

The True Vine

On the evening of the 15th Abib, many observant Jews keep what they called a Seder. One of the elements of the Seder is the opportunity, normally accorded to the youngest person present, to ask the person in charge four questions about why they are keeping the Seder meal. This is derived in part from a Scripture in Deuteronomy where God outlines the Days of Unleavened Bread and what took place in terms of these days. It was something that Israel was to remember, and never forget.

In Deuteronomy chapter 5 the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, had been reiterated. In the earlier part of chapter 6, the Sh'ma was set out for us; that grand statement that Israel was to hear and obey. The Eternal was their God. The first great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might", was to be their motivating force.

Deuteronomy 6: 20 "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD our God has commanded you?'

21 "then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;

22 'and the LORD showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household.

23 'Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers.

24 'And the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day.

25 'Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

God brought our forbears out of Egypt to preserve their lives, to fulfil the promises that He had given to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; to fulfil His plan and His purpose, not only for the fathers, but for all humanity. He said we have been given great commandments, great statutes, great judgements, that, if they are observed properly and appropriately, will be righteousness for us.

God set aside the Days of Unleavened Bread for a remembrance of what He has done for us in a particular manner:

Deuteronomy 16: 3 "You shall eat no leavened bread with it (the Passover); seven days you shall eat unleavened bread with it, that is, the bread of affliction (for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste), that you may remember the day in which you came out of the land of Egypt all the days of your life.

It was an event that was never, ever to be forgotten; the lessons of which were not to be passed over, and allowed to become dim in our minds. The Jews to this day make an attempt at not forgetting it, by having the four questions as part of the Seder, and having the youngest person there ask the questions:

- Why?
- What?
- When?
- How?

God set aside these days for remembering what He has done. We think of God bringing Israel out of Egypt. We think of all the wonderful things that He did, the great miracles that He performed. But let us ask ourselves the question: WHAT was it that God brought out of Egypt? Obviously you might say it was Israel.

But God uses analogies by which to describe what He brought out of Egypt. Oftentimes we sing the words from Psalm 80 at the Passover service. It talks about the shepherd of Israel:

***Psalm 80: 1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock;
You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth!
2 Before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, Stir up Your strength, And come
and save us!***

There was a question of plight. They were pleading for God's intervention at this point in time.

3 Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

There was a looking for salvation, for God's intervention, to redeem them once again. It talks about the way in which their enemies laughed against them.

7 Restore us, O God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be saved!

Then in the next verse, he uses a different analogy in terms of the Exodus. He picks up something that is mentioned in the Psalm of Moses, in Exodus 15, to a planting of something. The Psalmist enlarges on this ...

***8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and
planted it.
9 You prepared room for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land.
10 The hills were covered with its shadow, And the mighty cedars with its
boughs.
11 She sent out her boughs to the Sea, And her branches to the River.***

Here was a vine that God had planted in the land of Israel. It encompassed the land. He had prepared the ground for it. He had been a good husbandman, and the vine had grown and developed. It had filled the land.

But as so often happens in the Psalms, we suddenly find the positive suddenly turning to tragedy.

12 Why have You broken down her hedges ...

Why have You brought calamity upon your planting? Why have You allowed that to happen?

12 ... So that all who pass by the way pluck her fruit?

And not just the passer by ...

13 The boar out of the woods uproots it, And the wild beast of the field devours it.

So the Psalmist pleads with God to revisit His vine:

***14 Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts; Look down from heaven and see,
And visit this vine
15 And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, And the branch that
You made strong for Yourself.
16 It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your
countenance.
17 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man
whom You made strong for Yourself.
18 Then we will not turn back from You; Revive us, and we will call upon Your
name.
19 Restore us, O LORD God of hosts; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall
be saved!***

Why did God allow that calamity to come upon the vine, where it became destroyed, where the Psalmist had to plead with God to revisit it?

In Hosea we find yet another reference to the vine. We find why it had come to the situation that the Psalmist was able to lament about. Hosea was speaking to the northern kingdom of Israel that was now established with its headquarters in Samaria:

Hosea 10: 1 Israel empties his vine; He brings forth fruit for himself. According to the multitude of his fruit He has increased the altars; According to the bounty of his land They have embellished his sacred pillars.

What does it mean to empty God's vine? Hosea embellishes it by saying, "he brings forth fruit for himself".

Many of you have probably been through a vineyard. In various parts of the world, when the grapes are coming to ripeness, and ready for harvest, the vineyard keeper goes through and selects the best of the grapes for what may be referred to as "Reserve". The best grapes are chosen and picked ahead of time. They are picked with great care, for the better wines that they can produce. The rest are then left for the general harvest, for the "vin ordinaire".

