



# Ponder the Path

**LENTEN  
MEDITATIONS**

by the Rev. Kevin Parviz



# CONGREGATION CHAI V'SHALOM

Congregation Chai v'Shalom began in 1997 as a store-front office in Dogtown, St. Louis, MO. Rev. Kevin Parviz, a Jewish believer in Y'shua (Jesus), envisioned a congregation of Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus, worshipping together in much the same fashion as the Church in the 1st century, the worship style patterned after a "second-temple model" of worship.

A congregation of the LCMS, we partner with Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism to bring the gospel to Jewish people in St. Louis, the United States and internationally.

We celebrate Divine Worship on Sunday mornings, also in the pattern of the 1st century Church, as we celebrate the resurrection of Messiah, Y'shua. Our services are at 10:00 a.m. with Bible study beginning at 9:00 a.m. Oneg Shabbat follows the service. We hope you will join us. Shalom!

CONGREGATION CHAI V'SHALOM  
REV. KEVIN PARVIZ, PASTOR  
6327 CLAYTON AVE., ST. LOUIS, MO 63139  
[WWW.CHAIVSHALOM.COM](http://WWW.CHAIVSHALOM.COM)  
[REVKEYYE@AOL.COM](mailto:REVKEYYE@AOL.COM)

# Ponder the Path

LENTEN  
MEDITATIONS

by the Rev. Kevin Parviz



## Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism

6327 Clayton Ave, Dogtown, St. Louis, 63139  
www.lije.org • (314) 645-4456

© 2000, 2018 by Kevin Parviz. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations are from the HOLY BIBLE,  
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by  
International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing  
House. All rights reserved.

## Foreword to the 2018 edition:

Much has changed in our ministry since this Lenten devotional was published. So I thought I would take this opportunity to update the reader on what is going on in the LC-MS within Jewish missions.

In 1973, at the encouragement of Rev. Bruce Lieske, their pastor, St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Philadelphia submitted a memorial to the 1973 convention of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, titled "To Facilitate Gospel Proclamation among Jews." The synod ultimately referred this issue to an ad hoc committee, headed by Dr. Erwin J. Kolb then the Executive Director for Evangelism of the LC-MS. You can find these and related documents in *Witnessing to Jewish People* by Bruce J. Lieske on our website.

This beginning grew into what is now Lutherans in Jewish Evangelism (LIJE), founded in 1981. Rev. Lieske became its Founder and first Executive Director, and LIJE became the first mission society outreach of the LC-MS since World War II. There are 6,000,000 Jewish people in the United States, accounting for 45% of world Jewry.

To minister to this community, we help prepare congregations for ministry to Jewish people through preaching, teaching, writing and workshops while developing branches that are active and intentional in evangelism to the communities where God has placed them. We affirm and seek to be faithful to St. Paul's proclamation, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).

This booklet was first published by Lutheran Hour Ministries in 2000 as part of a series that I wrote including a Lenten Sermon series, "Walking in Y'shua's Footprints to..." published in *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, a LifeLight Foundations Study, "Bible Feasts," (both published by Concordia Publishing House) and an Advent devotional, again published by Lutheran Hour Ministries, called "Amen, Come Lord Jesus." (Most, or all of these resources are available on our website.) At that time, the ministry here in St. Louis was young. I became involved in 1996, having begun my ministry with a Jewish outreach organization in Denver, CO, called Menorah Ministries where I was serving as a volunteer missionary on the campus at the University of Colorado. By 1996 I was attending Concordia Seminary and had not heard much about the existing Lutheran mission to the Jews when I met Steve Cohen. He was then the field counselor and advisor to LIJE. In 1996 he left Jews for Jesus and

came full-time with LIJE and moved to St. Louis. We worked together to found The Apple of His Eye Mission Society, which was ostensibly intended to be a missionary training center, working with LIJE. But it ended up effectively operating as a competing mission to the Jews, causing a lot of confusion within our church body. So Steve and Bruce decided to separate their work. Steve left the ministry of LIJE but continued to operate under LIJE's street name of "The Apple of His Eye."

Because of all this confusion, LIJE determined to open new mission branches under the name of "Burning Bush Ministries" to distinguish itself from Steve's new ministry, and in 1999, opened a new branch of mission in Detroit, MI, the first of "Burning Bush Ministries."

However, two branches of ministry were still open, St. Louis and New York, operating under the "Apple of His Eye" name. Both branches were attached to messianic-Lutheran congregations, Congregation Beth El in Queens, New York, and Congregation Chai v'Shalom in St. Louis, where I have the privilege of pastoring.

Congregation Chai v'Shalom was founded in 1998, celebrating its first worship service on April 18, 1998, about a year-and-a-half since beginning mission work in St. Louis. Then, in 2005, Bruce retired and LIJE called me to serve as its second Executive Director, and has moved its offices to St. Louis, MO, where it continues a variety of ministries under the structure of LIJE, such as The Apple of His Eye, Burning Bush Ministries, and Aish HaEmeth, our Center for Jewish-Christian studies.

Unfortunately, in 2008 our ministry and congregation in Queens, New York closed as the missionary there took a call to serve a traditional Lutheran congregation. But, we have opened new mission stations in Atlanta and S. Florida, and continue to minister in Detroit, St. Louis and Orlando, and work with partner ministries to serve in the Ukraine and in Israel. We are actively working with congregations in the New York metro area to reopen our New York branch. **LIJE continues as a faith-ministry of the LC--MS, and as such relies on the regular support of those to whom God has called to sustain it with their gifts and prayers.**

*"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. " (Romans 10:1).*

--Rev. Kevin Parviz, Executive Director

## INTRODUCTION

*"Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established"* (Proverbs 4:26 NKJV).

The season of Lent is a journey, in which we walk with Jesus to the cross. It is a rugged path at times, as we look at ourselves and all that He went through for us. We discover as we travel, that there are many side roads, detours and forks from the one True Path.

These devotions use the festivals of the Jewish calendar, as Jesus would have celebrated them, to illustrate various aspects of our Lenten journey. We will ponder the feasts as God established them and also discover some interesting truths that shine through the traditions that have been added to them over the years.

We begin at the Jewish New Year and **Rosh HaShannah**, the Feast of Trumpets. It is here you will listen and receive the call of God, His invitation to you to receive the gift of faith. **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement, follows closely as we find that through faith in God's appointed sacrifice our sins are forgiven. An understanding of this gift leads us to praises of thanksgiving at the feast of **Sukkot**, or Tabernacles.

Having received the gifts of faith and forgiveness, what is next? **Chanukkah**, the Feast of Dedication helps us learn new ways to dedicate ourselves to the work of God. We discover at the festival of **Purim** how best to deal with the persecution that comes from living in the world, but not of the world. And finally, we are delivered from bondage and death at **Pesach**, or Passover. The Passover is the story of our continued deliverance in the body and the blood of our Messiah, Y'shua, Jesus. Join me on this journey, and ponder the path...

*Pastor Kevin Parviz  
Congregation Chai v'Shalom  
St. Louis, Missouri*



## THE JEWISH CALENDAR

The Jewish calendar is based on the period of the moon, rather than the sun. The year based on the moon cycle is called a lunar year. It has only 354 days a year, while the solar year has 365 days. The Jewish calendar is centered on the agricultural activities of Israel. Like Western calendars, it has 12 months, though in order to stay with the proper seasons, a leap month was added approximately every three years to bring it back in balance.

Today the Jewish people have two separate calendars, one a religious or sacred calendar and the other a civil or secular calendar, and each begins at a different time of the year.

The first month of the year for Jewish people depends on which of the two calendars one is using, the civil or religious. The civil calendar year begins in our September or October with the New Year Day Festival of Rosh HaShannah (the Head of the year). The religious year begins with the Passover in March or April.

The Jewish years are counted from the creation of the world so that 2018 is year 5778 A.M. The A.M. is Latin for *Anno Mundi*, the year of the world.

### Jewish Months (Religious sequence) Festivals

Abib or Nisan (Mar.-Apr.)	Nisan 15-Passover Nisan 16-First Fruits
Ziv or Ivar (Apr.-May)	
Sivan (May-June)	
Tammuz (June-July)	
Ab (July-Aug.)	
Elul (Aug.-Sept.)	
Tishri or Ethanim (Sept.-Oct.)	Tishri 1-Rosh HaShannah Tishri 10-Yom Kippur Tishri 15-Sukkot
Bul or Marcheshvan (Oct.-Nov.)	
Kislev (Nov.-Dec.)	Kislev 25-Chanukkah
Tebeth (Dec.-Jan.)	
Shebat (Jan.-Feb.)	
Adar (Feb.-March)	Adar 14-Purim
Second Adar or Adar Sheni (the leap month which is added to bring the lunar calendar back in correspondence to the solar year.)	



## **SCHEDULE OF JEWISH HOLIDAYS**

Jewish holidays are days set aside to commemorate special events in Jewish history. They are celebrated in several ways: with prayers and rituals, stopping work or not doing certain activities and, in some cases, by fasting or eating special foods. How one observes these holidays depends on the particular religious faith of the Jewish person, whether that person practices the Orthodox, the Conservative or Reform faith or whether he or she is a cultural or secular Jew.

The holidays include: days of repentance such as Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur; seasonal festivals relating to harvest time, such as Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot; and days observing events in the history of the Jews, such as Chanukkah and Purim. We have included primarily the religious festivals that have roots in the Scriptures. Other related holidays very important to Jewish people today are: Yom HaShoah, the holocaust remembrance day; Yom HaAtzmaut marking the creation of the State of Israel (May 14, 1948); and Tisha bAv, marking the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Today Jews pray at the Western Wall, the last remaining part of Solomon's Temple.

All Jewish holidays, with exception of some fasts, begin on the evening previous to the first day, a half-hour before sunset. For the most current calendar of Jewish holidays, go to [www.lije.org](http://www.lije.org) and click on the "Calendar" tab.

## **ROSH HASHANNAH** (Feast of Trumpets-- “New Year”)

**Date:** The first and second day of the Jewish month, Tishri, which falls in September or October. It was an autumn festival associated with preparations for the harvest.

**Name:** The Bible name is Feast of Trumpets because it was observed with the blowing of trumpets or the *shofar*, the ram’s horn. In later years, it was called Rosh (Hebrew for head or beginning) HaShannah (Hebrew for the year) since it marked the beginning of the year.

