

Special Holiday Portion Forgiveness, Restoration and Resurrection

Torah:	Exodus 33:12-34:26
Haftarah:	Ezekiel 37:1-14
Brit Chadashah:	John 11:38-57

This is the Sabbath of Passover and is one of the Sabbaths where the annual Torah Reading Cycle is suspended and a special holiday portion is read. This happens several times during the year and is the reason some of the regular Torah portions are doubled up. This is the first special Torah reading of the new festival cycle. Exodus 33:12-34:26

Before we deal with the details of the actual portion, we have to back up to the sad events of chapter 32. You see, one of the saddest events in the history of Judaism was when the rebellion of the golden calf temporarily took over the camp and broke the newly enacted covenant between the former slaves and their sovereign G-d.

Fresh from the glorious events of the Exodus and with the mighty mountain voice of G-d still echoing in their hearts, in the absence of Moses, there is an attempted take over by the idolatrous core which was lurking in the shadows of the camp. Moses had left Aaron and the seventy elders in charge of the camp while he spent forty days and nights on the mountain.

In Exodus 32:1, it says the people gathered around Aaron and either cut him off from the seventy elders, or had them all surrounded and cut off from the people. They were likely all surrounded. Later, we learn that the leaders of this rebellion numbered some 3,000 and had a large, unspecified group of followers, scattered among the people. Once this rebellion was dealt with by Moses, the idolatrous core was effectively wiped out.

It was a take over which nearly worked because the leaders of the righteous core were held hostage. The people should have rebelled against the rebels and pushed through to liberate Aaron and the seventy, but they were taken completely by surprise and the text does not indicate that there was any organized resistance to this attempted idolatrous take over.

Moses comes down the mountain in great wrath and the group holding Aaron and the elders hostage, either scatters or tries to melt back into the people. At the end of WWII, many Nazis war criminals attempted the same escape route. Moses desecrates the Egyptian abomination and in the drinking of the melted gold, the people break free from any further allegiance that they had towards the false god which Moses has just slaughtered.

They are no longer YHVH's covenant people and the process has to begin from scratch again. In the interim, Moses moves his tent out of the camp and goes back up the mountain to continue receiving the stipulations of the covenant. There are not enough idolatrous core survivors to attempt a second rebellion. Aaron and the seventy are likely guarded now.

On the mountain and in the cloud, Moses sees G-d's glory (but not His face, because Yeshua is still hidden and not yet revealed) and he is promised that G-d Himself will walk with Moses as they head towards the Promised Land, leading a very stiff necked people. Moses carves two more stone tablets and at some point, YHVH rewrites the ten sacred words on them.

As part of the forgiveness and reconciliation process, YHVH fully proclaims the meaning of His name. This recitation is called the thirteen attributes and only the 12th and 13th could be called punitive. This slow to anger, merciful and compassionate G-d receives His repentant people back into the original covenant and as part of this reforming process, they are returned to the annual Festival Cycle. These are seven special Sabbath observances, based on the principle festival of Israel, which will always be the weekly Sabbath.

As we read the passage, we discover that there is no such thing as a generational curse. The punishment only extends to the living generations and can be fully and instantly broken when one or all of the living generations repents. The sins of the fathers are not visited on the children, nor are the sins of the children visited on the fathers (Ezek. 18:20).

Sin has a limited shelf life while G-d's great mercy doesn't. In the Bible, one thousand is used as a symbolic number which refers to the duration of G-d's mercy. It extends from the first baby who was conceived, right up to the last one which will be conceived before the end of the world. In this life, His mercy is both limitless and inexhaustible and is readily accessible to all who seek for it in spirit and in truth.

The Haftarah passage in Ezekiel 37:1-14, deals with the vision of the valley of dry bones where G-d promises to restore the diminished and scattered house of Israel to their former numbers in the Land. The Talmud gives a weird twist to this symbolic vision and says that at some point before Moses, a false Messiah led around 400,000 of our people into the Promised Land and they were slaughtered. So many Jews were killed during the deportation scenario, that G-d apparently opened up their graves and these resurrected ones joined the ranks of the survivors in exile. It was intended to be a vision of the return and not an actual historical occurrence. It is a figurative vision, not an actual occurrence.

