has done for us.

Another point here is that in remembering Israel's humble beginnings in slavery, we are humbled. Through this story we are reminded that over and over again God chooses the lowly to do His best work. And humility is really the key attitude of this season – the humility of the lamb led to the slaughter. We focus on being led by the Good Shepherd at this time of year, and that requires humility. The mazal of the month of Nissan is the lamb, Aries. The lamb is one of the lowliest of God's creatures in that it's extremely vulnerable. The lamb is, in its way, obedient and easily led, and this keeps it safe, tucked away in the interior of the flock. We should be like the lamb now in setting aside our will and submitting to the will of God our Father, the Good Shepherd.

Themes: God's Strong Arm

Speaking of the lamb brings me to another strong theme of the Passover season – the idea of God's strong arm. God is strong and obvious in every way in the exodus story, flinging miracles like bolts of lightning. And the Sages connect the name of the month, "Nissan," to the Hebrew word "nes," which means "miracles." It's the month of miracles.

And I think beyond all the miracles, one way that God shows His strength here is by making everything hinge on the little lambs. The blood of the lamb has the power of life and death in it because God decides that it will carry that power. Again, He chooses that which is low to humble those who raise themselves up to be high. Everything about the story speaks the message that this is an unlikely salvation, a salvation that is beyond human reason, beyond human design or human ability. How can a people be born from another nation? Oh, it's by the blood of the most timid of all animals that is eaten after that blood is spread on the doorway of the home. Huh? So Passover is a time to recognize God's sovereignty and power and that salvation is not found in ourselves but only in Him and in His chosen vessel, the Lamb.

Of course we know that the lambs of Passover represent Yeshua. And we should remember that Yeshua was killed on the 14th of Nissan, apparently just when the lambs were being slain at the Temple in preparation for the seders that would happen that night. Yeshua may have been able to hear the sounds of the mass slaughter of the lambs happening at the Temple while He

was hanging on the cross. Many of those lambs were specially raised there locally for just the moment of Passover, around the town of Bethlehem.

More than any other annual mo'ed, in the Passover season, we focus on WHAT GOD DOES FOR US in salvation, when we are lowest and weakest and most vulnerable, when we are a newborn.

Themes: Rebirth

This word “newborn” leads us to another great theme of the season, rebirth. Any step of salvation requires death and rebirth – this is God’s way. He creates and leads us to the point of giving up our lives, surrendering them. And when we do that, He says, “Very good. You pass. Now I’m going to create you again.” And He re-creates us, only we get to take our growth with us. We are not the same people starting a new cycle. We’re not hamsters endlessly spinning a wheel that goes nowhere. We go upward even as we come back around to the same points on the cycle. A circle that goes upward is a spiral. We are not going round and round on a circle but also upward. We are spiraling upward.

Connected to this point of rebirth, we should mention the importance of the season. First moments of creation are critical, and we do well to treat such formative moments with intentionality and care. If an adult gets a scratch, it’s usually no big deal. But if an embryo gets a scratch, that could be fatal. And so we see how very strict God can be when something is at this critical point of formation. He is very strict with Israel in the wilderness. And He is just as strict with the young body of Believers in the book of Acts. Think of what happens with Ananias and Saphira, how they are struck dead merely because they told a lie about how much they sold their property for. They were largely DONATING the money to the body. And yet, at that critical moment of formation, everything needed to be done just right to prevent something creeping in like leaven that will fester and wreak havoc down the line.

And so we should try to rise up to the moment however we can in these formative days. Resist getting bogged down in physicality. Be quick, and don’t take more than you need, especially now. Feast at the seder, of course. That is a time set aside for feasting. But otherwise, focus now on using the physical as minimally as is needed to accomplish the work God has for you in this world. Don’t take more time or stuff from this world than you need. Anything extra will only sink you into mere physicality. The word for “passover,” “pesach,” means “to leap over.” This is a time for hopping levels. We don’t want to be dragged down to earth when God is making it possible for us to transcend.

I’ll mention here one last point connected to the idea of rebirth: the mode of a newborn is not primarily that of understanding but simple receiving. What is happening now is not necessarily accessible to our understanding. It is very spiritual. And the physical reflection of that very high work is particularly low, which is how reflection works. In the Passover story, God does an extremely lofty work of transferring Israel from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light, and the physical reflection of this spiritually lofty work is that the people physically leave Egypt. I call this a low reflection because the salvation hasn’t touched the soul of the people to

a great degree yet. Their physical surroundings have changed, but they are largely the same people, just in a different spot. But my point here is to say that neither the very high spiritual work of transferring kingdom nor the low reflection exist in the territory of the mind, in the understanding. Understanding will follow eventually, but this is not a time to search for that in whatever God is doing in your life right now. Don't focus on understanding right now. Just focus on moving when He says to move.

