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*From the President's Desk***Why Should We Care About Passover?****By Daniel Gwertzman**

*"Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee. Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near." (Isaiah 55:5-6)*

Why should people who are not Jewish be concerned about the holiday of Passover? After all these events happened long ago and today there are those who even dispute the fact that the Exodus occurred at all. They deny the truth of the Biblical account.

To begin with Jewish redemption affects all mankind. History in a natural sense is disrupted. This is a time of global historical transformations. The ten plagues were not the normal events of any given year. This was a time of judgment in which things could not continue in a normal way. Much like our world today the world was rapidly changing before the eyes of those living in it. It was literally being turned upside down and all the traditional beliefs were being called into question. *"For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord." (Exodus 12:12)*

There are those who trust in the Word of the Lord and they know what to do to avoid disaster. *"He that feared the word of the Lord among the servants of Pharaoh made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses:" (Exodus 9:20)*

There are those who choose to ignore the handwriting of the Lord on the wall and seek to maintain their control of the existing society at all costs for fear of losing their power. This is a spiritual struggle that exists for the soul of a nation and for mankind. *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12)*

True equality and justice comes from knowing there is a higher authority rooted in the Word of God and not in the desires of one's heart and the quest for material benefits. *"Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." (Colossians 4:1)*

The time of Passover was a time of Messianic expectations and it is still so today. The events of Passover were meant to be retold for all succeeding generations. Life comes through recognition that we have a higher calling. Reexperiencing these events from our nation's past allows us to continue to be part of that journey today. *"And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations: ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever." (Exodus 12:14)*

This feast was what brought Jesus and his disciples to Jerusalem. The Last Supper was in fact a Passover Seder. *"And they went, and found as he said unto them: and they made ready the Passover." (Luke 22:13)*

Both the Jewish Passover and the Last Supper express gratitude to the Lord for Salvation at the appointed time. These are not one time events but perpetually available to those who maintain their connection with the Word.

When we answer the call of the Lord, those things done in remembrance of Him are life changing for each of us has a task and work to perform, kindness to show, mercy to ease the suffering of others, loneliness to ease and providing healing to others to they can mend broken lives. This gives life meaning and purpose and answers God's call. Showing gratitude to God for all the blessings He bestows upon you leads to positive emotions of contentment, happiness, love and hope.

Grateful people have better relationships and perform better at work. This helps us to survive all the challenges of life. Saying thank you to the Lord cannot be delegated to other people. It must come from us. This is beneficial to body and soul. This is the logic of prayer. *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24)*

This is hard to do in our world because much of the news is negative. Now is the time to focus on the Good News. The Lord is there for all that seek Him. There is mercy, forgiveness of sin, and the Gates of Repentance and Salvation are open wide especially at this time and season. It is time to thank God especially while He is near.

*"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. (James 5:11)*



## “WHEN THINGS SEEM HOPE-LESS”

By Reverend Patti Mariano

*“And the Lord, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.” (Deut. 31:8)*

In these past twelve-plus months, we have been experiencing some of the most defining moments in the history of this planet. We are experiencing more *major fulfillment of prophecy* than all the generations who have lived before us. As a result of these unprecedented times, many people are sensing a *genuine HOPELESSNESS* that they have never felt before... a sense of “anxiety” as to how all these changes in the world are affecting life as they once knew it...

A “fear” which has caused stress and unrest to overshadow them. We are told to isolate ourselves... and our minds go in many directions... We find ourselves suffering alone, both physically and emotionally... Suffering with past memories, mistakes, regrets, things said and done... Questioning... Does anyone REALLY understand what we are feeling? Does anyone really CARE about what we are going through? We begin to ask ourselves “Where is God in all of this? Does He see? Does He care? Why doesn’t He DO something? Is there any HOPE things will change?”

Is this sounding familiar to you? Perhaps you have felt this “hopelessness” or even asked yourself many of these questions. I have News for you...GOOD News! YES, God sees! YES, God CARES! And IF you will listen to His Word and its guidance for your life... IF you will place your complete Trust in His Word... He will give you the HOPE you need to go forward... He will give you the strength to PERSEVERE through the challenges. No matter how bad our situation may appear, we MUST be convinced that God has NOT abandoned us...He has NOT forgotten us...He has NOT left us on our own. As the Scripture from Deuteronomy states: “He will be with you, He will not fail you nor forsake you.”

HOPE is *vital* to all people and HOPE has been *shattered* in many lives during these “trying times”, affecting us through: Broken bodies, ravaged with sickness, loss of lives. Broken Homes, increased debt, abuse, desertion. Broken lives, alcohol and drugs. Broken dreams, loss of jobs, businesses. It seems things are growing more and more HOPE-LESS. We must gain back that BELIEF, that CERTAINTY that we have a God that is GOOD and that His PROMISES are TRUE. More than ever before, the world needs “*people with CONFIDENT Hope... SECURE Hope.*” The world needs to SEE this Hope. We, as His children, should possess this, and it should be evidenced in our daily lives. It should be VISIBLE... for ALL to see. The question remains... “IS IT VISIBLE?” All this despair, discouragement, fear, anxiety that surrounds us is a “*great opportunity*” for us to share the Good News, the Word of God, with others so they may understand and know where *our* HOPE comes from.

