

1 Nissan, 5779 (01/04/19) **Getting Ready for Pesach: Infected Believers** J. M. Terrett

Tazria	She Bears Seed	Shabbat HaChodesh
Torah:	Exodus 12:1-13:59	
Haftarah:	2 Kings 4:42-5:19A (Isaiah 66:1-14; I Peter 2:4-10)	
Brit Chadashah:	Luke 7:18-35	

Reading: Mike E. pp. 105-107 and Ps. 106. Jewish Hero: Jeremiah. Carrier: Margaret

The Haftarah portion is doubled today. The regular portion deals with the first mention of bread being miraculously multiplied and with the healing of Naaman the Syrian. He is healed when he bathes seven times in the Jordan and he becomes a believer. The second portion deals with the meaning of the new moon and with our calling to walk as living stones, a separate people who belong to G-d and who practice holiness.

The regular New Testament portion deals with John the Baptist (Jochanan HaMatbil) receiving confirmation that our Messiah is the promised Redeemer. It is followed by an explanation of the ministry of John, that he is the Elijah who was to come.

Today is the first day of the month of Nissan and it is to be first month of the year in our sacred calendar because this is the month when our people were delivered from the bondage of Egypt. In fact, there are five new year's in Judaism and it can be quite confusing, unless you understand that each of them points to a new beginning.

- (1) New year for the L-rd: 1st of Nissan and the beginning of a new festival cycle.
- (2) New year for the Kings: 1st of Nissan. No matter when he began to reign, the first year of the reign was not counted until after the 1st of Nissan.
- (3) New year for the scholars: 18th Of Iyar (Lag B'Omar) 33rd day of counting of the Omar, when a plague stopped among the scholars.
- (4) New year for the year: 1st of Tishrei (Rosh Hashanah)
- (5) New Year for the trees: 15th of Shevat (Tu B'Shevat) when new trees are planted.

So today we are celebrating the New Year in the L-rd. It is also known as Shabbat HaChodesh, because after a long year of plagues, Pharaoh is finally going to capitulate, once the angel of death strikes down all the first born of Egypt. It is the official beginning of the season of Passover and the people were told to get ready to leave at a moment's notice.

Our L-rd's return is approaching. We need to live every day being ready to leave at a moment's notice. We are not to become too attached to the Egypt of this world, because we are truly citizens of the world to come are merely strangers and pilgrims passing through this world on our way home to our Father's Home in Glory. Our Torah portion is revolutionary, not because it is so technical, but because it deals with sickness, not as some kind of spiritual affliction, but as a physical condition which manifests symptoms.

It also outlines the need for quarantine when evidence of an infection is present and gives the body time to recover. The sickness is called unclean and once healing (recovery) has occurred, this return to health is called clean. It also deals with a kind of mildew on clothing. Mildew in a dwelling is dealt with in the next portion.

The portion begins with the recovery time which is given to a woman who has given birth. She is unclean for seven days for a boy and two weeks for a girl. This actually means she is given time for all the bleeding to stop and the womb to recover. The woman is given another 33 days of recovery time for a boy and a further 66 days of recovery for a girl. It is my understanding that during this period of time, no sexual relations were to occur so that her body was fully recovered, before another child was conceived.

Why is the woman given twice the amount of time to recover from a girl? The rabbis teach that the mother is taking an extra purification period in anticipation of the girl's first menstruation, so the little girl can group up clean and not defiled.

The next section deals with a series of infections which are all grouped under the heading of leprosy. This refers to any skin conditions which produce ulcers (sores) or ruptures or bleeding. When anyone came down with any of these related conditions, they were brought before the Levites and were examined to see if the disease had run its course or if the person was still infectious and had to be quarantined.

If there was no doubt that the person had an infectious leprosy condition, they were not quarantined, they were just excluded from the camp until there was a change in their condition. They dwelt outside the camp and were fed, they just had to keep their distance so that the infection did not spread among the people.

When an infection showed up, the priest would quarantine them for a seven-day period to see if the disease had run its course and the whether the body had successfully recovered from it. If he was declared recovered, he or she washed their clothes and were allowed back into the camp.

In one surprising case, if the whole body was covered with an outbreak of dried skin and scabs, with no fresh outbreaks, the priest would declare the recovered sufferer pure. If a new outbreak in the skin occurred, the sufferer would be declared impure until the sore dried up and became a dry, whitened scab.

In a similar case, if the infection did not appear to be deeper than the skin and did not turn the body hair white, the priest would declare the sufferer clean, because the disease had run its course and the sufferer was no longer contagious and was on the road to recovery. In the case of mildew on clothing, it was examined and washed and quarantined for seven days and if the disease continued to expand in the cloth or on the leather, the clothing was burned. If it had not spread, the infected portion was removed and the clothing was pronounced pure.

Years before hygiene and quarantine became common practice in the treatment and prevention of disease, the Torah provided for a way of treating disease as a physical phenomenon and not as a spiritual infection. We will deal with spiritual infections during the sermon.