**Purpose:** To present Israel before the Lord for His favor.

**Old Testament:** “*On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire*” (Leviticus 23:24-25). Also Numbers 29:1-6.

**Observance:** It was a day of rest when Jewish people gathered at the tabernacle (temple) with their sacrifices. Today they come to the synagogue to examine their deeds of the past year and pray for forgiveness. They reaffirm their faith and prepare for a 10-day period of repentance that climaxes on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

**Tradition:** The ram’s horn recalls Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son when God asked it of him, but in the last moment God provided a ram and accepted the sacrifice of the ram instead of the son. The sounding of the shofar reminds people of their responsibility to God and calls them to repentance.

One tradition holds that three books are opened at the sound of the *shofar* on Rosh HaShannah--one for the completely righteous, one for the completely wicked, and one for the average person. Those most righteous are inscribed in the Book of Life, the wicked are inscribed in the book of death, and the average are kept in suspension for the ten days of repentance until the Day of Atonement. If they fare well, they will be inscribed in the Book of Life.

**Fulfillment:** As the trumpet called people to the presence of God to stand before His judgment and mercy, believers in the Messiah look forward to hearing the trumpet on the last day when He will return with “*the voice of the archangel, and the trumpet of God*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

## Ash Wednesday

### ROSH HASHANNAH--CALL TO REPENTANCE

*“Now my eyes have seen You. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6).*

Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the 40-day Lenten season, leading up to the celebration of Christ’s resurrection on Easter. The tradition of ashes evolved from the Old Testament custom in which those who were sorry for their offenses covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes.

Rosh HaShannah is also a beginning. It is the first festival of the Jewish holiday year. *Rosh* is the Hebrew word for head, or beginning, and *HaShannah* is Hebrew for the year. Rosh HaShannah is a day when Jewish people gather at the synagogue to examine their deeds during the past year and pray for forgiveness.

For believers in Christ, Lent is a similar time of self-examination. Lent is a time to prepare to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection on Easter Sunday. We have eternal life and, by God’s grace, we travel the path of Life. The Lenten season is part of that journey.

Your Lenten journey begins with the ashes of repentance. At the start, you carried your sin and it was a very heavy burden. But Jesus is walking with you, and though He has no sin of His own to carry, He takes the burden of your sin and carries it for you.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for calling me to You, and for taking the burden of my sin. Give me the strength and the faith to follow You on the path of Life. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As you walk the path of Life, Lent is a call to repentance as you prepare for Jesus’ death and resurrection.

## Thursday (Week of Ash Wednesday) ROSH HASHANNAH--A CALL TO LISTEN

*“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: . . . “you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts” ’” (Lev 23:23-24).*

Yesterday, we began our journey. The destination is heaven. Our guide is God’s Holy Spirit. Our map is the Bible. In it we see the road that Jesus walked. Throughout this book, we will look at the pictures of six festivals celebrated during the Jewish year. Each festival foreshadows the saving work of God in Jesus Christ and the response of His faithful people.

We are walking on a road that leads to the cross, the cries of the crowd and the clarion call of the empty tomb. Rosh HaShannah, the beginning of our walk, the beginning of our year in the Lord, is the first picture.

Rosh HaShannah is the head of the year and the Feast of Trumpets. The trumpets first call us to rest.

The trumpet of Rosh HaShannah is the ram’s horn. God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham obeyed, but God had mercy and at the last moment provided a ram to be sacrificed instead. The sounding of the ram’s horn at the Feast of Trumpets recalls God’s merciful act, reminds us of our responsibility to God and calls us to repentance.

This fast also reminds believers in the Messiah to look forward to hearing the trumpet on the last day, when *“The Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God”* (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

**Prayer:** Abba Father, thank you for being merciful to Abraham and Isaac, and to me. Help me to await your victorious return every day. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Listen to the sound of the trumpets! Remember God’s mercy and live in anticipation of His return.

## Friday (Week of Ash Wednesday) ROSH HASHANNAH--A CALL TO WORSHIP

*“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites: . . . “you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts”’” (Lev 23:23-24).*

We have heard the trumpet call. It is a call to listen and it is a call to gather in God’s name. In Jesus’ day, the ram’s horn called many to worship at the temple. The festival of Rosh HaShannah takes place during the busy fall harvest season. During the busiest time of the year, God’s trumpet cries out for His people to stop what they are doing and worship Him.

“But, I’ve got so much to do this weekend!” you might say. “Surely God understands that I’ve got to get this job done. And there’s always next Sunday.” Perhaps this time of the year you are involved not in a fall harvest, but a spring planting. If you don’t get the seed in by the time the rains start, your entire year will be ruined. There are many “good” reasons why we don’t take time to stop and worship God. Yet, were it not for Him, we wouldn’t have weekends or jobs or new seed.

The path we walk is a busy one indeed. There are many challenges and distractions along the way. It is easy to forget our heavy burdens of sin from the start of the journey. Jesus seems to carry them so easily. Look closely. See the sweat and blood pouring forth from Him as he strains to bear the weight. The muscles and sinews of his arms and legs are stretched to the maximum as he walks on with us. The burden is neither light nor easy to carry. And yet he continues on with us. Worship is an opportunity to thank and praise God for removing the burden of our sins through Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:** Lord God, Heavenly Father, thank You for all you have given me: food to eat, clothing to wear and a Messiah to bear my guilt. Make my worship a gift sweet to you. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As you plan for your own worship, guide others onto the path with you and invite them to worship with you this Sunday.

## Saturday (Week of Ash Wednesday) ROSH HASHANNAH--A CALL TO TRUST

*“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, ‘The LORD has kept me from having children. Go sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.’ Abram agreed to what Sarai said” (Genesis 16:1-2).*

God had promised Abraham that he would be made a great nation, that his descendants would number as many as the stars in the heavens. He and his wife, Sarah, did not have any children and she seemed too old to bear any. Abraham wandered onto the path of self-reliance. Not believing God’s promise could be fulfilled through his union with Sarah, Abraham had a child with her maidservant, Hagar. But this was not God’s plan.

When Abraham was one hundred years old, God gave him a child with Sarah. *“Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him” (Genesis 21:2).* One hundred years old! God does fulfill his promises, at the very time He promises. Abraham learned that God was worthy of his trust.

God has been fulfilling promises since the beginning of time, including His promise to provide a Savior for the nations. When Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden because of their sin, God promised that a Savior would come through their offspring. Approximately 2000 years later, God promised Abraham that a Savior would come to the world through his descendants. About 2000 years later, Jesus Christ, our Savior, was born. Now, 2000 years after His birth, God is keeping His promise to you. The Savior is for you.

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for keeping Your promises. Today, give me an opportunity to share the promised Savior with someone else. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** God’s promises are worthy of trust! 2000 years after the birth of our Savior, how is God calling you to serve Him and spread the Promise?

## First Sunday in Lent

### ROSH HASHANNAH--A CALL TO SACRIFICE

*“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about’” (Genesis 22:2).*

The tradition of reading the *Akedah* (ak-KAY-dah) is followed on Rosh HaShannah. The *Akedah* is the story of the binding of Isaac. God commanded Abraham to take his only son Isaac, up on a mountain and sacrifice him as an offering. As we read this story, we look to the road ahead of us and see on the map a large obstacle in our way. The obstacle can easily distract us from focusing on God.

Perhaps God knew that Abraham was placing his faith in Isaac, rather than in Him. So He told Abraham to sacrifice his only son on Mt. Moriah. God wanted Abraham to trust Him, the Promise Maker, instead of Isaac, the object of the promise.

Abraham faced the obstacle on the road before him and could have taken the detour, just as he had before. But he learned from his experience with Hagar. The detour of self-reliance is a dead end, but God’s promises can be trusted. So Abraham trusted God, was willing to sacrifice his son, and focused his faith back on God.

Sometimes even God’s gifts become obstacles, taking our eyes off of God and God’s will for us. But Jesus always kept His eyes on God, even in the darkest hours. On the night before He was arrested, Jesus prayed to His Father, *“Take this cup from Me. Yet not what I will, but what You will”* (Mark 14:36).

**Prayer:** Our Father, guide me through the obstacles in my life, those things on which I rely and which distract me from You. Help me to rely on You for all that I need. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** What might be the obstacle in your path? Perhaps it is money, a car, or a friendship you depend upon more than you depend on God. Today, set those things aside and focus your eyes on God.



## **Monday (First week of Lent)**

### **ROSH HASHANNAH--A CALL TO ACTION**

*“But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’ . . . ‘Do not lay a hand on the boy . . . Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son’” (Genesis 22:11).*

Abraham trusted God. He knew God’s promise. And he obeyed God with his actions. It was not enough to take his son to the top of the mountain. It was not enough to bind him and lay him on the altar. He drew his knife and raised it over his son’s head, preparing to do that which God had commanded. He knew that somehow, even if he must kill his own son, God would be glorified, and God’s promise would be fulfilled.

God stayed Abraham’s hand and provided a substitute, a ram caught by his horns in a thicket. And the ram’s horn would forever trumpet victory over death. That is why, at Rosh HaShannah, a ram’s horn is used to call God’s people to the temple to worship.

But the death of the ram was not the final victory. The ram was only the substitute for Isaac. People were still slaves to death until God led His own Son to the mountain, bound and whipped. God laid his Son on the altar, a roughly hewn cross to which He was nailed. There was no substitute for Jesus; He is the substitute for you and me. His death assures us of life. Now the trumpet calls for us and it calls us to action. As we continue our journey, struggles and temptations to wander from the path await us. But we have no fear, for we hear the trumpet and remember God has won victory over death for us.

**Prayer:** Thank you Father for your provision for me. Take the roadblocks from my path and guide me in your way. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** What action is God calling you to? Consider writing down your obstacle and placing it in the offering. Pray that God will strengthen you to truly give to the Lord that obstacle.

## **Tuesday (First week of Lent)**

### **ROSH HASHANNAH--A CALL TO BLESSING**

*“Then the angel of the LORD . . . said, ‘I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore . . . And through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed Me’” (Genesis 22:15-18).*

Abraham received God’s blessing for the third time. This would be the last time the Bible mentions that God blessed Abraham in such a way. Abraham’s descendants did number as many as the stars in the sky. Because of Abraham’s faith in God, all nations were blessed as well.

