

**Achare Mot After the Death****Torah:** Lev. 16:1-18:30**Haftarah:** Ez. 22:1-16 (S), Amos 9:7-15 (A)**Brit Chadashah:** Heb. 9:11-28; I P.1:13-16 (L), I Cor. 6:9-20 (F)

## Introduction:

There are now seven Shabbats until Shavuot (Pentecost) and I want to deal with “countdown” as it relates to the three major themes of the Festival. First of all, Shavuot is a **(1) Harvest Festival**, the Second Pilgrimage (Sheloshim Regalim) after the wheat harvest. Second of all, it is the **(2) Festival of the Giving of the Law** (three categories: Principles, applications and rituals) at the Mountain – sort of a definition of Israel with a firm mandate on how to serve G-d. Lastly, it is the **(3) Festival of the Holy Spirit**, setting the New Covenant in motion (Heb. 7:25), where three laws (my understanding, the Law of G-d and the Law of the Spirit) gang up on the lawless law (I John 2:15, 16 – three henchmen: the devil, the world and the flesh).

I want to give you a series that weaves these themes into a countdown. We have to sow in order to reap – there is always a period of waiting and a need to gather, as the cycles turn, because we are a generational community, centered on the L-rd’s timetable. We are not an uncertain people, looking for purpose in a world full of choices (Micah 6:8). Our generational community has a firm mandate of **faith** and **obedience**, summarized in the Ten Commandments and applied in the rules and rituals surrounding the lifestyle of worship and obedience we are called to, as Jews and as Gentiles.

Finally, it is not just about us, the two fold promise to Abraham is being fulfilled – the Spirit is calling all mankind to make a choice, to make aliyah – to come home to the Father, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. The Harvest fields are whitening (Matt. 9:36-38), and the L-rd is sowing and reaping in the lives of every individual, and He wants us to be labourers in that Harvest.

How? Three ways. **First**, we participate in the Harvest by who we are and how we live our lives (Matt. 5:13-16). **Secondly**, we become labourers in His Harvest by what we believe and what we teach – what we stand for and the priorities we are building into our lives (Matt. 28:19, 20). **Finally**, we are a testimony to our world by what G-d is doing in our lives, and how we are responding to that (Acts 1:8).

We have an evangelistic imperative which we must take seriously and fulfill with great wisdom. I am not saying we should arm ourselves with religious tracts and go on a door to door campaign for three reasons. First of all, it offends more people than it reaches (I Peter 3:15) and is very inefficient – intrusive, confrontational salesmanship may sell a few cars, but it does not build the kind of rapport upon which a spiritual community can be built.

Secondly, we live in a different world than the one in which this kind of method produced results. When small pox became a problem in Europe, one doctor, who specialized in bleeding patients, to release infection, said: “Small pox, I will teach you to respond to bleeding”. A method that no longer works, or that does not produce results, needs to be dropped or modified.

Am I calling for us to be deceptive and to use “friendship evangelism”, so that we can use our charm to recruit people for the Gospel? No. And this brings me to my third point and to the seven messages which I am going to share with you in this series. We are to share **three kinds** of truth and cooperate with what the Spirit is doing in the lives of people (John 16:8-11). The **(1) first truth** is the truth of the Bible, which is not as complicated as it seems (**May 3<sup>rd</sup>**). The **(2) second truth** is the truth of G-d in our lives (Phil. 2:13, Rom. 8:28), which is more complicated than it seems (**May 10<sup>th</sup>**). The **(3) third truth** is the truth of G-d in our midst, as a community, and boy is this complicated (**May 17<sup>th</sup>**).

Well what is G-d doing in the lives of everybody in the world? (Acts 17, Prov. 8 – **May 24<sup>nd</sup>**). How do we handle opposition to us as individuals, and to our community mandate? (**May 31<sup>st</sup>**). How do we handle people when they discover our clay feet and the problems and the contradictions that have always plagued the people of G-d, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile? (**June 7<sup>th</sup>**).

Today, I want to conclude with a countdown passage which has haunted me for 31 years, and which brings me back to all three truths of G-d, and both drives me nuts and gives me peace: Is. 28:9-13 (Jer. 9:23,24).

28:9 We are not always ready to be taught, we have to grow in trust and get used to spirituality as a lifestyle – we kind of have to take the time that it takes to get our hearts and our lives together, and to find our place in the community. Until this happens, we are not ready to launch out and teach and charge over the horizon in search of adventure and mission – cause it is all about Him and what He has done (and is doing), and not about us.

28:10. G-d is not in a hurry, and He is thorough. He wants us to be well formed and solid, before He uses us or sends us. Ministry and spirituality are lifetime and lifestyle realities that must be firmly rooted in who we are and how we live, so that when the storms come, we are not overcome (Matt. 7:24,27).

We are beginning again at B’nai Chayim, and as much as I want to get going and move ahead, we will take things as quickly and as slowly as we need to, to make sure our foundation is firm, and our community is built on a solid footing, spiritually, financially and organizationally. Yes I’m impatient. Yes, I’m patient. What’s the difference? Life is too short to play games. I want to deal in spiritual realities and we will move ahead at B’nai Chayim as quickly as our acquired spiritual reality will let us.

28:11, 12. G-d is the ultimate communicator and He will get His message across. He wants us to get it, before we take it to others, and it is all about rest and renewal. Everything we do, needs to be based on rest and aimed at rest, at who He is, what He has done, and what He is doing.

28:13. He is infinitely more stubborn than we are, and He has had lots more practice. If we do not do it His way, well, we stumble, are snared, fall backwards and are broken. This does not mean that only spiritual people have happy lives, drive big cars or are in perfect health. It means that spirituality is the only treasure worth anything in this life, and without it, you are an eternal wretch, with no eternal life, and no final reality – no means of invisible support – and in a very real sense, spiritually insane.

Let me conclude with an old favourite – Jer. 9:23, 24 and ask you to examine your lives as we countdown to the Harvest – the one in June, the one in your own life and the final one that is coming for the whole of creation.

“Thus says the L-rd, do not let the rich man boast in his riches, nor the strong man in his strength, nor even the wise man in his wisdom. Let the one who wants to boast, boast in this – that he or she knows that I am YHVH (the eternal L-rd) who exercises mercy, righteousness and justice on the earth. For it is in this that I take pleasure, says YHVH.”

Mercy brings healing and seeks for the best.

Righteousness does that which is right, and establishes what should be as the priority.

Justice, corrects and punishes wrong, and does whatever it takes to re-establish mercy and righteousness, because this is what the Spirit does, and what spirituality is – nothing more, nothing less.

Shabbat Shalom.