

## PESACH 2007

Taking part in Pesach is an indication that someone sees himself or herself as part of Yahweh's people. Why would we, South African people with no obvious Jewish connection, celebrate Pesach if it is true that Pesach is merely a Jewish festival and that Jews are the only ones who are supposed to take this feast seriously. We should understand that Pesach or Passover originated some 3500 years ago when the Almighty, Yahweh, brought about the supernatural liberation of the people of Yisrael from 430 years of bondage in the land of Mitsrayim or Egypt. To be honest, the commandment to celebrate Pesach year after year was given only to them - to the people of Yisrael - to the ones Yahweh continually calls "my people", to the ones the nations of this world up to this day, refer to as "Yahweh's people". So, unless we see ourselves as part of Yahweh's people, and Yahweh Himself sees us as part of his people, I am not sure what we are doing here today.

Let me try to explain, before someone decides to pack up his things and go. Indeed, we are here today because the Almighty Himself has made it possible for you and me to become part of Yahweh's people. Let me put it to you quite clearly, so that everyone can understand. Not only has He made it possible for you and me to become part of his people. It was his design for the world from the very beginning, that people from every tongue and tribe and nation would hear and read about what He has done and shown to physical Yisrael, and would then join Yisrael out of sheer desire to come to know this wonderful Elohim, this wonderful Saviour and this wonderful Protector. Yahweh clearly made known this plan to Avraham. He said to him: "I shall bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you ... My covenant is with you, and you shall become a father of many nations ... And in you all the peoples of the earth shall be blessed." It is no accident that people outside of physical Israel received their share in the blessings intended for Israel only. The way people sometimes refer to themselves as part of Yahweh's people create the impression that they see themselves and their inclusion in the Father's plans for this world as an afterthought, something that happened as a result of a change in plans.

This is definitely not the case. Remember what happened to Ruth, who was a Moabite - someone complete outside the legal and ethnic limits of what was known as "the people of Yahweh". But Ruth understood something that many people, up to this day, fail to understand. She simply joined the people of Yisrael, by saying to Na'omi: "Your people is my people, and your Elohim is my Elohim. For wherever you go, I go; and wherever you stop over, I stop over." It was with people in mind like Ruth, and also you and me, that the prophet YeshaYahu once wrote: "And let not the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh speak, saying, Yahweh has certainly separated me from His people,' nor let the eunuch say, 'Look I am a dry tree.' For thus said Yahweh, 'To the eunuchs who guard My Sabbaths, and have chosen what pleases Me, and hold fast to My covenant ... also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to Yahweh, to serve Him, and to love the Name of Yahweh, to be His servants, all who guard the Sabbath, and not profane it, and hold fast to My covenant ... to them I shall give in My house and within My walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters - I give them an everlasting name that is not cut off."

So in a very special sense, our being here today is also a celebration of the fact that Yahweh has given us in his house and within his walls a place and a name better than that of sons and daughters. He has given us the privilege of becoming grafted into the original olive tree, and thereby becoming full members of the people of Yahweh. Yisrael or Israel, in Yahweh's eyes, is not confined to the borders of the land of Israel and to purely ethnical definitions and classifications. Yes, it is true: Yahweh has never neglected, and will never neglect his promises to the physical descendants of Avraham. But those exact same promises was made in such a way as to include people from outside, like most of us, here today.

Where does this leave us with regards to our allegiance to our own country, and even our own ethnic group? Of course we cannot disregard our own nationality. We cannot ignore the political and socio-economic conditions in our own country. We are commanded in Scriptures to obey the

authorities that have been given over us and even to pray for them. But like Shaul (Paul) we can say our true citizenship is in the heavens where Yahweh's kingdom is being prepared for us.

Let us take an important celebration that one will find in almost all the countries of the world, the celebration of every country's Day of Independence. This day is usually taken as the day on which a specific country became independent from another country. America's Independence Day is the 4th of July, because America became independent from Great Britain on the 4th of July, 1776. Our own true Independence Day is 11th December, because as a country we became independent from the United Kingdom in 1931, on the 11th of December. There may have been other dates in South Africa's history which stand out as quite important but in the normal sense of the word, that's our "Independence Day".

Interestingly enough, according to a list of the Independence Days of approximately 130 countries, all over the world, only two countries will have their celebrations in the month of April. These two countries are Zimbabwe and Israel. Israel, by the way, received their modern day independence from the British mandate of Palestine in 1948. Our celebration here, today, is almost like an Independence Day celebration. Who knows, perhaps this is why not many of the nations of this world are having their Independence Day in the month of April - almost as though April, especially this year, has been set apart for an Independence Day celebration of another kind. Pesach is our independence from the bondage of Egypt. It is our independence from the strongholds of the enemy. It is our independence from following after the traditions and institutions of this world. In the truest sense of the word, it is our independence from the bondage and the slavery because of the effects of sin in our lives.

I was asked this week by someone, what do we mean when we say that Yahweh has set us apart from the nations of this world? Does this mean that we see ourselves as better or "holier" than other people? Seeing oneself as set apart from the nations, or independent from the nations, is not the result of an attitude of pride, but it is the result of an act of obedience. It is a commandment of Scriptures: Be set apart, for I am set apart, says Yahweh. Be different from the nations and their habits and their ways, for I am different, says Yahweh. If we have an attitude of pride in doing this or even just in confessing this, we should search our own hearts and repent before Yahweh. But this does not relieve us of the responsibility of not following after the ways of the nations and the peoples of this world but following after the ways of Yahweh. In one sense it is independence and liberty and the lifting of bondage. But in another sense it is obedience and loyalty and love towards another Master. He has initiated and prepared and made possible our complete release from the bondage of sin, by sending his own Son as our Pesach Lamb and allowing Him to be slain for our redemption. We have been touched and inspired by this wonderful act of redemption and now have a keen desire to live according to his words and commands.