

***The End of the Beginning: Making Plans to Leave*****Tazria****She Bears Seed****Facing Problems Head on****Torah:**

Lev. 12:1-13:59

It is amazing that the Torah outlines sensible hygiene in the midst of outlining the majesty of all the symbols and rituals. A woman is unclean for a week after the birth of a son and needs another 33 days to be purified, for a total of 40 days. This means that she does not enter the crowded sanctuary where she could contact germs or expose the baby to the same. She is not required to avoid all human contact, like someone with leprosy, it just means that she is not required to participate in public ceremonies until she is fully recovered and the baby is thriving.

When she gives birth to a female child, she is unclean for two weeks and requires a further 66 days to be purified, for a total of 80 days. Why is the recovery time double for a baby girl? It is not because girls are somehow inherently more defiled than boys, but in anticipation of menstruation, the mother purifies herself and the baby girl and in so doing recognizes her future role as a mother.

The rest of the portion deals with quarantine when someone has a skin condition which could be leprous. In order to prevent the infection from spreading, the sick person is put into quarantine until either the condition disappears or it is diagnosed as leprosy and the person enters a permanent state of quarantine outside the camp. Instructions are also given about articles of clothing and household articles which could also be contaminated and must also be cleansed.

The Torah teaches us to face our problems head on and to deal with them until they are either resolved or we have a permanent strategy of containment. This means we are either delivered from a problem (condition, wounding) and recover from its impact, or we develop a means of setting a straight path for our feet, so that the limp or the wounding is not made worse, but better. You are either delivered from it or you learn to live with it with both your spirituality and your walk with the Lord intact as a vital member of your community.

**Haftarah:** (Ezekiel 45:16-46:18)

This is not the regular Haftarah for this portion, but is read in conjunction with the first of Nisan and it speaks about modifications which are to be made in the worship ceremonies in the temple which Ezekiel is given the pattern for in a vision. Modifications are made to the number of sacrifices to be made during the seven days of Passover (which is also the festival of unleavened bread) and these modified sacrifices are also to be made during the seven days of the festival of Sukkoth. Judaism has always understood that when Messiah comes, He will make changes in how things are done, not to change the Law of God, but only to modify the rituals and sacrifices in recognition of what His ministry would accomplish. These modifications will be a necessary reaction to all the wonder of what it is all about.

A second feature of this passage is that there is a degree of flexibility given to the Prince as He offers His sacrificial lambs. He is to offer whatever He wishes. For me this indicates that our Messiah is not bound by arbitrary ritual observance, but can introduce whatever changes He

deems necessary to keep the people focused on worshipping G-d and walking with Him according to His Word in recognition of Messiah's unique ministry.

In Hebrew the term Law can both refer to the Ten Words and to the stipulations governing how the rituals and sacrifices were performed. The Ten Words were never abrogated or altered by our Messiah, because G-d's Laws are eternal. However there has been a change in the laws governing rituals and sacrifices because of the fulfilment of all that these symbolized. They are fulfilled and now the only sacrifice we are required to make is the sacrifice of praise and obedience and this new approach to rituals and sacrifice is no longer centred on a particular building or on a particular human priesthood, it can be practised by every believer everywhere.

The change occurred in recognition of all that Messiah fulfilled and represents a new form of worship, and never a change in the Ten Commandments or in the moral obligations (privileges) of the Law. We still have to face our problems head on and deal with them by faithfully applying the principles of G-d's Law to every situation in our lives.

**Brit Chadashah:** Luke 7:18-35

The New Testament portions links us back to the regular Torah portion and speaks of the signs by which people could recognize that the Messiah had come. Lepers are cleansed and the dead are resurrected! Disciples from John ask Yeshua if He is the Messiah and He gives a firm, indirect answer – He speaks about what He is doing and says that the signs speak for themselves. He does what He does because of who He is.

He also indicates a shift in Kingdom entrance which needs to be examined carefully to understand what He is referring to. He praises John as the greatest man who has ever lived and as one whose righteousness was sufficient for Him to gain entrance into the Kingdom on his own virtues. But He immediately stipulates that entrance through the grace of Messiah makes even the least of men in Heaven, greater than the greatest of men who have made it on their own merits. John paved the way for the ministry of Messiah to have a maximum impact and to continue to function long after the temporary ministry of John was finished.

We realize that only a certain number of the miracles of the Messiah are recorded in the New Testament, but we are given this record so that we could recognize the valid signs and wonders as they are manifest throughout our generations until the Kingdom comes. We are told clearly what kinds of things our Messiah does, so that we are not taken in by counterfeits and charlatans whose ministries violate the pattern established for us in the New Testament.

We have to face our problems head on and learn to distinguish between that which is authentic and that which is counterfeit, because unless we do things G-d's way according to His Word, His name is not glorified, no matter how nice or how loud we may sound or look.

