

12 Nissan, 5774 (12/4/14) **Shabbat HaGadol: Four Reasons to Celebrate** J. M. Terrett

Acharei Mot **After the Death** **Singular, Separate and Focused**

Torah: Lev. 16:1-18:30

Ch. 16: A first personal high priestly cleansing, a bull and a goat for atonement, a scapegoat, two burnt offering rams; the double blood cleansing atonement of the mercy seat and the incense altar, releasing the emissary (sin bearing) goat, a second personal high priestly cleansing before the first burnt offering of the two rams and a double final purification cleansing, first by the one who released the scapegoat and then by the one who burnt the bodies atonement bull and goat. Year by year the emissary goat took the confessed sins of the people into the wilderness until the Lamb of G-d came and removed them forever.

Ch. 17: Centralized (community) worship. Goat worship forbidden, along with the forbidding of eating the life which is in the blood. Personal cleansing by someone who eats defiled meat.

Chapter 18: the singular assumed acceptable context of sexuality is marriage. This sexuality should not violate kinship, gender or species. There are fourteen forbidden marital unions, five forbidden sexual practices (offering children to Moloch included here which profanes the name of G-d). two horrible sex acts (sodomy and bestiality) which are called an abomination and the violation of the three categories of acceptable sexuality (kinship, gender and species) are given as the reason why the land is vomiting up its defiled inhabitants and is a warning.

Haftarah: Mal. 3:4-24

Call to repentance before the arrival of the Day of the L-rd (sevenfold mention) and sevenfold indictment of evil doers. Double mention of Elijah's arrival before the Day of the L-rd – he is considered to be the “eventual” guest at every Seder – though since our L-rd the Messiah gave up Passover for us, Jew and Gentile, He is really the One who hovers over every Jewish Passover and it is His spirit which teaches His people (and all peoples) repentance so they are not judged before His return.

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 6:9-20

The Tenfold kingdom exclusions, the threefold kingdom entrance cleansings as our bodies are described as the temple of the L-rd and we are described as one spirit with Him.

Shabbat HaGadol (Bernie, p. 167) **Ps. 26** Jewish Hero: Mike Holland

I want to talk about three things, even four this morning as we make our home stretch preparations for our Seder. Here are three reminders. Have you all removed the leavening from your homes in preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread? Have you stocked up on matzah for the week of the festival?

I have lots of gluten free matzah to last the week where all leavened products are avoided. Also Next Shabbat we will be having chocolate matzah instead of challah and it is our first Yizkor memorial of the new festival cycle – bring pictures of the beloved departed!

The first of the four reasons to celebrate which I want to talk to you about this morning has to do with the tenth of the month of Nissan, which was the day when every Jewish family was to procure a lamb in preparation for the coming Passover. This was done for a number of reasons, but primarily to avoid a last minute scramble that would have set off the idolatrous Egyptians unnecessarily (or prevent a Jewish family from participating in the first Seder). The Egyptians had already been informed about what was to come and it likely that when the believing Egyptians saw what was going on, they also procured a lamb and went through the rite of circumcision, and would be recovered in time for the Seder and the Exodus.

There are two elements of the first Seder which are not binding on those of us who perform it in later generations. We no longer put blood on the doors – because the angel of death does not slay the Egyptian first born at Passover anymore and we no longer require that our guests who celebrate the Seder with us be circumcised, because our people do not get up in the night and flee from Egypt at Passover anymore. We remember these requirements because they had to do with the Exodus, as we look back on what happened and celebrate the great deliverance which was performed by the L-rd on our behalf and which is not repeated.

Since communion was taken from the ritual of the Passover, if we required that all of those who celebrate the Seder with us be circumcised, should we also then not serve communion to those of our guests and our people who are not circumcised? I think not.

Now let us move on to the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Chag Hamotzot). First of all, it is not intended to be a kind of fasting because it is a kind of feasting. But what are we feasting? We are feasting both our freedom and the seven days which it took our people to walk and make it out of Egyptian territory.

