

Passover – The Intermediate Sabbath

We were hoping....

A Messianic Jewish Commentary by Hannah Nesher

Readings: Numbers 28:16-25, Ezekiel 37:1-14, Luke 24

The parashah (scripture portion) for this Shabbat, in the middle of the Passover week, begins by describing the Passover of the Lord (14th day of the first month), followed by the feast of unleavened bread which begins on the 15th day and lasts for seven days. Usually we blend these two special times into one, calling it Passover, but I believe there is a crucial difference between the two, which we will explore in this study. Also, the day after the Sabbath is the Feast of Firstfruits (Bikkurim), at which time the first fruits of the harvest are brought to the priest (cohen) as a wave offering before the Lord. (Lev. 23:9-11)

It seems to me that we have three, distinct time frames here, representing three unique spiritual states or conditions of the soul:

1. Passover represents **Salvation** - we are saved from the wrath of God by faith in the blood of the Passover Lamb. *“And when I see the blood I will pass over you.”* (Ex. 12:12) Yeshua was slain on Passover as the perfect fulfillment of the Lamb: **“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”** (John 1:29)
2. Unleavened bread, also called Matzah, or bread of affliction, represents the wilderness experience. Matzah is flat, devoid of yeast (chametz) which represents pride (puffs us up) and all wickedness (a souring agent) (1 Cor. 5:8) The week of unleavened bread represents **sanctification**. It is a time of affliction, trials and testing, to purge us of our pride; to teach us humility and obedience by the things we suffer. *“And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”* (Deut. 8:2)
3. First Fruits, also called Bikkurim, represents **resurrection**. Just as the barley is offered up to the Lord as the first crop from the death of winter, so Yeshua was also raised from the dead on the Feast of Firstfruits, on the First day (Sunday), which begins Saturday night. *“But now the Messiah is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* (1 Cor. 15:20)



Passover -----	Unleavened Bread-----	First fruits
Salvation	Sanctification	Resurrection.

From this picture, we may see that between salvation and resurrection is sanctification.

The Intermediate Sabbath – Losing Heart in the Wilderness

Between the cross and the resurrection lies the wilderness, a dry and thirsty land where water is scarce. I have lived in the desert, in the Negev of Israel, and it is not an easy place to live – even with air conditioning! It is a land of snakes and scorpions; a place of great danger. It was in the Negev that I faced my greatest test. It almost cost me my life. And yet, the wilderness is not a punishment, but a necessary stage in our spiritual journey.¹ Notice that the Holy Spirit led Yeshua into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. It is God who leads us into our wilderness experiences, to humble us, to test us, to refine our faith, to teach us perseverance and endurance. It is a place that, if we come out of it alive, we walk out ‘leaning on our beloved’. (SOS 8:5) We have finally learned to trust in and depend upon the Lord. Our response to the wilderness, however, may determine if we ever make it to the resurrection or not. Because it is in the wilderness that it is so easy to lose heart. It was because the Israelites became discouraged along the way that their carcasses lay scattered across that vast wilderness. Discouragement caused them to lose heart, to lose hope, to long for Egypt, to grumble and murmur and complain. All except two – Joshua and Caleb – who followed the Lord wholeheartedly and kept faith.

THE WEDGE OF DISCOURAGEMENT

These days it seems all too easy to become discouraged. Bob Proctor writes about a fable in which the devil holds a sale of his wares. There on display, and offered for sale, were the rapier of jealousy, the dagger of fear, and the strangling noose of hatred, each with its own high price. But standing alone on a purple pedestal was a worn and battered wedge. This was the devil’s most prized possession, for with it alone he could stay in business. It was not for sale...it was the wedge of discouragement. Why did he prize discouragement so highly? It was because of its enfeebling, demoralizing effect. Hatred, jealousy, fear, and other negative states may cause a person to act foolishly, to fight or to run. But at least they act. Discouragement on the other hand, hurts the person more than any of these. It causes the person to sit down, pity themselves and do nothing. The answer to discouragement then is intelligent action. We must get rid of discouragement before it gets rid of us! Even though I write about it and teach about it, I find myself also, at times, losing heart, losing hope in this wilderness I walk through daily. Just the other night, I felt so discouraged. Going through a divorce brings up all kinds of issues. Being a single Mom at 50, starting all over again, feeling lost and alone can lead to a huge case of self-pity and discouragement. I drove my son to the airport to leave on a trip to Israel. We brought an extra suitcase in case his was overweight but it was fine. I should have taken the empty suitcase back to the car, but discouragement causes us to forget things, lose things and not think straight. So I forgot the suitcase. Fortunately, I remembered and within a few minutes returned to the airport, only to be told that they had already taken it away and destroyed it. Now if I hadn’t felt so discouraged, I probably would have taken their advice to go to the RCMP station to look for it just in case they hadn’t disposed of it yet. But because of my emotional state, I just