(Margaret: pp. 115-119) **Ps. 106**

Jewish Hero: Jeremiah

Torah Carrier: Marie

**L-rd's Table**

Shabbat HaChodesh portion: (Exodus 12:1-20)

Sermon: **The End of the Beginning: Making Plans to Leave**

Today marks the beginning of the sacred year and a new festival cycle. This cycle begins on the first of Nisan, which is today and ends with Simchat Torah at the end of the festival of Sukkoth. We have two winter festivals, Chanukah and Purim which remember how the L-rd prevented the total destruction of His people at two critical points in our history. So we have seven festivals of the L-rd and two additional celebrations which together make up the sacred year.

At the end of the Egyptian year, in the tenth month, G-d gets ready to defeat the last of the Egyptian calendar gods and a final warning is issued to Pharaoh to let our people go from the slavery they were so unjustly subjected to. We were invited in as privileged guests because of the deliverance which Joseph spearheaded, but when there was a regime change, the new Pharaoh turned the guests into slaves and for one calendar year there was a spiritual struggle between the false gods of Egypt and the one true G-d.

At any point, if Pharaoh had agreed to let the people go, the Egyptian people could have been spared the horror of the plagues, but Pharaoh was apparently convinced that the greatest of the Egyptian gods, who was celebrated in the tenth month, when the waters of the Nile began to rise, would be able to finish off the G-d of Israel.

After Pharaoh refused to listen, two things occurred. First, Moses outlined the procedures for the first Passover, so that the angel of death would pass over the houses of the Jews and only strike down the first born of Egypt. Secondly, this ritual meal was declared to be a perpetual reminder of the deliverance which we are told should be celebrated annually in the same month when the first Passover occurred.

I have three things to say to you this morning from this portion concerning Shabbat HaChodesh, so buckle your seat belts and hang on tight because here we go!

The first thing relates to how we view time and how we live our lives. Our lives need to revolve around both the deliverance of G-d and the Word of G-d, because we truly do not belong to this world or this age and we are only pilgrims passing through on our way home. So instead of rejoicing at our good fortune or lamenting all the trials we are facing as our first and foremost reaction to what is going on in our lives, we need to take a step back and look at our lives from an eternal perspective. Passover gives us the opportunity to remember both the great suffering of our people and the great deliverance which G-d accomplished on their behalf, so that we never move away from looking at everything in our lives as opportunities to serve G-d and see His handiwork in us through His Word.

We must never lose sight of our pilgrim status moving through a temporary world! Eternal life is both our destiny and our calling as we travel through all the events and stages of our lives. G-d knows who we are and where we are and what is happening in our lives and He never loses control of the final direction He is moving the nations and generations of mankind towards. He will always be the L-rd of all and the One who sits over and above all the hopes and fears of all the years, peacefully and powerfully manoeuvring the glorious arrival of His wonderful eternal kingdom – everything else which is happening on our planet pales in comparison to this unavoidable eventuality.

Being kingdom focused is the only way to live in our confusing world, so that we do not lose our way and get sidetracked by things which really do not matter and which have no eternal

significance. How are you looking at the world? How are you looking at the events and stages of your own life? What impact does knowing that you are heaven bound have in the way you live your life? At Passover we reset our clocks to Kingdom time and turn our backs on all the false gods and false hopes of our darkening world.

As we prepare for our annual cosmic feast which we will one day share with the Messiah in the Kingdom of G-d, besides having a firm Kingdom focus there are two features of the original Passover Seder which we are only to remember and not to practice or repeat.

The first of these is the blood which was only to be put on the doorposts of our houses in Egypt and not to be part of the annual Seder of remembrance. The blood delivered our people from the angel of death, but no angel of death hovers over any modern Seder and no Egyptian firstborn are in any imminent of being struck down as they were during the first season of Passover. This is part of what we are to remember, but is also part of that which is non repeatable, just like the angel of death, the Exodus itself and the crossing of the sea of reeds.

The second of these refers to strangers (Gentiles) celebrating Passover with us. At the first Passover, no uncircumcised Gentiles could be present and if they wanted to avoid losing their first born, they had to go through circumcision and join Israel. But in subsequent Passovers, Jewish people invite their friends and neighbours (strangers) to share in the Seder with them. In our passage, Passover is linked with the festival of unleavened Bread, because it took our people seven days of walking to make it out of Egyptian territory and stop long enough for their bread to rise.

When our passage talks about how to celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the rules of the festival must apply to both Jews and Gentiles who are observing it (Exodus 12:19). Since the two, Passover and Unleavened Bread, are linked we see that provision is made for Gentiles to join in subsequent memorial celebrations which remember the actual events of the Exodus.

