

משיח

MASHIACH

Apostolic
Writings
Messiah
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Judaism

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8, “For our *Pesach* [Passover] lamb, the Messiah, has been sacrificed. So let us celebrate the Seder not with leftover *hametz*, the *hametz* of wickedness and evil, but with the *matzah* of purity and truth” (CJB). I would like to raise two questions concerning this text: (1) Why does Paul say “let us celebrate the *Seder*” immediately after passing judgment on a Yeshua believer in Corinth who committed incest? And (2) Was Paul speaking only figuratively about Passover?



Concerning the relationship between incest and Passover, Paul may have had in mind the various passages in the *Nach* (Prophets and Writings) that speak of celebrating Passover after cleansing the community of Israel from sin. In his book *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5-7*, Brian Rosner interprets 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 in light of 3:17 (“For God’s temple is holy, and you yourselves are that temple”):

Having “cleansed the temple,” Paul calls upon the congregation to celebrate spiritually the festival of Passover/Unleavened Bread in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8. That this sequence of events occurred to Paul’s mind may itself testify to the influence of the Old Testament temple motif, since, in the Old Testament, there is an observable link between cleansing or restoring the temple and celebrating the Passover. Following the “removal of all defilement from the sanctuary”

(2 Chron 29:5) in order to “reestablish the service of the temple of the LORD” (2 Chron 29:35), King Hezekiah in 2 Chronicles 30 calls upon the people to celebrate the Passover. Similarly, King Josiah, after removing the articles of idolatry from the temple and replacing the sacred ark in its rightful place, ordered the Israelites to celebrate the Passover and observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread (2 Chron 35:1-19; 2 Kings 23:1-23). Ezra followed the same pattern; Ezra 6 records first the completion and dedication of the temple (6:13-18) and then a joyous Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (6:19-22). It is intriguing that, even in the Gospels (Matt 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-47; John 2:13-22), as in 1 Corinthians 5, cleansing the temple and celebrating the Passover are connected.

There are several reasons why we should not preclude the possibility of a literal Passover celebration (of some kind) at Corinth. First, the congregation grew out of the local synagogue (Acts 18:4). Crispus, the president of the synagogue, and his family were founding members of the Messianic congregation, and they were joined by Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos (Acts 18:2, 8; 19:1; 1 Cor 3:4-6)—all Messianic Jews who celebrated Passover. Secondly, as I explain in the March 2010 issue of *Verge*, a Gentile form of Passover was widely observed in the early *ekklesia*. Thirdly, Paul refers to a second Jewish festival, in clearly non-figurative terms, at the end of the letter. The passing comment—“But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost” (1 Cor 16:8)—suggests that the Corinthians knew when Pentecost would occur. Moreover, since Pentecost is calculated by counting fifty days after “the day after the Sabbath” during Passover week (Lev 23:15-16), Paul implies that the literal day of Passover was not insignificant to the community. Finally, Yeshua and Philo offer similar figurative interpretations of Passover imagery without implying a denial of the literal observance.



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