¹ See DVD Walking in the Wilderness available by mail or through our website: www.voiceforisrael.net

gave up, walked back to the car and cried. When I couldn't find my parking ticket as well and was told I would have to pay the maximum, I didn't even put up a fuss. It was like – go ahead devil – do whatever you want. Here I am, use and abuse me, I just don't care anymore. Hopelessness is a very dangerous state of being. Hope deferred makes the heart sick.

When Hope is Lost – The Day With No Name

The Scripture reading between Passover and Bikkurim is simply called 'Intermediate Sabbath'. It doesn't even have a name like the other parashot. Philip Yancey called the Saturday before the resurrection, 'The Day With No Name'. He then writes, "**It's Saturday on planet earth; will Sunday ever come?**"² It is a day when all hope seems lost; we wonder if it has all been in vain, if the sun will ever shine again in our grieving hearts. Israel asked the same question in the haftorah³ reading for this intermediate Sabbath. The dry bones, which represent the whole house of Israel say: "**Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.**" (Ezekiel 37:11) Sometimes we feel that we have been cut off from hope itself. But so often, when we feel the closest to darkness, it is in that moment that God is doing His greatest work. It is when Israel's hope in itself is completely destroyed that God's promise of restoration comes forth as a breath of life. "**Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord...And I will put My spirit in you, and you shall live...**" (Ezekiel 37:13-14). The Hebrew word for spirit here (Ruach) is the same one used in verses 5 & 6 translated breath. "**I will cause breath (Ruach) to enter into you and you shall live.**" Just as Israel's restoration could not be achieved by human power, but only by the spirit of God, so too will our restoration be completely supernatural!

RESURRECTION AND LIFE

In the New Testament, we see Yeshua literally fulfilling this Word of God. Lazarus had died and been in the tomb already for four days by the time Yeshua arrived so that their hope was completely lost. Why did Yeshua wait for four days? Jewish tradition believes that the person's soul hovers around its physical body for three days, but after this time period, the soul leave. Therefore the Jewish people standing around knew that by the fourth day, the situation was completely and totally without any hope whatsoever! Even the soul of the deceased had departed. But Yeshua called out to Lazarus, TZEH HAHUTZAH! COME OUT! And Lazarus came up out of his grave and he lived! One thing, however, needed to be done before Lazarus could come out of the tomb to resurrection life – the stone had to be rolled away. Somebody had to do it and notice it wasn't Yeshua. No, he could have easily rolled it away himself or even commanded the heavy stone to move and it would have obeyed Him, but instead, he called upon the people involved to participate in the miracle. Yeshua said to them, **Take away the stone.**" (John 11:39) Why? Perhaps he wanted to teach us that we are not to be completely passive and expect God to do everything for us. Maybe there is one stone standing between us and our miracle; and that all we need to do is draw upon the faith and strength within us to 'take away the stone.' And then we will see God perform a resurrection in our own life! Halleluyah! Yeshua's

² Our Daily Bread, April 11th, 2009

³ Prophetic portion of Scripture reading

mother, Miriam, said to the servants at the wedding feast, “Whatever he tells you to do – just do it!” Maybe we need to listen to Mama Miriam’s advice ourselves – whatever He tells us to do just do it! We could sit there, looking at that stone, and crying, and thinking it’s just too heavy or too hard to move – or we can just do it – and see miracles. May we hear the voice of our Good Shepherd and obey what He tells us to do – even if it doesn’t make sense or seems impossible in the natural.