Themes: Freedom

Before we look briefly at Unleavened Bread and Firstfruits, let's focus just a bit on the theme of freedom. What are we being set free from? We have talked in previous teachings about how Egypt represents the physical world in general. Egypt is the archetype of exile, and our spirits experience a kind of exile just by coming down to this dark place of the material realm, where it looks like everything exists on its own without a creator.

The point I want to make here about freedom is that we are not exactly being set free from the physical realm. The physical is good. What we are being set free from is the RULERSHIP of the physical, symbolized by the fact that Israel is in SLAVERY in Egypt. Pharaoh is their master and owner. Physicality is good and useful, but it is not meant to be our ruler.

Now, having said that, we have to wonder why God's plan is that we wake up into life in these bodies with the physical in control. A baby wants to take everything and put it in its mouth. Already in our first conscious moments, the physical dominates us, and we cry for food, and we cry when we aren't comfortable for any number of reasons. In the same way, God ordained that Israel would be in slavery in Egypt when it was forming as a nation in the womb. Even when Israel comes out of Egypt, they are a very physically-oriented people, as can be seen with the incident of the golden calf.

Why did God want Israel to form in such a dark, physical place? I think the answer is that it is in the OVERCOMING of the flesh that we grow in our relationship with God. It is in the battle to master the flesh that we grow up into the mature bride God desires. And the mature bride doesn't run away from the flesh. She masters it and puts it to good use, spiritual uses. She uses it to serve. She uses it to become a living sacrifice. Freedom is not found in destroying the darkness, the physical. It's found in mastering it and turning the darkness into light.

Unleavened Bread

Let's turn our attention now to the festival of Unleavened Bread, or Matzah, specifically. We've already touched upon one of the main ideas specific to the Festival of Matzah when we talked about humility, making ourselves low. Matzah is low; it's lowly. It's poor man's bread.

Like I said earlier, the first day of Unleavened Bread begins with the seder, and Firstfruits happens on the second day of Unleavened Bread. It's all happening so quickly that it's almost hard to tease them apart. But the three are distinct in the Torah. And we'll see that there is a reason for keeping them distinct. There are lessons to be learned in treating these three as both one unit and as separate mo'edim. More on that later.

Unleavened Bread speaks to us and reflects to us a kind of death that is happening. Matzah is bread that has had the air removed. The air is like the spirit of the bread, the air that is breathed into the bread like the spirit of life is breathed into Adam's nostrils. If the spirit is removed, the thing is dead. In a way, matzah is "dead bread." It is a vessel that has been emptied out of that which filled it up. And we see that there will be a process of restoring to life, of filling up the vessel again with a new spirit, a new life force, and this is represented by the two LEAVENED loaves offered on the altar at Shavuot, 50 days after Passover. The matzah of Passover is filled up with air again by Shavuot.

But before we arrive at that leavened bread that is somehow kosher to offer on the altar, we have to be humble enough to say to God, "Empty me out of that which needs to go." This isn't only sin as we ordinarily think of it, but it could be whatever mental and emotional prisons we build for ourselves. These are built on lies. Or it could be a whole set of teachings that aren't quite hitting the mark, maybe from a religious tradition we grew up in. To whatever degree they aren't hitting the mark, they are lies, too. Yeshua apparently chose largely unlearned men to be His close disciples, men who weren't already filled up with another rabbi's teachings. They were fillable, teachable, moldable. So we need to be asking God now to reveal the lies we have believed, the lies we have told ourselves that are keeping us locked up, the lies that others have taught us that are in the way, blocking the fullness of truth from flooding in.

Releasing the lies and the behaviors that come with them feels like death, and it truly is death. It is death to the half-life, the zombie life. Death is separation. God wants to draw us away from the life that is not life, the life of being smothered in Egypt. It feels like death to release Egypt because we are good at developing strategies for coping with Egypt. We grow accustomed to that place, even comfortable. And we can hardly imagine that a better life, the real life, exists elsewhere, on the path into the desert with God leading the way. Egypt is all we know. Truly, it takes a miracle to be delivered from that place. It takes a miracle for us to see the lies that trap us. But praise be to God that He is in the miracle business! And this is the season for it. And God is saying to us now, "It's over. That half-life, that imitation of life, is over. Walk away from it. I have something much better for you. I have REAL life for you. You're gonna love it. But you have to trust Me. Separate from the world and be holy."

