

4-5-25 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – *VaYikra* (and [G-d] called)
Torah: Lev 1:1 – 6:7 (5:26 in Tanak)
Haftarah: Isa 43:21 – 44:23
Recommended Brit Hadashah:

Passover and the Resurrection

Central question of this message: Will you celebrate Passover and First Fruits as G-d intended?

The Torah portion for today is the first reading from the book of Leviticus, called *VaYikra*. It means “and [G-d] called [to Moses].”

Lev 1:1-3

1 Then the Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock. 3 'If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord.

וַיִּקְרָא 1:1 אֶל־ מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל
And called unto Moses, and spake the Lord unto him out of the tabernacle of
7121 413 4872 1696 3068 413 168

מִוֶּעֶד לֵאמֹר:
the congregation, saying,
4150 559

דַּבֵּר 2 אֶל־ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם כִּי־ יִקְרִיב
Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, any man if bring
1696 413 1121 3478 559 413 120 3588 7126

מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לַיהוָה מִן־ הַבְּהֵמָה מִן־ הַבֶּקֶר וּמִן־
of you an offering unto the Lord, of the cattle, even of the herd, and of
4480 7133 3068 4480 929 9999 4480 1241 4480

הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ אֹת־ קָרְבְּנֵכֶם:
the flock. ye shall bring your offering
6629 7126 853 7133

אִם־ 3 עֹלָה קָרְבָּנוֹ מִן־ הַבֶּקֶר זָכָר תְּמִימִם
If be a burnt sacrifice his offering of the herd, a male without blemish:
518 9999 5930 7133 4480 1241 2145 8549

יִקְרִיבֵנוּ 1 אֶל־ 1 פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ
let offer at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation he shall offer him it
7126 413 6607 168 4150 7126 853

לְרָצוֹן לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:
of his own voluntary will before the Lord.
7522 6440 3068

Before I continue with the teaching for today, I wish to show you something important that you won't see in the English rendering of this passage, nor the original Hebrew in printed form. You will only see it by looking at a hand-written Torah scroll.

What you will see is that one of the letters in the first word of this book is written differently. It is considerably smaller.



Although this smaller letter aleph might be rendered differently in various scrolls created in various locations, one thing remains the same in all the scrolls – it is *not* written full-sized.

There is an interesting tradition surrounding the way that this particular letter is written. And it is illustrative of what we know about Moses from other sources.

Moses was taking dictation from G-d regarding what he was to write in the scrolls. When G-d spoke the first word of Leviticus as *vaykra*, Moses wrote the word *vayakar*. He did that because *vayikra* suggests an intimate friend calling to Moses, and *vayakar* indicates a lack of that degree of intimacy. That final *aleph* in the word made all the difference.

G-d, who was superintending the writing of the Torah, paused in His dictation and questioned Moses about why he had not written down precisely what G-d had just said.

Moses explained his actions by saying that he was unworthy of being spoken to by G-d at that higher level of intimacy and friendship, but rather more of a distance would be more appropriate as a permanent description of their relationship.

As the tradition goes, Moses persisted in his objections, and G-d persisted in His insistence. In the end, G-d and Moses reached a compromise. Moses would write precisely what G-d had spoken, but Moses would be granted the power to write that final *aleph* smaller. And so he did. And every Torah scroll since that time written by a scribe has preserved that smaller *aleph*, so that we can see it today.

So the smaller *aleph* stands as a memorial today. When you see that smaller *aleph*, you can remember this sweet story of how humble Moses was before G-d, and how G-d made a way for that humility to be expressed, but still preserving the unchanging accuracy of what G-d actually said, and how He said it should be written.

We are one week from Passover. Because next Saturday night is the first Seder celebration, we are going to cancel formal services Saturday morning so that people can prepare their home celebrations.

So, I wish to take this opportunity to discuss many important matters regarding Passover, and its connection to the resurrection of Yeshua, because I will not have another opportunity to do so before we sit down to celebrate next Saturday night. I will resume my series on Biblical Dispute Resolution after the season of Unleavened Bread.

Let's begin by reading Scripture regarding the Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits festivals of the L-rd.

Lev 23:1-12

23 The Lord spoke again to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'The Lord's appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations — My appointed times are these: 3 'For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation. You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings.

4 'These are the appointed times of the Lord, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times appointed for them. 5 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight is the Lord's

Passover. 6 'Then on the fifteenth day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to the Lord; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. 7 'On the first day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work. 8 'But for seven days you shall present an offering by fire to the Lord. On the seventh day is a holy convocation; you shall not do any laborious work.'"

9 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 'And he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.