When it comes to our passage in John 11:38-57, we are dealing with the actual resurrection of a single individual, Lazarus. It is not a true resurrection, because Lazarus is just returned to life in his old body and does not receive the glorious new body which all of us will receive after the end of the age, when we prepare to march into the glorious kingdom of our blessed Messiah.

Two things. The Sanhedrin was worried about the dangerous impact that this Giver of life would have on the fate of the temple. Their solution is to try and kill Him to protect the big business of the temple which they ran very profitably. The Sanhedrin was also concerned about protecting their great power, even though this council was badly split into incredible warring factions. They were all about maintaining the current status quo and not about ushering in the coming Kingdom. What are you all about? The Kingdom is all that matters.

Next, the passage ends with the High priest making an unwitting prophecy. It appears that G-d raised up another donkey who said that it is better for one man to die for the people than for the entire people to perish. He was prophesying about Messiah's sacrifice on Calvary.

G-d's voice cannot be silenced even by those who live their lives in rebellion or in opposition to it. His Spirit stands at the entrance to noisy places (Prov. 1:20-23) and makes His voice to be heard. No matter where you are in your walk with the L-rd, He will make His voice heard in your heart and life. Will you give heed to it or will you succumb to whatever cloned version of idolatry and fornication the modern version of the idolatrous core is trying to pour into your life? Only those who listen and take heed can actually be called authentic believers.

Now, here is my sermon. As we walk through the season of Passover, we are almost completely swamped with the Gentile celebration of Easter, which in its own way, also celebrates the death and resurrection of our blessed Messiah. They have the right idea, but the wrong chronology. History shows us that in the year in which our Messiah died, the Passover Seder occurred on a Tuesday evening and that Yeshua suffered and died on a Wednesday. The earliest church tradition was Good Wednesday and not Good Friday. The story was starting to get jumbled.

In that year, Wednesday sundown was the beginning of the Festival of First Fruits, which was the biggest temple event of the year. Once the rabbis took power away from the surviving priests, this may be a reason why First fruits is largely ignored in the Synagogues.

Our L-rd spent three days and nights in the tomb. Night and day Thursday, night and day Friday and night and day Saturday. The Messiah rose sometime after sundown on Saturday, which, in Judaism is the beginning of Sunday. That year it was on the first day of the week.

This year, our Seder was celebrated on Wednesday evening. Messiah's sufferings would have occurred on Thursday, along with His burial. He would have spent Friday, Saturday and Sunday in the grave and rose sometime after sundown on Sunday, which is the beginning of Monday in Judaism. This year, Resurrection Day should be observed on Monday.

The only L-rd's Day which the Scriptures recognize is the Sabbath and the day "after three days" when the resurrection occurred is never one single day, but varies because it is calculated from the date of the annual Seder. In the year when our Messiah was crucified and buried, Sunday just happened to be the day "after three days" when the resurrection occurred and Sunday is never given any special status in the Bible.

In conjunction with the annual festival cycle, Judaism observes four memorials or Yizkors, where the departed loved ones are remembered. As Bible believers, we understand that death is only a temporary condition of the soul. When we die, our spirits go to either Gd's great remand centre, called hell, our up to our Messiah, to sleep under the altar until Resurrection Day. Where will you be resting when it is your turn to fall asleep?

We sleep, but we are neither punished, nor rewarded, because we have not yet been judged and have not yet received our sentence, for good or for bad. There are basically three things which I would like to say about this temporary condition of the soul which we call death.

First, we are not told where this remand centre is located, but it is not a place of burning or suffering, because its inhabitants have not yet been judged. Hell is also not under the dominion of the adversary, because he is not G-d's jailer. Hell is reserved for human spirits. There is another place, called the abyss, reserved for demons and fallen angels, but not too much detail is given about this destination, because it does not apply to us.

Secondly, while His body rested in the tomb, in the Spirit, Yeshua went down to Hell, woke the spirits up, separated the blessed ones and took all them with Him when He arose. And now these blessed souls are back asleep, this time under the altar. The others went back to sleep to await judgment day. Now, when believers fall asleep, they join the others under the altar.

Lastly, when the great shofar of G-d shall sound at the end of the age, all the dead shall be resurrected and those who are alive, will be snatched (raptured) out of their bodies. Then both groups shall stand before the Messiah in the cosmic interim between the old burned up creation and the new one where believers shall live joyfully forever.

