

4-3-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – Passover
Torah: Exod 33:12 – 34:26
Haftarah: Ezek 37:1-14
Recommended Brit Hadashah: 1 Cor 5:6-8

Celebrate!

Central question of this message: Will you celebrate the festivals as G-d intended?

Today there is no normal Torah reading in the standard sequence, that is because of the way the lunar calendar (which governs the festivals of Leviticus 23) interacts with the weekly calendar established upon the seven-day cycle. Today we are on the second day following Passover, if you follow the current rendering of the Orthodox Jewish calendar. If you follow the way I believe G-d ordained the calendar, tomorrow is the third day, *Yom Habikkurim*. First fruits.

Today's Torah portion is read in synagogues on the Shabbes known as "*Shabbes Chol Hamoed Pesach*," which means, "the Sabbath during the days of Passover" as the current Jewish calendar is rendered.¹

¹ In current Jewish terminology, the term "Passover" is used to describe not only the Passover meal at the outset of these festival days, but also all of the intervening days of Unleavened Bread as well.

Ex 33:12

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.'

וַיֹּאמֶר	מֹשֶׁה	אֵל-	יְהוָה	רְאֵה	אַתָּה	אָמַר	12
And said	Moses	unto	the Lord,	See,	thou	sayest	
<u>559</u>	<u>4872</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>7200</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>559</u>	
אֵלַי	הֵעֵל	אֶת-	הָעָם	הַזֶּה	וְאַתָּה	לֹא	
unto me,	Bring up		people:	this	and thou	not	
<u>413</u>	<u>5927</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>5971</u>	<u>2088</u>	<u>859</u>	<u>3808</u>	
הוֹדַעְתָּנִי	אֶת אֲשֶׁר-	תִּשְׁלַח	עִמָּי	וְאַתָּה			
hast let me know	whom	thou wilt send	with me.	Yet thou			
<u>3045</u>	<u>834</u> <u>853</u>	<u>7971</u>	<u>5973</u>	<u>859</u>			
אָמַרְתָּ	יָדַעְתִּיךָ	בְּשֵׁם	וְגַם-	מֵצָאתָ	חֵן		
hast said,	I know thee	by name,	and also	thou hast found	grace		
<u>559</u>	<u>3045</u>	<u>8034</u>	<u>1571</u>	<u>4672</u>	<u>2580</u>		
בְּעֵינַי:							
in my sight.							
<u>5869</u>							

I wish to focus today on what the normative Christian church calls “Easter” or how some now better say, “Resurrection Sunday.”

Let's review how did the Christian Easter become so disconnected with G-d's First Fruits festival.

At the council of Nicea, convened by Constantine in 325 CE, the rulers of the normative Christian church decided to place a distance between their celebration of the resurrection of Yeshua, and the Jewish celebration of First Fruits. The Church even gave their celebration a new name – Easter – because it closely coincided with the pagan spring festivals to the goddess Ishtar.

I believe they intended that giving this Christian celebration the name of the Babylonian fertility goddess would encourage more of those pagans to join in the celebration. They even adopted many of the trappings of the pagan worship of that age, such as new clothes (particularly hats), bunnies, and eggs. All of these trappings were chosen to be illustrative of “new life” because they believed that Ishtar brought new life to the world every year.

One can trace the transformation of Passover to Easter, although the path is dim. 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 Eстера, 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.

It is true that the normative church has given the Easter Sunday celebration a hefty shot of spiritualism. What pagan celebration, regardless of how “shined-up” the Church has made it, can actually properly honor G-d? How can the normative church not see the tragic irony in eating an “Easter ham?”

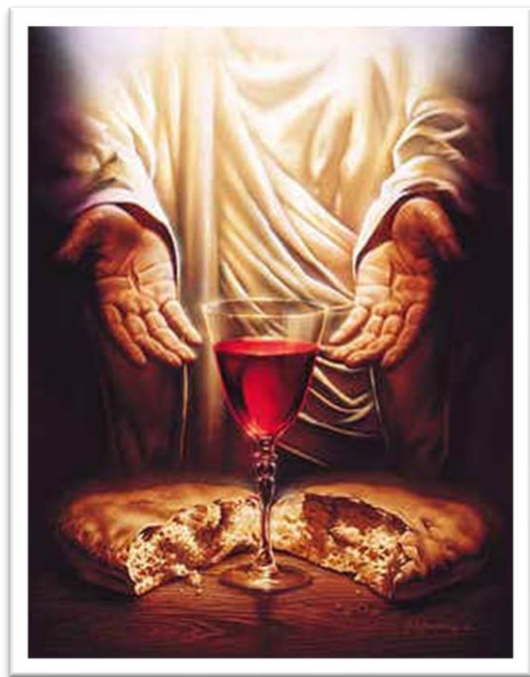
The early believers resisted the forced divestiture of Passover from its calendar. The historian Eusebius wrote of Polycrates, a believer who lived in Ephesus from 130 to 196 CE. Polycrates responded to the pressures by the Pope to abandon Passover in favor of “Easter” by writing a letter to him. That 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 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.

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.

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!)², which is disconnected from the actual proper day. It is common to see depictions of Yeshua offering wine and *leavened bread* as communion.



