

Shabbat Pesach (Chag Ha Matzot (Yom Habikkurim) Longing and Groaning

Torah: Exodus 12:21-51 (Numbers 28:16-25)

Haftarah: Joshua 3:5-7; 5:2-16; 6:1,27

Brit Chadashah: John 1:29-31; 10:14-18

This week's Torah portion recalls the exodus of our people out of the land of Egypt and our need to celebrate this freedom throughout our generations. We are never to forget that the blood of the Lamb prevented the angel of death from striking down our first born. We are to remember the unleavened bread they ate for the week that it took them to walk out of Egyptian held territory. Any Egyptian who wanted to join this departure had to be circumcised, because the L-rd only spared the first born of those who belonged to Him.

The Haftarah portion deals with Joshua crossing the Jordan river while it was in flood and performing a mass circumcision of the children born during the wilderness wandering. The newly crossed people, newly circumcised, observed their first Passover in the land and the next day the manna eased and they ate the wheat of the land, while they observed the week long festival of Unleavened Bread, which begins today.

The New Testament portion reminds us both that the L-rd voluntarily surrendered His life as the cosmic Passover Lamb and that He has other sheep out side the flock of Israel that He died for.

Before our people experienced the awesome power of the Exodus, they spent many years groaning and longing for the deliverance that did not seem to be in a hurry to come and set them free from the oppression they were living through. Our Torah reading tells us that they were set free 430 years to the day from the time they entered the land and that should give us great comfort because we shall all be delivered precisely according to G-d' appointed times – not a minute too soon, not a second too late.

What is His will that we do to occupy our time until we are finally set free from the Egypt of this world? Our primary purpose is twofold: we are to shine and be salty before a darkening world to encourage as many darkness dwellers as possible to join us when it comes time to leave this withering world and also, we are never to give any of our heart allegiance to anything which belongs to this world which is passing away.

This being said, we are to give our heart to longing and groaning for the Kingdom and not allow where we are or what we are passing through to define who we are or to show us how to live in this extremely temporary portion of our lives. As we travel through this life, we have to learn to survive spiritually, before we can learn to thrive and not be sucked into the darkness which keeps trying to attach itself to our souls and pull us away from the straight and narrow path we are called to follow on our way home to our Father's Home in glory.

I would dearly love for the kingdom to come immediately, so that we could all be instantly set free from the swirling darkness and meaningless folly of this world, but there is a clear duty for me to fulfil while I am waiting for this glorious liberation to happen.

We have to learn to give our lives over to longing and groaning for the world which is certainly one day going to burst forth upon the unsuspecting darkness dwellers of the present age. Now this groaning and longing can either draw us closer to the L-rd and to the principles of His

coming Kingdom, or it can turn us into bitter complainers who grow daily more angry that we have to wade through the folly of this world, before we can experience the joy of the world to come.

Knowing the glory of the kingdom which is to come, believers who are stuck wandering through the wilderness of our world could fall into the trap of saying: why me? And where are you G-d? They could also whine to the point of saying, I can't stand it anymore and when will it be finally over? But when this line of thinking makes it all about us, we will sink because this focuses on where we currently are and does not give us the patience to wait for the wonderful glory which is to come.

We will spiritually flounder if we do not understand that the trials and tribulations are the valley road we have to navigate through, both as the only way home and as the will of G-d for our lives in this life. We may not like it when our lives become a burden as this world's pharaoh increases the oppression we have to survive, but along with captive Israel we have a double duty to perform. We have to learn never to give up and we also have to learn never to give up on the promises which are functionally more real than any of the pain and suffering this old world can throw at us.

One day it will finally be over and all along the way, He will always sustain us through all the trials we have to face, before our final deliverance finally grants us the eternal deliverance we are all longing for. We have to learn to be patient in trials as we rejoice, not in what we are going through, but in the far off promises which are daily drawing nearer.

Like David, as we are being chased up and down and around all the mountains of the wilderness of this world, instead of giving up and getting bitter, we can rejoice in the spiritual realities of our relentless wandering. He is our good Shepherd and as we flee, He will make us lie down in green pastures, as He prepares a feast for us in the presence of our enemies. The cup of our deliverance will always be overflowing and despite the pain and the turmoil, our head will always be anointed, because we are living daily for the day we know is coming, and instead of looking around and worrying where we are, we keep our eyes focused ahead of us on the home where we will spend eternity.