Sermon: Getting Ready for Passover: Infected Believers

Passage: “Your boasting is not good. Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast so that you may be a new batch without yeast – as you really are. For Messiah, our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Therefore, let us keep the festival, not with the old yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. (I Corin. 5:6-8)

Leavening is used here as a symbol for a sinful infection which can strike believers if they do not practice caution and good spiritual hygiene. Just before this passage, and twice after it, Paul mentions some serious sin, which the Corinthian congregation was guilty of practicing and which can also infect modern believers as well.

Sadly, when believers backslide, their last condition is often worse than their first condition. They can become worse than they were when they came to faith. There is an argument which many believers like to debate concerning whether or not backsliding believers were ever actually believers in the first place. This view is espoused by Calvinists who believe that once you come to faith, you cannot lose your salvation. It is also called the once saved, always saved teaching.

In response to this radical Calvinism, a Dutch theologian came up with the Arminian position which states that losing your faith is a possibility which believers must guard against. This possibility is outlined in the Scriptures and it is against this possibility of backsliding that Paul is warning the infected believers in Corinth about. The growth of sinfulness in the lives of believers and of communities will eventually result in an effective loss of the faith which is needed for believers to be considered citizens of the world to come.

Just before our passage, we learn that someone in Corinth had married his father’s wife. It may not have actually been his mother, since polygamy was not uncommon in the ancient world. In any event it says that someone married his father’s wife or had sex with her, which is a sin not even the pagans thought of committing. Coming to faith is no guarantee that we will adopt a biblical morality, but part of coming to authentic faith involves making a commitment to live according to the moral teachings of the Bible.

The Corinthians were loud and enthusiastic believers, but they had not purged the old leavening of sin out of their midst. They were infected and the infection was growing and the community was in grave spiritual danger. Right after our passage, Paul says that while we cannot completely separate ourselves from living in a sinful world, it is our duty to live sin free lives in the world. He goes on to say if anyone who claims to be a believer and yet wallows in the sinfulness of the world, they should be excluded from the assembly and we should even eat with them.

When Paul says that the sinful one is delivered over to the enemy, he is taking about exclusion from the community and being shunned and nothing more.

He is not talking about committing any kind of physical violence against them. What he is saying is that if they act like a pagan, we have to treat them like a pagan and have no fellowship with them. We want to share our faith and engage in all kinds of outreach towards the unsaved, but fellowship is reserved for those who have come to faith and who have left the immorality of the world behind.

He includes idolatry as a reason to practice exclusion because coming to faith also means accepting that there is only one G-d and that He is the only one worthy of our spiritual devotion. Israel struggled with two besetting sins: idolatry and fornication and these two categories of spiritual intrusion and spiritual infection will always try to get a growing foothold in our midst. A believer may be struggling against some forms of sinfulness, but there is a big difference between struggling with something and giving in to it.

Paul says that the infected ones need to be excluded so that their spiritual leprosy does not infect the community and make many more people sick. Sexual immorality of any kind is an exclusion issue, as well as any kind of criminal behaviour, including greed and drunkenness. We have to clean our spiritual houses thoroughly and keep them clean so that we can shine as a light to the darkening world we are passing through.

We have a unique set of beliefs which sets us apart from the world and we also have a unique spiritual morality which should also set us apart from the world. Both how we look at the world and how we live in the world, has changed and this change is our greatest and most effective witness. When our people were set free from Egyptian bondage, they did not want to allow any negative Egyptian habits hitchhiker rights as they began their new life. Are you giving any sinfulness hitchhiker rights in your life?

The Festival of Unleavened Bread is a symbolic week where we examine our hearts and lives – and even our homes, so that the leavening of this world has no place to go. Our people did not stop long enough to let their bread rise, until they were completely out of Egyptian held territory and G-d promised not to strike them with any of the plagues He punished the Egyptians with. Sinfulness is any action or idea which rises up against the clear teaching of the Scriptures and unless it is dealt with swiftly and radically, we could all become infected with its spiritual leprosy.

It is not our job to judge those who are outside of our community, but it is definitely our job to judge those who are in our community. This does not mean we become intrusive and try to run each other's lives and become critical whenever we see something which does not please us. It means that we are all held to the same level and kind of morality, based firmly on what the Scriptures teach and uphold.

There are any number of negative, carnal influences which want to become part of our lives in our modern cybernetic world and we should have nothing to do with our secular society's politically correct agenda. I never thought the day would come when a politician who takes a stand against homosexuality, risks both being excluded from his party and barred from participating in the election as a candidate for political office.

In a very real sense, we have to proclaim that our attitude towards same sex relationships is a religious conviction which should be protected under the charter of rights and freedoms. I would never accept anyone who practiced same sex bonding, just as I would not accept anyone who practiced any form of sexual immorality which violated the clear teachings of the Scriptures. Premarital sex is just as wrong as adultery and homosexuality and if anyone who calls themselves a brother or a sister, is engaging in this kind of fornication, we need to exclude them from our midst.