² The sweet people in the normative Christian church have not been taught that leavened bread has no place on the Passover table, nor would it be appropriate for a communion. Communion is a shortened form of the end of Passover, where Yeshua took the Afikomen matzoh, and then also the third cup, illustrating a newly-revealed truth of His sacrifice in those parts.

Today, in the normative church, the festival of Unleavened Bread is completely ignored, and First Fruits has become Easter, which only accidentally occasionally coincides with the actual day G-d established for First Fruits.

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 using the very same rabbinic interpretations that were used then, and even today, in the orthodox community.

Let's examine G-d's holy days from His Word.

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. So it is not uncommon that a more than one "Sabbath" can fall in the first week of our festival year.

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 a festival day... all within one week.

There is a persistent Catholic tradition out there about “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. Here is a better chronology:

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Night	Night	Night1	Night2	Night3	Night
Day	Passover meal concluded.	Day1	Day2	Day3	First Fruits
Paschal lamb slain in the afternoon, and Passover served just after twilight	Mount of Olives Prayer Betrayal Arrest	Unleavened Bread	In the grave	In the grave	Probably arose after Havdalah, long before dawn
	Day	In the grave			Day
	Trial Crucifixion Death Burial			Havdalah at twilight	Encounter with Mary

The Church celebrates what they call “Palm Sunday”, which they believe was the day that Yeshua had His “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. 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 in the day 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 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. And He delivered a clear sign to the people of His kingship and their unworthiness.

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 Psalm 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 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 rescue. In Hebrew it is pronounced *hoshiah na*. This means “save us now!”

25
 אֲנִי אֶתְפַּלֵּל לְיְהוָה אֲנִי אֶתְפַּלֵּל לְיְהוָה
 O Lord, I beseech thee, now, Save O Lord: I beseech thee,
3068 577 4994 3467 3068 577

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 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.

Much has been lost to the modern normative church because of their disdain for being grafted-into the Jewish olive tree. They often insist that the church has replaced Israel, contrary to Romans 11.

But the modern Synagogue has fared no better. What we see in modern Judaism is in large part a reaction *against* normative Christianity. And we see one example of this during this Passover season.

In modern Jewish theology, the festival of Unleavened Bread (beginning the 15th of the first month – Nisan) has been merged seamlessly into an extended Passover, during which time

unleavened bread is also eaten. Further, Jewish orthodoxy has completely ignored the festival of First Fruits, which is commanded to be celebrated on the “day after the Sabbath.”

Lev 23:9-11

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.

It is clear from the wording of Lev 23 up to this passage that the term “*the Sabbath*” refers to the weekly Sabbath, which is the first of the commanded festivals of Lev 23. The normative Jewish theology of 2000 years ago recognized the week-long festival of Unleavened Bread as a distinct celebration, and during that week there was by necessity a Sunday (morrow after the Sabbath), which was the proper time for the festival of First Fruits.

But modern Judaism has chosen to distance itself from Christianity to such a strong degree, they have also distanced themselves from G-d Himself as well in those matters that the normative church got right!

The orthodox Jewish theology of today is that what would be First Fruits, is the next calendar day following Passover. They recognize that Passover is a Sabbath (regardless of what day of the week it falls), and then they say the “morrow after the Sabbath” then can legitimately be the very next day following Passover.

But that rendering is based upon a strained reading of Scripture. First of all, *never* do I find the words “*the Sabbath*” used to refer to any day *other than* the weekly Saturday Sabbath. That alone should have been sufficient, but it is clear that Leviticus 23 specifically appoints the day following the Passover as the beginning of Unleavened Bread, and so it would be incredibly odd to put two festivals (Unleavened Bread and First Fruits) on the same day. If that were the intention, there would not be two festivals described, but only one. And the instructions in Scripture would have made it clear that First Fruits was to be observed on the day following Passover by saying, “the next day”, or words to that effect. But in

Scripture, there is a significant separation between the description of the seven days of Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits.

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.

This interpretive disconnect by normative Judaism of today has also led to a different way of counting the omer. If we more closely adhere to G-d's calendar as set out in Leviticus 23, the counting is to begin upon the occurrence of First Fruits, and First Fruits (as I believe) is to be *always* on a Sunday, then Pentecost will *always* be on a Sunday.

I don't believe it to be accidental that the theology of modern Jewish orthodoxy causes the day that Messiah was resurrected to quietly disappear from the festival calendar. There is not even a distinct liturgy found in the Siddur for First Fruits today.

The bottom line theology for both the church and the traditional synagogue of today is this – there is no First Fruits – because it just doesn’t fit with either of their convenient theological constructs.

But I stand before you today to affirm to you that I stand with G-d on this matter. There *is* a separate celebration called First Fruits, because G-d said so.

And we know we have the correct day for it – Sunday during the week of Unleavened Bread – because we know that Yeshua arose on that day.

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.

As I see the way things unfolded, Yeshua was murdered on Passover, placed in the grave just before dark at the beginning of Unleavened Bread, and He rose again on First Fruits. His “keeping of the festivals” by these events settles the matter 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.

And it is clear that First Fruits 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.

It is my prayer that the faith of the Apostles be likewise resurrected among those in the normative church as they come to see just how far they have strayed because they have followed their own eyes.