Dear Lee, dear friends

Why the story of the 5 rabbis? And why so prominently, right at the start of the seder? I had not thought about it until now, but just recited it by force of inertia and habit. (In recent years, though, I find a particular resonance with Rabbi El'azar saying "I am about seventy years old...") Thinking it over however gives an idea.

Rabbi Akiva perished in the Bar Kochva revolt, so the event told in the Haggadah happened not too long after the destruction of the Second Temple. (Was Rabbi El'azar old enough to remember the Temple?) One wonders whether the seder was widely celebrated outside Jerusalem while the Temple was still standing. To celebrate the holiday properly in those days, you had to make your pilgrimage to Jerusalem, which included making the Passover sacrifice there and eating of it.

The Passover seder we observe, I suspect, evolved only after the destruction of Jerusalem. If so, its observance by the 5 rabbis--in Bnei Brak!--was among the earlier seders celebrated, certainly the oldest of which we have a record. That may be the main reason for telling its story.

Peace

David Stern

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Lee Tracy wrote:

Subject: The 5 Rabbis -- why is the story there?

From: "Lee Tracy" <ltracy@earthlink.net>

Date: Thu, 24 Apr 2003 03:03:38 EDT

To: <recon-j@shamash.org>

Every year, the five rabbis story confuses me. This year, I really noticed

how it confused those around the table who were paying attention. Stuff

before that makes sense. Stuff after makes sense. The five rabbis story just

sits there. What is it in the haggadah for? What is the meaning of it?

I have come across one explanation that the rabbis were all secretly

plotting in the time of the Bar Kochba revolt and the students reminding

them it was time for morning prayers were really warning them that the

Romans were coming. I have also seen others point out that one of the rabbis

was a devout pacifist and would not have been part of the revolt. I read

another explanation saying that it is there because these rabbis would

ordinarily not be together and must have overcome their differences to be

together, and the story is supposed to say something about transcending

differences. I am not convinced. Does anyone have any good readings or

explanations they can share or direct me to? I want to use them in next

year's seder.

lRt