Sometimes we may find ourselves in an utterly hopeless situation; it is so tempting to give in to despair and depression. But this is exactly when we should be reaching out for a miracle to the One who said, **“I am the resurrection and the life.”** (John 11:25) Perhaps we were hoping that God would show up and do a miracle before the whole thing died. But He did a ‘no show’. The relationship or the business or the whatever we were hoping for still died. And disappointment sets in. Where was God? Where was His power when I needed Him? Could it be that He is waiting for His perfect timing to act, which is not necessarily our concept of perfect timing?

“NOW you will see what I will do to Pharaoh!” God said to Moses in Egypt after things only got worse instead of better. It may seem like things are going from bad to worse and then it’s all downhill from there – but God’s purpose is always redemptive – that the Son of God may be glorified through it!

But We Were Hoping

Yeshua’s disciples knew hopelessness. At Passover, after Yeshua’s death on the cross, it looked like all hope was lost; that the forces of evil had triumphed. After Yeshua’s death, His disciples wandered in darkness, confusion, and sorrow. They were hoping that this finally was the ‘real deal’. After so many false Messiahs, they were hoping that this man was truly the ‘mashiach’⁴ who would redeem Israel from Roman oppression and restore the Kingdom of Israel. **“But we were hoping...”** The Hebrew word used is ‘kavinu’, from the root kaveh. קָוָה Two of them were traveling to a village seven miles from Jerusalem. Notice how disappointment was taking them away from Jerusalem? Similarly, it will drag us away from our ‘Jerusalem’ as well if we’re not careful. As they walked, they conversed and reasoned and were sad. Isn’t this just like us when we’ve experienced a disappointment – we’ve just got to find somebody to talk to about it. We try to reason the thing out, to somehow make sense out of something that just doesn’t make sense. This only causes more sorrow. But then Yeshua came near and walked with them along the road. **But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.** (Luke 24:16). In their darkest hour, in their utter hopelessness, they didn’t recognize that Hope was walking right alongside them! For Yeshua is a ‘living hope’. **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Adonai Yeshua the Messiah in his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you.”** (1 Peter 1:3-4) In Yeshua, we have the hope of eternal life. Yeshua’s disciples had a certain expectation of how God was going to work things out. It didn’t happen the way they thought it should. But it was God’s greatest triumph over darkness. When things don’t work out the way we had hoped they would, it could

⁴ Messiah

be that redemption is right there with us, walking alongside us; that hope is right under our noses but we don't perceive it because it comes in a form we didn't quite expect.

Mike Murdock wrote a book called 'The Law of Recognition' in which he states:

Anything unrecognized becomes uncelebrated.
 Anything uncelebrated becomes unrewarded.
 Anything unrewarded eventually exits your life.

*"Everything you need in your life is already in your life merely awaiting your recognition of it. There is something you are not seeing in your life today...and it could be costing you dearly."*⁵

What is it that we are not recognizing? It took the Spirit of God to open their eyes to the truth of what they had not been seeing. Beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, Yeshua explained the things concerning Himself from the Scriptures. (Luke 24:27) Again, when Yeshua appeared to them, they didn't understand. They were terrified and thought they had seen a ghost. And once again, Yeshua opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures concerning Him written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms. I wonder how many Christians could explain to a Jewish person about the Messiah Yeshua from the Old Testament Scriptures?

The point is, that when we are in the midst of those dark, confusing storms of life where nothing seems to make sense, we need to recognize the Hope that is walking right beside us and allow the Spirit of God to show us the way through the darkness into the Light. That situation that seems so incredibly hopeless may be just the circumstance that will bring new life, new vision, and new awareness to a previously dull and dreary life. We must never believe the lie that we are all alone; that we have been abandoned and that our hope is completely cut off. For He has promised that **He will never leave us and never forsake us.** He has promised that **His plans for us are for good and not for evil, plans to give us a hope and a future.** If we will seek Him with all of our heart, His promise is that we will find Him. Perhaps the answer has been with us all along; we just haven't recognized it yet. Once we do, we will return to our 'Jerusalem', to our place of destiny, with great joy. And just like the disciples, once their eyes were opened to see the resurrected Messiah, **they were continually in the temple praising and blessing God. Amen.** (Luke 24:52-3)