Passover today remembers the events which occurred in Egypt so long ago and two elements of the Passover Seder form what is now called the L-rd's Table and both Jews and Gentiles are invited to celebrate this special ceremony which we are celebrating today. The same would apply to our Passover Seder, the memorial is open to both Jews and Gentiles.

There is a big difference between a memorial and a repetition of the actual events. Passover was a one-time event and during that event, our people put blood on the doorposts of their houses and only circumcised Jews or converts could participate in the Seder and avoid having their firstborn smitten by the angel of death. We will always remember what happened at the first Passover, but we understand that it was a non-repeatable event. So we will not be putting blood on the doorposts of the downstairs Hall and we will not be checking to make sure that all the men who come to celebrate with us are circumcised!

The third thing I want to say to you today as we prepare for our annual Seder has to do with making sure we live lives that are always ready to go when the L-rd comes. In the parable of the ten virgins, only five have enough oil in their lamps to be ready to go when the bridegroom arrived. The foolish virgins were not living lives in a stage of preparedness and they had to go

shopping for oil and missed the bridegroom when He came.

Now rather than making us all nervous and panicky, when we look at the parable, all ten were sleeping and none of them were anxious or nervously pacing all night, unable to rest or function because they were so focused on the bridegroom's arrival. The point of the parable is to live lives which are ready to go and not live in a state of spiritual unpreparedness.

We are not told whether there were any Jews who were not ready to celebrate the Seder meal and who had become assimilated into Egyptian culture and were not ready to leave when the call was given. We need to live lives which are unconnected to the Egypt of this world and which have not left walking with our L-rd something which we plan to do and are not yet ready to commit to.

This doesn't mean that we need to have all of our issues resolved and all of our baggage dealt with every day, if we are to be ready for the return of the L-rd and do not want to be left behind. It means that we are constantly giving everything in our lives to the L-rd and refuse to let anything come between us and our walk with the L-rd, even if there are issues and problems in our lives which we are still working on.

Passover was not set up to be convenient and does not occur with our schedules in mind. We have to make arrangements so that spiritual priorities from His Word are those which drive our lives. Our people had to drop everything and flee Egypt when the signal was given and not once they had got all their packing done. The wise virgins made sure they were ready and rested, not knowing the time when the Groom would arrive.

We need to live every day as if the Groom could come at any time but not in a state of constant panic where we make no plans and do not get on with the necessary business of living. We need to live lives focused on eternity, realizing that our temporary existence in this world is not worth our primary energy. Everything we do and everything we have needs to have this eternal priority as the controlling focus of our lives.

As we come to the season of Passover once again, we need to make sure that we are not attached to the Egypt of this world to the degree that we are no longer strangers and pilgrims. We need to see Passover as the biggest and most important annual celebration of the L-rd's Table, where we reset the clocks of our hearts and lives so that we are once again in line with eternity.

On the first of Nisan, we understand that back then it was the end of the beginning, where the spiritual battle would finally be over and the people would actually be free. At the Passover Seder which is also called the Last Supper, our Messiah told His disciples that the fulfilment of all things concerning redemption was at hand.

It is an opportunity for us to realize that our faith and the power of the kingdom do not just have to be concepts which we acknowledge, but which do not have a major impact on our lives. It is a time to move from theoretical spirituality to practical daily spirituality where instead of fleeing from geographical Egypt and beginning a trip towards the Promised Land, we arrange our lives to revolve around the coming Kingdom and adopt a lifestyle of praise and worship and obedience.

We have another opportunity to make sure we have not wandered far from the L-rd and are not forgetting that our primary calling is to be pilgrims and strangers in this world, travelling through and not attached to it.

Unless our spiritual house is in order, we are in grave spiritual danger. I do not say this to frighten you, but to encourage you to make your spiritual state the most important thing in your life. This way, no matter what else is going on in your life, you will suffer no substantial damage when this fleeting life is over and the things which people in the world cherish wither and are blown away before the glory of the coming kingdom.

Passover is coming and we can use this time for spiritual reflection so that there are no Egyptian influences controlling our lives. It is an opportunity for us to remember the price which was paid for our redemption and to make sure we have not become attached to this world which is indeed passing away.

We need to be like the wise virgins who got ready first and then went to sleep. If we are always poised to go when we are called, then we can sleep peacefully and go about the business of living without worrying about what is coming next.

David said that he was young and is now old, but he has never seen the righteous forsaken or their descendants begging for their bread. If we take care of the things of G-d as a priority in our lives, all the other details of our lives will fall into their proper place as secondary details which will never have a primary impact on our lives.

Today, on the first of Nisan on Shabbat HaChodesh, we can say with assurance that for us, once again, it is the end of the beginning and it is time once again to make sure that our plans to leave are ready, no matter what else is going on in our lives. Getting ready and staying ready together form the central message of Passover because one day we will celebrate it in the New Creation as we share in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Let's pray.