In the world of the normative synagogue, Passover this year begins Saturday night the 12th of April. Unleavened Bread begins the next day, and continues until sundown on April 20th. In the current expression of Judaism, there is no mention at all of First Fruits, which is also one of the festivals of Leviticus 23.

I suspect that omission is grounded in two streams of thought. First, the festival of First Fruits is to be celebrated in the Land of Israel, and an offering is to be brought to the Temple. So, outside the Land, and without a Temple, there is no obligation for this celebration.

Secondly (and in my opinion most importantly), since Yeshua was resurrected on First Fruits, the Messianic believers gave that day great significance. Even today the normative church calls that day “Easter Sunday.” They will celebrate this on Sunday, April 20.

Those in the normative church who reject the interjection of the pagan goddess Ishtar – together with the trappings of Ishtar worship - into G-d’s holy days have begun calling this day “Resurrection Sunday.” That is a step in the right direction.

And because the Christian world reveres this day above almost all others, I believe normative Judaism has refused even to recognize this holy commanded celebration. That way, they can maintain their strong distancing from Christianity, with less to explain to the people about the connections between Jews and Yeshua every year.

I could speak at length regarding the efforts of the normative synagogue to distance itself from anything Christian, but today I

wish merely to discuss how the normative church has gotten to where it is today, and how we might operate in this age to help our sweetest brothers and sisters in that group see how to walk-out Scripture a bit more clearly.

In the world of the normative church, they will celebrate a festival they call “Easter” on April 20 of this year. Almost never does the church’s calendar line-up with G-d’s biblical calendar. When the dates do align, it is not at all intentional. In fact, the disconnect between the calendars is quite intentional.

Many of the early “church fathers” were decidedly antiSemitic, and there was a strong push to distance Christianity from its Jewish roots. A good documentary exposing this truth is a movie by Derek Frank called *Let the Lion Roar*. It reveals a great deception perpetrated upon the normative church, and I strongly recommend each believer see it. But I will offer some insight now, not found in the movie.

Early in church history, the celebration by believers of the Passover was abandoned, and a new celebration – Easter – was substituted which, sadly, also included the existing trappings of the pagan

worship of that age, such as new clothes (particularly hats), bunnies, and eggs.

One can trace the transformation of Passover to Easter, although the path is somewhat obscured. The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft:

EASTER

(es'-ter) (pascha, from Aramaic paccha' and Hebrew pecach, the Passover festival): The English word comes from the Anglo-Saxon Eastre or Estera, a Teutonic goddess to whom sacrifice was offered in April, so the name was transferred to the paschal feast. The word does not properly occur in Scripture, although the King James Version has it in Acts 12:4 where it stands for Passover, as it is rightly rendered in the Revised Version (British and American). There is no trace of Easter celebration in the New Testament, though some would see an intimation of it in 1 Cor 5:7. The Jewish Christians in the early church continued to celebrate the Passover, regarding Christ as the true paschal lamb, and this

naturally passed over into a commemoration of the death and resurrection of Our Lord, or an Easter feast.

Let's take a closer look at Ishtar.

Ishtar is the Mesopotamian goddess of war and sexual love. Her counterpart in Canaanite pagan worship is Astarte. Ishtar is identified with the planet Venus. Ishtar is represented by a star with 6, 8, or 16 rays within a circle.

As goddess of Venus, delighting in bodily love, Ishtar protected prostitutes. Part of her cult worship practices included temple prostitution, which was thought to assure fertility for crops as well as animal herds. In later myths she was known as "Queen of the Universe."

The ancient Sumerian legend of their pagan deities Tammuz and his wife Ishtar, is found in texts dating back to 2500 BCE. As the legend goes, Tammuz, the god of fertility who has the power for new life in nature, dies. A grieving Ishtar follows him to the underworld where she, naked and bowed low, is judged, killed, and then hung on display. Deprived of Ishtar's presence, the earth loses its fertility, crops cease to grow and animals stop reproducing. Clearly, all life will end, unless something is done!

Ishtar, now missing for three days, gets help from another pagan god, who also descends into the underworld, where he gives Tammuz and Ishtar the power to return to the earth as the light of the sun for only six months.

After those six months, Tammuz returns to the underworld, to remaining there for another six months. Once again, Ishtar pursues him, prompting the pagan water god to rescue them both. And thus this six-month pattern of life and death kept repeating for all time. Thus, pagan worshippers understood how the cycle of winter (death) was followed by spring (life).

The English word Easter, which essentially is “Ishtar”, also parallels the German word *Ostern*. One view, expounded by the Venerable Bede¹ in the 8th century, was that it derived from *Eostre*, or *Eostræ*, the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring and fertility.