Our challenge is not to see how many trials we can go through, or how many times we are privileged to suffer for our faith. Our challenge is to stay kingdom focused and nurture the inner joy that comes from walking with the Messiah daily, knowing that His kingdom is finally coming, even if it takes its time to get here. We need to learn to groan for the kingdom and the spiritual release it will award us with and not be trapped into any anger or bitterness because our particular valley is painfully long and full of difficult surprises we could really do without.

Are you groaning and longing for the kingdom or are you too busy complaining about the valleys you have to keep on walking through before you are finally and forever set free? Have patience, look for His provision and set your eyes firmly focused on our final destination.

Sermon: *Chronology and Testimony*

Thursday this week was Maundy Thursday on the Gentile Christian Calendar, when they believe that the Last Supper occurred. They have the right idea but the wrong date. However, Maundy Thursday holds a special place in my heart, because it was on March 30, Maundy Thursday, 1972, that I invited the Messiah into my heart. So I am 46 years old in the L-rd. It has

been an amazing, bumpy journey, learning how to repack the heart baggage I came to the L-rd with, but, honestly, even when I was really sick with my scent allergy (MCS), I have never regretted a single day. Sometimes life sucks, but the L-rd never does.

A close reading of the Scriptures will give you more accurate chronology of the events surrounding the suffering, death and resurrection of our Messiah. One little clarification about the language of the Bible. When it says the third day, it means AFTER the third day – an idiomatic expression, where the words together have a different meaning from the words separately – a phenomenon common to most languages.

In the year when our Messiah was crucified, Passover fell on Tuesday at sunset (14th of Nissan between sunset and full dark). The fifteenth of Nissan (Wednesday) was when the Festival of Unleavened Bread began.

He was arrested, tried and crucified in the early morning of Wednesday and was crucified during the day. They wanted Him off the cross before Wednesday sunset, because, Jewish days end and begin at sunset. Wednesday sunset, when Thursday began, is when the Festival of First Fruits began and it was the biggest temple festival of the year. It was one of the three pilgrimage festivals when the people would bring their agricultural tithes to the temple (Even though Unleavened Bread is listed in the Bible as one of the three pilgrimage festivals, but that is another discussion).

He was already dead, so they buried Him around sunset and He spent Thursday, Friday and all day Saturday, from sunset to sunset, in the tomb, and rose sometime after sunset on Saturday. In the Hebrew calendar, sunset on Saturday, is when the first day of the week begins. The important thing was that He arose AFTER the third day, which just happened to be on the first day of the week (Sunday).

In Hebrew, we only name one day of the week – the Sabbath, which is the seventh day of the week. The rest of the days are counted as the first day before the Sabbath, the second day before the Sabbath, all the way to the sixth day, which is called the eve of the Sabbath (Erev Shabbat).

Which ever day is the one AFTER three days from the crucifixion, is when believers should celebrate the resurrection, no matter what day of the week it falls on. Making Sunday into a special day for the resurrection is not supported by the context and the chronology of the Bible. The Messiah is called our Sabbath, He is never called our Sunday.

However, when a Festival (Holy Day) falls on an unnamed day of the week, it is called a High Day or a High Sabbath (John 19:31), to distinguish it from the weekly Sabbath, but the day is still not named, even though it is in reality a weekday Sabbath. It only bears the name of the Festival which falls on the day, nothing more, nothing less.

In the year when our Messiah died, the High Day or High Sabbath was from sunset Wednesday to sunset Thursday, and Friday functioned as a day of preparation for the weekly Sabbath. Both the 15 of Nissan and the 16th of Nissan were considered Sabbaths, but the 16th was considered more important, because it was the Festival of First Fruits and began the annual countdown to Shavuot (Pentecost).

In that week, there were two weekday Sabbaths: Unleavened Bread (15th of Nissan, Tuesday sunset to Wednesday sunset) and First Fruits (the 16th of Nissan, Wednesday sunset, to

Thursday sunset). The regular seventh day Sabbath never varies. The 16th of Nissan was considered a High Day and the 15th was considered a day of preparation (John 19:31) even though it should have been considered a weekday Sabbath also, but, again, why this happened is also a discussion for another day.

Biblically, the 15th of Nissan should also have been considered a Sabbath, but our Messiah was crucified early Wednesday morning, which was the 15th of Nissan and buried before sunset, which was the beginning of the 16th of Nissan.