There is a verse in Isaiah 49:14-15 that I love. It says: *“But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her suckling child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.”*

As strong as a mother’s love is for her child, God’s love for US is even stronger! How amazing is that! He WILL NOT leave us.... He CANNOT ever leave us! THIS is the HOPE we have and we should be rejoicing and shouting “*Hallelujah!*” No matter how bleak the world around us may appear, no matter how discouraging the circumstances of life may be, There is HOPE... because He Loves us with an everlasting Love. We may not always see or recognize what God is doing... We may not even understand what He is doing... (and we shouldn’t expect to). Yet, these are the times when our faith should *kick in*. When the “mustard seed” should begin to *sprout*... When we are tested and tried through the *refining fire*. The ultimate CHOICE is ours... Either we TRUST Him or we don’t. We can’t do both. Either we BELIEVE the Word or we don’t. Yes or No.

Yes, sometimes the mirror is cloudy; sometimes we don’t see things clearly; sometimes it seems like God is hiding His face from us and we wonder how we are supposed to trust when we find no tangible reason to trust. It is here where we must grasp on to a HOPE that is anchored in the “Promises of God”... Promises of His goodness and wisdom, His love and His power. These are what we hold fast to... these are what we tightly grip to keep on course even though the storms rage around us. In other words, we must BELIEVE, regardless of our circumstances, that what *Jeremiah 29:11* says is TRUE: *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you and expected end.”*

And what Romans 8:28 says is TRUE: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”*

And Proverbs 13:12: *“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.”* And these are only SOME of the MANY PROMISES contained in His Word.

Remember the words of the three Hebrews thrown into the blazing furnace... *“...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us... But if not,... we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image...” (Daniel 3:17-18)*

Yes, if God chooses to do so, He CAN change our circumstances... He CAN relieve our sufferings... And maybe He will... BUT IF NOT... TRUST HIM! WALK BY FAITH! BELIEVE HIS PROMISES! BECAUSE HE LOVES US! For THAT is our HOPE to face a world in HOPE-LESSNESS!



## The Many Layers of Magdala

By Rabbi Ed Snitkoff

When I studied to be a tour guide, for the most part we were told that Christians and Jews are touring Israel for different reasons, looking to understand and touch the central narratives of their respective faiths.



While both will find the places of the Hebrew Bible such as Hebron, Shilo and the City of David in Jerusalem to be meaningful, Jews will not usually have an interest in the exclusively Christian sites such as the Mount of Beatitudes, and Christians will generally not have an interest in the exclusively Jewish narratives (such as the city of Safed in the Galilee, the home of the Medieval Jewish mystics). When you visit such an important place as Israel for only a week or two, priorities must be made.

Over the years, I see that while the above is generally true (I have visited the Garden Tomb with hundreds of Christians I have never been there with a Jew), I am learning that there are more and more sites that simultaneously tell both the Jewish and Christian stories.

Here is a wonderful example that has literally leaped out of the Land to amaze us all.

We all know of the town of Magdala, also known as Migdal, Dalmanutha or Magadan. This Galilean town on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee is mentioned many times in the Christian Scriptures, mostly in connection with Mary Magdalene, a probable native of the place. She is mentioned 12 times in the Gospels in connection to her spiritual healing, the fact that she travelled with Jesus, supported his ministry and was witness to the crucifixion, burial and resurrection. She is sometimes called the "Apostle to the Apostles".

The town is also mentioned as the destination of the boat in which Jesus sailed after the feeding of the four thousand as we read in Matthew 15:39.

Curiously, despite the above verse, we do not read of Jesus setting foot in the town, and we learn nothing about daily life there from the Gospels. We do know that Jesus travelled throughout many of the 200 or so Galilean villages and preached in the synagogues, but only a handful are mentioned by name, so it is possible, even likely that Jesus visited here.

What more do we know about this town from the texts? We know that it must have been a fishing village as it was on the shore and was accessible by boat. We know that Mary was a woman of material means, perhaps pointing to the possibility that this was a prosperous town.

For Jews through the ages, the town has never had any significant meaning. There are Jewish sources that mention a Second Temple town called Magdal Nunayya- "The Tower of the Fishes", telling us that it was obviously a center of the fishing industry on the Sea of Galilee. This is of interest to Jewish historians, but not to most Jews, who would view this place as a footnote.

There were archaeological excavations there in the 1970's by the Vatican, but the reports were written in Italian, and nothing significant was found. After this, not much attention was paid to the archaeological site, besides guides pointing it out when passing the modern town of Migdal on the bus.

**All of this changed in 2009.** In fact, something revolutionary happened on the site of ancient Magdala that profoundly touched both the Christian and Jewish worlds. It turns out that is a place that is moving to both Jews and Christians, while standing side by side in faith. Why? Because both contemporary faiths find inspiration, kinship and connection in the ancient stones of Magdala.