So far here with Unleavened Bread, we have been focusing on our part, our role. But our role only comes after Yeshua's. Yeshua is first, and we imitate Him. As we saw with Yeshua's surrender to death at Passover, Yeshua is the real story behind Unleavened Bread. It would have been on the first day of Unleavened Bread that Yeshua's body and spirit would have been separated from each other. It's unclear what Yeshua was doing during that time, but 1 Peter 3 seems to indicate that He "proclaimed to the spirits in prison," those who had been disobedient. Day 1 of Unleavened Bread would have been the only full day that Yeshua would have been dead, in the sense that His body and spirit were separated.

Firstfruits

The third of the three special days here is Firstfruits. Unlike Pesach and Matzah, Firstfruits is done by the priesthood on behalf of the people, so it's not discussed much. Israel is not allowed to eat of the new crops until the priests successfully offer the firstfruits of the new crop to the Lord on this one day. If they should ever fail in this, the consequences could be quite dire for the nation, and we don't have a record of the priesthood ever failing on Firstfruits. Though it's not discussed or recognized much, Firstfruits is not an inconsequential day.

The first-to-ripen of the new crops is barley, so the Firstfruits offering is an omer of fine barley flour, something like 3.5 pounds. It is mixed with olive oil and sprinkled with frankincense and waved before the Lord. Firstfruits is a food offering, and the food of the nation depends on it. Through it, Israel acknowledges that all of the harvest to come, all of the food to come, depends on God and God alone.

Notice that while Matzah looks to an emptying out, Firstfruits looks more to the end result, the harvest, the food which fills us up. But of the two, the one that is emphasized in the spring is Matzah, the dying, the emptying. We see this in the fact that the Festival of Unleavened Bread extends beyond Firstfruits, extending for a whole week. But even though the emphasis of the time is more on dying, here we have in Firstfruits a sort of picture of the end goal included as the whole cycle is getting underway again.

Yeshua at the heart of Firstfruits is not hard to see. On the third day, His body and spirit were reunited, and He rose from the grave, the firstfruits from the dead, and the world was changed in an instant. Firstfruits, like the others, is a reflection of Yeshua, not the other way around.

Firstfruits is the celebration of the harvest of seed, in this case barley. We are to take the story of Yeshua's death and resurrection and ingest it like a seed. Yeshua is the seed promised to Abraham. We take Yeshua's story and bring it into our minds and hearts and let it touch our emotions. And the church even developed communion as a gesture of bringing Yeshua into our physical bodies. And through learning His story, trusting in it, trusting in Him, and allowing His story and Who He was and is to fill us up inwardly, Yeshua lives in us. And anyone who takes in the seed that is Yeshua will not regret it because Yeshua in us sprouts and bears every fruit of the good life, the true life.

The Seed (of the Year): Connected to the Harvest and Day 3

I want to go deeper into this topic of the seed now because God's way is to give us the free gift of the seed at the beginning of salvation, and it is the seed that becomes the touchstone and a great source of strength for us. In other words, we are to see the whole of the Passover season from Pesach to Firstfruits as the seed of salvation for the year. It contains the whole picture of salvation and is the map of the healing and growth to come. The Passover season is the DNA that will unfold in the year. It's by God's design that the agricultural context for the beginning of the calendar is the grain harvest. That is to say, when we are focused on Passover, Israel is getting ready to harvest seeds from the fields.

As we open up this topic a little, I want to first point out that the word “seed” is emphasized on the third day of creation. That’s the day that boundaries are given to the seas, and dry land is caused to appear. God then creates the plants. Listen to the emphasis on “seed” in the two verses related to the plants: “And God said, ‘Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:11-12). (Notice that there are two kinds of seed here: plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed. In the same way, there are two harvests in the year in this order. We’re seeing how salvation plays out here in the very verses that describe the seed (these verses that are part of the very establishing of the pattern), first by means of the more spiritual seed in the spring, then by means of the seed that also includes salvation of the flesh in the fall).

Day 3 brings to completion a 3-step mini-picture of salvation that starts with a kind of undifferentiated, chaotic unity that starts Day 1, moves into a strong separation on Day 2 (the separation of the waters above and below), and continues with the establishing of order and life below on Day 3. And the emphasis of the life on Day 3 is the seed. So we’re seeing a kind of goal reached on Day 3, or we can say “Step 3,” and that goal is the seed.