One modern tradition of Rosh HaShannah (not mentioned in the Bible) teaches that when the trumpet blows, God opens three books: the Book of Life, the Book of Death and a third book, which we will call the Book of Waiting. The Book of Life for those who are especially righteous. The Book of Death awaits those who are especially wicked. And everyone else waits...10 days until Yom Kippur. These are the Days of Awe. Jewish people spend these days paying and forgiving debts, rebuilding damaged relationships, and doing good deeds in vain hope that God will write their names in the Book of Life for another year. On Yom Kippur, the trumpet will blow again, the books will be closed, and each person’s name will be written to either Life or Death.

The road ahead has split into three paths. We walk the path of Life, but a wider side road invites us to try another way, to try to do good works to earn eternal life.

The tradition of the Days of Awe is a false hope. There is no one who is righteous. The prophet Isaiah said, *“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags”* (Isaiah 64:6). Everyone’s name is written into the Book of Death. We live because through Abraham’s offspring all nations on earth have been blessed. Y’shua our Savior, is a descendant of Abraham. Everyone who believes Y’shua is the Messiah is written into the Lamb’s Book of Life. For believers in Christ, the trumpet is a celebration of victory over death.

**Prayer:** Lord God, You are indeed the Author of life. Thank you for writing my name in the Lamb's Book of Life. In Y'shua's name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** The only path to life is through Jesus, who paid the debts and rebuilt our relationship with God. Share the blessing that you received through the blood of Y'shua.

## **YOM KIPPUR (Day of Atonement)**

**Date:** The tenth day of the Jewish month, Tishri, September or October.

**Name:** Yom (Hebrew for day) Kippur (Hebrew for covering, referring to the covering of sin, equivalent to the English “atonement”).

**Purpose:** To atone for the sins of the priests and the people.

**Old Testament:** *“Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites”* (Leviticus 16:34). *“The tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering . . . Do no work on that day . . . when atonement is made for you before the LORD”* (Leviticus 23:27-28). Also Leviticus 16; Numbers 29:7-11.

**New Testament:** Romans 3:24-26; Hebrews 9:7, 10:3, 19-22.

**Observance:** Next to the Sabbath, Yom Kippur is considered the most holy day on the Jewish calendar. It is preceded by the 10 Days of Awe, which are filled with personal reflection and repentance. In Bible times there was a solemn assembly during which the High Priest made two sacrifices for the atonement (covering) of sins.

This was the only day on which the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. He entered first to sprinkle the blood of the first sacrificed bull

on the mercy seat to make atonement for his sins. The second time he entered to sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed goat for the sins of Israel.

The Jewish people observed Yom Kippur throughout the centuries as a day of rest, fasting, meditation and prayer to find forgiveness of sins and thus begin the new year with a clear conscience.

**Tradition:** Because no sacrifices have been made since the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., Jewish people see forgiveness through their own prayers and the good that they do. It is customary to ask and to give forgiveness to each other, believing that God’s forgiveness depends on people being forgiving to each other.

At a service on Yom Kippur Eve, *Kol Nidre* (all vows), each person affirms promises to God for the coming year and prays to be excused from previous vows not kept.

**Fulfillment:** “*We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all*” (Hebrews 10:10).

## Wednesday (First week of Lent) YOM KIPPUR--A DAY OF REST

*“The LORD said to Moses, “The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement”” (Leviticus 23:26-28).*

The road we have walked with Jesus is a long one with many obstacles. We are tired and need of refreshment. We look in the guidebook, the Bible, for direction as we wearily look into the distance ahead. Another picture emerges. We are walking to the Feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Just in time, God has decreed another day of rest.

Today, the day of rest is welcome, and God seems very serious about us resting today. He makes it very clear that no work will be done on this day, because the work is God's. There is nothing we can do to achieve our own atonement (paying our debt of sin to make us right, or “at one,” with God). He will make atonement for us.

Lent also is a time of rest and preparation for the atoning sacrifice. During Lent, we remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to pay for our sins. This time of rest is God saying, “Stop! Stop trying to make Me love you. My Son, Jesus has paid for your sins and I have brought you back to Me.”

As you walk through Lent on the path of Life, take the opportunity to consider your sin, to realize the magnitude of your shortcomings before God. It is tempting to take a side trip onto the path of good works, seeking to appease God and negotiate your own reconciliation. But the path of self-reliance leads only to death. Remain on the path with Y'shua, who is God's sacrifice of atonement for you. The Sacrifice walks with you daily, and has already done all the work to make you right with God.

**Prayer:** Father God, thank you for doing all the work for me, that by your gift of faith, we are reconciled to You. Thank you for giving me rest. In Y'shua's name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Good works are the fruit of a thankful heart that accepts the forgiveness won on the cross by Y'shua.

## Thursday (First week of Lent) YOM KIPPUR--DENY YOURSELVES

*“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for Me will find it’” (Matthew 16:24-25).*

One of God’s directions for this leg of the journey is to deny ourselves. What does that mean, especially in the context of Jesus’ atoning work for us?

Denying ourselves has traditionally been expressed by fasting, and in most Jewish households, Yom Kippur is a fast day. No food or water is consumed on this day. For Jewish people, this may be an appropriate fast, for food has always come between God and His people. Remember the children of Israel in the wilderness? They were ready to abandon the path God led them on to escape slavery in Egypt, simply for want of food. So today, God further demonstrates our complete inability to negotiate our atonement, He commands us to give up whatever remains a barrier to our heart for God.

God knows our hearts well. He knows the challenges that have been before us as we walk this path to Mt. Calvary. He guides us through the obstacles that we have placed before ourselves. But He also knows the road ahead, and desires our whole heart. So on this day, He reminds us again that there is something we continue to grasp that we need to give up to Him instead.

During Lent it is traditional to “give up something.” For some it is chocolate, and for others it is a midday meal. Y’shua walks with us and tells us to deny ourselves and take up our cross. Denying ourselves helps us remain focused on God’s promises and his gift of forgiveness and everlasting life. *“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:2).*

**Prayer:** Dear God, sometimes I do not know the depth of my dependence on things other than You. Give me the strength and guidance to deny myself and walk with You a little closer today. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** If you were to fast today, what food or activity would you choose to eliminate? Why?



## **Friday (First week of Lent)**

### **YOM KIPPUR--THE PREPARATION**

*“The LORD said to Moses: ‘Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover’” (Leviticus 16:2).*

As we journey to the Feast of Yom Kippur, we notice that people have gathered from all over the country. They are resting from work, fasting, meditating and praying for forgiveness of their sins. God has appointed this as a solemn time of preparation for the sacrifice being offered on their behalf by the priest.

Yom Kippur is the only day that the priest enters the Most Holy Place. That is why everyone has gathered and everyone has prepared. This is a special day.

Lent is a season of preparation, too. We are preparing ourselves for the sacrifice that is to come. For the people of Jesus’ time, the preparation was outward, though its purpose was to prepare people’s hearts for the miracle of forgiveness to come. Today, our preparation is less visible. But what does the Lord require of us? The psalmist says, *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart”* (Psalm 51:17). God has appointed this time for us to prepare for the sacrifice of His Son. His sacrifice was one for all time, for all of us, and we remember it each year during the Lenten season.

**Prayer:** Our Lord, thank You for helping me to prepare my heart. Give me a broken and contrite heart as I get ready to celebrate Christ’s victory over death. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As you continue to prepare for Easter, examine your heart. Take time to prepare your spirit to receive again the good news of Christ’s resurrection.

## **Saturday (First week of Lent)**

### **YOM KIPPUR--THE SACRIFICE**

*“I will set My face against the person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar. It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life” (Leviticus 17:10-11).*

As we journey closer to the temple, we notice that the road ahead is sprinkled with blood. The Yom Kippur sacrifices have begun. God has decreed that blood must be shed. that it is blood that makes atonement for us. Se we bring our sacrifices to the temple: bulls and goats--innocent animals that must die for us to be forgiven.

Jesus was a righteous Jew who kept the covenant with God. He would have been among those who brought sacrifices to the temple, and Jesus was certainly at the temple every year for this festival. Knowing what He knew, how hard it must have been for Him to see the deaths of those animals. He knew that this was just a picture of the sacrifice that was to come. He knew that the bulls and goats were just precursors of the sacrifice that God would make once for all, and that He would be that sacrifice. By that once-for-all sacrifice, God’s people would never have to slaughter another animal to atone for their sins.

By the death that this season anticipates, your sins have been paid for in full. Now our offerings at the temple are not sacrifices, but gifts of thanksgiving. Praise Him!

**Prayer:** My Lord God, You are the Creator of all things and have blessed me with much. Thank You for the sacrifice You made in my stead, and give me a heart filled with joy as I make an offering to You. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Tomorrow is Sunday. Consider the offering you will bring. Remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for you and give with a grateful heart.

## Second Sunday in Lent

### YOM KIPPUR--THE SCAPEGOAT

*“He [Aaron] is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites--all their sins--and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the desert” (Leviticus 16:21).*

Have you ever been blamed for something you didn’t do? Perhaps as a child, your older brother or sister made you a scapegoat for them. How did it feel? Often, there was nothing you could do to defend yourself. No matter what you said, it wouldn’t have made any difference.

Notice that the scapegoat does not take the blame for another’s actions. When the high priest confessed the sins of the people on the head of the goat, he was not saying that the goat did the deed. No, the scapegoat only pays the price for the deed.

We make others our scapegoats all the time in an effort to shift the blame for our action or inaction. As we walk along the path, only we can take the responsibility for our decisions. No one else can play the scapegoat--save one. Jesus is our scapegoat. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, *“My righteous Servant will justify many and He will bear their iniquities”* (Isaiah 53:11). Jesus was righteous, and bore all of our iniquities, or sins. He paid the price for them. And He did nothing to defend Himself.

Jesus was led to a mountain to die on a cross, but He rose from the dead three days later. He has victory over death! Because He is our Scapegoat, we also have victory through His death on the cross.

**Prayer:** Lord God forgive me for my sins against You and others. Give me strength to accept responsibility for my actions. Thank You for sending Your Son to be my Scapegoat. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Have you blamed someone else for your mistakes? This is a good time to accept responsibility, knowing that the debt for your sin has already been paid.

## **Monday (Second week of Lent)**

### **YOM KIPPUR--COMPLETE FORGIVENESS**

*“This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites” (Leviticus 16:34).*

*“This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).*

We pause in our journey at the city walls. The sacrifices are complete. The carcasses of the animals are being burned outside the city. The priest is cleansed. The scapegoat has been banished. Another year has come and gone. It is a new beginning. We are reborn . . . for another year.