Being biblically inclusive means that we accept anyone into our midst from any background as long as they make a complete break with the darkness out of which they have been saved. If showing support for the gay community is a prerequisite to running for office, then our constitutional rights are being violated because it is good and proper to label sinful behaviour as sinful behaviour.

The UCP candidate from Drayton Valley was forced to make a public apology for remarks about homosexuality which he made during a sermon he preached in the Drayton Valley Baptist church. After he made his public apology, he refused to comment any further and I took it to mean he still holds the same position he did, when he spoke in church. The gay community has become quite powerful and the federal Liberal party has said they do not want any pro-lifers in their midst. Their loss, not ours.

Our beliefs and our morality are both being increasingly marginalized and we may face penalties when we stand up for them. The NDP minister of Education wanted to force Christian schools to have gay straight alliances or risk losing their funding. It is a grave violation of our right to freedom of religion and you need to bring it up with any candidate who is trying to get your vote. Paul stipulates that we must exclude immoral idolaters from our midst and those who subscribe to evolution fall into this category along with pro-abortionists and members of the gay community. That is what the Bible says.

We are not even supposed to eat with them and I certainly would not vote for them. If all major parties subscribe to this twisted politically correct agenda, then we need to hound them and demand our constitutional right to freedom of religion. Political pollsters have a rough time when they call my home. Pray for wisdom as you exercise your right to vote and only support those candidates who will protect your right to freedom of religious conscience. Make it a major election issue, whether they want to or not.

I am still uncertain where I will cast my vote but I want candidates to speak to issues which are important to me and to our community.

After Paul requires exclusion for idolaters and fornicators, he says that we should not wash our dirty laundry before the world and sort out our issues among ourselves. We maintain high resolution standards and are not prepared to let the world decide between us on important issues. I will say that if a believer is acting like an unbeliever and trying to take advantage of me because I am a believer, I will treat them as an unbeliever and even pursue them in the courts, as I would any unbeliever.

Acting like an unbeliever makes you an unbeliever, no matter what you claim to believe. We need to learn to avoid acting like unbelievers towards one another. Paul goes on to say that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of G-d. He is not saying that there is no chance for sinners to enter the kingdom, he is saying that those who have entered the kingdom can no longer live like they did, while they were wallowing in darkness from which they were delivered. It is part of our past and not part of our present.

He outlines ten kingdom exclusions and says that those who practice this immorality and paganism are effectively excluded from the kingdom. The Corinthian community was in grave danger of spiritually imploding and slipping back into the darkness from which it was once delivered. It does not mean that every time we sin, we lose our kingdom citizenship, it just means that we have to deal with all and any spiritual infections before they take over our lives. We need regular cleansing as a form of spiritual accountability.

This is why we observe the L-rd's Table and remember our need to keep our lives clean and free from any sinful intrusion by the enemy, the world or even our own flesh. It is an extensive list and homosexuality is mentioned twice because male prostitution is just as bad as any kind of same sex relationship. It is interesting that murder is not mentioned as a kingdom exclusion, but ten categories are given, because any violation of the Ten Commandments should be seen as a kingdom exclusion. Kingdom ethics are as important as Kingdom beliefs.

It is one thing to be occupied by an enemy, as many nations were when the Nazis conquered most of Europe, it is quite another thing to go over to the enemy's side and work with them and for them – which is what the Vichy government of France did when they surrendered to the Germans. The Nazis were able to set up collaborationist governments in every country they conquered, except in Poland, which is why Poland was so ravaged by them.

We need to refuse to cooperate with the world which we are only passing through and if it becomes dangerous to remain a believer in our politically correct dictatorship, we need to do three things and I will close with this. First, we need to remain faithful to what the Bible teaches about creation, redemption and the coming end of the world. Next, we need to live as light and salt and refuse to adopt any behaviour which is forbidden by the Bible, just because it is now become both acceptable and even protected under the law. G-d's standards do not change.

Lastly, we need to realize that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual and these are the only ones we will use both in our defense and as a means of fighting back against the forces of spiritual darkness which are closing in on us. We will overcome all and any tribulation and persecution the same way our Messiah and early believers did. If we can make a political difference, we need to make it. If we are unable to make it, then we need to stand firm on the promises of our Messiah and serve Him fully and freely and exclusively, as we avoid any kind of spiritual infection.

Those who cave into the world and want to bring it into our midst, will be excluded, so that their spiritual infection does not make all of us sick. What we believe and how we live are our two greatest challenges in this darkening world and as we come to Passover, we look back at the deliverance of our people from Egyptian slavery and look forward to the coming deliverance when our Messiah returns to set up His everlasting Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. May the L-rd help us to purge all and any sinful leavening from our midst.

Shabbat shalom and shavua tov!