

Today is the seventh day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread. It is also known as the Seventh Day of Passover among Talmudic Jews. Most traditional Jews observe an eighth day, even though this is not mandated by the Scriptures. There is an eighth day for the Festival of Sukkoth, but only seven for the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

There are also eight days for Chanukah because it was first called the Festival of Sukkoth of the month of Kislev. The only eighth day mandated for the biblical festival cycle is the eighth day for Sukkoth. Traditional Jews do not begin to eat leavening again until after the eighth day they have added to the festival. For us, after the seventh day, we can eat leavening again. So have a doughnut after sundown tonight. Mine will be gluten free!

As I have said before, the Festival of Unleavened Bread commemorates the seven days it took our people to walk out of Egyptian held territory and camp long enough to let their bread rise. If you move bread that is rising, you flatten it and the yeast no longer works. Our people likely had several short pauses during this seven day journey, but never stopped for an entire day to let their bread dough rise, so they had to eat their bread unleavened.

They were not embarking on a journey of perpetual wandering. Once they reached Mount Sinai, they were to spend a year getting trained and getting the tent of meeting and all of its furniture ready. The mountain was to be their launching place for the invasion of Canaan. It was only when they disobeyed G-d and refused to enter the land that they spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. Their wandering should be a warning to us about obedience.

You have to quit wandering if you want your bread to rise and if you want to send down roots and deepen you walk with the L-RD. After the destruction of the second temple, our people were scattered across three continents and were chased from one nation to another. Each time they entered a new nation, they tried to settle down and form permanent communities. In communities like Babylon and then Baghdad, they set up communities which they lived in for over 1,000 years.

There were other communities in Egypt, Greece and Italy where Jews lived either until the Nazis deported them to death camps or they were required to leave, once Israel became a nation. The Jews of Yemen first settled there before the destruction of the first temple and only left when Israel became independent in 1948. Other communities in Ethiopia, India and China were also settled by Jews who fled the destruction of the first temple. These ex-patriot Jewish communities formed small enclaves which retained their Judaism, even when they intermarried with the people among whom they lived.

Some Jews also migrated to southern Africa and to places like Nigeria and Rwanda, but they mostly assimilated into various African nations and their Judaism became a distant memory, though they retained certain customs. Today, people from these nations are rediscovering their Judaism in great numbers and many have thriving Messianic communities which compete with traditional, Talmudic Judaism for new adherents.

The ten lost tribes is an historical myth which the Scriptures do not teach. 2 Chronicles mentions where the survivors of both Judah and the Northern Kingdom settled when they were carried off into captivity. Most of those from the Northern kingdom retained their Judaism and did not come home until Israel became an independent nation in 1948.

Most of the Jews from the southern kingdom of Judah came home after the seventy years of captivity, even though large numbers of these Jews remained in their host countries until Israel became an independent nation. They were forced out by their Arab hosts, even though they spoke Arabic and had dwelt peacefully with their neighbours for over 2,000 years.

Once Jews were forced out of Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition, many of them settled among Jews who had been living in their Arab communities for over a thousand years. Many Jews settled in Istanbul and also throughout the Ottoman Empire. They revitalized the Turkish empire, which was going into a decline and within a generation, Turkish armies were at the gates of Vienna. Jews have always made positive contributions wherever we settle.

Again, none of the Jews in these scattered communities became permanent wanderers by design, but at various times in our history, we were expelled and forced out of our communities and had to set up shop in other places. Several times, Jews were forced out of Russia and Poland, but the heaviest concentration of Jewish communities was found in these lands until they were destroyed by the mass genocide we now call the Holocaust.

Our faith does not call us to wander perpetually, but really teaches us to bloom where we are planted and we did until we were allowed to return to the Holy Land. Out of Israel's population of some 9 million, over 7 million are Jews. For the first time since the second temple was destroyed, Israel once again has the largest Jewish population in the world.

The whole point of the Festival of Unleavened Bread was for our people to escape from Egypt and begin their preparations to enter the Holy Land. For me, one of the saddest things about the return of our people to the Holy Land were the promises made to them by G-d that they would never again be scattered among the nations, as long as they walked with YHVH according to His Word. The second scattering did not have to happen.