The covenant God made with the Israelites required yearly sacrifices, yearly trips to the temple for atonement. God sent a prophet, Jeremiah, to announce the new covenant that would make complete atonement once for all. *“‘The time is coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant . . . I will put My law in their minds and write it on their hearts . . . I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more’” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).* Jeremiah proclaimed this new covenant 600 years before Christ--the fulfillment of the covenant--was born.

The new covenant is not like the one in Leviticus that requires annual sacrifices. This sacrifice is once for all, and through this sacrifice, the law is written on our hearts and in our minds. Jesus announced this new covenant at His last supper with the disciples, just hours before He was led away to fulfill it. The benefits of this new covenant are ours every time we confess to a fellow believer and receive the assurance that indeed we are completely forgiven. Now every day is Yom Kippur.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for the complete forgiveness You have given me. I love You, Lord. Help me to give myself completely to You. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Is there something that you feel God could not possibly forgive you for? Go to your pastor today and know that all of your sins are forgiven completely by the shed blood of God’s sacrifice, His Son Jesus.

## **Tuesday (Second week of Lent)**

### **YOM KIPPUR--THE LAMB'S BOOK**

*“Jesus answered, ‘I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me’” (John 14:6).*

On our journey to the cross we have visited two festivals, Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur, and these two festivals have shown us two aspects of our Christian walk. At Rosh HaShannah we looked at the call to faith God gave us, and how He continues to call us to service and worship. And as we traveled with Jesus to Yom Kippur, we saw the completeness of the sacrifice which Jesus made for us, the sacrifice which makes us worthy to respond to God’s call.

At Rosh HaShannah, Jewish people send each other a greeting, *“La Shannah Tovv Tiku Teivu,”* (la SHAH-nah TOE-voo TICK-oo TAY-voo) which means, “May your name be inscribed for a good year.” The prayer is that your name will be inscribed by God into His Book of Life. But at Yom Kippur, the obvious question remains unasked. “Is it?” Is the work you have done sufficient to appease a God who cannot abide with sin?

You have God’s promise that your name is indeed inscribed in the Book of Life. What makes you different from those whose names are in the Book of Death? God has called you to the path of Life, and by His grace you know that Jesus’ atoning sacrifice on the cross is the only way to pay for your sins. God has saved you, and He has written your name in the Book of Life.

As a believer in Christ, your journey is on the less-traveled road with Jesus. There may be obstacles and temptations to turn to a side road, but this is the road of Life. The easy road without Him is a smooth journey to death.

**Prayer:** Lord God, You sustain me through the hardship in my life. Thank You for calling me to faith and for sending Your Son to walk with me through the weeds of my sin. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As you stumble and fall over the weeds and ruts of your sins, your Traveling Companion is there to help you up. Look around you. Is there anyone else at the crossroads who looks confused? Share your path with them.

## SUKKOT (Feast of Tabernacles)

**Date:** The 15th day of the Jewish month Tishri, September/October.

**Name:** Sukkot (soo-KOT) means huts or booths, which are built for the celebration. It is also called the Feast of Tabernacles.

**Purpose:** Give thanks for the harvest and memorialize the journey from Egypt to Canaan.

**Old Testament:** *“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts seven days. The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. For seven days present offerings . . . on the eighth day hold a solemn assembly . . . (Leviticus 23:33-36). “Celebrate the festival . . . live in booths for seven days . . .” (Leviticus 23:39-43). Also Numbers 29:12-34; Deuteronomy 16:13-15.*

**New Testament:** *“When the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near . . . On the last and great day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, “If any man is thirsty; let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:2, 37).*

**Observance:** A week of living in booths and offering sacrifices to celebrate the harvest and remember the journey to Canaan. The booths symbolize the huts the Jewish people lived in during their 40-year journey.

In the temple ritual, water was poured at the altar symbolizing prayers for winter rains and reminding them that God provided water when it was needed.

**Tradition:** On the seventh day of Sukkot, called Great Deliverance Day (*HoShana Rabah*), willow branches are beaten so some leaves fall off, a symbol of the renewal of life. This is also the day on which God decides the fate of each person for the next year.

On the eighth day of Sukkot, the Solemn Deliverance Day (*Shemini Atzereth*), prayers are said for rain and good crops for the coming year.

The day after *Shemini Atzereth* is *Simchat Torah*, the day of Rejoicing with the Torah. The last chapters of the Torah are read and the first book begun again.

**Fulfillment:** Jesus is the Water of Life and the Bread of Life. John 4:13-14; 6:35-40. At the end of time the *“Tabernacle of God is with men”* and Jesus says,

*“To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life” (Revelation 21:6).*



## **Wednesday (Second week of Lent)**

### **SUKKOT--OFFERINGS OF THANKSGIVING**

*“On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD’s Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts for seven days . . . For seven days present offering made to the LORD by fire . . .” (Leviticus 23:33-34).*

We don’t have to walk far on our journey to come to another festival. Sukkot is only five days after Yom Kippur, and this is no accident of convenience. Once we have responded to God’s call to faith, and received complete forgiveness for our sins, our response is to give thanks to God. Sukkot is a festival of thanksgiving. Also called the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths, it reminds us of the provision and protection that God has given us.

During the Feast of Tabernacles, Jewish people live in special outdoor huts built to remember the journey out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land of Canaan. This festival reminds us that the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, that they wandered in the wilderness, and that God provided them with food and shelter in the desert. We respond to God’s gifts with our own gifts of thanksgiving.

Before God called you to faith in Christ, you wandered in the wilderness too. You were in bondage to sin, and no shelter could protect you from the death you deserved. But Jesus came and gave you the way to new life with God. Now every day is a new day to thank Him for the life you have.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord of Life, thank You for giving me new life. Help me always to give thanks that You led me to the path of Life. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Sukkot was a time to bring a thank offering over and above the people’s regular offering. Perhaps there is something else you can offer to God as you come for worship tonight.

## Thursday (Second week of Lent)

### SUKKOT--THANKSGIVING FOR PROVISION

*“Beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate . . . On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days” (Leviticus 23:39-40).*

The Feast of Tabernacles reminds us of God’s provision in the wilderness. The wilderness is a hard place to be. Often the roads we walk are rough and hard to follow.

When the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they lost sight of God’s provision and cried out to be returned to Egypt, where they had been in slavery. The familiarity of bondage sounded more comfortable than being in the wilderness, where they had to trust God to keep them on the path.

How often we cry out for a more comfortable path. Struggling along on the path, it is often hard to see God’s provision. God calls us to, *“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for Him”* (Psalm 37:7). He will provide.

In the wilderness, God guided the Israelites with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He provided manna, quail and water to sustain them. He gave them His covenant--the Ten Commandments--by which to live. He promised to lead them to the land of Canaan, a land that would be their own. And He delivered.

Look around you and see how the Lord has provided for you. Choice fruits abound in your life. Did you wake up this morning? Thank God for protecting you through the long night. Did you have work to do today? Thank God for providing you with productive work. All that you see and all that you have is God’s abundant provision for you. He guides you, sustain you and has promised you eternal life. Through the blood of His Son, God promises you will be with Him for eternity, and your struggles in this life will be no more. He will deliver.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for all the ways You have provided for me. May I always be mindful of Your generous care for me. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** It is so easy to see a challenge in life and take the shortcut. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him. He will deliver.

## Friday (Second week of Lent)

# SUKKOT--THANKSGIVING FOR PROTECTION

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you”* (John 14:2).

The Sukkot tradition of building a hut, or *Sukkah* (SOO-kah), is a command of God. He has commanded His people to build this structure and live in it for seven days. Today, most Jewish families who have a *Sukkah* will not actually live in it, but find it sufficient to take a meal in it during this season.

The *Sukkah* is built from “*choice fruits, palm fronds, leafy branches and poplars.*” In Nehemiah’s time the people built the *Sukkah* from “*branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees*” (Nehemiah 8:15). And the roof of the *Sukkah* is sparsely thatched so that the sky is visible through the roof. It is not the roofs of our construction that protect us, but the covering that God provides.

The *Sukkah* is a reminder of the wilderness travels of God’s people. It is a symbol of the protection that He gave His people on their journey to the promised land. It is a temporary dwelling, which reminds us that our time on earth is also temporary. God promises to provide us with an eternal home.

Jesus promised to prepare a place for us in God’s house, which has many rooms. As you follow Jesus on the path ahead, He has gone on to prepare your room.

**Prayer:** Lord God, I confess that sometimes my home is my security. Lord, thank you for my home, and help me to find my security only in you. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Many live in fine houses while others have no roof over their head. Yet all live under the protection of God which is there for the asking. Thank Him today for the dwelling you have and for the dwelling to come in heaven.

## Saturday (Second week of Lent)

### SUKKOT--THANKSGIVING FOR THE CHURCH

*“You were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree. How much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree” (Romans 11:24).*

We’ve traveled a long way together. Some days have been easier than others. Along the way God has given us rest, and He has fed us. We have built our *Sukkah* out of the branches on our path and in that God has given us shelter. While the *Sukkah* is a picture of God’s provision and protection, it can also be a picture of the Church. And for that, too, we have much to be thankful.

Nehemiah instructed the people to build the *Sukkah* out of “*branches from olive and wild olive trees.*” Saint Paul used this imagery to describe the Church in his letter to the Romans. The root of the Church is the covenant God made with Abraham when He promised to bring the Savior through his descendants. The natural branches are those of Jewish descent who have grown from the root. Some of those natural branches have been cut off because they did not believe in the Christ. Gentiles are “wild shoots” because they are not descendants of Abraham. However, Paul says that Gentiles who believe in Jesus as the Messiah have been grafted into Christ. Jewish people who come to believe that Jesus is Messiah are also grafted back in. So, the root, promised to Abraham, fulfilled in Jesus, now supports both wild and natural olive branches, you and me.

Our *Sukkah* is the Church. A structure commanded by God and built of both wild and natural olive branches, the Church, like the *Sukkah*, may seem shaky sometimes--but it is not. It has God’s covering, and is built on the rock that is Jesus the Messiah. In the Church we dwell, and grow, and serve, and prosper.