The Seed: Parts of a Seed and Salvation of the Whole Person

If you think back to elementary school, you were probably taught the three main parts of the seed. Those three parts are the embryo, the food storage, and the seed coat. The embryo is the living part of the seed and is actually the smallest of the three parts. It might look like a tiny, white shoot locked up in the seed. The food storage takes up most of the space in a seed, and that’s the bulk of what we eat when we harvest seeds of various grasses like wheat and barley. The seed coat is obviously the hardest and darkest part, the external layer that protects the seed.

In other words, the seed could be said to have a spirit, soul, and body. The spirit is the living part that animates the seed, the embryo tucked away inside. The soul is the majority of the seed, though it’s not visible from the outside, the starchy food storage area that is the real substance of the seed. The body is the seed coat that protects the seed and gives it a form and shape.

In the same way, Pesach, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits are like the seed of salvation for us that we can identify with the more spiritual side of salvation, the soulish aspect to salvation, and the physical aspect to salvation. And these three will play out during the whole cycle of the year. The seed composed of these three mo’edim will sprout and bear its fruit, and it’s a fruit that touches every part of us.

Pesach is the most spiritual of the three. It is quick and almost outside of time. The seder meal is described as happening “between the evenings.” It is a time for the transferring of faith and for getting the “big picture.” It’s a time for unity within the family.

Unleavened Bread is soulish in the sense that it touches both the spiritual and the physical. The soul is, in a way, like the rakia of Day 2 of creation, the atmosphere. You can look at it as either that which DIVIDES the waters above and below or that which CONNECTS the two. Matzah has two sides to it, both a spiritual focus and a physical one. The spiritual life is emptied out of the matzah, the air that animates it from the inside, and so the spiritual focus is one of emptying out the soul, we could say. But matzah also has a physical focus in that it is, in fact, bread. That flat matzah speaks to us of how we are to be an empty vessel ready for a new filling. Matzah is connected to the seder in that it's the bread we eat at the seder, and it's connected to Firstfruits in that Firstfruits is an offering of barley flour used to make bread.

The fact that the Firstfruits offering is barley flour means that it's especially earthy. Barley is considered food for animals. But don't we say that we have an animal side, and we call that the flesh? The barley flour offered at Firstfruits with olive oil and a sprinkling of frankincense are the physical stuff used to make the bread, but it's not quite bread yet – it's just the physical components of the bread. So one way we can see Firstfruits is that one of its characteristics is a focus especially on the physical components of life.

Again, to sort of summarize these musings about the seed, one of my points here is to show that Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits form the seed of salvation that will play out in the year, and that salvation touches all parts of our being from the spiritual to the soulish to the physical. The three mo'edim occur right on top of each other and are usually thought of as one combined mo'ed, one seed, but what they contain in them is the plan for a whole year's growth in each realm of the human being.

The Seed: The 4 Cups of the Seder

For my last topic here, today, I'd like to zoom in on just the seder to see the whole picture of salvation there. Remember that one important characteristic of the salvation pattern is that it's the same picture of salvation on every zoom level. In the same way that the three mo'edim of Passover, Matzah, and Firstfruits form a single picture of salvation, so to does the very first have the whole picture all by itself. The way I want to bring that out is through a quick look at the two verses that provide the outline for the seder, to see the whole picture of salvation in these two verses. They're in Exodus 6, verses 6-7:

“Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians’” (Exodus 6:6-7).

First, notice that the verses are circular; the end brings us back to the beginning: “...I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians...who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” In the same way that the year is circular and our salvation journey is circular, these verses are circular.

We could rephrase these four steps like this (and listen for the whole story of salvation here): God is saying 1) I will take off the BURDEN of death from you; 2) I will break the MASTERY of sin over you, 3) I will MARRY you like a kinsman redeemer, and 4) I will establish an intimate relationship of DEEP KNOWING with you.

Let me repeat those: 1) I will take off the burden of death from you; 2) I will break the mastery of sin over you, 3) I will marry you like a kinsman redeemer, and 4) I will establish an intimate relationship of deep knowing with you.

That is the story of the whole year of salvation, the whole pattern of salvation, and here we are seeing it in two short verses and four lovely cups of wine around which this Passover seder meal has been structured since ancient times. It's quite a remarkable legacy of ancient wisdom in a meaningful and practical package of the seder preserved through these many centuries. And we are very blessed to have the seder as part of our inheritance today.

In closing here today, let me just bless you that your seders would be times for both remembering the past and receiving something new from the Father, that they would be times to help build each other up in faith, that we would be strengthened to walk out of Egypt to a higher level of freedom, that the seder would be a seed of salvation for us, and that we would see the Lamb of God ever more clearly as we walk with Him this year. And may He make us into the people He wants us to be. Shalom.