

The Lamb of Nisan

Ex 12:1-6 “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their father’s houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.”

For 430 years the people of Israel had lived in the land of Egypt, subjected as slaves. As God prepared to deliver His people from slavery in Egypt, He also established a new calendar for them. The month of their deliverance was to be the beginning of the year for them. (The Egyptians started their year on July 19, so God was separating them from that pattern) The name of the month at that time was *Abib*, which means “tender” or “green”, as in the young ears of grain which were forming at that time. After the Babylonian captivity, the Jews adopted the Babylonian name *Nisan*, which means “beginning.” Nisan/Abib marked the beginning of spring, and the end of winter. The Hebrew word for winter is *setav*, “time of darkness”, so spring is the end of darkness, the beginning of light and life.

We observe a principle at work here, which is still applicable to us today. When God does a work of deliverance, it ought to result in a major change in the pattern of our life. A new way of living, different from the culture we have been a part of. There is a fresh beginning for the people of God. When we think of the Hebrew calendar that God enacted, it has two cycles of holy days, the spring cycle that opens the sacred year, and the fall cycle which closes it. The spring cycle deals with new life – Passover, firstfruits – and deals with Messiah’s first coming.

Now, coming back to our text, God told the people of Israel that on the 10th day of the month, each head of household was to select a lamb for his house. This lamb was then to be kept until the 14th day, when it would be killed at sunset for Passover. You remember that Passover was the final plague which God inflicted on Egypt. God said in Ex 12:12 “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.” The lamb which was selected for each household was to protect them from the wrath of God, and it had to be perfect, without blemish.

Coming to the time of Jesus, as He neared the end of His earthly ministry, He came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, just like so many other observant Jews. There would have been a massive crowd of people making the pilgrimage at that time, and as news spread that Jesus was among the travelers making their way to Jerusalem for Passover, excitement spread, and we read in Matthew 21:8,9 that “most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!’”

We call this Sunday Palm Sunday because of those palm branches they waved. We call His entrance into Jerusalem on this day the triumphal entry because of the praise He received from such a vast multitude of Israelites. There is one other name for this day that we need to recognize, though, and it ties back to our earlier reading. They called the day on the calendar 10 Nisan, the day for selecting the Passover

lamb. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was selected by the house of Israel on lamb selection day. As the people of Jerusalem were leading their Passover lambs to their homes, Messiah was being led from the Mount of Olives into the city gates with palms and hosannas. Yes, He was being acclaimed as the rightful king, the Son of David, but unknown to the people at that time, He was also being acclaimed as the true Passover Lamb, prepared to be killed in order to take the wrath of God and give new life, new beginnings to His people. He was selected on the appointed day for the Passover lambs, and He was examined for the next four days, then killed as the true Passover lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

There is another event the Bible speaks of happening on the 10th of Nisan, and we find it in Ezekiel 40-44. On that day, Ezekiel was given a vision of the New Temple which will exist in the millennial kingdom. In ch 43, he saw the glory of God coming from the east, entering and filling the temple. Then he heard the voice out of the temple, "This is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of my people Israel forever..." In ch. 44, he was brought to the outer gate of the sanctuary, which faces east, "and it was shut. And the Lord said to me, 'This gate shall remain shut; it shall not be opened, and no one shall enter by it, for the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it. Therefore it shall remain shut.'" Ezekiel had a vision of the God of Israel entering the temple, claiming it as His own, and sanctifying it. The eastern gate through which He entered was shut to all others. Jesus' triumphal entry was a precursor to that future one. The current eastern gate to the city, leading to the temple mount, is closed. According to legend, it was sealed by Muslims in order to prevent the Jewish Messiah from entering it. They won't prevent His entrance when He comes. Just as He came the first time, He will come again, in all His glory, and claim His rightful place in the temple, beginning a new era for His people Israel and the whole world.

I said earlier that the name of the month, Nisan, meant "beginning," and it marked the beginning of a new year, the beginning of the cycle of spring and new growth. Jesus, the Lamb of Nisan, is the Lamb who gives us a new beginning. 2 Cor 5:17 says "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." Jesus is our Lamb of Nisan, the Lamb of beginnings. His first coming was all about the new birth, redemption from sin. When we receive Jesus as Savior, it is then the spring cycle begins in our lives – the winter of sin ends, new life begins. Nisan is the month in which Messiah entered Jerusalem, died on the cross, and rose from the dead. Through faith in the Lamb of Nisan, we can end the darkness and unfruitfulness of sin in our lives. Just as the lambs had to be personally chosen, picked out by the Israelites for Passover, you and I have to personally choose Jesus as our Lamb, the one who died in our place so we can be delivered from God's wrath on our sin.