Just before the second temple was destroyed, there were up to 7 million Jews in the Holy Land, as well as over a million Samaritans who lived between the province of Judea and the region of the Galilee. Throughout the Roman Empire and the Middle East the total population of Jews and their converts may have exceeded 20 Million. The temple in Jerusalem was still the center around which the lives of diverse groups of Jews revolved. Jews became wealthy and they were usually very educated and very hard working.

The only Jews who wandered were scholars who taught the Torah and who converted Gentiles to the Jewish faith. Wherever they lived, Jews were a stable, settled people who often rose to become community leaders.

What happened and how did our people become perpetual wanderers among the nations? Three unsuccessful rebellions against imperial Rome decimated the Jewish population in the Roman empire and punitive laws were passed to prevent Jews from ever becoming strong enough again to rebel against their Gentile masters. The church turned on its Jews and Jews went from being a respected and educated minority to become a despised minority which was frequently persecuted and robbed.

Over the centuries, there were periods of time when there was peace between Jews and their Gentile neighbours. But there were also frequent periods of violent persecution which continued to trouble our people wherever they lived.

So, when I say it is time to quit wandering, we need to understand that our Jewish heritage is not one of persistent wandering because we have always tried to settle down wherever we lived. And in our lifetime, more and more Jews continue to return to the Holy Land to settle and wait for the Kingdom of Messiah to be established.

However, one of the sad features of religious communities in our modern internet driven world, is high turnover rates, where too many believers are never able to settle down into any particular community for very long. Today, we celebrate our people's successful exodus from Egyptian slavery in anticipation of traveling to the Holy Land and settling in to a life which revolved around Tabernacle worship and the festival harvest cycle.

Frequently changing religious communities is one of the most spiritually disruptive bad habits which believers can develop. Giving up on becoming a part of an actual religious community and relying on various internet ministries for spiritual sustenance is a growing problem among believers who should know better. Our group spirituality is as important as our personal one.

An internet ministry can never really hold you accountable to biblical standards and authentic biblical spirituality can only be developed in an actual physical community. Learning to get along with other believers is a task we are all called to perform, but it is the inability to get along with other believers which turns too many believers into spiritual gypsies. I am not saying anything bad about the Gypsies, because they were never able to find land to settle on and harsh treatment by the more settled communities have kept them wandering. They suffer persecution and racism and until very recently, they were kept moving and were mistreated and not allowed to settle anywhere. Wandering is never what we are called to.

Becoming part of a spiritual community and becoming rooted in its spiritual life means that we have left the Egypt of this world and are exercising our rights of citizenship in the world to come. The Festival of Unleavened Bread is drawing to a close. It was time for the refugees from Egyptian bondage to be transformed into the close knit people of G-d and settle into an observant, Torah based lifestyle, while they waited for the next stage in the kingdom purposes of G-d. How are His kingdom purposes doing in your life? Are you wandering spiritually?

We will continue to have many visitors who are initially fascinated by all things Jewish and all things Messianic. This is because Messianic Judaism is an exciting, kingdom focused lifestyle which revolves both around the cycles of the Torah and our anticipation of the coming Kingdom of G-d. But we uphold high standards of conduct where there is no room for the leavening of this darkening world to take root and ruin our spiritual hearts and lives.

Once the newness wears off and the call to biblical holiness and obedience gets louder and louder, some will pick up their toys and head for the hills. They appear to be unable to settle down anywhere for long. I know some believers who have been a part of over twenty different churches and fellowships because they cannot stop wandering. This is usually because there are lifestyle changes made up of biblical attitudes and habits, which can only be made in fellowship with other imperfect, but serious believers.

It takes a long time to figure out who somebody really is behind the public persona people show when we first get to know them. In most cases, this is not consciously a form of hypocrisy, but it can be a sign of spiritual immaturity where the wonder and power of the Word of our Messiah is not allowed to take root in their lives and bring forth fruit.