Two passages give us further clarification. Luke 23:56 says that the Ladies saw the place where our L-rd was buried, then bought their spices and rested on the Sabbath (The Great Day). Mark 16:1 says that these same ladies rested on the Sabbath and then bought their spices. Did they buy two sets of spices before and after the Sabbath? Both, because in that week they observed two Sabbaths, First Fruits and the seventh day Sabbath.

They bought their spices on Friday, which was both after the weekday Sabbath (Great Day) and before the weekly seventh day Sabbath. They only came once to the tomb on the first day of the week, with the intention of finishing the embalming of our Messiah's body. They were going to use the spices which they had bought after the High Day, weekday Sabbath and before the weekly, seventh day Sabbath. They actually rested twice, once on the High Day, weekday Sabbath and on the weekly seventh day Sabbath. Again, we know this because they only came back to the tomb once, on the first day of the week.

Our Messiah was in the tomb three full days, sunset to sunset, and rose AFTER the third day. The earliest church tradition celebrated His suffering on Good Wednesday and not on Good Friday. Jewish people do not consider a portion of a day the same as a full day, so if He had suffered on Friday, He would not have resurrected until after sunset on Monday, which is when Tuesday starts.

Gentile Christians were not aware that when Festivals fell on a weekday, that day became a weekday Sabbath and a High Day. They were only aware of the seventh day Sabbath, so they crunched the original chronology to fit into their flawed understanding that there is only one, seventh day Shabbat is Judaism. They moved Good Wednesday to Good Friday and wrongly understood that the Messiah was in the tomb for only portions of three days.

As it stands, in the year when He suffered, died and rose, the following chronology should be applied. He suffered in the early morning of Wednesday, was buried before sunset on Wednesday and spent three full days and nights (sunset to sunset) in the grave.

Could He have risen on Saturday? Not according to how gentile people reckon days – from midnight to midnight and yes according to how Jewish people reckon days – from sunset to sunset. So in Judaism, sunset on Saturday begins Sunday, so He could have arisen anytime after sunset on Saturday, when the Sabbath was over and the first day of the week began, which was AFTER the third day since He died.

The Gentile Christian chronology has all the right details, but messes up the days when things actually occurred, except for one thing. He did rise AFTER the third day, which in that year, just happened to be the first day of the week (Sunday).

This year, according to the biblical chronology, He would have suffered in the early morning of Saturday, which this year is the 15th of Nissan, and been crucified before sunset on Saturday, which is when the 15th of Nissan ends and the 16th of Nissan starts. Following the biblical chronology, He would have spent Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, sunset to sunset, in the grave. He would have risen AFTER three days, sometime after sunset on Tuesday. This is why we are holding our resurrection Service on Wednesday, which is the 19 of Nissan and is AFTER three days, sunset to sunset, since He died.

It takes a while to get your head around all the details, because our culture usually thinks of days as running from midnight to midnight, instead of from sunset to sunset. Also many are confused by the idiomatic expression "the Third Day", which should be understood to mean AFTER three days. In the year when our Messiah was crucified, died and rose, there were three Sabbaths, the 15th of Nissan, the 16th of Nissan and the regular weekly Sabbath, on the 18th of Nissan.

In temple times, the first day of Passover, the 15th of Nissan, was considered to be a just a day of preparation for the Great Day, the Festival of First Fruits, which fell on the 16th of Nissan and inaugurated the countdown to Pentecost (Shavuot). The Messiah spent three full days in the grave, starting before sunset on the 15th of Nissan (which is the beginning of the 16th of Nissan) and He arose sometime after sunset of the 18 of Nissan (which is the beginning of the 19th of Nissan).

I know that there is some disagreement about when to start counting the Omer (50 days to Shavuot/Pentecost), whether it should be on the day after the 15th of Nissan, or on the day after the weekly, seventh day Sabbath which follows this Festival. According to our understanding of festivals which should be considered weekday Sabbaths, it would start on the 16th of Nissan, which is Sunday April 1st (no fooling).

As long as you have a chronology which recognizes that the Messiah was in the grave for three full days (sunset to sunset) and realize that when a festival falls on a weekday, it is considered a weekday Sabbath (and is called a High Day), then your Crucifixion to Resurrection chronology will not be far wrong. Fixing Sunday as the permanent Resurrection day violates the biblical chronology and gives Sunday an importance it only had whenever it was the day AFTER the third day. It is not the day AFTER the third this year.

Join us on Wednesday evening at 7 pm in the chapel of Saint Timothy's for our 19th of Nissan, AFTER the third day, Resurrection service.