One day in 2009, construction began on a church retreat center on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, a short distance from the area of the early excavations. Not much time went by before the builders unexpectedly found ruins, many, many ruins. The Israel Antiquities authority was called in and a major excavation took place, an excavation that is ongoing to this day. It turns out that the center of ancient Magdala was found by accident. The earlier dig uncovered an unimportant area of the outskirts of the town!

Walk with me through some of the uncovered treasures of ancient Magdala, a prosperous fishing village the first century. We look out over the site from the west, with the beautiful Arbel Cliffs behind us. We notice: \*A large structure to North- this is the synagogue \*The ruins of many structures immediately to the south - this is the town market \*A cluster of buildings farther south- these are homes and public buildings that contain Mikvaot- ritual baths.



The Sea of Galilee can be seen about 250 meters towards the east.

We begin our tour on the north side, in the **OLDEST SYNAGOGUE EVER FOUND IN THE GALILEE**, and one of four found in the country that were contemporaneous with the Temple in Jerusalem! We read plenty about synagogues during the time of the Temple and Jesus, but very few have been found. The synagogue in Magdala has been dated to the time of Jesus, and the icing on the cake is a coin from 29 CE found on the floor of the synagogue, absolute proof that people during Jesus' life frequented the synagogue.



The synagogue faces towards Jerusalem (in this case southward), something that all ancient and modern synagogues have in common. What makes this synagogue stand out is the Magdala Stone, a unique carved stone that stood in the center of the synagogue, depicting the Menora lamp of the Temple and carvings that are associated with the Temple Service, including many ritual vessels and the Holy of Holies. This teaches us that the Jews who prayed and studied in this synagogue, a long way from Jerusalem, saw their worship as directly connected to the main Jewish worship in the Temple.

The carving of the Menora is the oldest depiction found of this famous lamp, predating the famous Menora carving on the Arch of Titus in Rome from around the year 70 CE,

celebrating the Roman victory over the Judaeans. What is especially notable is the fact that both Menoras are almost identical in design, probable proof of what the Menora in the Temple looked like.

For a Jew to be able to visit a synagogue that was built and used before the (70CE) destruction of the Temple, is extremely memorable and meaningful. Most especially, as we noted, that the building faces Jerusalem and houses a stone with depictions of the Temple in the center of the worship area. This brings our history and heritage to life.

For a Christian to walk through a building that most certainly was one of the synagogues in which Jesus preached, is amazing. The connection of Jesus to communities of the Galilee and the Temple in Jerusalem is written in stone in this place!

The synagogue was a modest but well-appointed building, with a large ark (where the Torah Scrolls were kept) built into the southern wall, and many mosaics and frescos. Perhaps Mary Magdalene's family contributed to the building? Perhaps she funded some of the repairs to the mosaics or even placing new mosaics? Was the Magdala Stone her idea? We will never know, but it is possible.

How about the fishermen who worshipped here? The synagogue stands adjacent to the town market. I remember the first time I entered the market and how moved I was by what I saw there. A ROW OF OPEN STORAGE RECEPTICALS BUILT INTO THE GROUND, EACH ABOUT A SQUARE METER IN VOLUME. THESE WERE THE FISH TANKS!

I can imagine the fisherman returning home after a long night on the sea. They come into town, place their catch into the fish tanks to keep the fish fresh, and enter the adjacent synagogue for morning prayers, at the same time that the Jerusalemites were bringing their sacrifices to the priests in the Temple. These were the people of great faith and yearning for redemption that Jesus found to be the perfect disciples. Can you imagine Jesus and perhaps a few of the apostles visiting the synagogue regularly? I can. The communities were close and the families were probably related. The fishers of fish who became fishers of men, all seeking the redemption promised by the prophets!! Jews and Christians alike can marvel at this sight.

As we move towards the South, we enter the buildings that house the ritual baths. The Mikveh, Ritual Bath, was an important part of Second Temple Jewish life (as well as modern Jewish life) and they are found throughout Israel. The narratives of John the Baptist on the River Jordan, the Pools of Bethesda, and the Pool of Siloam are all connected to the centrality of water in the process of ritual and spiritual cleansing.

A Jew comes here and feels the amazing continuity of Jewish civilization over the centuries (the Mikvas of Magdala are totally "kosher" and could theoretically be used by modern Jews). The people of Migdal were devout and we Jews see ourselves in their lives.

A Christian comes here and understands the Jewish context in which Christianity sprouted. I see a challenge to us in the accidental uncovering of ancient Magdala, as Jesus tells Simon Peter after an unsuccessful night of fishing (in Luke 5:4): ***"Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught."*** Don't give up, the catch will come.

We all understand the charge today: keep searching to find common ground and places we can marvel together, to ensure that the Jewish and Christian faiths continue to acknowledge their mutual heritage. This is indeed holy work as we read in the Talmudic Ethics of the Fathers, ***"The work is not for you to complete, but even so, you must continue to do it!"***



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