But there are some clusters of grapes that will not even be collected then, because they are useless -- they have not formed properly. They have no juice. They have no sweetness. They are useless for the vineyard keeper.

Here, Israel was emptying himself. He was bringing forth fruit for his OWN consumption. It wasn't good for making wine. It wasn't good for eating. It was only good for himself. The Kingdom of Israel had become a totally self-centred society. It had forgotten what its purpose was. It had failed to remember, and had brought forth fruit for itself.

2 Their heart is divided; Now they are held guilty. He will break down their altars; He will ruin their sacred pillars.

God is going to intervene. He is going to clean the place out. But it wasn't only to Israel that God spoke in such terms.

Isaiah spoke to the southern kingdom, Judah, in exactly the same way:

Isaiah 5: 1 Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill.

It is well located for sunshine! It is fertile. It is well drained. It has everything going for it that a vineyard could ever need.

2 He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes.

It brought forth useless grapes. Judah also brought forth fruit for itself. It didn't provide what the vineyard keeper was looking for. It brought forth what it wanted itself.

3 "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard.

Let's look at this. Let's evaluate it and consider what is going on here.

4 What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? ...

"It has had the best of everything! What else could I have done? What better fertiliser could I have used? What better location? What better vine-stock?"

4 ... Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes?

5 And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6 I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it."

God was going to bring desolation upon it. Why?

7 For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.

In Hebrew, there is a very, very profound word play in this verse. In the sermon entitled "[Judgement and Justice](#)" (23-Feb-2002) I discussed two words which are fruits of God's government: they are oftentimes translated as "justice" (or judgement) and "righteousness". The Hebrew words are "mishpat", which is normally translated judgement, and "ts^edâqah", which is translated as "righteousness".

In the latter part of Isaiah 5:7, the Hebrew states:

"He looked for "mishpat", but he saw "mispach",

and ...

"He looked for "ts^edâqah", and he saw "tsa'âqah".

There is a change in the words, a very profound word-play. The Jewish translation renders it perhaps better than others, to show the import of what God was meaning:

7 For the vineyard of the Eternal of hosts is the House of Israel, and the seedlings He lovingly tended are the men of Judah. He hoped for justice, but behold injustice; for equity, and behold iniquity.

This translation tries to maintain that word play a little more effectively. God planted something which was to be righteousness to these people, but it didn't materialise. It didn't happen. Wild fruits were produced which had the opposite effect of what God was looking for -- bloodshed, oppression and iniquity.

Jeremiah, writing some time after Isaiah, uses this same theme to correct Jerusalem. He talked about the way in which the people had been playing the harlot on every high hill. They were making altars and groves on the hills.

Jeremiah 2: 21 Yet I had planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me Into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?

How have you switched so totally?

22 For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me," says the Lord GOD.

You can scrub, and you can try and clean yourself as much as you like.

The Tanakh says:

22 But though you wash with natron, and use much lyre, your guilt is engrained before me, declares the Eternal.

You cannot clean yourself up!

In Deuteronomy 6, God says if the people did what He required, it would be counted as righteousness to them. Paul picks up on this theme. This helps us appreciate what is being said in terms of wild grapes:

Romans 10: 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

They missed the message. They sought to establish their own righteousness.

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them."

Israel and Judah did not live by them! They went about seeking to establish their own righteousness, and no matter how much they washed, no matter how much they sought to purify themselves, they were seeking the wrong end. They were seeking their own righteousness, rather than the righteousness of God.

What God intended, the lesson He wanted remembering, was not being learned. But God does not leave us hopeless. In Isaiah 27 we see the end of the matter. We see the salvation of the Eternal:

Isaiah 27: 1 In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong, Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent (the twisted serpent), Leviathan that twisted serpent; And He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.

This is obviously talking about the end times, about the intervention of God, and the return of Jesus Christ; the way in which Satan will be removed from the influence of this world. He will be restrained.

2 In that day sing to her, "A vineyard of red wine!

3 I, the LORD, keep it, I water it every moment; Lest any hurt it, I keep it night and day.

Here is a watchful vine-keeper! No one is going to hurt this vine.

4 Fury is not in Me. Who would set briars and thorns Against Me in battle? I would go through them, I would burn them together.

5 Or let him take hold of My strength, That he may make peace with Me; And he shall make peace with Me."

6 Those who come He shall cause to take root in Jacob; Israel shall blossom and bud, And fill the face of the world with fruit.