Again, Gentile Christians have the right idea, with all the major details, but the Gentile church follows the wrong chronology. How important is it to follow the biblical chronology? I would say that it is important for those who claim to follow the Bible and not the traditions of men. But over and above biblical accuracy, what really matters is that we acknowledge that He is risen and will one day return.

Nonetheless, I am a bit of a stickler for accuracy when it comes to what the Bible says, and even though I have been invited to preach this coming Easter Sunday, I will celebrate His resurrection AFTER the three days He spent in the tomb, which this year falls on Wednesday, April 4th. The first day of the week has no special significance in the Bible, except when it happens to be the day AFTER the third day. Also, the day AFTER the third day is only special once a year, in the season of Passover, when the day AFTER three days is connected to the

resurrection, the seventh day weekly Sabbath is important once a week, all year long.

May your celebration of His suffering, death and resurrection be blessed, whether or not you have the right biblical chronology – because it is the reality of the resurrection which really matters and He rose over 2,000 years ago. He is risen indeed and is alive forever more! Are you alive in Him? By faith have you been resurrected with Him and is your life hidden with Him in glory? Are you looking ahead to His return, when the dead shall be resurrected and those of us who are alive, will be freed from our mortal bodies, in the twinkling of an eye?

In honour of my recent 46th spiritual birthday, I want to share my testimony and it revolves around a series of encounters and finally being cornered by a single Bible verse.

Before: I was a troubled immigrant raised in a dysfunctional secular home and bullied into oblivion in Junior High. Sunk into depression and hiding my pain and confusion in alcohol and drugs. Looking in all the wrong places for the truth (Buddhism). Things went from bad to worse – dropped out of high school – went back to a Catholic school and encountered charismatic Catholics but kept my distance from them, mainly because of the drug lifestyle).

In my second semester of my first year at university, I moved into residence and encountered a campus ministry that intrigued me. I sometimes agreed with them, but more often argued with them (Al Buzzard in the Arts and Science student lounge). My life was spiralling out of control and I was ready to give up and disappear into the hippy drug culture, but the L-rd had other ideas.

On my floor in residence there lived two evangelical Christians who everybody liked and who shared their faith with conviction and respect. It was in late March, 1972 and finals were coming up. In order to be able to study, I would smoke up and when I settled down, then I would study. When I had no dope, I would watch TV for an hour and study for two hours.

During one of my TV sessions, one of the Christians, Percy, gave me a brochure about a Hindu mystic who had given his life to the L-rd. I read it and was incensed – I understood that Christians adopted eastern religions and not the other way around. I went back to my room, loaded up with all my eastern religion holy books and knocked on his door.

He and his roommate had gone to bed, but I sat on the floor and argued with them for about two hours. Percy talked while Cliff prayed. First encounter (forget about all of this, when you die you are going to stand before G-d and the only thing He is going to ask you is: what have you done with my Son?) (vision of the cross, striking me dumb). Loaded me up with tracts and brochures and I exited as quickly as I could – it scared me and they knew I was convicted.

On Maundy Thursday, I was finishing a French assignment (who gives homework due on Good Friday?), when Percy knocked at my door. Second encounter. He quoted Rev. 3:20 at me and said: don't keep him waiting, let Him come in. When he left, I went back to my homework and the next phrase to translate said: Don't keep him waiting, let him come in.

Started crying, walked around the university til midnight and surrendered: G-d if you are real come into my heart, if not, I will go elsewhere. An incredible peace filled my heart and 46 years later it is still filling my heart.

I had lots of issues and challenges to deal with over the years. Betrayals, cults, health concerns. I finished an Education degree in French, then a Masters and went into missions in Quebec until my health failed. Third encounter (temple Beth Emmanuel Reformed Temple).

When we came home in 1990, we got involved with the Messianic Movement in 1995 and have not looked back. Discovered I was Jewish and have lived Sabbath powered and festival driven ever since.

Biggest lesson? He is the Shepherd, I am a sheep. He has led me through much tribulation, but He will never leave me nor forsake me.

Have you heard Him knocking at the door of your heart?

Have you invited Him in?

Are you letting Him fill your heart and life with peace?

Are you working through your life and heart baggage in Him according to His Word? What kind of soil are you?

Are you planted by the living waters? Are you building your life on the Rock of His Word?

Have you found your place in the Messianic movement?

Are you being Sabbath powered and festival driven? Where is He leading you in your life?

Are you letting Him be your Shepherd?

Let's pray before you indulge in the wonderful chocolate matzah.