

Wednesday in Holy Week 2024
Passover and Covenant

The stories of Nathan and Joanna

[Reading from Exodus 12](#)

Nathan

Hello – my name is Nathan. I've come to share my story. I hope you will be patient with the ramblings of an old Israelite man, waiting expectantly as we – God's Chosen People - prepare to cross into the Promised Land.

Chosen People? O yes, we are. Descendants of Abraham – maybe you have heard of him? YHWH, the LORD, the one true and living God – made a covenant with him.

What's that? What's a covenant? It's a special relationship - like a partnership – binding the participants together and made legal and 'live' by the shedding of an animal's life-blood. Messy – but that's the way we do it.

And in this covenant, God's part was that he would make childless Abraham & Sarah the father and mother of many nations; and Abraham and Sarah's part was that they would trust the LORD, and train their family to do what was right. And so they did.

But Abraham was way before I was born. Hundreds of years. By the time I came along, we Israelites were living in Egypt – and we were slaves. And I mean real slaves. Building pyramids. Utterly powerless and oppressed, with Pharaoh on the point of becoming genocidal. Praying and longing for freedom.

And then Moses came along, bringing the message from God to Pharaoh to let God's people go.

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Joanna

Good evening. My name is Joanna. Looking back I'm surprised to see how many years it's been since I became one of Jesus' followers – I was part of the group of women who supported Jesus practically and financially, and I went with Mary to the tomb on that first Easter Day.

Mostly, in those days, the men overlooked us – but Jesus never did. He knew that women could understand the scriptures as well as the men. He saw that we understood God's covenant with King David, that, one day, one of his descendants would be God's True King. Jesus recognised that we had heard the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel¹ and were waiting for the New Covenant they spoke about – where God would live among us and be our God, and we would truly be God's people, living in relationship with him.

¹ Jer 31:31-34, Eze 37:24-28

But mostly I was trapped in a world which thought that women had no value beyond producing children. How I longed for freedom....

Nathan

Maybe you know what happened. Plagues. They were horrible. Much worse for the Egyptians mind, and they took their revenge on us poor slaves. Nine plagues there were – and then we got this message from Moses. We were to select a lamb, slaughter it, put the blood on the doorposts and lintels, and then roast the lamb and eat it with bread made without yeast. And be ready to leave. Because God was going to strike down the firstborn of every human being and every animal to demonstrate to Pharaoh and his gods who is the One True God - and then Pharaoh would set us free. But where the door was marked with blood, it would be a sign that God's people lived there, so God would pass-over that house and the eldest would survive. And the Israelites would be saved.

And it all happened just as Moses and God had said. And when it was all over, God told us to celebrate that meal every year as a way of remembering of how the blood of the lamb saved us and set us free.

Joanna

It was Passover time and we gathered in an upper room to celebrate and eat together. Later if felt like every word and every action of Jesus was etched into my brain. He washed feet – Jesus, our Lord, washed filthy smelly feet as if he were a slave – and then told us that we needed to live lives of service. He spoke of love, of living lives characterised by love, in the same way as he had loved us. Love, and service – the distinguishing marks of the new people of God.

And he took the Passover ritual and made it different. He broke the bread and spoke of his body being broken for us. He shared the cup of wine, representing the sacrificial blood, and said that it was like his own sacrificial life-blood poured out for us. Just like it is when a covenant is made. And, just as with the Passover meal, he told us to do this to remember him.

Nathan

Pharaoh let us go. We were free.

But it wasn't long before he changed his mind. Losing all that free labour was more than he could bear. He sent the soldiers after us – and soon we were trapped between the soldiers and the sea. Death seemed certain.

But God told Moses to hold out his staff over the water. The wind got up, the sea divided into two, a dry road appeared, and we, our children and our old folk, our flocks and our herds walked through the waters, which were piled up on either side. When we had all reached the other side, Moses raised his staff once more, the waters closed up again, and the soldiers were lost in the waves.

We had passed through the waters of death and emerged on the other side.

Joanna

We went to Gethsemane, Jesus prayed in anguish, the soldiers came. Twelve hours later Jesus was hanging the Cross in agony, shedding the sacrificial blood, the blood of the New Covenant he had spoken of the evening before.

We women stayed. It was close to unbearable, but we couldn't leave him. And then, in the middle of the afternoon, Jesus cried out "It is finished" and gave up his spirit.

And the curtain in the Temple – the one which separated God's most holy place from the worshippers - was torn in two – top to bottom. God himself had opened the way to freedom to know him in a new way - just like at the Red Sea all those years ago.

Nathan

You probably know the rest of the story. God established a covenant with the whole of Israel at Mount Sinai when he gave us the Commandments and other rules for living.

And then, just a few days ago, after we had wandered in the desert for 40 years or more and as we prepared to go into the Promised Land, Moses gathered us all together one last time, and reminded us of it.

He reminded us that God's part of the Covenant is to bless us and to make us into a people who will represent him to the rest of humanity. And that our part is to follow the laws and guidelines that he has set down.

And he reminded us of how it would be if we turned away from God.

And then he said this, "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.

Then Moses appointed Joshua as his successor, climbed Mount Nebo, looked out over the Promised Land and, being old and full of years, he died.

Choose life. I too am old and full of years, but for every day I have left, I will do that. I will choose Life.

Joanna

He was taken down from the cross and laid in a new tomb, and we prepared to go and anoint his body once the Sabbath rest was over.

But when we got there on the Sunday, there was no body to anoint. Jesus had risen! The ultimate sign that death was defeated – he had passed through death as the Israelites had passed through the Red Sea – and he was alive! We saw him, spoke to him. Ate with him.

He was risen to new life – the old covenants were fulfilled and the New Covenant was established. Our Lord, our God and our King.

And now we can all partner with God. Through Jesus we are all set free to become God's people – men, women, Jews, non-Jews, poor, rich, or any other characteristics that human beings devise to divide and separate us from each other. Free to live lives of love and service and to represent God to the world.

Free for a new life in the Kingdom of God.

A reading from the book of Exodus, chapter 12²

The First Passover Instituted

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt:

This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.

You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the

² Verses 1-3,5-8, 11,

lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgements: I am the Lord.

The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.