**Prayer:** My Lord, thank You for the gift of the Church. Give me strength to minister to those who are broken in the Church, and when I am broken, help me to seek You in church. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** It is often tempting to turn away from the Church, especially when we have been hurt by someone within it. But even though the branches that God uses to build the Church are sometimes bent, and gnarled, and brittle, together, we are very strong indeed. Thank God today for His gift of the Church and share your thanks with others in your congregation.

## **Third Sunday in Lent**

### **SUKKOT--THANKSGIVING FOR RESTORATION**

*“The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated like this. And their joy was very great”* (Nehemiah 8:17).

Imagine Jerusalem 400 years before John the Baptist walked his dusty path. The road to Jerusalem is crowded with people returning home. For 70 years, they have been exiled in Babylon. They were taken away from their homes, the temple and the presence of God. They finally have returned to Jerusalem, but their homes are destroyed, the city wall is torn down, and the temple is ruined. Where is God?

It is a question we all ask at some time in our lives. The path is long and dusty. We are burdened by work, by debt, by stress, by the world. And sometimes we feel like we are in exile. Where is God? Why does He not hear our cries for help?

But in Jerusalem, in the days following the return from Babylon, the temple, the city wall and the Israelites’ homes all were rebuilt. Knowing this could not have happened without God’s help, the people celebrated. They built *Sukkahs* all over town, and celebrated their thanksgiving with great joy. The writer of Nehemiah tells us that it had not been so joyful since the days of Joshua, when the Israelites first came to the promised land.

Just as God was with the Israelites during 70 years of exile, God is with you, and does hear you. He comes to you in His Word and Sacraments. He knows your trials, and He has suffered trials Himself. When Jesus stood before His persecutors, He stood for you. He suffered for you, and He died for you. God restored Him, and God restores you. Praise Him with joyful thanksgiving.

**Prayer:** Dear God, You are indeed the God of restoration. Thank You for the gifts of Your Word and Sacraments, which bring healing and strength. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** When it feels like you are in exile, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

## Monday (Third week of Lent) SUKKOT--JESUS AT THE FEAST

*“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18).*

The seventh chapter of the Gospel of John gives us an account of Jesus’ participation in the Feast of Tabernacles. Jesus traveled to the temple at Sukkot. His brothers invited Jesus to attend with them and “show Himself,” but instead He traveled there secretly to hear what others had to say about Him. It was a lonely path. But Jesus discovered how others were responding to His message.

If you could overhear what others thought about you, what might you hear? “He is a good man.” “No, he deceives the people.” These are the things that Jesus heard. No matter what miracles He performed, or what testimony He shared, the response to Jesus was the same--mixed. Yet, Jesus persevered. He began to teach the people. And the result of His teaching is that His walk to the top of Mt. Calvary was very lonely. By the time of His crucifixion, Jesus had been completely rejected by almost everyone.

Does that sound a little bit like the response you get when you share the message of Jesus with your friends, relatives and co-workers? Those who will listen might conclude that you are a good person who loves the Lord. Those who reject the message, however, might say that you are a “Jesus freak” or a bigot.

Jesus is the one who is rejected, not you. He is the one who was crucified so that you would not have to be. God raised Him up and His message continues to be heard. And people come to faith through your willingness to risk rejection and share the message of Christ. When you hear those who seem to reject your message, think of it as a wonderful opportunity to teach, that many others would join you on this journey to the cross and the empty tomb.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for Your message. Give me the boldness to risk rejection and share Your Word, that many would believe in You. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** It is easy to keep our mouths shut, and just say “Our actions are our witness.” But people need to hear the good news of Christ. *Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). Share the message today!

## **Tuesday (Third week of Lent)**

### **SUKKOT--HOSHANA RABAH**

*“On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him’” (John 7:37-38).*

The festival of Sukkot is a festival of Thanksgiving and a festival of prayer for the harvests to come. The “*last and greatest day of the Feast,*” called the *Hoshana Rabah* (hoh-SHAH-nah rah-BAH), the great Hosanna, is a day of prayer for the coming year. Jesus used this day as another opportunity to teach. Consider His words in the context of the festival.

For Jesus to stand and speak this way in a loud voice was not unusual. Nor was it unusual for Jesus to concern Himself with the physical needs of the people, as He does here in talking about quenching their thirst. But for this audience, their own thirst was not the only thing that came to mind. On *Hoshana Rabah* it was the practice for the priests to pour large urns of water out from the temple steps onto the dry, thirsty ground below. This ritual was a prayer for rain for the coming year, and a prayer for God’s Spirit to be poured out on a dry, thirsty people.

The living water of which Jesus spoke is the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit quenches your spiritual thirst to know God and to have peace and comfort. At the Last Supper with His disciples, Jesus promised, “*I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever*” (John 14:16).

**Prayer:** Father God, thank You for the water You have poured out onto me. Refresh me today through the Holy Spirit, that I might be used to quench another’s thirst. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Are you thirsty today? Drink from the living water that pours out through the Holy Spirit. May that stream pour through you and to those around you who are dying of thirst.



## CHANUKKAH (Festival of Dedication)

**Date:** Eight days beginning with the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev (November/December).

**Name:** Chanukkah (KHA-noo-kah) means Dedication. It commemorates the rededication of the temple after it was defiled by Syrians and made into a pagan shrine. It is also called the “Festival of Lights” because the sacred temple lamp is said to have burned eight days on one day’s supply of sacred oil, all that was left.

**Purpose:** To celebrate the Jewish victory over the Syrians by Judah the Maccabee in 165 B.C. and to celebrate regaining political and religious freedom.

**Old Testament:** None. (The Jewish victory over the Syrians occurred after Old Testament history.) The story is recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees, two historical books of the Apocrypha.

**New Testament:** “*Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade*” (John 10:22-23).

**Observance:** A special nine-branch candleholder, called *Hannukkiyyuh*, is used so that a candle can be lit on each of the eight days of Celebration. The *shammes*, the helper or servant candle, is lit first and it is used to light the other candles, one on the first day, two on the second, and so on through the eight days of Chanukkah. This recalls the miraculous burning of the temple light for eight days on one day’s supply of oil.

**Tradition:** Pancakes made with potatoes and oil, called *latkes*, are a traditional treat, the oil in the *latkes* recalling the oil in the sacred temple lamp. Other popular foods are doughnuts and cheese dishes.

Children play with *dreidles* (DRAY-dulls), square tops inscribed with the Hebrew letters N, G, H and S for the Hebrew phrase, “*Nes Gadol Haya Sham*,” (ness gah-DOLE hah-YAH shahm) meaning “A great miracle happened there.”

Gifts are exchanged, especially between members of the family.

**Fulfillment:** Just as the lights of Chanukkah overcome darkness, so the darkness of this world is overcome by Jesus who said, *“I am the light of the world; whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12).

## **Wednesday (Third week of Lent)**

### **CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION**

*“Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade” (John 10:22-23).*

It’s a rather strange irony, isn’t it, that Jesus never celebrated Christmas? His “winter holiday” was Chanukkah. The long, hot roads of summer are past, and it is winter in Judea. The rainy season has begun, and the path ahead is muddy and striped with rivulets of running water. We see Jesus walking in the temple. He is there for the Chanukkah--The Feast of Dedication.

Though not a festival commanded by God in the Scripture, it is still a feast which Jesus attends. It is a time to remember God’s grace and protection of His people. A traditional holiday celebrated by Jewish people, it is interesting that the only mention of Chanukkah in Scripture is here in John 10. The events which Chanukkah remembers are recorded in 1 and 2 Maccabees, books of the apocrypha written during the 400 years between the ministry of the prophet Malachi and the birth of the Messiah.

Traditions are good opportunities to remember how God has shown His grace to us in the past. They are not objects of our worship, just carts we pull along on the path--carts which carry treasured memories that remind us that God forgives sins and gives us eternal life through our faith in the death and resurrection of His Son, our Messiah, Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for traditions and the value they have in remembering Your mercy for us. Help us to rededicate ourselves to You, especially today and during this season. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** What traditions do you take with you on your path through Lent? Wednesday night worship during Lent is not commanded by Scripture, but has become a useful tradition by which we remember the grace that God has shown us. In your worship tonight, praise Him who has shown you every mercy.

## Thursday (Third week of Lent) CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION

*“The Jews gathered around Him saying, ‘How long will you keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly’” (John 10:24).*

As Jesus walked in the temple, a crowd gathered around Him. Some were walking the path with Him, many had witnessed His miracles, and all were longing for a Messiah. Now they asked Him to be clear: “Are you the Messiah or not?”

God’s people have waited a long time for the promised Messiah. This festival reminds them of the wait. Chanukkah commemorates the rededication of the temple in 167 B.C. The land of Israel had been conquered by Syria, and its king, Antiochus, declared himself to be god. He refused to allow the Jewish people to worship the true God, and he desecrated the temple. A man arose during this time who would help lead the Jews in a victory over the Syrians. His name was Judah (the name alone would evoke hope, because Jacob promised the Messiah would come through his son, Judah) and following a miraculous victory, many hailed him as the messiah.

But as Jesus walked in the temple, Judah had been dead for many generations, and another foreign power controlled Israel. Jesus, from the tribe of Judah, is being asked, “Are you the Messiah?” Some hope for deliverance from the Romans. Others hope for deliverance from persecution. Few hope for the deliverance that Jesus would effect. He would deliver them from death, and a new temple would be dedicated in the hearts of those who follow Him on His path to the cross.

**Prayer:** My God, and my salvation, thank You for my faith. Renew and strengthen me today to answer with boldness, “Yes, Jesus is my Messiah.” In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** When you’re on a journey, it is OK to stop now and then and ask directions. “Are you the Messiah?” is an appropriate question to ask Jesus on this journey through Lent. What answer do you hear? Listen as Jesus tells you, *“Yes, it is as you say” (Matthew 26:64).*

## Friday (Third week of Lent) CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION

*“Jesus answered, ‘I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in My Father’s name speak for Me . . .’”* (John 10:25).

God is in the miracle business. We have been given the miracle of life, the miracle of breath, and the faith we find in answer to yesterday’s question is the greatest miracle of all.

Chanukkah is a time to remember miracles. It was certainly a miracle that the small army of Jewish soldiers was able to overcome the vast resources of the Syrian war machine, and it is a great miracle that Jewish people today are still seeking the Messiah in the miracle of Chanukkah.

