


Passover

The Story of Easter from the Beginning

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Contents

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-----|
| Preface | | 1 |
| 1. Puzzle Pieces | | 3 |
| 2. What's in a Name? | | 9 |
| 3. The First Passover | | 27 |
| 4. Genesis – From the Beginning | | 49 |
| 5. Joshua and the Passover | | 69 |
| 6. Redemption, Rest, and Ruth | | 87 |
| 7. Timing of the Last Supper | | 107 |
| 8. Face to Face with the Lamb of God | | 121 |
| Notes | | 137 |

Preface

It's often said that the Bible is one story from beginning to end—a story of redemption. I couldn't agree more. Yet our biblical instruction is rarely done that way. Sermon series often cover month-long topical issues or emphasize a particular person or story such as Moses or the Exodus. Done this way, stories such as the Exodus are investigated in isolation and when the story is over, a new topic begins. But what about the rest of the “one” story?

The Passover and Easter (and all the connections in between) are best told as one story rather than as two separate ones. This pairing is certainly one of those cases where the entirety is greater than the sum of the parts. The philosophy behind this book is to take familiar stories such as the Exodus, Isaac and Rebekah, Joshua, Ruth, and the Triumphant Entry and to organize them as pieces of a larger puzzle.

My hope is that this perspective will enrich the redemption story that you think you know with new depth and appreciation. In essence, the goal is that “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). By that, I mean we already have an understanding of the individual stories, but, when woven together as one, the complete story provides a new peace that transcends the parts.

This book can certainly be read at any time of the year, but since it walks through the history of redemption, culminating in Easter, it's particularly well-suited for the Lenten season. Lent is a

Preface

season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. Lent is a time of repentance, fasting, reflection, and preparation for the coming of Easter. The material in this book is easily broken into six parts, one for each full week of Lent. Finishing the final chapter just before Palm Sunday will hopefully refresh your soul and prepare your heart for Easter. My suggested outline for such a study is as follows:

Week 1 – Chapters 1 and 2

Week 2 – Chapter 3

Week 3 – Chapter 4

Week 4 – Chapter 5

Week 5 – Chapter 6

Week 6 – Chapter 8 (Optionally, include Chapter 7)

This material is especially well-suited for group studies. The connections between Passover and Easter are numerous, and it wasn't my intention to exhaustively cover them all. As a result, there is ample room for group discussions as readers may find their own connections left unexplored here.

Regardless if you are taking this journey by yourself or with a group, I am eager for you to revisit some familiar stories with the goal of refreshing the redemption story as we watch the Passover unfold, from the beginning of creation, into the story of Easter.

- One -

Puzzle Pieces

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

It's been almost a decade since my pastor at the time invited a Messianic rabbi to speak at our church one Sunday morning. He came in preparation for an evening Messianic Passover meal, called a Seder, which he would lead us through to illustrate some of the Jewish connections to Jesus.

His premise was simple. He linked the sacrifice of a lamb without defect to provide redemption from Pharaoh at the first Passover with Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, who was also sacrificed at Passover to provide our redemption. This is familiar ground for most of us. Something we've heard preached many times.

However, in the midst of this familiarity, he mentioned some details that I'd never before connected. He started by identifying the prescribed timing of the selection, inspection, and sacrifice of the Passover lambs in the twelfth chapter of Exodus. The precise instructions were to happen on specific days of the month. Next, he reconstructed the days leading up to the crucifixion and showed

that they aligned with the twelfth chapter of Exodus. Jesus and the Passover lambs were brought to Jerusalem at the same time, inspected together, and then sacrificed. The facts were not new to me, yet having both events overlaid and shown to match so closely seemed momentous.

As I later asked around, there were people who, like me, were not aware of these connections. And yet others were aware. It made me ask, “How many other connections were known about which no one ever told me?” And, just as importantly, “Are there any connections that may have begun to evaporate from common knowledge over the decades?”

FIRST CONNECTIONS

I immediately started searching for other connections between the early Passovers and the final week of Jesus’s ministry. Very quickly, links between Moses, the Exodus, and Jesus became apparent.

One of the first I discovered was Luke connecting Jesus and Moses in a significant way, which only appears as a footnote in most Bibles. In Luke’s account of the transfiguration we read: “Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his *departure*, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:30-31, emphasis added). The word “departure” is the translation of the Greek word *exodus*.¹ It’s a subtle link, but using my paraphrase, one could read it as, “Moses and Jesus spoke of Jesus’s *exodus*, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” Both Moses and Jesus having an *exodus* seems significant.

