Passover Commemorative "BBQ" Meal

By **Avi Tekle**

Every now and then, I get the inspiration to do some BBQ or "low and slow" cooking. It has become an emotional outlet for me to smoke meat for hours or cook something on an open fire. I receive additional joy when the family graciously complements my amateur cooking.

One of my favorite chefs is Marcus Samuelson. He was born in a rural area in Ethiopia, but at a young age, a lovely Swedish couple adopted him and his sister. Growing up, he loved to watch his Swedish grandmother cook, and that's how he picked up his own passion for cooking. I love to watch him, because when he prepares a meal, I see the diverse accounts of his life come together. His meals tell the story of his identity and life journey. Here's something that he has shared about food and his personal history:

"*In the dead of night when I should be sleeping, I sometimes imagine the breath of [my biological mother]... I sometimes reach into that tin by my stove and take a handful of berbere [spice], sift it through my fingers, and toss it into the pan. I watch my wife cook and I imagine that I can see my mother's hands. I have taught myself the recipes of my mother's people, because those foods are for me, as a chef, the easiest connection to the mysteries of who my mother was. Her identity remains stubbornly shrouded in the past, so I feed myself and the people I love the food that she made.*"
- Marcus Samuelson

Food, besides its nutritional value, also connects us to our past. You can see it throughout the Scriptures. God uses food to communicate and create a narrative for His people: Adam and Eve's garden; the biblical kosher dietary laws; Yeshua multiplying and eating fish and bread with His disciples. However, the most significant meal in the Jewish narrative is the Passover meal, a divinely ordained "BBQ" which Yeshua eagerly desired to eat:

"That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs." (Exodus 12:8-9)

"And He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will never eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 22:15-16)

The story told during the Passover meal describes the transition of Israel from slavery into freedom. God instructs all the children of Israel to keep this tradition of communally sharing this commemorative meal and passing down the story of our slavery in Egypt to succeeding generations. God embedded in the Seder meal a preserving element – like opening a family album that perfectly reminds us of His redemptive plans for us.

This year, we invite you to join us in helping our fellow Israelis celebrate Passover – through intercession and giving. In the continuing COVID-19 crisis, we are prayerfully preparing to help 900 struggling families in our town, with ingredients to prepare and celebrate the Passover meal. We are now living in times and in a season which is unlike any before it. Life is confusing and complicated and uncertain. Suddenly, we are thrust into new realities that we probably were not prepared for, just like parents having their first baby, or an army inductee just before basic training – realities for which we probably could not have ever fully prepared.

During this holiday of freedom, please pray for the recipients and, indeed, for all Israel, that the Lord will release them from the slavery of sin and spiritual blindness, bringing them into His promised land of salvation!

When We See His Face, our Face Changes

By **Guy Cohen**

"The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace." (Numbers 6:22-27)

When we see His face, our face changes.

It is the manifestation of the priestly Aaronic blessing on our lives.

The Lord wants to reveal Himself to us – His love and plans for our lives. Yet the worries of this world make it hard to receive all He has for us. What we get instead, for all our striving, is a lack of peace as we operate in survival mode through our own efforts.

To enter into His light, we cannot remain in survival mode. Life with a "me only" attitude will cause us to look for man's solutions and not see God's leading. There is no light in living this way, whereas it is amazing to see the light on the faces of those who follow the Lord's way.

The level of faith at which we are operating becomes obvious when catastrophe strikes. Those who trust in themselves will be the ones emptying grocery store shelves, stealing, hoarding, and panicking. Those who have no faith will be the ones discounting the law and losing basic respect for their fellow human beings.

In this past year of Covid-19 closures and restrictions, what new and surprising elements have you noticed in your personality and behavior? If the pandemic continues on for years, do we really know how we will respond?

This has been a year of searching for hope and answers. First, a vaccine was the solution. However, now the health officials are concerned that it won't be effective against new strains of the virus. So we continue with masks, maybe doubled masks; and while we are at it, we keep our distance from each other.

How am I, a person of light, to act in times of uncertainty and trials such as we are experiencing? God calls us to trust in Him at all times. He knows our needs and is never late, no matter how it might appear. The difference between reverting to survival mode and standing in faith is a change that begins inside, within our own hearts. These are the days when we must diligently put on the whole armor of God, lest we find ourselves responding to all we have faced and will yet face, in a way surprising even to ourselves.

We might ask, is it truly necessary for these events to take place? Why can't God simply reveal Himself to all mankind? Obviously, this is not our choice to make. But as we go through the process of death to self, the resurrected Messiah can shine much more brightly from our faces.

Let us be faithful in seeking intimacy with Yeshua, praying to the Father with our hearts – being filled with His Spirit, even while we are still clothed in our bodies. He is waiting for us.

Strengthen Feeble Arms and Weak Knees

By **Leon Mazin**

Shalom,

Peace and grace to you from God through Yeshua the Messiah. Thank you for your prayers and support, which enable us to serve the people of Israel!

"Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees." (Hebrews 12:12)

2 Chronicles 22-23 recounts a time of governmental change in Israel, and "righteous and wicked kings," as well as the tension and depression that ruled in society. Oddly enough, such events are extremely relevant today.

Israel is having its fourth election in just two years. Even though there is once more the opportunity to choose a new government, people have little hope that there will be any real change. Likewise, repeated lockdowns, a sense of totalitarian control in everyday reality, and occasional pressure on Messianic believers from local authorities are challenging for all of us. Many struggle with feelings of depression. But history in 2 Chronicles 23:1-2 says:

"In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself. He made a covenant with the commanders of units of a hundred … they went throughout Judah and gathered the Levites and the heads of Israelite families from all the towns."

The priest Jehoiada found faithful allies and gathered the Levites. They stood around the king, and each of them took on a specific task (from prayer and service in the Temple to wielding weapons and working tools), and everything CHANGED!

Allegorically, Jehoiada's allies and the Levites today are the disciples of Yeshua seeking the Lord. They are also people of authority who fear the Lord. Their unity, their active steps, and their FAITH in the Lord can change the situation in the country, and BRING SALVATION and liberation from confusion and oppression.

We are praying that we will bring such a transformation through intercession and service to the Lord and to our country. We encourage you to view yourselves in this way as well and to actively pursue God's restoration in your own communities!

What's happening these days at Return to Zion Ministry?

- Our humanitarian outreach and aid distribution are growing. In January, two hostels with elderly people asked for our assistance to provide hot meals.
- New immigrants are coming despite the lockdown, and as an essential "industry" charity organization, we can help them.
- Our congregation meets "together" using YouTube and home groups via Zoom.
- My home group has about 120 people gathering online.
- We have begun to study the weekly Torah Portion via Zoom with friends from all around the world in English every second Saturday of the month.

Please continue to pray and partner with our ministry. Israel needs a breakthrough, and believers must play an active role. We are confident in God!

With love and best wishes in Yeshua,
Leon and Nina Mazin

Return to Zion Congregation

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Driving Through a Storm?

A study-guide roadmap for our redemption journey

By **Eitan Shishkoff**

Decades ago, our family drove through a blinding snowstorm at night on an interstate highway in Arizona on our way to a winter-break vacation in sunny California. As the car's headlights reflected off the barrage of white flakes, we slowed to a crawl, straining our eyes to see the highway markings and not stray off the road.

Our life in Messiah is also a journey, a journey of transformation with plenty of "low visibility" moments and "opportunities for growth" along the way. Each of us is on a personal road of challenge, discovery and change—and we are also travelling together with others. Understanding this journey helps us find God's love and redemption in every situation.

Here are a few basic questions that point the way:
Why do I exist? What is my **purpose**?
Who am I? What is my **identity**?
Where can I find peace and **security**?
What does it mean to love God with true **devotion**?
Why does personal **transformation** sometimes elude me, and what will achieve it?

We discern a process:
Purpose -> Identity -> Security -> Devotion -> Transformation

For each "step" in the process, there are foundational passages of Scripture. Would you join me by searching out these passages and additional passages that speak to you in these areas? It will deepen and strengthen you for the journey as you embrace whom God has made you to be and calls you to become.

I. PURPOSE—Why do I exist?
• Genesis 1:26-28 - Made in God's image & likeness, to carry His nature (2 Peter 1:4)
• Genesis 2:7-8,15 - Inbreathed by God's Spirit, He puts His very Spirit in us
• Romans 5 - Through Yeshua, we return to the purpose originally given to Adam

II. IDENTITY—Who am I?
• Psalm 8:4-8 - Man is crowned with glory and honor, granted dominion over creation
• John 1:12-13 - Through faith in Yeshua I become a child of God, born of God
• John 3:3-7 - The new (second) birth brings me into God's kingdom, forever!
• Romans 8:14-16 - I have been adopted by the Living God as a co-heir with Messiah

III. SECURITY—How can I find peace within?
• Psalm 61:2 - When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I
• Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5; Matthew 28:20 - I will never leave you nor forsake you
• Hebrews 4:16; 10:19-23 - We are to come boldly before God's throne of grace

IV. DEVOTION—What does it mean to be "in love" with God?
• Deuteronomy 6:4,5; Matthew 22:37 - Love the Lord your God with all your heart
• Song of Songs 2:4,10,13, 16 (and the entire book) - My beloved is mine and I am his
• 1 John 3:16; 4:9-10 - He loved us first and showed it by laying down His life
• Philippians 3:7-14 - All things are rubbish compared to knowing Yeshua

V. TRANSFORMATION—When will I be whole?
• Psalm 84:7; Proverbs 4:18 - The path of the righteous shines every brighter...
• Colossians 3:3, 8-10 - You have put on the new man...according to the image of the Creator
• 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, Romans 8:29 - We are being transformed into His likeness
• 2 Corinthians 5:17 - Old things have passed away, all things have become new