Now it is totally different! This is talking about the return of Jesus Christ, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, and the end result is a world full of fruit.

He goes on to talk about Israel and His dealings with them.

13 So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

This shows the time setting. That is not what is happening to Israel now! But it is what is going to happen to Israel, and to all the world, in the future.

It is a very simple step from here into Matthew's gospel. Jesus had been talking to the religious leaders of His day. Some had been questioning Christ's authority.

Matthew 21: 23 Now when He came into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?"

Jesus put them on the back foot, by asking the question of the baptism of John:

24 But Jesus answered and said to them, "I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

25 "The baptism of John - where was it from? From heaven or from men?" And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

26 "But if we say, 'From men,' we fear the multitude, for all count John as a prophet."

27 So they answered Jesus and said, "We do not know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

They couldn't respond to that because of their own duplicity, their deceitfulness and their rejection of God.

In response to these people having come to Him, asking about the authority with which He had spoken, He said:

33 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country.

34 "Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit.

Oftentimes we read parables in the New Testament without having totally immersed ourselves in what was in the Old Testament. What was going through these people's minds as they heard Jesus Christ saying these words? I am sure they were calling to mind Isaiah 5. They were very much aware of it. They knew the Scriptures. They may not have understood them, but they certainly knew what was said. They realised very clearly who Jesus Christ was talking to, and the analogy that He was using in this parable and how it worked.

35 "And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another.

36 "Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them.

37 "Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

Where is He taking that from? Psalm chapter 80!

38 "But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.'

39 "So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?"

There was only one answer to this! They couldn't say, "Pat them on the back and say they are good guys". There was only one answer available here:

**41 They said to Him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons."
42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD'S doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes'?
43 "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.**

... or given to a "people" bearing the fruits of it.

**44 "And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."
45 Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.**

They knew! They got the message! They knew what was in their hearts. They knew the destructive thoughts that they had towards Jesus Christ.

The next verse reeks of their malice and wickedness! It reeks of their attitude towards Jesus Christ, and all that He represented:

46 But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

The people saw Jesus Christ as a prophet. They had a little more respect for Him.

On the last Passover night that Jesus Christ spent with His disciples, He introduced to them one of the "I am" analogies. John's gospel has seven "I am" analogies that Jesus Christ used to describe Himself.

John 15: 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

But what have we seen? When He started speaking those words to the disciples, they were sitting there with a quizzical look on their face saying, "What is He talking about? Where is He going now?"

The analogy of the vine was rooted (if you will pardon the pun) in Israel's identity! The disciples and the leaders had probably read and heard these Scriptures since their boyhood. They knew the way in which God looked upon Israel as His vine! So when Jesus Christ started talking to them about being the "true vine", He was speaking to people who knew of which He spoke. To those who had read God's Word, and had been schooled in the Scriptures, it conveyed meaning.

He was talking about an analogy that was part of Israel's identity, including the Exodus and the Promised Land.

**1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.
2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.**

The word "prune" is there by use of the analogy. In the King James Version it uses the term "purges", which, in fact, is closer to the meaning of what is intended.

What Christ is talking about here is not NECESSARILY the pruning process, although that can be derived in terms of the analogy, but he is talking about a process of cleansing, a process of purging, to use the King James English. "Kathairo" is the Greek word from which we get the term "catharsis", meaning "to purge" something. He cuts away at it to cause it to become clean; to make clean, or to cleanse.

Jesus Christ was saying He is the true vine, His Father is the vine-dresser, and we are the branches. If we

don't bear fruit we are going to be cut away, as part of a cleansing process. If we DO bear fruit, we will be cleansed as well! We are going to be cut at, so that we can bring forth MORE fruit!

Translators, because of the analogy of the vine, like to keep the analogy running and translate "kathairo" as "prune".

We can start to get an insight into where the problem lay that the apostle Paul was talking about in Romans 10.

Matthew 23: 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.

Nothing has changed! It is still full of malice and wickedness.

26 "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also.

There is a right place to start in terms of cleansing. God is going to work with us to produce the right cleansing. He is concerned about that.

A similar word to the purging and pruning of John 15:2, in terms of the Greek translation of the Old Testament, is also used in Psalm 51:10. David, having sinned over the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba, pleaded with God

Psalm 51: 10 Create in me a clean heart, O God ...

The same Greek word is used in the Greek translation.