The words Jesus chose to use at the Last Supper also connect that week to Moses and the first Passover. God told the Israelites before leaving Egypt, “This is a day you are to *commemorate*; for the *generations to come* you shall celebrate it as a festival to the

LORD—a lasting ordinance” (Exodus 12:14, emphasis added). Compare this to Jesus’s words:

And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”

Luke 22:19-20

At this Passover Jesus also declares, “Do this in remembrance of me,” meaning, commemorate this Passover. Even more striking are the symbols of the covenant. Jesus marks the new covenant with wine representing his blood. Similarly, “Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, ‘This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exodus 24:8).

The connections between the first Passover and this one run deep. Both tell of redemption: one within an old covenant; the other by defining a new covenant. The purpose in Jesus’s declaration was to link his words and actions to the Old Testament and to establish a unity of purpose in his ministry and in the entire history of redemption.

After the resurrection, the events on the road to Emmaus that opened this chapter (Luke 24:27) provide another significant connection. Any doubts that the Passion of Christ was not included in the ancient prophecies are put to rest with this grand declaration.

EXTRADIMENSIONS

Once one starts looking for connections, you become hypersensitive to those ideas. Subtleties that you once would’ve overlooked now become triggers for thought.

Puzzle Pieces

After becoming aware of these first few connections, whenever the Exodus, Passover, or redemption came up in books, sermons, and studies, I paid special attention. I found that once I started asking, “Where does the Passover appear?”, its richness and depth started appearing in unexpected places.

It reminded me of those Magic Eye² books that came out in the ‘90s. They were full of abstract pictures and dots that you would stare at for a while until a three-dimensional image would appear from out of the two-dimensional page. It took some effort, but the reward was the appearance of a remarkable image with extra depth, an image that otherwise would be absent to a casual observer. An important distinction here is that the three-dimensional image was intentionally designed into the picture by the designer and was not just an anomaly created by an imaginative observer, like seeing animal shapes in passing clouds.

The redemption of the Passover and Old Testament were obviously intimately connected to the redemption of the New Testament. However, many times I’d heard it presented as simply comparing the Passover of the Exodus to the new covenant defined by Jesus at the Last Supper. Was it really that plain? Was redemption shown at the Exodus then figuratively put into hibernation until Jesus completed redemption and later explained it in the New Testament? Most know that’s not how it happened, yet, at the same time, in this generation of thirty-minute sermons it often comes across that way.

The gospel is an amazingly rich message that is simple while also having extreme depth. A recent book by Jayson Georges called *The 3D Gospel*³ discusses the depth to which sin is viewed across different cultures. He explores three different perspectives of the same gospel, namely: guilt-innocence, shame-honor, and fear-power perspectives.⁴ Each facet uses different terminology when discussing redemption. The guilt-innocence perspective speaks of law, justice, and sacrifice. The shame-honor view often

Puzzle Pieces

uses words such as loyalty, approval, and inheritance, while the fear-power perspective highlights triumph, oppression, and prayer.

These different facets of the same gospel give it richness and appeal to different people and cultures in unique ways. A good example of how Paul uses all three occurs in Ephesians where he says:

*In him we have redemption through his blood, the **forgiveness** of sins, ... I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious **inheritance** in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That **power is the same as the mighty strength** he exerted ...*

Ephesians 1:7a, 18-20a, emphasis added

If the redemption of the new covenant has such depth, what about the redemption of the old covenant? As we'll find in the following chapters, the redemption of the Old Testament, which helps establish the depth of the gospel, is not "flat" at all. Rather, it has remarkable depth, and its connection to the gospel message will bring more dimensions to both.

COMPLETING A PUZZLE

The purpose of this book is to take a fresh look at the connection between Passover and Easter. We'll collect pieces of the puzzle as we explore all of scripture, much like an investigator trying to solve a mystery. As with any puzzle, often the best place to start is with the corner pieces, and then to proceed to the edges. From that point the entire puzzle begins to take shape. Similarly, we'll start with some fundamental corners—a summary of the gospel and the Exodus—from which we can fill in the edges.

Puzzle Pieces

Many of the pieces we'll look at are very familiar but are still helpful to revisit as we connect the dots between the Passover and Easter. However, some of the pieces may be completely new to many as we connect them to the Passover. Stories such as Joshua only quickly mention Passover while, Ruth doesn't even use the word at all. Yet both will provide rich depth to the Passover as they point toward Easter.

Finally, I want to emphasize that while connections and facts will make up the bulk of our investigation, they are not the ultimate point. What good is it to be knowledgeable about redemption as outlined from the Passover to Easter if it doesn't change your life? Therefore, each chapter will end with a section titled "What do I do with it?" It's intended to revisit the information we've uncovered, but from a *life* perspective, and to provide a catalyst to think about how it could change your relationships with others and with God.

