

Mastery of Time

Today is *Shabbat HaChodesh* and tonight is *Rosh Chodesh Nisan/Aviv* in the Hebrew Calendar. Passover is nearly two weeks away! On this Shabbat Exodus 12:1-20 is read, announcing the arrival of the month of *Nisan/Aviv*. *Shabbat Hachodesh* is the last of four special *Shabbatot* that surround the festival of Purim. *Shabbat Shekalim* (plural of *shekels*) and *Shabbat Zachor* (remembrance) precede Purim, and *Shabbat Parah* (fruitful) and *Shabbat HaChodesh* (shabbat of the month) follow Purim.

Exodus 12 details the beginning of the Sacred Hebrew calendar, just before the Israelites leave Egypt. God commanded the Israelites to begin counting the months of the year: “*Now Adonai spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying* ²*“This month will mark the beginning of months (Rosh Chodesh) for you; it is to be the first month of the year for you” (Ex 12:1-2)*. The *Torah* joins *Rosh Chodesh* with the more important festivals where His people are commanded to be joyous, offer sacrifices, and be reminded of His divinity (*Nu. 10:10*).

Originally, there was not a set calendar for Jewish months. Instead, the *Sanhedrin* (an ancient court) would declare a new month after receiving the testimony of two reliable witnesses reporting that they had seen the new moon. Then the message was spread throughout Israel and Babylonia via small fires on hilltops. When a new moon was announced, someone would go to the top of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem with a long wooden pole. He would set the end of his pole on fire and wave it around until he could see someone on another hilltop waving his own pole. The second person waved his pole until he could see a third person waving, and so on until the message reached Babylonia. Eventually the Samaritans began lighting fires on hilltops in order to mislead the Jews, and so instead of fires, messengers were sent out from Jerusalem. By the later Amoraic period, a fixed calendar was set, and there was no longer any need for witnesses or messengers.

The first day of *Nisan (Aviv)* is a historic day for our Jewish people. It was the day when we received our first commandment as a nation: *sanctify the new moon*. The old monthly new moon declaration ritual had a profound spiritual and historic significance for Jews living all over the world because it sets or establishes when the Biblical Holy Days (*chagim*) fall, how many days they encompass and when they are celebrated in and out of Israel. By virtue of this commandment, the Jewish people were/are given *mastery* and *privilege* over the reckoning of time. From that moment on the calendar with its cycle of *Shabbatot*, High Holidays/Festivals (*chagim*) could exist only when human witnesses declared the new month. This signifies more than control over the determination of time and the everyday events of daily life. It represents the potential for change and renewal, for rebirth and growth, and for the waning and waxing of the moon each month.

The concept of *Rosh Chodesh* is one that connects holiness with time. Sanctifying (setting apart) time and marking time is central to our lives as Messianic Jews. As Abraham Joshua Herschel states: “*Judaism is more concerned with time than space and Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time.*” The *Torah* tells us in Exodus 12:2 how to mark our time so we can keep our appointed times (our times of intimacy with Him). They are not based on the Catholic (Gregorian – Pope Gregory the Great’s) calendar, nor on whenever we feel like it. He gave His Bride (Israel) instructions on these special dates and we should be persuaded to keep them sacred. Tonight’s new moon (usually the *first* new moon in the springtime) is to be unto us the beginning of months (moons). This is the start of *The Lord’s sacred year* – the first day of *Aviv*. Modern Jewish calendars refer to this month (*Nisan/Aviv*) as the *first* month of the year not *Tishrei 1/Yom Teruah*. If the sages believe the world was created in *Tishrei*, then why is *Nisan/Aviv* considered the first month of the year? *Moshe Maimodenes (Rambam)* understood this in the following way: “*The children of Israel should mark this month as the first, and should count months in relation to this one; the second, the third, to the 12th month. This is to ensure that we remember the great miracle (the Exodus) for whenever we mention the month; we will (effectively) be mentioning the miracle. That is why there are no names of months in the Torah, but the Torah will say (for example): ‘and it came to pass in the third month’ (Ex. 19:1) or ‘In the second month of the second year’ (Nu. 10:11). This is the same notion as our counting the days of the week in relation*

to Shabbat. And this is why it says in the verse 'it shall be the first of the months of the year FOR YOU'. It is the first month for you as it is a remembrance of our redemption."

It is interesting to note that following the Greek conquest of the land of Israel, three observances of the Jewish people were forbidden: (1) Circumcision, (2) Sabbath observance, and (3) The sanctification of the New Moon. Evidently our enemies always understood that these three observances, all time related (**circumcision** on the 8th day, **Shabbat** observance on the 7th day), were/are fundamental to the existence of Israel as a nation. Forbidding these three **Mitzvot** contributed to the revolt of the **Hasmoneans** and the victory of **Chanukah**.

In addition, Jews around the World read special readings to emphasize the fact that in this next new month is the festival of Passover. Passover is unique from all the other festivals of Israel. For during Passover **Elohim** established His covenant people. Passover challenged not only the Hebrews who were in Egypt, but also all the other people who were in Egypt during this time to respond to **Elohim** by receiving the blood of the lamb.

It is significant that to receive the blood of the lamb one had to do so in a most public manner – by applying it to the outside of one's home upon the door posts and lintels. This fact reminds us that we need to be public about our faith in our Passover Lamb – **Messiah Yeshua**. In the same way that by receiving the blood of the lamb each household was spared from death, so too those who receive **Yeshua's** blood are spared from the consequences of death. Remember that immediately after the people kept the Passover, the Lord gathered them and brought them out of Egypt – the place of bondage – to freedom with Him. He began the journey that led the people into the land that **Adonai** had promised them. So too, after we receive **Yeshua**, **Adonai** begins a journey for the believer that will end with living in His Kingdom. Through the **Blood of Yeshua** we escape sin and the spiritual death that it brings and receive eternal life.

Passover is called the festival of redemption and redemption involves a transfer of ownership. Passover should remind believers that they have become **a purchased possession** of **Adonai** and therefore need to submit to the Master's instructions. All too often we tend to emphasize the freedom of Passover as giving us the opportunity to do what we want, rather than remembering that Biblically-speaking, Passover gave the people the **liberty to serve Him**. How does your life reflect the fact that you are a servant of **The Most High**? Can other people see the effects of you receiving the blood of the Lamb?

Make no mistake about it – the Egyptians knew immediately who kept the Passover and who did not. For those who did not, their house had death within it. Remember that Biblically speaking, death is related to sin. Therefore those who reject **Yeshua**, the true Passover Lamb, are going to be living in the midst of sin, while those who have received **Yeshua** are going to be leaving sin behind, just as the Children of Israel left Egypt in a hurry. If one reads carefully the story of the Exodus from **Mitzrayim** he will find that there was a joy in the homes of those who had kept the Passover and whom the Angel of death had not visited.

Is there freedom in your life? Do you live with a great sense of gratitude for the deliverance that you have received? May the joy and freedom of knowing the **Lamb of God**, strengthen you this Passover Season as we look forward to our very own freedom experience. It is **for us** the **beginning of months**. *Shabbat Shalom!*