Resting in the Middle

The intermediate Sabbath is the place in the middle, the place of transition. We've left Egypt but are not yet in the Promised Land. We've been saved and put our faith in Yeshua, but not yet seeing the Promises come to pass. We've seen the work of the cross in our lives but no sign yet of the resurrection power on the horizon. Now is not the time to give up or give in. Now is not the time to succumb to the three deadly 'd's': discouragement, depression and despair. No, no! Sabbath is a time to rest. It is a time to stop striving for our provision, stop gathering and reasoning. It is the place of trust, of quiet confidence. Sometimes there is nothing we can do in that 'intermediate Sabbath place but rest. After the women who had come with Yeshua from the

⁵ P. 7,9

Galilee observed the tomb and how His body was laid, they simply went home **and they rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment.**” (Luke 23:56) Shabbat comes from the word la’shevet which means simply ‘to sit’. Can we, after having done all that we know to do, simply sit down and rest, trusting in a loving God to do His part to make it all work together for good in His perfect timing? (Notice I said *His*, not ours). I know it’s not always easy to keep hoping when it seems that all hope is lost. Nothing looks like it should and we don’t understand why what has happened has happened. That’s why we need to keep meeting together and encouraging one another, more and more so as we head even closer to that perfect day. Let us continue to pick each other up when we fall, exhort and encourage one another with the truth of God’s word and with the assurance of His unfailing love for each one of us.

HEBREW WORD STUDY ON HOPE

The Prophet Isaiah gives us a beautiful promise that is commonly mistranslated in English. **“But those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”** (Isaiah 40:31) The Hebrew word used here again comes from the root ‘kaveh’ קָוָה which means hope, as in the Israeli National Anthem, Hatikvah. הַתִּקְוָה. Therefore it is not enough to just sit and passively *wait* on God, but to actively hope: Hope in His goodness, hope in His mercy, hope in His love, in His forgiveness and in His guidance. Other meanings that branch out from this same root word kaveh (hope) are kav, which means ‘line’ and kavanah, meaning ‘intention’ and kivun (direction). If we put all these related words together, we may glean what God is really meaning in this verse. We must actually set the line of our hope intentionally in the direction of the Lord. For when we recover hope, we recover joy; and the joy of the Lord will be our strength.

In order to regain our strength, we must persevere in our hope in the Lord.

“If we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

(Romans 8:25)

If we allow ourselves to succumb to hopelessness, we make ourselves weak and therefore easy prey for the enemy. Therefore, on this intermediate Sabbath, let us call ourselves **‘Prisoners of Hope’**. **“Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak, The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”** (Zeph. 3:16-17)

Prayer: Adonai, God of Israel, when I feel hopeless and despairing, would you open the eyes of my understanding to see that You are actually walking right there alongside of me, the Living Hope. Strengthen me Adonai, not that I may become more independent of You, but that I may have the strength and courage to simply rest in You, trusting in You with all of my heart, even as I walk through the wilderness. Show me Your ways, Adonai, that I may see Your glory. May Your presence walk alongside me always. I believe, Lord, help my unbelief. Give me the strength to persevere and endure, hoping for the things I do not yet see, eagerly waiting with perseverance, even for eternal life with You in Your Kingdom. In Yeshua’s name. Amen.

Please receive this AARONIC BENEDICTION (BLESSING) from Zion spoken over each of you with the love of Yeshua Hamashiach (the Messiah):

**Y'VARECH'CHA ADONAI V'YISHM'RECHA
 YA'ER ADONAI PANAV A LECHA VICHUNECHA
 YISA ADONAI PANAV ALECHA
 V'YASEM L'CHA SHALOM**

**MAY THE LORD BLESS YOU AND KEEP YOU
 MAY THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE SHINE UPON YOU AND BE GRACIOUS TO YOU
 MAY THE LORD LIFT UP HIS COUNTENANCE UPON
 YOU
 AND GIVE YOU PEACE**

About the Author:

Hannah Nesher grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home and received her education in a religious Hebrew school in Canada. During a crisis pregnancy, she came to know Jesus (Yeshua) as her Messiah and Savior. She now lives in Israel with her children and grandchildren, teaching Christians about the Jewish roots of their faith.



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