So let's begin our investigation of Passover—the story of Easter from the beginning.

- Two -

What's in a Name?

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalm 51:12

One Saturday, my daughter Adeline, who was seven at the time, and I were driving to the hardware store. She was sitting next to me in the front of our truck when she asked: "Dad, how do you know you're driving in the lines? I can't see the lines on the road, and it looks like the front of the truck goes over them. How do you know that you won't get hit by the cars coming toward us?"

It was a very clever question since, indeed, when you look over the hood or fenders, the lines in the road and nearby vehicles are obscured by the truck. At least from our perspective.

At first I chuckled at this simple question. But then, as I tried to form a good answer to satisfy my curious daughter, I realized maybe the answer was not going to be that easy after all. What I quickly recognized was that I was so familiar with driving that I never thought consciously about where the edge of my truck

What's in a Name?

actually was compared to the lines in the road. And the more I thought about it, I couldn't recall anybody ever showing or explaining to me that the projection of my hood was not where the wheels or bumper would be. It was just something I picked up from experience. Over time I had become so *familiar* with the idea, that I now took it for granted.

That familiarity with the principle made it challenging to explain to my daughter. Eventually I came up with a contorted explanation, which seemed to settle the issue in her mind. At least, it settled it enough that she hasn't felt it necessary to ask her dad again.

THE LAMB OF GOD

Many things in our daily lives, professions, and our Christian faith can reach that same level of familiarity. They can become familiar to the point that we take them for granted and often struggle with the reasons we know and trust those principles.

One such Christian principle, a common name for Jesus, occurs at the opening of John's gospel. "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the *Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29). If you've grown up in the Church or even have just been around the Church, the "Lamb of God" is likely a very familiar name. It's a prolific phrase and a common theme that appears in many traditional songs, such as "Are You Washed in the Blood" and "Just as I Am."

But what does the name Lamb of God really mean? The simple answer is that it connects the crucifixion (and the subsequent resurrection) to the Passover in Exodus and the atonement sacrifices instated in the Pentateuch. While that answer may be correct, it also seems quite sterile and void of the emotion that John the Baptist intended when he announced Jesus as "the

What's in a Name?

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Are we so familiar with the name “Lamb of God” that we take it for granted? Does it still invoke all the meaning and still stir our passions like John the Baptist intended centuries ago? I have to admit, there are times when the name “Lamb of God” occurs in songs or sermons so often that I’m almost dismissive of it. Not because I don’t recognize its importance, but because it’s so often used.

That’s not to say that it’s overused. There are good reasons why the Lamb of God is cited so frequently in Christian circles. Let’s look at a few.

If you had to summarize the gospel very concisely to someone, how would you go about it? I suggest, based on the three sections of scripture below (although there are many others we could also use), that we can form a solid, yet concise, foundation.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.

Romans 3:23-25

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

Pulling together the ideas from above, the gospel may be summarized as, “We have all sinned, redemption comes from the

What's in a Name?

death and resurrection of Christ Jesus, it's a gift of God, which is accepted through faith." That's a very good summary of the gospel, and, while some may find nuances they would clarify, I contend that most Christians would accept that summary. What's more, these four gospel elements, just distilled from these seven verses, are also summarized very well by the name the "Lamb of God." That one name covers aspects of the Passover and the atonement sacrifices, who does the work and why, and how we are to engage in redemption—all without needing to dive into complex theology or Old Testament rituals.

In English the names for Passover and Easter put up an artificial divide between the two events which unintentionally masks the intimate connection between the two. The origin of the English (and German) name for Easter is from the pagan goddess of spring and fertility, Eostre. However, when we look at almost all other languages, the intimate connection between Passover and Easter can be seen. When God told Moses and Aaron about the final plague and how blood on their doors would allow the plague to passover them, he declared "... it is the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:11). In Hebrew, the word for the Passover is *Pesach*. Most languages refer to Easter by names derived from the Hebrew name for Passover,¹ Examples include *Pascha* in Latin, *Pâques* in French, and *Paskha* in Russian. Easter and Passover are two events that are really just parts of one story, sometimes referred to as the "Paschal Mystery" —a term describing redemption and the events of the Last Supper and Passion, which reach their climax on Easter Sunday.

John the Baptist's main emphasis of proclaiming Jesus as the Lamb of God may have been to connect the Passover to Jesus. In doing so, he linked the substitutionary sacrifice of the Passover to Jesus and what he would soon fulfill through his death and resurrection, which we celebrate as Easter. The declaration "Lamb of God" keenly connects both Passover and Easter and everything