

DEATH OF MESSIAH

This year (2010) we have the rare coincidence of Pesach and Unleavened Bread, on the one hand, and Easter on the other hand, being celebrated during the same time of the year. Pesach with its emphasis on Death VS Freedom (if one thinks only of the Exodus events) and Easter with its emphasis on Death VS Life (if one thinks of the events surrounding the execution and resurrection of the Messiah). I am not going to focus on Easter today, with its pagan roots and modern-day pagan practices and its inability to account for the fact that Messiah had to be dead for three days and three nights in order to comply with the conditions of the sign of Yonah - the sign that Messiah Himself had given beforehand that would proof that He is truly the Messiah.

What is important for us to realize, however, is that Pesach and Unleavened Bread is a reminder for us all to come to a standstill and spend some time thinking about death - and not try to skip or ignore the profound significance of the death of Messiah. With Easter, all the emphasis is on resurrection and life, with eggs symbolizing life and bunnies symbolizing life and the name "Easter" symbolizing life (a name which comes from "Astarte" the goddess of fertility and life) and even the designation "Good Friday" symbolizing life (because the death of Messiah can only be called "good" in the light of life and resurrection). This is the way the majority of people prefer to handle the subject of death - get it over and done with as quickly as possible and start talking about life! Right from the very beginning of time there has been a refusal to face the reality of death. Satan started with the oldest and most repeated lie of all times: "You shall certainly not die", when earlier, Yahweh had clearly revealed: "Do not eat of it, nor touch it, or else you will die!" (Bereshit / Genesis 3:3). Up till this day the lie is still believed by many that believers don't really die - they only pass through the portal of death and enter into life after death immediately. Whallah! Death is irrelevant! Death doesn't really hurt! Like the scorning rulers of Yerushalayiem during the time of YeshaYahu we have made a covenant with death and have declared: "It will not come to us" (YeshaYahu 28:15). But to those who have this attitude, Yahweh is saying: "Your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your vision with the grave shall not stand" (YeshaYahu 28:18).

Death is not irrelevant, nor is it harmless - not even from the viewpoint of belief. Y'shua's death did not take place so that others may skip death or only experience partial death. No, death, and the full impact of death, is something that all of us will have to go through - except for those ones who will still be alive when Messiah comes again. For the rest of us, death is a reality: Even as believers in Messiah we will die and remain dead until that day when Messiah comes again. Our first and foremost hope as believers is to be raised from the dead on the most important and climactic Day of resurrection, not to be transferred to the heaven (in a fairy tale manner) any time before that turning point in the history of mankind. This is the clear message of Scriptures: In Acts 24:15 Sha'ul clearly states that his hope for the future is the hope of the resurrection of the dead. In Romans 8:23 he declares that all believers should eagerly await the day of the redemption of their bodies, and in the rest of the New Covenant Scriptures it is very clear that this day is the Day of the Second Coming of Messiah. The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 deals with the issue of resurrection and how the end-time resurrection of believers is the basis and foundation of their hope for the future. If we are basing our hope for the future in some vague doctrine that moments after the time of death, death itself will disappear and life will be resumed somewhere in heaven, we are just repeating (and believing) another form of the age-old lie of Satan: "You shall certainly not die!"

So what is there in the death of Messiah that we can learn from and build upon, even today? Somehow, I believe, the death of Messiah and the full acceptance of this fact is one of the most crucial aspects of Scriptural belief. The death of Messiah is the one major event that joins the Old Covenant and the New Covenant together, because its an old covenant principle that animals and lambs are to be killed to bring reconciliation between men and Yahweh and also an old covenant prophesy that someone would be smitten and pierced and killed, for the transgression of others, just like a lamb led to be slaughtered. And it is clearly explained in the

Messianic Scriptures that this is exactly what the new covenant means: Yahweh has sent his own Son as the perfect Lamb of Elohim to suffer and be humbled and, finally, to die on our behalf, so that we may be restored in our relationship with Yahweh, through believing in his Son, Y'shua. Believing in Y'shua means believing that He is the fulfilment of prophecies. It is not believing that Y'shua, somehow, is Yahweh in human form. This is not what was prophesied about Him. It is not believing that, somehow, Y'shua's death wasn't really death, because, as Yahweh, He couldn't die. It is also not believing that, somehow, when Y'shua died, Yahweh also died. This kind of confusion about Y'shua is weakening and damaging the true and clear message of Scriptures.

Years ago, the well known South African poet and writer, NP van Wyk Louw, wrote the famous poem called "Ecce Homo". Ecce Homo are the Latin words which means: "Behold the Man". It refers to the words of Pontius Pilate when he brought Y'shua out for the people to see him (with a crown of thorns on his head and covered with a purple robe) and to decide whether they wanted Him to die or not. Isn't it ironic that even Pilate knew that Y'shua was a man of flesh and blood?!! Behold the Man! Look at this man! Do you really think this man deserves to die? But now, much more recently, a poet like NP van Wyk Louw reflects the world-wide confusion about Y'shua and about the meaning of his death, when he concludes the poem with these words: "Dan in die donker net die gloed van dowwe woord se helder spot in enkele letters bo Sy hoof: Dit is die God en Seun van God."

The same Yahuchanan (John) who wrote about Pilate introducing Y'shua to the crowd with the words "Behold the man" also wrote about these words, coming from the mouth of Y'shua Himself: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Yahuchanan 12:24). Our human obsession to ignore and belittle death is undoubtedly related to our pride and our inherent dislike of any form of humbleness. Y'shua's death signifies the climax of a life of being humble and even taking upon Himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). It is this kind of humbleness and servant-like attitude that is needed in our own lives, so that we may bear much fruit. Otherwise we will remain alone and our groups of believers will remain scattered and ineffective and alone. Sha'ul wrote to the Romans that it is only when we are willing to die with Messiah that we will also live with Messiah (Romans 6:8).

Should we not also rejoice in the resurrection of Messiah? Of course we should! After we have clearly and fully grasped the meaning of the death of Y'shua, we should most certainly celebrate with believers all over the world that Yahweh had raised Y'shua from the dead. Today we can truly be glad, for Y'shua had proved that death does not have the last word. Death does not have the final say! After three days and three nights Y'shua was resurrected as the first-born from the dead and one of the most powerful statements ever, was sent into the world and even into the heavenly realms: Death is swallowed up in victory! "For if we believe that Y'shua died and rose again, so also Elohim shall bring with Him those who sleep in Y'shua" (1 Thessalonians 4:14). Even the Jews, who normally up to this day do not accept that Y'shua was raised from the dead, believe firmly that death opens up the possibility of life and that there is a future resurrection of the righteous. The term they use for a cemetery is most revealing. In Hebrew culture a cemetery is often called "Bet Chaim" which means "House of Life". And on the gravestone of believers one will often find the words: "May his soul be bound up in the covenant of life". When visiting Jerusalem, one will find thousands of Jewish graves on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem. The Jews know that the coming of the Messiah will somehow be focused on the Mount of Olives. If only they could believe that the coming they are hoping for, will in fact be a second coming and that the resurrection of righteous ones on that day, will only be possible because of the death and resurrection of the righteous One approximately 2000 years ago ...