You see, believers will also pass through the fire of judgment so that we can be purged (Latin purgatore) of all the sins and problems we did not deal with during our pilgrimage through this life. But how will all mankind be judged? I have four things to say about this as we discuss Yizkor on Shabbat Pesach. Judgment is not something faithful believers should fear.

First, all mankind will be judged according to the principles of truth outlined in G-d's Word. It will not be theologically based, but spirituality geared (Acts 17, Ps. 19, Eccl. 12 and Romans 2). There will be a separation of the goats and the sheep, based on their commitment to meaning and purpose, both within and without the boundaries of the Gospel. Amazing!

Secondly, we need to ask ourselves what will happen to those who never heard the Good News of the Gospel? Does this lack of opportunity arbitrarily exclude them from the Kingdom? I have said in the past and will say it here again. The Bible teaches that those who would have, if they could have, will be treated as if they had.

Next, does the Bible teach that punishment is constant and eternal? We have to understand that separation from G-d is eternal, but punishment is geared to the severity of crimes which were committed, just like rewards are geared to acts of righteousness. After the day of Judgment, even the lost cannot die and they will not be able to go back to sleep. They might not be punished eternally, but they may spend eternity weeping and gnashing their teeth because of their foolishness. G-d is not a sadist and they will get what is coming to them, nothing more and nothing less. The Bible does not go into great depth about what that will look like. Judgment will also be based on G-d's great mercy and His enduring righteousness.

Lastly, we understand that there is no second chance when we stand before the judgment seat of our Messiah. Not even the wilderness generation was given one. Again, those who would have if they could have will be treated as if they had, during this final cosmic reality check. You see, the righteous core of humanity exists both within and without the House of faith and in the same manner, the idolatrous core also exists inside and outside of the House of Faith. Which core do you belong to and which one drives your life?

Many who think they have made it will be rejected, because they have rejected the truths of His Word. Some who think they have not made it, will be accepted because they lived their lives according to the dictates of the copy of His Word which was written on their conscience.

Don't get me wrong, I am not a liberal who denies the truths of G-d's Word. I would that all mankind should come to faith in our glorious Messiah in this life, so that they could get on with preparing for the life which is to come, which is the sole purpose of this life. In discussing the nature of Salvation, there are two broad perspectives: Broad hope (all are saved) and narrow hope (only a small number of redeemed are saved). I hold a broad narrow hope perspective, where all those who spend their lives looking for purpose and meaning will be welcomed by our Messiah even if they have not come to faith. Some who are attached to the idolatrous core, but who dwell within the faith, will be rejected because of this wrong affiliation.

There is no way to the Father, except through the Messiah, but it is His decision alone which will determine who is admitted and who is rejected. Even as believers, should we be afraid? As long as we live our lives daily as expressions of His Word, then His grace will grant us an abundant entrance into His heavenly Kingdom. This should cause us to be very humble because G-d is no respecter of persons and stands alone as the impartial eternal Judge over all the nations and generation of mankind. All shall be judged, not all shall be welcomed. You can fool yourself and others in this life, but no one can fool the Messiah. He sees through you.

There is a strand of Christianity called Calvinism, with a cousin which proclaims that once we are saved, we are always saved, because they wrongly teach that once salvation is obtained, salvation cannot be lost. According to this erroneous perspective, humanity is seen as permanently divided into two distinct spiritual categories: the sheep and the goats.

They say that if you are born a sheep, you will come to salvation and you cannot lose it. If you are born a goat, you cannot be saved, no matter how sincerely and thoroughly you repent. This was all apparently decided before the foundation of time. Not so.

What was decided before the foundation of time is that we are all born to choose (Gen. 4:6,7) and our eternal destiny is decided by our choices. These will either place us among the sheep or among the goats. You win or lose by the way you choose. Does this mean we can choose our way out of salvation? Yes, but it is not as easy as you might imagine. Sick ain't dead, yet!

I have encountered an incredible array of sickness in my life, but every time I get sick, I do not die. So every time you sin, you do not lose your salvation, but if you slip into a spiritual coma, you better heed the words of James, which state that faith without works is dead. It is time to wake up, to repent and learn to walk with G-d according to His Word. How about you?

Well we have covered quite a lot of ground this morning, so where does that leave us as we observe Shabbat Pesach and wander through the week of Unleavened Bread? I want to make ten statements for you to meditate on as you dig deeply into His Word and challenge anything which does not line up with this single, authoritative and inerrant source, His Word.