There is only one other occasion in which that word from John 15:2 is used in the New Testament, of and by itself. Not surprisingly, it relates to the Passover:

***Hebrews 10: 1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.
2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshippers, once purified ("purged" -- the same word), would have had no more consciousness of sins.***

God is working with us to help us take sin out of our lives. It is an ongoing, purging process that never stops. There is a goal in mind as far as the Father is concerned, and that is MUCH FRUIT -- not just any kind of fruit, but fruit that is acceptable to God.

The writer of Hebrews says that worshippers who had been purged would have no more consciousness of sin.

3 But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year.

The sacrificial system did not bring about the cleansing that God was looking for.

In 1st Corinthians 5 there is a derivative of the same word:

***1 Corinthians 5: 6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?
7 Therefore purge out the old leaven ...***

The New Revised Standard Version says:

7 Clean out the old leaven ...

It means a process of cleaning. "Ekkathairo" means "to purge out, to clean out". It is something WE have to be involved in as well. Jesus Christ is going to prune us, cut us, or work with us in such a way that we can accomplish that, to the Father's honour and glory.

***7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.
8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.***

In John 15 Christ is talking about the way in which the old habits, that brought forth fruit that was not acceptable to God, are going to be purged away. You and I have a part in seeking to purge that out.

We find the same term, "ekkathairo," being used in:

2 Timothy 2: 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses ("ekkathairo" -- purge) himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

Jesus Christ is working with us in an ongoing manner to purge us so that we can bring forth godly fruit. God purges it for one reason, and one reason alone -- that it may bear more fruit.

John 15: 3 "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

He is talking about a different form of cleanliness here. It is not exactly the same word. It is an adjective -- "katharos", meaning "being ritually clean or pure". They had been purified.

The same word was used in John 13 when Peter remonstrated with Jesus Christ over washing his feet. Peter said, "You are not going to wash my feet". Jesus answered and told him that if He didn't wash Peter's feet, he would have no part with Him. Then Peter said, "Well, not just my feet, but all of me. Give me a bath. I want to be part of this totally!".

Jesus said, "He who is clean, doesn't need to be washed other than His feet". The same adjective is used there in terms of being "clean".

So obviously there is an aspect of cleansing that has taken place, so that we can have a relationship with God. But so many people want to stop there: "Just believe".

But it is not just a matter of being pure and clean in your relationship with God. God wants to CONTINUE the purifying process, so that fruit can be produced.

***4 "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.
5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.***

There is a relationship here, a relationship that is always to be kept in mind.

***6 "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.
7 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.
8 "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit ...***

That is what God is looking for. That is what God wants us to remember; that He is looking for something!

"If you do this ...

8 ... so you will be My disciples.

9 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.

John 15 is an interesting section of Scripture because John uses the word "meno" with probably a greater degree of concentration than any other part of the New Testament. It is used in John chapter 6, where it talks about "abiding" in Christ. It is used something like 12 times in 11 verses. In other words, we have got to be attached to the right vine! We have got to be linked to the right root system. We have got to have the right sap and the right juices flowing through us, so that we can produce the fruit that God looks for -- not any old fruit!

John uses the term "meno" and it is translated "abide, continue, remain". It is used some 12 times in John 15. John really likes the word!

If we go to the second chapter of his first epistle, we find that he uses it approximately 11 times in the second chapter, and another 4 or 5 times in the chapter 3! John was really concerned about the Church abiding in Christ, being linked in to Christ, and realising their total commitment to Him.

Purification and cleanliness for the Passover was an imperative. When people came to Jerusalem for the Passover a red heifer was offered, the ashes of which were used as part of the purification ritual. The people went through a purification process.

After the death of Lazarus and his Resurrection 4 days later by Jesus Christ, Christ said:

John 11: 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life ...

This is another of the famous "I ams". Of course it created a difficulty for those who saw Jesus' power as being a challenge to their own.

After Jesus Christ had raised Lazarus from the dead ...

45 Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him.

46 But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did.

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs.

There was a recognition of where these signs came from.

48 "If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

49 And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all,

50 "nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish."

51 Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation,

That was quite an incredible statement on the part of Caiaphas.

52 and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

Then notice what it says:

53 Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death.

Here was a man who had just resurrected someone, and given him back to his family! Obviously Lazarus had a lot of respect in the community, from the number of people who came to mourn his death. He was given back to the community. The Scribes and Pharisees, from that time on, sought to put to death the One who had given this man life again.

Notice the context:

54 Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples.

In other words, He kept a very low profile.

55 And the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went from the country up to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves.

... to become cleansed, to go through the ritual of cleansing the outside.