For centuries, conquerors, kings and popes have sought to destroy the Jewish people. But God has always sustained them. During the dark time of the Church, Spanish inquisitors tried hard to destroy the Jews in the name of God, forcing conversions at the point of a sword. But God’s miracles were remembered through a simple child’s game called *Dreidle*. The *dreidle* is a top inscribed with four Hebrew letters which are an acronym for “*Nes Gadol Haya Sham.*” \* “A great miracle happened there.” Disallowed by the Church of that day to celebrate their festivals, Jewish people remembered the miracle of God’s deliverance in this game.

Today, the Church remembers God’s grace and love, and prays that the Jewish people would again be delivered, not by the point of a sword, but by the work of the true Messiah--Jesus.

**Prayer:** Dear God, remove from the Church those who would persecute Your people. Give us Your truth that Jesus is the Way for all people, including Your Jewish people. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Has God placed any Jewish people along your path? Share this study with them and tell them about the Messiah.

\*In Israel, the *dreidle* has the acronym for “*Nes Gadol Haya Po.*” “A great miracle happened here.” After all, the events of Chanukkah happened in Israel, as did the greatest miracle of all, the birth of Messiah, Y’shua!

## **Saturday (Third week of Lent)**

### **CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION**

*“ . . . you do not believe because you are not My sheep ” (John 10:26).*

*“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:22-23).*

Sometimes the path we are on is lonely. We see many on other paths. They call out to us, urge us to turn from the foolishness we are following and join them. They tell us to stop, don't go on, that we are chasing a fool. The closer we get to the cross, the more foolish this journey seems.

Jesus speaks to those who see the miracles of God and still do not believe. They say that Jesus is a fool, and that those who follow Him are even bigger fools. And they are right, because, *“God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:27).*

How often do we see miracles and not believe? There are many who witness daily the miracle of creation, and yet still believe in evolution. They say that we are fools to believe that this world could be created in six days. They would say that we are fools to believe that the little Jewish army could defeat the might of Syria. They would say we are fools to believe that God would sacrifice His Son for us and raise Him again so that we can be forgiven and have eternal life.

Yes, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are dying, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

**Prayer:** Dear God, if it is foolish to believe in You, then thank You for making me a fool. In Y'shua's name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** April Fools' Day often falls during Lent, but every day is an opportunity to show our foolishness. Michael Card wrote a song called “God's Own Fool.” The refrain is “And so we follow God's own Fool; For only the foolish can tell. Believe the unbelievable; Come be a fool as well.” Share this message today with someone who might believe you a fool.

## **Fourth Sunday in Lent**

### **CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION**

*“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).*

Jesus makes clear what it takes to walk the path of Life. He uses a shepherd/sheep analogy to describe the relationship we have with Him. A shepherd teaches his sheep to distinguish his voice from anyone else's, so as to protect them from following a false shepherd. His concern is for their safety. A shepherd will protect his sheep even at the risk of his own life.

To be called sheep is not necessarily a compliment. Sheep are fairly dumb animals who cannot accomplish anything for themselves. If a sheep falls, it cannot even stand up without the help of the shepherd. That is our situation exactly. There is nothing we can do to help ourselves. We must listen to our Shepherd's voice and follow Him. His role as leader is not commander, but servant. He leads us through serving us, and because of His service, we are dedicated to Him.

The Feast of Dedication is a time to remember the dedication of the temple, but also gives us an opportunity to examine our own dedication to God. If we listen to His voice and follow Him, we are sure to be led safely on the path of Life. But if we stray, we risk our lives. False shepherds will call us. But the Shepherd who served us with His life and death now serves us in His resurrected life and continues to call us. Listen to His voice as He leads us in the path of Life.

**Prayer:** *Avinu Malkenu*, Our Father, our King, thank You for sending Your Son to serve us as our Shepherd. Tune our hearts to His voice, and help us to listen always. In Y'shua's name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** False shepherds call us from the radio, television, movies, books, and friends. Are you listening to the True Shepherd who calls to you from God's Word, and leads you through the Holy Spirit? He will never lead you astray.

## **Monday (Fourth week of Lent)**

### **CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION**

*“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28).*

Chanukkah teaches us something about service. Tradition says that when the temple was rededicated, the lamp stand was filled with oil and lit. But following the war, there was only enough oil to last for one day, and it would take seven more days to press enough olives for oil to keep the lamp stand burning. Miraculously, the flame lasted for eight days, and so the festival lasts eight days to commemorate this miracle.

Each day of the festival a new light is added to the Chanukkah menorah until the eighth day, when the entire lamp stand is lit and the room is bright with light. Usually, beeswax candles are used today, and they are not extinguished, but are allowed to burn as long as they will. Although the festival lasts only eight days, the menorah has nine branches. What is this ninth candle? Called the *shammes* (SHAH-mesh), meaning “servant,” this candle lights the rest of the candles. Day after day, the *shammes* lights one more flame, until the entire room is lit.

This tradition was not begun until the 4th century, recorded in the Babylonian Talmud, but I believe it is God’s truth being deposited in the traditions of men. We have a servant King who brings us eternal life. Just as the *shammes* lights the candles of the menorah, our *Shammes*, Jesus, ignites the light of life in us. But unlike the candles at Chanukkah, which will eventually burn out, our lights will never perish.

**Prayer:** Lord God, Heavenly Father, thank You for the light You have shined into my heart. Thank You for Your Son, who died so that I might live. Help me to understand how You desire to use me to serve You. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** To walk in darkness is never a pleasant experience. Even if the path is well worn and easy to follow, without light you will inevitably trip and fall. The Holy Spirit is the flame that lights your way and leads you to serve. Which gift of the Spirit have you received to use in service to the Body of Christ? (Read 1 Corinthians 12.)



## **Tuesday (Fourth week of Lent)**

### **CHANUKKAH--FEAST OF DEDICATION**

*“Jesus said, ‘I and the Father are one.’ Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone Me?’ ‘We are not stoning You for any of these.’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because You, a mere man, claim to be God’” (John 10:30-33).*

Here is where “the rubber meets the road.” Jesus takes the opportunity of the Feast of Dedication to make an extraordinary claim. “I and the Father are one.” You see, to be the Messiah, He must be God. Judah, the one whom God used to deliver His people from the oppressive rule of the Syrians, was just a man. He did not claim to be God. In the same way, God used Moses to deliver His people from the oppressive rule of the Egyptians. But Moses never claimed to be God either.

Israel’s prophet Isaiah prophesied that Messiah must be both God and man. A child born of a virgin, a son who is called Immanuel, “God with us.” Jesus is Messiah, God with us. Blasphemy? No, not if it is the truth. But the truth isn’t always easy to understand. How can God be a man? How could He die? Truth does not require understanding, and neither does faith. Faith clings to what it knows is true, and clings to the One who claimed to be Truth: Jesus, True God and True Man.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I long to teach Your truth to one who does not know You. Teach me through Your Word, and send someone with questions that I might answer. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** So many say that they are afraid to tell others about their walk with Jesus because they may not have the right words or answers to questions. Prepare well and pray. God will give you what you need, and it’s OK to say, “I don’t know, let’s look into it.”

## **PURIM** (Festival of Lots)

**Date:** The 14th day of the Jewish month, Adar (February/March).

**Name:** Purim (POOR-im) means “lots.” The Persian King’s advisor, Haman, who was plotting to destroy the Jewish people in the kingdom, cast lots to choose the day on which he would carry out his plan, so it is sometimes called the Festival of Lots. Because Queen Esther saved the Jewish people, it is also called the Feast of Esther.

**Purpose:** To celebrate the national deliverance of the Jews from destruction under the Persians.

**Old Testament:** *“The Jews in Susa . . . had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth . . . that is why rural Jews--those living in villages---observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to others”* (Esther 9:18-19). Also the entire book of Esther.

**New Testament:** None.

**Observance:** The celebration in the synagogue revolves around the reading of the book of Esther from the *Megillah* (meh-GEE-lah), the scroll that contains this book. It rehearses how Queen Esther, through the counsel of her uncle, Mordecai, revealed Haman’s plot to destroy the Jews. King Ahasuerus had Haman hanged on the gallows Haman built for Mordecai.

**Tradition:** During the reading of Esther, noisemakers (*groggers*) are twirled when the name of Hamen is read in order to blot it out from hearing and from memory. A traditional festival meal, *purim seudah*, is held in the late afternoon. Special three-corner pies are served, known as *hamantashen* (Haman’s pockets), reminding us that Haman’s pockets were full of bribe money. Gifts are given to friends and the poor. It is a time to be merry and joyful.

The 13th day of Adar, the day before Purim, commemorated Esther’s fasting before seeing the King to plead for her people--the Jewish people.

**Fulfillment:** The Jewish people were miraculously delivered from destruction under the Persians and returned to the promised land. Jesus delivers us from the destruction that is the consequence of sin and all evil and will bring us to our

promised land. *“The Lord will deliver me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen”*  
(2 Timothy 4:18).

## **Wednesday (Fourth week of Lent)**

### **PURIM--PERSECUTION**

*“Mordecai recorded these events and he sent letters to all the Jews . . . to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies” (Esther 9:20-22).*

As we walk on our faith journey with Jesus, we have heard God’s call and responded to it in the Feast of Rosh HaShannah. We have seen the penalty Jesus paid for our sins foreshadowed at the Festival of Yom Kippur, and we have responded to God’s grace with thankfulness in the Feast of Sukkot. Chanukkah was a time to consider a renewed dedication to our Christian lives. Now it is time to face a harsh reality. People of God often face harsh persecution. The Festival of Purim is the story of persecution and how God prepares us for it.

The observance of Purim is recorded in the book of Esther, and its observance is decreed by the testimony of Scripture. The book of Esther is the story of a plan to systematically destroy the Jewish people, and of how God preserved His people, even in the face of persecution. Though Scripture does not mention it, Jesus probably celebrated this festival as an observant Jew.

Purim is more than the story of persecution, though. It is also a promise. A joke is going around our Jewish congregation that says that many of the Jewish festivals could be summed up on three sentences: “They tried to kill us. We won. Let’s eat!” That is so true. We are persecuted, but Jesus is our Deliverer. Because of our faith in His death and resurrection, we have won over death. This is cause for celebration. Let the feast begin!

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, even when persecuted, I know that You have redeemed us from death, and that our time here is but a moment compared to the eternity that You have given us. Help me to be strong and courageous in the face of my enemies. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** It is easy to fall prey to persecution and discouragement. Instead of being discouraged, focus on the empty cross and the victory that our Messiah has given you, and joyfully give thanks.