They had to pack up and take off in a hurry – right after the Seder and you can imagine the confusion as their neighbours were loading them up with rituals clothing and gold and silver and pressing them to hurry and get out of dodge. They had to round up their livestock, fill up their wagons, find where they put the tent and load up with fuel and water – and all of this happened in the dark. There must have been a lot of bumping and running into things.

As they moved off they were really a motley crew which did not have time to organize and most of them had never travelled far from home and would have been nervous about heading into the uncharted wilderness. We are not told how long it took them to reach the sea of Reeds, but they must have been beginning to sort themselves out and once their enemies were slain and there was no longer any fear of immediate pursuit, they may have gone through the stuff they brought and begun a community wide triage. The path they took must have been strewn with abandoned things and the kids must have been running around chasing each other and asking the perpetual question: are we there yet?

They would have had to stop for short breaks to sleep and cook food, but never long enough to let their bread rise because the Egyptians would still have been capable of a second assault and now they could never go back – because of the first born and because of the slaughter of the army elite. A violent, clean break had been made and they were putting in a redemptive distance between themselves and the land of their former captivity.

What does this mean for us? It is never a convenient time to serve the L-rd, because He does not operate according to our schedule, but the same process of a hasty, complete exodus from the things of the world in our own lives also needs to occur and as we languish without our yeast, we can celebrate the fact that we have become glory bound pilgrims, tossing aside the useless things of the world as we stride towards our true home.

What we are actually doing is both celebrating our deliverance and learning to integrate the imperatives of the kingdom into our joyful pilgrimage. We move away from the sad declaration: “I can't get no satisfaction” and declare more and more: “the joy of the L-rd is my strength”. We begin to learn a new way of living and progressively realize that neither Egypt, nor the things or the habits of Egypt really matter any more.

You see, both the destination and the journey matter more than the place we have come from. In 1959, my family left the hot weather of Zimbabwe and landed in the frozen wastes of Canada. We had to learn to wear different clothing and eat different food and even to speak a different language. Not very much of what we had in Zimbabwe was very useful in Canada. We brought mementoes and when you visit, I may show you a few of them, but we had to make so many major shifts that it took us longer than seven days to get it all sorted out.

It took Israel seven days to realize that they really were no longer in Egypt and that there was no going back. They still had many adjustments to make but there are three which are still important for us as we come to our annual festival of joyful freedom and flight (Unleavened Bread). First of all, we are not longer in Egypt – we no longer belong to this world. Second, there is no going back, because we do not belong there any more. I am quite friendly and open to the arts and culture, but not to the secular values of a society which is focused on pleasure, gain and is in open rebellion (and denial) when it comes to the spiritual realities of G-d's universe. I really do not fit in. None of us do. We are not misfits, we are pilgrims.

Lastly, our lives are a journey and we have to keep moving until we make it home. We need to see our lives as a pilgrimage from conception through the grave to our Father's Home in Glory and we are focused on the most amazing coming event since the resurrection of our Messiah – the arrival of the eternal Kingdom of G-d in the new Heavens and the new Earth, where we shall receive our glorified bodies and eat of the tree of life and drink from the living waters forever. And as we say during the Seder, as good as this life may get, what is coming is infinitely better beyond our ability to conceive or describe.

We are not in Egypt anymore. We don't fit there any more and there is no going back. We are heaven bound and need to dump any unnecessary baggage which is not going to be useful once we get we we are all certainly going.

Here is a scary thought – everyone is Kingdom bound in that judgment and the kingdom are coming whether people like it or not or whether they are getting ready or not – you think the Egyptians screamed and mourned – wait for the sound on judgement day (but I like to think that the shouts of joy from the redeemed will drown out the screams of agony from the lost – which crowd do you run with?).

Let me now talk about how Unleavened Bread and the L-rd's Table are related. I Cor. 5:6-8 calls believers to celebrate the feast with the unleavened bread of purity. It is talking both about unleavened bread and about the L-rd's Table. In I Corinthians, Paul says that if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged with the world. We need to regularly perform personal spiritual inventories so that we do not clog up our hearts and lives with the things of the flesh, the world or the enemy. That is what the L-rd's Table is all about.