56 Then they sought Jesus, and spoke among themselves as they stood in the temple, "What do you think - that He will not come to the feast?"

"Is He going to keep a low profile?"

57 Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a command, that if anyone knew where He was, he should report it, that they might seize Him.

Here were people going through the process of purification -- but who was leading it? The chief priests and rulers. The chief priests would have been the ones who sacrificed the red heifer, and who put aside the ashes for the process of purification for the Passover. Yet what was in their heart? It is so easy to go through the externals, and not see what the internal should be.

It is as Isaiah 5 says. "He looked for justice, and what He got was injustice. He looked for equity and what He got was iniquity." All that could be said of these people was that they were unjust and iniquitous. Their hearts were full of malice and wickedness. They did nothing to purify that.

It is very sad, but it is a problem that each and every one of us can fall into. Or it can become external, and we forget that God has called us to an internal relationship as well.

In fact, as Christ said to the Pharisees in Matthew 23, you have got to clean up the inside first! That is where it has got to begin. That is why John the Baptist said to the Pharisees, "*Bring forth fruits that are evidence of repentance, then you can be baptised*". There has got to be a change of mind.

That purification process goes on as long as we live, as we take of the sap that comes from being attached to the vine -- the vine that is rooted in the ground that God has created. We have the opportunity then of bringing forth fruit that is acceptable to the Father.

What fruits were being produced in the lives of the chief priests and the rulers at this point in time? Were they godly fruits? I speak as a fool!

I guess the big question has to be; what fruit is being produced in my life? What do I see being produced in my life?

This is part of the remembrance of what God has done. It is not just an idle question. It is a part of remembering what God has done, because He brought us out of Egypt, and He put us in a land that He has prepared for us. He is looking for fruit in the lives of each and every one of us. We should take time to stop and think; how do I compare with what God wants? How does my life compare with that?

Some other translations provide a bit more of the emphasis and the sense of urgency that Moses was conveying to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 6:

Deuteronomy 6: 20 (New Revised Standard Version) When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?"

21 then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

22 The LORD displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household.

23 He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors.

24 Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case.

The next verse gives a bit more of an emphasis to it:

25 If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."

It is not just a question of obey, or observe. There is something there in the Hebrew that is a little more gutsy than that. He said, "*If we diligently observe this entire commandment as He has commanded us, we will be in the right. We will be connected to the right vine! And we will be able to produce the fruit that God is seeking from us*".

During the Days of Unleavened Bread, we seek to put leaven out of our lives, and we eat matzos. But we have lessons to learn. We have to become unleavened. We have to make those things which are important to God, of great importance to us, so that we can see the right fruit that God is looking for in our lives. We will then be able to see what God is doing in terms of our lives, in cutting away and cleaning out that which was part of our own personal Egypt; getting rid of that wildness of our past, so that we can be pure before God.

As I said earlier, at the Seder a child is able to ask four questions about what it was all about. Do you know how an observant Jew finishes the Seder meal?

Zechariah 12: 2 "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem.

3 "And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.

We won't get into all the details of that today, but in verse 10 he tells us what is going to happen in the future:

10 "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

The Jews read that as they finish their Seder meal. They don't stop there. We understand about grieving for the firstborn in Egypt.

11 "In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning at Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.

12 "And the land shall mourn, every family by itself ...

14 "all the families that remain, every family by itself, and their wives by themselves.

The thought does not finish there. It carries on into chapter 13:

Zechariah 13: 1 "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.

2 "It shall be in that day," says the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land.

The idolatrous past is going to be forgotten! What is going to be remembered in its place?

The One who was pierced for their sins! There is a time of cleansing coming, when they really will be able to be purged of their past -- not just the Jews, or the descendants of David and of Jerusalem, but of all humanity, as Isaiah 27 says.

You and I have the privilege of being part of that purging process ahead of time. We have the privilege of being linked to the vine now, so that we can have the pure, unadulterated Word of God, giving life to the fruit that we are to produce. The rest of mankind does not have that at this point in time.

God has not just brought us out of Egypt so that we can do our own thing! God has brought us out of our own individual "Egypt", so that we can be linked to Him, and we can produce the fruit that He desires, that He looks for.

It is a great opportunity, that the rest of humanity doesn't understand, even when they read the Scriptures!

You and I have a lot to remember and appreciate. God has started the process of purging and cleansing within us. It is our responsibility to work with Him, to work with His Word, to continue that purging process, so that we truly can produce the fruit that is acceptable to Him.

*...Peter Nathan
28 Mar 02*

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