I enjoy meeting new people and I enjoy most of the people whom I meet, but I always wonder who they are behind their company manners. The older we get, all of us have the unfortunate ability to develop more and more emotional and spiritual baggage. We can either allow the L-rd to use it to help us grow spiritually into our full potential, or it can be a something which keeps us unstable, moving from place to place, unable to settle down.

In the front of my Bible, I have a list of life verses which help me to understand what G-d wants to do in my life and in the life of all believers. One of my favorites is Philippians 2:13, which says that it is G-d who is at work in you to give you the desire and the ability to accomplish His will for your life.

Another is Ephesians 2:10, which says that we are His workmanship, created for good works which He has prepared for us to perform. Proverbs 4:23 says that we should guard our heart with all diligence, for out of it flows the springs of life. Philippians 1:20, 21 says that it should be our earnest desire and hope that we will never be put to shame in any way, but that the Messiah would be exalted in our body, now as always, whether by our life or by our death. For us to live is the Messiah and to die is a gain.

I had a very difficult childhood and was bullied to oblivion in Junior High and the L-rd has told me that I will bear some of these scars and some of the brokenness with me my whole life. But this does not mean I have to live a broken life – I want to set straight paths for my feet, in order that, that which is wounded will be made better and not worse (Heb. 12:13)

I want my life to be a well watered garden where the fruit of the Spirit flourish and I want to lead this community with integrity and give it a well balanced diet of teaching and preaching. It has not always been easy to walk with the Messiah, both before I joined the Messianic movement and in the 26 years I have had the privilege to be involved with it.

I have met and worked with some really special and amazing people. I have also worked with those whose lives were spiritually unintegrated and were choked with the works of the flesh. I have met too many who do not seem to know what it means to grow up spiritually and leave the childish things of this world behind. I have also been betrayed and attacked by some who claimed to be spiritual, while they were worse then the troublemakers Paul had to deal with in Corinth.

One thing I have never been is bored. Each new relationship is a challenge, where we can either build a strong connection or succumb to misunderstandings and the works of the flesh. The Scriptures teach that the works of the flesh can choke out the Word and make us sink lower than we did before we came to faith. We have to deal with any doubts which rise up and try to derail our faith. We have to overcome all and any temptations which want to prevent us from taking root in the Word of our Messiah.

We also have to be on our guard so that the carnal trinity of the cares, the riches and the pleasures of the world we are only passing through, do not overturn our spirituality. We have to weed out any thorns which are trying to choke us spiritually and prevent us from developing a healthy spirituality. We are called to have an honest, sincere heart which not only hears the Word of our Messiah, but which puts it into practice in every area of our lives. This remains a lifelong struggle because the world we are passing through is a dark, dangerous jungle, always ready to make war on our souls and on our faith.

With the information explosion of the internet, new heresies continue to rise up and hit us with ever newer versions of: "has G-d really said?" Some believers and some religious organizations have succumbed to the lies of evolution and wrongly suppose that evolution was the means which G-d used to bring us to where we are today. This spiritual folly is called theistic evolution and is one of the key foundations of the New Age movement.

The Bible is downgraded to a book of interesting stories which were made up to teach us values and is said to have no more basis in fact than any of the mythologies which ancient peoples believed. Several major world religions still have intricate myths about the various false gods which they worship. Animism, or the belief that everything is alive, is still practiced by several societies around the world who call our planet mother earth.

There have been several attempts to label the Bible as a book of myths, but honestly, the biggest myth is evolution and believers should not ever swallow any of its lies. The Bible teaches creation and not evolution and those who have ceased to accept the Bible as the Word of G-d, have succumbed to the new age propaganda which wants to fill their hearts with doubts and remove any trace of faith from their lives.

The internet and other forms of media also want to fill our lives with temptations which our ancestors never had to deal with. Sophisticated forms of temptation are especially targeting our young people as they promote all kinds of sexual immorality as acceptable conduct. Nearly every new show on television has a least one gay couple, along with men who are drag queens and women who want to look like men.

They want to wean us away from biblical morality and re-educate people to accept that which the Bible forbids and labels as an abomination. Have you gained victory over temptation in your life? Some may struggle for a long time, but have never surrendered their belief in biblical morality. Some make excuses and rationalize carnal approaches to morality. A once renowned evangelist has caved in to the homosexual agenda and now teaches that monogamous homosexuality is acceptable, which it is not.