We remember His body which was broken for us and His blood which was shed for us and we have a mini feast – called an agape feast in some churches, where we celebrate both our ongoing forgiveness and cleansing and our eventual reuniting with our L-rd in the coming Kingdom – and we realize that the marriage supper of the Lamb is really a Passover feast to celebrate our eternal deliverance from the Egypt of this world and our permanent entrance into the Eternal Kingdom, once all enemies have been put under His footstool and all issues have been resolved and healed and our eternal bliss begins.

Communion is both a solemn and a joyful celebration and while some Messianics feel that it should only be celebrated as part of the Seder, our L-rd said “whenever you celebrate it” and it is really our personal, regular Festival of Unleavened Bread where we take stock of the three things I mentioned previously with the Festival of Unleavened Bread. We remember and celebrate that we are delivered from the Egypt of this world. We also realize that there is no going back and that we no longer belong to this world or really fit in. Finally we remember that we are pilgrims bound for glory and we regularly discard things which are useless for our journey and for our destination.

I would like to conclude this morning by talking about the third festival which occurs at Passover and which celebrates a transition from wilderness wandering to taking up residence in the Promised Land. You see, when Joshua lead our people across the Jordan, performed the mass circumcision and celebrated the first Passover in the Holy Land, the next day, which was Chag Hamotzot, the manna stopped and the people began to eat of the fruit of the land.

First fruits celebrates the provision of G-d were our lives move from readjusting to the new order of things as we wander and get our lives used to walking with the L-rd as we settle into faithful obedience and we discover that it actually works. He really does meet our needs and He will feed us from the fruit of the land where we live as we make our lives revolve around His practical provision. This is another way of looking at the meaning of the annual festival cycle.

As we remember our deliverance and our journeying from the habits and attitudes of Egypt to living lives based on the principles and teachings of the Scriptures, we discover how practical the L-rd is and how He will meet our needs as we continue our generational journey through this life to our final home. We reach a point of spiritual “settling-in” where the prerequisites of the Kingdom (our faith and our obedience) become second nature and we begin to live in His promises and our lives are blessed by Him through every stage and transition we face and travel through

Some of us will make aliyah and take up residence in Israel, others of us will let the power and promises of His kingdom take up residence in our lives and together, those in the Holy Land and those among the nations, will make aliyah to our Father's Home in glory, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

I have spoken to you about the tenth of Nissan where the preparations were made to celebrate the first Passover. Two of the provisions for the first Seder are remembered and no longer practised or required. So we will not be putting any blood on the doors and Blue Meadows on Monday night and we will not be checking to see that only circumcised men participate in the Seder. We are remembering our double deliverance, we are not repeating it.

I next spoke to you about the triple lesson we learn from the seven days of the Festival of Unleavened Bread: it takes time sometimes to realize that we are no longer in Egypt and that there is no going back, because we no longer fit in and finally that we need to become Kingdom focused because we are heaven bound.

We then looked at our own mini Unleavened Bread where we regularly perform spiritual inventory and dump the junk in our hearts and lives which has no kingdom or heavenly value as we regularly feast on our renewed forgiveness and cleansing. We also focus on our ongoing connection with the L-rd with whom one day we will be reunited, because our bodies are His temple and we are one spirit with Him on the inside.

We talked about First Fruits where our lives settle in to the spiritual realities of G-d's Word and of His practical provision as we make our lives revolve around His Word and the festival cycle as we journey through this life towards our final destination in glory.

This is Shabbat HaGadol, where we reach the point of no return, the jumping off or the launch pad. It is where we begin the launch sequence once more and make sure that our lives revolve around both our redemption and the festivals of the L-rd. It is also where we make sure that all of our systems are functioning as they should be and that our spirituality remains intact and is the driving force (the hard drive) of our lives.

Getting ready for Pesach, Chag HaMotzot and Yom Habikkurim gives us the opportunity to be spiritually proactive and make sure that we are putting first things first and not allowing the flesh, the world or the enemy to get a foothold in our lives as we begin another festival cycle and move closer to the L-rd and as His return moves closer to us.

May the L-rd and the things of the L-rd remain our singular Gadol in every area of our lives. Next stop, our annual Seder, for one more year.

Lets pray.