1. There is no such thing as generational curses which derive from previous, now deceased generations. They only exist among the living generations. When you repent, you leave the idolatrous core and join the righteous core. No matter how wholesome or dysfunctional your family or origin is, neither their righteousness nor their sinfulness sticks to you, unless you choose to let it. Making different choices and coming to faith and walking in the Word, will set you free from anything and everything.
2. The Messiah rose "after three days". Resurrection day changes every year and is geared to the annual Passover Seder. Sunday is just the first day of the week and only rarely and temporarily becomes special, when it happens to be the day "after three days". It is not the Day of the L-rd and does not replace or supersede the Sabbath.
3. What are you building in your heart and life? Is it your version of the abomination of the idolatrous golden calf or the temple of the living G-d, as you walk in the Spirit according to His Word? The choice is yours. What faith choices are you making?
4. Have you let Him write His Word on your heart as the updated copy of what is already written on your conscience? It is only in the Messiah that the veil is torn to allow us to see the glory of G-d as intensely as Moses did and to make the thirteen attributes the place where we dwell and the foundation upon which we build our lives. The contents of your heart are the only treasure of grace which you can take with you into the next life. In your case, will it be a positive treasure of grace or a negative treasure of wrath and judgment? It is best to sort the contents of your heart out in this life and not wait for them to be sorted out for you on the day of Judgment in the next life.

5. Do you celebrate our Messiah's resurrection according to the biblical chronology, or according to the twisted traditions and myths of men? You have to choose how you will walk with the Lord and whom you will serve. I serve the resurrected Passover Lamb and not the pagan Easter bunny who is not even kosher. The bunny came to us as a residue of an abominable pagan fertility ritual and has no place in our celebration of our blessed Messiah's resurrection. Isn't it time to clean up our act?
6. Where will you rest when you enter that temporary sleep state we which call death? We will neither be rewarded nor judged before the Day of Judgment, we just have to select our sleeping berth. Our temporary accommodations are decided by the choices we make. Those who walk in faith and in obedience to the Word of God, will rest in Heaven under the altar. Those with no faith or whose faith violates the truths of God's Word will have other accommodations in the great remand centre of God, among the other spiritual criminals who are waiting to be judged. Which destination are your life decisions choosing for you? God is not mocked, what we sow, we also reap.
7. How much of your life will burn up before your eyes on the the Day of Judgment when we will all pass through His cleansing fire? In the depths of your heart, what kind of spiritual house are you building and what kind of building materials are you using? How many surprises will there be for you on Judgment Day when it is no longer possible to practice deceit or disguise unresolved issues in your heart? Are you see through, with nothing to hide? We need to resolve and not hide or avoid our problems.
8. Related to this, are you keeping your heart and life right with God according to His Word? Too many who call themselves believers, routinely violate the teachings of His Word as they fill their hearts and lives with the works of the flesh. We need to become good spiritual gardeners and weed out the flesh and encourage the growth of the fruit of the Spirit. It is His job to provide for us and to protect us. It is our job to learn to respond to all of the happenstances of our lives according to the reactions which His Word requires of us, as we walk through life, continuously filled with His Spirit.
9. Is your faith bubbling over with faithful works as you show your faith by your works? Or are you not showing your faith by your works and slipping into a deadly spiritual coma where there are no signs of life? Is it time to wake up and walk with the Messiah?
10. Are you spiritually healthy, keeping short accounts with the Messiah? Or are you spiritually unhealthy putting off resolving negative heart and life issues for far too long? The Bible teaches us to forgive and forget, not just to forget. Some of the bad things which people have done to us are quickly forgotten and do not have the ability to chain us to negative attitudes and thus defile our lives for years and years.

If there are lingering hatreds and malingering wrath which are filling your heart and life with bitterness, these need to be dealt with, because we are called to live full of love and joy and peace, even as we wade through the mighty storms of life. Inner peace and harmony need to be the only acceptable spiritual condition of our hearts.

What do signs of spiritual health look like? There are first the basic disciplines of prayer, Bible Study, fellowship, outreach and worship. Then there are disciplines like good deeds and tithing, which is a major sign of good spiritual health. How is your spiritual health doing? Shabbat Shalom and may your journey through the week of Unleavened Bread be blessed and joyful and free of the leavening of sin.