Well, if the enemy cannot destroy you with doubt or defeat you with temptations, he will hit you with the cares, the riches and the pleasures of this life. Our modern global society is entertaining itself to death, but as strangers and pilgrims just passing through this life, we need to quit wandering away from biblical spirituality and move out of Egyptian held territory.

All week we have been feasting on Matza and have removed all leavening from our homes and kitchens. We do not want to keep on wandering and get pulled back into the Egypt of this world. How spiritually healthy is your life? We may be just wandering through this life, but we do not want to become wanderers who are unable to settle into an actual spiritual community. We also do not want to have our hearts and lives choked with the works of the flesh and do not want to get into the bad habit of perpetually changing where we fellowship because of unresolved heart and life issues we refuse to deal with. Always finding fault is a carnal habit.

We want to be spiritual warriors who keep on walking through the valley of the shadow of death and who don't settle into the valley along with the other spiritual zombies who have either lost their faith or have hardened their hearts to avoid considering the truths of G-d's Word. Instead of being rendered spiritually sterile and spiritually unproductive, we want to overcome our tendency to wander away from a healthy spirituality and become fishermen.

Only we are not out fishing for trout or even salmon, we are fishing for the souls of the lost men and women and children of this darkening world. It is now becoming increasingly unacceptable for us to reach out and try to bring people to faith. Biblical spirituality is now often equated with religious fanaticism because nobody in their right mind believes the Bible anymore.

A belief in the supernatural G-d who created the universe and who is calling the scattered children of Adam and Eve back to Himself, is now, more and more considered, a sign of being mentally unbalanced. The rise of end times cults is seen as a mentally unstable view of life and Bible believing Jews and Gentiles are being lumped together with them.

What should we do in a world that is increasingly dangerous to our faith and to our spirituality? First we need to keep on moving until there is not a trace left of the Egypt of this world. We also need to avoid the leavening of the enemy, the world and the flesh. We need to allow the L-rd to show us how to grow through any issues that we have not yet resolved, so that we do not participate in the sins of those spiritual vagabonds who keep on moving on and are never able to settle down into a healthy, stable, personal and community spirituality.

We will encounter any number of challenges that could sink us just as readily the iceberg which sunk the Titanic. There are things, places and even people we need to learn to avoid, not because we are afraid of what they say, but because we want to serve the G-d of the Bible and His Messiah. Running with the wrong spiritual crowd is a dangerous game to be playing in a world that is welcoming the great darkness which covered it in the days of Noah.

We need to defend our rights and speak out against violations of G-d's Word, even when they succeed in having the force of law to protect them. I am pro-life and feel great compassion for the sexually broken, both gay and straight. I will never resort to violence as an acceptable means of defending my faith, but I will always resist when social pressure and carnal political correctness try to silence me and attack my lifestyle.

Canada is a secular nation, among a world of secular and secularizing nations. Religious fanaticism is becoming a means to wage holy wars for personal and criminal gain. I do not accept other world religions as just different expressions of the same universal truths which I embrace and yet I would never violate their right to religious freedom. I believe that they are on the wrong path, but I would never use physical or social violence against them.

I am a believer in re-instituting the death penalty as a deterrent to those who would murder and rob and rape their way through life. Human trafficking is a horrible crime. Pedophiles are criminals. It is not enough to decriminalize certain behaviours which were once considered immoral. Racism is a heinous crime against humanity. The Bible has always taught gender equality and as believers, we should join forces with all those who struggle to end the violation of basic human rights.

We can either wander away from a biblical spirituality and drag our spiritual and emotional baggage with us as we wander from fellowship to fellowship, or we can remove all and any of the leavening of the flesh, the world and the enemy. During this new year in the L-rd, we need to walk the straight and narrow and take advantage of all the challenges He will bring our way as we integrate His Word into every area of our lives. No more wandering. It is time to settle down and overcome, as we travel through this world on our way home to our Father's House in glory. His kingdom is coming! Shabbat shalom and shavua tov.