It is not reasonably subject to dispute that at the beginning, this messianic faith known as “the Way”² as well as what would then

¹ Much of what is known regarding *Eostre* comes from Bede, an English monk and historian from the 8th century. In his work “*De temporum ratione*” (The Reckoning of Time), Bede mentions *Eostre* as the name of a month corresponding to April and suggests that the festival of Easter may have been named after this goddess.

² Acts 24:14.

become known as “Christianity” was predominantly held by Jews, and converts. However, once the Apostles went out into the world to proclaim the good news, that missionary effort produced great fruit.

That was good, but it also had some negative consequences. The Italian historian Gavassi reminds us, "A pagan flood flowing into the church, carried with it its customs, practices and idols".³

Some in the early normative messianic faith saw the abomination of substitution and resisted the forced divestiture of Passover from the holy calendar.

The historian Eusebius wrote of Polycrates, a believer who lived in Ephesus from 130 to 196 CE. Polycrates responded to the pressures by the Pope to abandon Passover in favor of “Easter” by writing a letter to him. That letter included this language,

“We observe the genuine day (Passover) neither adding to nor taking from... For in Asia great lights have fallen asleep, which will rise again in the day of the Lord’s appearing... Philip, one of the twelve, John, who rested

³ *Gavazzi’s Lectures*, Page 290

upon the bosom of the Lord, Polycarp of Smyrna... All these observed the 14th day of the Passover, according to the Gospel, deviating in no respect but following the rule of faith... I am not threatened or intimidated, for those greater than I have said – ‘We ought to obey God rather than men.’”

But, because of the relentless pressure by the Catholic church, the connection between resurrection day (First Fruits) and the church was completely and finally broken in 325 CE, at the first Council of Nicea, where the Catholic church established “Easter” as the first Sunday after the full moon following the March equinox. This disconnected the church’s Easter from G-d’s Passover.

One of the main indications I see that the church has lost G-d’s calendar as established at the exodus, and fleshed-out in Leviticus 23, is that the church now routinely refers to G-d’s festival calendar as the “Jewish feasts.” They have inadvertently illustrated just how effective the distancing has become, and at the same time recognizing that the Jewish people are the only ones who have actually taken G-d seriously regarding His holy days.

Today, following the Catholic pattern, the Church has truncated Passover to become “the L-rd’s Supper”, becoming merely a sip of grape juice and a tiny cracker (or on occasion even leavened bread!), which is disconnected from the actual proper day.

It is common to see depictions of Yeshua offering wine and *leavened bread* as communion. This is how far astray the Church has now come, after it purged all the Jews who possessed thousands of years of institutional understanding of how to live in obedience to Scripture.

Not only did G-d establish Passover as an eternal festival, and not only did Yeshua celebrate it every year of His adult life, Paul also taught that the new adherents to “the Way” should keep it as well.

1 Cor 5:6-8

6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. **8 Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and**

wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Scripture makes it clear that Paul was celebrating the days of Unleavened Bread while he was on his missionary journeys.

Acts 20:4-6

4 And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. 5 But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. 6 And we sailed from Philippi **after the days of Unleavened Bread**, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.

Paul was teaching and observing consistent with the normative Jewish theology of his time. He knew that foods being “puffed up” as leaven does, is an illustration of haughtiness and pride.

And not only that, Paul was using the very same rabbinic interpretations that were used then, and even today, in the orthodox community.

Rb. Ari Kahn has said,

Talmudic teachings regarding Passover associate leavened bread with the evil inclination: The difference between leavened bread, chametz, and matzah, the unleavened "bread of poverty," is that bread is puffed up, indicating haughtiness or pride.

Although the normative churches almost universally have a table in the front of the sanctuary which has emblazoned upon it in bold letters, "This do in remembrance of Me", the vast majority who see those words have not yet even known what the "This" is, nor have they done it.



Ironically, this seems to be the only teaching of Yeshua which has been carved indelibly and displayed prominently in most churches. And it is this very teaching that has either been minimized or abandoned by those churches.

How did G-d set up these first holy days in Torah?

The first full moon of spring, which governs the dates of Passover (1-14) and Unleavened Bread (1-15) can fall on any day of the week. The lunar calendar is not perfectly aligned with the weekly calendar or the yearly calendar.

Because of this annual slippage between the two calendars, it is not uncommon that a larger number of “Sabbaths” can fall in the first week of our festival year. Remember every holy day is a “Sabbath”, as is the weekly one.

This “clustering of Sabbaths” occurred in the year that Yeshua was crucified, so He was murdered on a Sabbath, put in the ground on a Sabbath, lay in the tomb three days and three nights, and then rose on yet another festival day... all within one week.