## **Thursday (Fourth week of Lent)**

### **PURIM--PERSECUTION**

*“But when the attendants delivered the king’s command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger” (Esther 1:12).*

Purim is a story of conflict. It begins with a king, drunk on wine, who in a stubborn rage divorces his prideful wife and banishes her from the kingdom. This king, Xerxes (Ahasuerus in Hebrew), likes his wine. Having drunk more than enough of it, he decides to show off his beautiful wife to his drinking buddies. Queen Vashti refused to be put on display, and denies the king’s request. While we sympathize with Vashti for standing up for herself, she knows it’s dangerous to mess with the king. She is banished for her disobedience and as a lesson to all the wives of the kingdom that their husbands are to be obeyed.

What a classic illustration of the curse placed on Adam and Eve as a result of their sin in the Garden of Eden! Because of our disobedience in the garden, the relationships between men and women are forever changed. There is now spiritual warfare between husband and wife, and Xerxes certainly plays that warfare out with his wife, Vashti. (Don’t feel too sorry for Vashti. She reasserts her power later as the Queen mother when her son Artaxerxes takes the throne.)

On our path there are sometimes those who attack and accuse us. Spiritual warfare does not limit itself to enemies. Anger and resentment get between people who love each other, too. But Jesus came to banish the devil for us, so that as we walk, we can turn over those spirits to Him and we can forgive as we are forgiven. It isn’t easy, but God promises to lead us.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, You are the Victor over the curse. Thank You for forgiving me, and give me the strength to seek forgiveness from those I have hurt. Change my heart and help me to forgive. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Is there a loved-one whom you have wronged and from whom you have not yet sought forgiveness? Don’t wait. And be prepared to forgive as well.

## **Friday (Fourth week of Lent)**

### **PURIM--PERSECUTION**

*“Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (Esther 2:17).*

The warfare between Xerxes and Vashti does not end in harmony. Though God is grieved when His children hurt each other, He is able to use the evil for His purposes. Xerxes grows lonely and desires a new wife, and there in Persia lives a young Jewish woman named Esther. She is a victim of the exile, and is living there with her uncle Mordecai, who is caring for her in place of her parents who have died. She is beautiful and Xerxes chooses her to be the new queen. On Mordecai’s advice, she does not tell Xerxes that she is Jewish. Perhaps Mordecai desires better for his charge than he can provide, and fears that if Xerxes learns of her ethnic identity, she will be discriminated against and persecuted.

Jewish people have lived for centuries with the fear of persecution because of their faith and ethnic identity. Babylonian exile, Haman’s plot, Syrian conquest, Muslim invasion, Spanish Inquisition, English Crusades, Russian pogroms, and Hitler’s Final Solution. All were efforts to destroy God’s people. But God has reigned over evil, and has preserved His people. The root of faith has been guarded zealously by God, who patiently waits for His people to realize that He has sent the Messiah for them.

There are many who would persecute those who believe that Jesus is the Messiah as well. The Pharisees, the Romans, the Muslims, Stalinists, and “modern society.” Persecutors try to deny God’s people the faith that God has given them. But God reigns over this evil too. The root of faith nourishes all who believe in Jesus, gentile and Jewish. And in the face of persecution, the root sustains faith and gives strength.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, guard my faith in the presence of persecution. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** We have many opportunities today to deny our faith in the face of discrimination and derision. It has become politically correct to support activities that defy God’s Word. But politically correct is neither political, nor correct. It is spiritual and a denial of truth.

## Saturday (Fourth week of Lent) PURIM--PERSECUTION

*“Then Haman said to King Xerxes, ‘There is a certain people dispersed . . . among . . . your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the law of the land; it is in the king’s best interest not to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them’” (Esther 3:8-9).*

The road we walk is often shadowed by betrayal as well. Betrayal is expressed in many forms, but Purim is a festival that tells a story of betrayal that takes shape in a murderous plot to eliminate God’s people. The plot begins with a plan to murder the king.

With Esther in the king’s court, Mordecai, with continuing concern for her well being, is sitting at the king’s gate. It was likely his only opportunity to interact with his beloved niece. While sitting there, he overhears a plot to kill Xerxes, and alerts the king. Mordecai’s role in saving the king’s life is recorded.

Soon after, King Xerxes honors another man in his kingdom named Haman. The king commands his subjects to bow down to Haman in honor. But Mordecai, as a Jewish man, refuses because only God is worthy of praise and worship. Haman is enraged and devises a plan to kill all the Jewish people in the land. The king, not knowing that his beloved Queen Esther is Jewish, signs the decree to kill the Jewish people.

It is unlikely that your life is endangered because of your faith, though in many places throughout the world Christians are being murdered for their faith in Christ. In much of Africa and parts of Asia it is dangerous to be a Christian, but there the Church is growing faster than anywhere else. your life is in danger, too. If not your physical life, then your eternal life. In countries where it is “safe” to be a Christian, people are not in worship, and future generations are not raised in the Christian faith. Faith in Jesus prompts a desire to worship God and be an active witness to His glory.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I confess that in my comfort, I sometimes forget the gifts You have given me. Quicken my heart to confess Your name and worship in Your holy house. Protect the faith of those who risk their lives by professing faith in You and deliver them from danger. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Tomorrow is Sunday. Call a family member or a friend and encourage them to worship with you.



## **Fifth Sunday in Lent**

### **PURIM--PERSECUTION**

*“All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death” (Esther 4:11).*

Haman is certainly an evil man to devise a plan to kill all the Jewish people in Persia. It is traditional during Purim that the book of Esther is read, when Haman’s name is mentioned, the people yell loudly, shake noisemakers and stamp their feet to cover the sound of his name. Often we will even put an “H” on the bottom of our shoes as we stamp our feet, symbolically stomping the memory of Haman away.

While this makes the reading of the story more fun, it truly does nothing to combat the persecution that Haman plots, nor does it do much to remove his name from history. Action must be taken. Mordecai knew this, too.

Mordecai put on sackcloth and ashes and walked throughout the city mourning very loudly to draw Esther’s attention. When she noticed him, he was prepared. He laid the whole plot out for her, even to the point of having a copy of the king’s edict delivered to her with a request to intercede with the king. But to intercede put Esther’s life in danger. No one approached the king without being summoned--the penalty was death! Mordecai’s response to Esther’s fear was concise: *“Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”* (Esther 4:13-14).

Mordecai knew the promise of God: the Deliverer will come regardless of our actions. But God desires to use us, and puts us in the right place to be used. Esther did intercede for the Jewish people and they were spared. But death will still claim them if they do not have faith in the Deliverer. Jesus came to deliver all people once for all from the threat of death.

**Prayer:** Dear God, thank You for placing me in the right place to share Your truth. Give me courage today to be Your servant. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Has God placed you in a position to share the truth of God's deliverance with someone today? Please do not remain silent.

## **Monday (Fifth week of Lent)**

### **PURIM--PERSECUTION**

*“If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life--this is my petition. And spare my people--this is my request” (Esther 7:3).*

Esther gave heed to Mordecai’s request and his admonition that she must use her royal position on behalf of her people. Esther chose the path of faithfulness to God’s people.

Esther may have been afraid, but she was also very smart. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet she prepared especially for them. At the banquet, after King Xerxes had drunk a little wine, Esther made her request. First, she requested that the king spare her people. Since he loved Esther, he readily agreed. Then Esther identified Haman as their persecutor, revealing herself as a Jewish woman.

The path you follow is the path that Jesus has walked. He also had to reveal Himself to people who threatened to kill Him. He is the Messiah, the Son of God. He also approached the King, as He cried out in the garden of Gethsemane to be spared. We lived under a death sentence for our sins, but as Esther interceded for her people, so Jesus interceded for you and me. Our death sentence is not simply an agreement made between men and easily changed. Our sins are crimes against a just God who demands a payment. And the One who intercedes says, “Father, take My life for them and may their penalty be forever paid.” Just as Xerxes was moved by love for Esther, so God is moved by love for His Son and all of His children. He allowed Jesus to die, and in His mercy lifted our death sentence. God raises His Son up from death as the first of His children to be resurrected, giving us a promise of life to come.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, You know my struggles and the weakness of my flesh. Help me today to see Your choices for me, and to live according to them. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** What choices are you struggling over? Often the easier solution is not the better one. Pray that God would guide you today through your Intercessor, Jesus.

## **Tuesday (Fifth week of Lent)**

### **PURIM--PERSECUTION**

*“In every province in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating” (Esther 8:17).*

The rest of the story, while a continuing story of persecution indeed, is also laced with wonderful ironic twists. Haman cast the pur (poor), or “lot” to determine a day to carry out his plan, and he builds a gallows upon which to hang Mordecai. He ends up leading Mordecai through town in a procession of honor ordered by the king. Finally, Haman himself is hanged from the gallows he built in rage against Mordecai. A prophecy spoken by Haman’s wife came to pass, and remains in the air for future generations: *“Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him--you will surely come to ruin!”* (Esther 6:13).

Someone should have told him that a lot earlier. Perhaps Haman’s wife understood the covenant that God gave His people through Abraham, *“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”* (Genesis 12:3).

Even though Satan leads the persecution of God’s people, you can know that God’s promise still holds true. Even though Jesus hung on the gallows built by the rage of human sin and died, it was no victory for Satan. It was his end. Jesus rose from the dead. Haman and Satan both are destroyed through Jesus Christ, the blessing God promised to Abraham.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank You for Your blessing. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** How are you likely to react to those who curse you for your faith? Rest in assurance that God’s blessing is for you and those who curse you will be accountable to God.

## **PESACH OR PASSOVER** (Festival of Unleavened Bread)

**Date:** The 15th day of the Jewish month Nisan (or Abib), which falls in March or April.

**Name:** Refers to the Angel of Death “passing over” the homes which the Israelite slaves in Egypt had marked with blood from a sacrificed lamb. This was the last of 10 plagues and moved Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go. Also called Pesach (PEA-sakh).

**Purpose:** Remembers Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

**Old Testament:** *“Take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs . . . The blood must be a sign . . . I will pass over you . . . the generations to come will celebrate it as a festival to the LORD”* (Exodus 12:7-20). Also Exodus 13:3-10, Leviticus 23:6-8, Number 9:1-14, 28:16-25, Deuteronomy 16:1-7.

**New Testament:** *“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem”* (John 2:13). Also John 11:55 and Luke 22:8.