This concept has been lost upon the normative Church, and so there is a persistent tradition out there about a “Good Friday”, and a fair number of theological gymnastics which are routinely used to try to cram three days and three nights into Friday evening through Sunday morning.

I have assembled a chronology which is consistent with each of the events of that week, and which actually allows Yeshua to be in the grave three days and three nights, as He said.

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Night Day	Night Day	Night1 Day1	Night2 Day2	Night3 Day3	Night Day
Paschal lamb slain by dark today	Passover Betrayal Trial Crucifixion Burial	Unlev Bread In the grave	In the grave	In the grave	First Fruits Arose by dawn

The Church celebrates what they call “Palm Sunday”, which they believe was the day that Yeshua had His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. Is that rendering correct? We can do some calculations to be sure.

We know that Yeshua’s entry into Jerusalem had to be four days before the day when the Lamb was sacrificed, so He could be

examined in the Temple for those four days to be determined to be blameless and without defect.

So, let's put that on our timeline as well. If the sacrifice of the Lamb was to be after dawn, but before dusk, on Tuesday, so as to be consumed on Passover (beginning Tuesday night and all day Wednesday, under the current rendering of man's calendars), then we can back-date His entry from the Monday before, since the lamb was to be inspected for four full days before it was sacrificed. Four days before Monday is Friday. So, Yeshua likely rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey earlier on the day on Friday.

The fact Yeshua rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey, the fact that the people were waving palm fronds as He rode by, and the fact that they were yelling part of the psalms, are yet more strong messages regarding the messianic nature of Yeshua that the normative Church has sadly missed.

Our sages believed that if Israel were worthy when Messiah came, He would come in the clouds on a white horse. But if Israel were unworthy, He would come lowly, riding on the foal of an ass. The way that Yeshua entered Jerusalem on that day spoke volumes. He was declaring Himself to be Messiah.

Then there was the phenomenon of the palm branches. Our people believed that Messiah would present Himself on Succot. Palm branches are one of the four species of plants that are waved on Succot. It didn't matter what time of year Messiah came, for us it would be Succot! The people's actions recognized Him as Messiah.

Then there is the issue of what the people were shouting. They are invoking much of Ps. 118 by their words.

John 12:12-13

12 On the next day the great multitude who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, 13 took the branches of the palm trees, and went out to meet Him, and began to cry out,

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel."

We can see the Psalm that they were invoking with these few words.

Ps 118:22-27

22 The stone which the builders rejected

Has become the chief corner stone.

23 This is the Lord's doing;

It is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day which the Lord has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

25 O Lord, do save, we beseech Thee;

O Lord, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity!

**26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the
Lord;**

We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.

27 The Lord is God, and He has given us light;

Thus, the people's words also recognized Him as Messiah, and proclaimed Him as King of Israel.

The normative Church believes that the proclamation "hosannah" is a declaration of praise. But that isn't technically correct. It's not praise, it is a petition for being saved. In Hebrew it is pronounced *hoshiah na*. This means "save us now!"

25

יְהוָה O Lord, <u>3068</u>	אֲנִי I beseech thee, <u>577</u>	נָא now, <u>4994</u>	הוֹשִׁיעָה Save <u>3467</u>	יְהוָה O Lord: <u>3068</u>	אֲנִי I beseech thee, <u>577</u>
				נָא: now <u>4994</u>	הַצְלִיחָה send prosperity. <u>6743</u>

And these actions of Yeshua, and the assembled multitude, proclaiming Him as Messiah and King, combined to be the tipping point for Caiphas, the High Priest, and the ruling political party of the Jews.

John 11:47-53

47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 "If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." 49 But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, **"You know nothing at all, 50 nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation**

should not perish." 51 Now this he did not say on his own initiative; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, 52 and not for the nation only, but that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. 53 So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.

Yeshua rose sometime between nightfall on Saturday night and dawn Sunday morning on First Fruits.

Matt 28:1-2

28 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave.

Yeshua laid down His life for ours on Passover, was placed in the grave at the beginning of Unleavened Bread, and He rose again on First Fruits. His “keeping of the festivals” by these events settles the matter of the calendar in my mind.

But there is a bigger fulfillment which is to come.

1 Cor 15:20-25

20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.

G-d's plan of redemption for all mankind follows the roadmap of the Leviticus 23 festivals. When we observe these festivals, we honor our King and Savior. This year we will celebrate First Fruits on "the morrow after the Sabbath" during the festival of Unleavened Bread. It will be this year on Sunday the 20th of April.

First Fruits, as a holy festival of G-d, and not as a shined-up pagan festival, is worthy of being remembered and celebrated because upon that day our Savior rose, and demonstrated to us that His victory over sin and over the grave was real – and not merely an unrealized hope.