**Observance:** Originally involved sacrificing a lamb on the 11th of Nisan and eating it with the family, together with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. The Passover was considered the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted eight days and ended with another celebration. Today the Passover *Seder* (SAY-dur), or Order of Service, is read from the *Haggadah* (the book with the Order of Service) which lists four questions to be asked by a child and in response the story of the Exodus is told.

**Tradition:** Required food includes: flat, crisp unleavened bread, called *matzoh*, since the Jews left Egypt in such haste their bread did not have time to rise; bitter herbs and salt water, called *maror*, to symbolize the suffering of slavery; four cups of wine. Other traditional foods include *charoseth*, a mixture of chopped apples, nuts and wine, recalling the mortar Jewish slaves mixed for Pharaoh’s monuments, and *karpas*, greens, standing for new spring. One place setting is left empty for the long-awaited guest, the prophet Elijah, who is to announce the coming of the Messiah.

**Fulfillment:** *“Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. Let us keep the Festival . . . with the bread of sincerity and truth”*

(1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at that Passover meal using the *matzoh* as His body and the wine as His blood. Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper in order to receive the forgiveness He obtained by the sacrifice of His body and blood and in order to remember their release from the slavery of sin to the freedom of His kingdom.

## Wednesday (Fifth week of Lent) PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE

*“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God’” (Exodus 6:6-7).*

Our journey is coming to the end. We can see in the distance a hill at a crossroad outside Jerusalem’s walls. We have seen much along the way but have much yet to see. The next festival will be Jesus’ last. The preparation has been long, but this festival promises deliverance.

*Pesach* or Passover, is often considered the greatest of the Jewish festivals. It has been the defining event of the lives of the Jewish people, and is often used by God to describe Himself as the One who has “brought you by the hand out of the land of Egypt.” This festival is probably the best known of all Jewish festivals, and has been the subject of many popular movies. The events leading up to this festival are dramatic indeed. All of them point to the deliverance of God’s people from bondage and the promise of a new home.

This is the last part of Jesus’ journey to redeem you. He comes to deliver you from the bondage of sin. He comes with the promise of a new home, a home in heaven with many rooms. You are nearing the end of the Lenten journey, but much must still happen before you come to the empty tomb. You must prepare for the Passover feast.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, give me new vision to stay on the path and walk daily with You to the empty tomb. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Often, toward the end of the journey, our weariness tempts us to stop even when we are so close. We have come together for 36 days. Press on to the goal. It is at hand.

## Thursday (Fifth week of Lent) PASSOVER~DELIVERANCE

*“Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. She named him Moses, saying, ‘I drew him out of the water’” (Exodus 2:5, 6, 10).*

The Passover is the dramatic retelling of God’s faithfulness in the deliverance of His people. To tell this story, Jewish families will use a *Hagaddah*. The Hebrew word, “HaGadah,” simply means “the telling” and it is the “Order of Service” for the Passover meal (the *Seder*). This meal will tell the story of the Passover.

God raised up a deliverer, named Moses, whose ministry started at a very young age and in persecution. Moses was hidden because Pharaoh, the king, was trying to destroy the Jewish people. Pharaoh had grown wary of the Jews and sought to destroy them by having all baby boys killed. Moses was hidden in a reed basket and sent floating down the Nile river. Pharaoh’s daughter found him and named him Moses, which means “I drew him out of the water.” Moses would grow to be the man to deliver his people from the bondage of their slavery to Pharaoh.

Is it any surprise that God has chosen water as the element that brings deliverance to His people? He would bring another Deliverer, draw Him out of the waters of His baptism, and through His ministry deliver you and me from the bondage of our slavery to sin. When Jesus was baptized, His public ministry began, and it will end soon with His death and resurrection. Because of that God has drawn us out of the waters of our baptism and could rightly call us by the name “Moses.” We are delivered, and are also used by God, through the teaching of His Word, to deliver others from their own bondage.

**Prayer:** Lord God in heaven, thank You for drawing me up from the waters of baptism and delivering me from sin. Show me today a person who needs to hear about this miracle. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Your baptism is a wonderful miracle of deliverance by God. Tell the story of your deliverance to someone who is in need of this miracle, and pray for his or her deliverance.



## Friday (Fifth week of Lent) PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE

*“In the first month you are to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days no yeast is to be found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born. Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread” (Exodus 12:18-20).*

This path we are on reminds me of the story of Hansel and Gretel. It is strewn with breadcrumbs--breadcrumbs thrown out of Jewish houses as they prepare for Passover.

Each element of the *Seder* meal is used to tell the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt, but first homes must be prepared. No yeast can be found in the home during Passover. For 40 days, Jewish homes are cleaned and the leaven is removed. Today, a little leaven is often taken to the synagogue and burned as a symbol that the home is free of yeast.

The time of preparing the Jewish home is akin to the season of Lent. As they prepare by scouring the house and searching every corner for yeast, during the season of Lent we scour our hearts, searching every corner for the yeast of sin. Physical yeast is removed from Jewish homes, and spiritual yeast is removed from our hearts. Unleavened bread, or *matzoh* (MAHT-zuh), is the bread of affliction, a bread baked in haste as the Israelites fled from bondage in Egypt. But it is also the bread that brings deliverance, Jesus, born in Bethlehem (which means “house of bread”), will also be both. For our sakes, He will be afflicted and we will be delivered.

**Prayer:** Our Father, You know my heart. Forgive me for the things I harbor and do not readily give to You. Thank You for the pictures You have given in the Passover, and thank You for sparing me the death I deserve. In Y'shua's name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Take advantage of this time to examine your heart and give to God anything that burdens you. He will assure you of forgiveness through Jesus, the Bread of Life.

## **Saturday (Fifth week of Lent)**

### **PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE**

*“Then Moses . . . said to them, ‘Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, He will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and He will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down’” (Exodus 12:21-23).*

“Nothing is certain in this world except death and taxes.” Surely you’ve heard that saying. All across the United States this time of the year, we are reminded that taxes are still pretty certain! But at Passover we learn that death is not so certain.

The *Hagaddah* picks up the story when Moses is grown. He has heard God’s call and presented himself to Pharaoh with God’s demand: “Let My people go!” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, he did not free the Israelites, and plague after plague was visited on Egypt. Finally, God Himself would pass through the land and slay all the first-born. But first, He instructed His people to mark their homes with the blood of a lamb so that He would “pass over” and spare their children.

One of the elements of the *Seder* is called *karpas* (kar-PAHS), usually a piece of parsley. This represents hyssop, which was a leafy plant on a long stalk. The *karpas* is dipped in salt water, which represents blood, and eaten. This tells the story of God’s instruction to dip hyssop into the blood of the lamb and spread the blood on the “top and sides of the doorframe.” God used this sign to pass over the homes of His children and spare them from death.

But, death still followed us after that night, until the day on Mt. Calvary when hyssop dipped in wine vinegar was raised again to a beam of wood on which blood was flowing. This was the blood of God’s Lamb. By our faith in this Sacrifice, God has passed over us forever and given us eternal life.

**Prayer:** My Lord, thank You for giving me the gift of life. Give me peace today, knowing that all things are gifts from You. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** This time of year it is easy to moan about taxes and the government, and forget about the real issues of life and death that happen around us every day. Thank God for His gifts to you, even His provision to pay taxes.

## **Palm Sunday**

### **PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE**

*“Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household” (Exodus 12:3).*

We take a break in our preparation for Passover to look again at the path we are walking. There is a great crowd gathered, and palm branches have been cut and laid on the road. Jesus is coming into Jerusalem, preparing to celebrate the Passover. The crowd is jubilant, shouting their faith in Him as the Messiah, but He looks at the crowd and knows that they will fall away. He is not their brand of Messiah. They are expecting a warrior king, a messiah who will bring earthly victory.

Jesus’ triumphal entry is reminiscent of the procession that took place at the first Passover. God sent fathers, husbands and sons out to find a perfect, unblemished lamb for the sacrifice. The blood of this lamb protected them from the death that God had planned for Egypt. Now, God Himself brings in His own perfect and unblemished Lamb for the sacrifice. When this blood is shed, it will be painted on the doorposts of human hearts. As we look out onto the crowd, it seems appropriate for them to be joyful. They may not know it, but God is bringing in His Lamb for them.

We turn back to our Passover preparations. On the Jewish Passover table is the roasted lamb shank and a roasted egg. Both of these remind us of the lamb sacrificed to save the firstborn sons of the Israelites in Egypt. The lamb shank reminds us that the temple has been destroyed and no more sacrifices are made there. Believers in Christ know that the perfect sacrifice, Jesus Christ, has been made. He is sufficient, and no more sacrifices are necessary!

The shell of the egg is darkened by fire, just as the lamb was roasted. The shell is removed to eat the egg, and the pure and unblemished white inside reminds us to praise God that our pure, unblemished Lamb is alive again.

**Prayer:** Father in heaven, You are our Provider. Thank You for bringing Your Son, the Lamb, into Your house and covering our hearts with His blood. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As you celebrate this Palm Sunday, remember that there are some who see the procession and do not understand its meaning. God's Lamb was brought into His house for them too. Share this truth.

## **Monday of Holy Week**

### **PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE**

*“Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast (Exodus 12:7-8).*

As we continue to prepare for our Passover *Seder*, there is a very strange looking root on the table. God commanded us to eat this meal with bitter herbs, and these days the horseradish root has gotten the job. Freshly grated, horseradish will really clear your sinuses (we call it “Jewish Dristan”) and bring tears to your eyes.

It is appropriate to cry tears of bitterness at Passover. With tears we remember our people who slaved under a yoke of oppression for 430 years. All that time, they cried out for a deliverer. And we sit here today, free from oppression, the blessed recipients of deliverance. It’s hard to cry when you are so blessed. So, the horseradish. Properly eaten, as a nice big bite on a piece of *matzoh*, trust me, you’ll cry.

It is much the same with Jesus. We know the gospel so well that when we contemplate the pain and suffering that Jesus experienced for us, we should cry, but often can’t. We know the ending and have become immune to the pain. We risk taking His sacrifice for granted. Perhaps a nice big bite of horseradish will remind us of the tears that are shed over death.

**Prayer:** My Lord, so often I take the death of Your Son for granted as I go about my blessed life. Forgive me Lord, and make me truly thankful for the gift You have given me. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As this Holy Week goes on, focus on the real pain that Jesus suffered for you, that you will truly appreciate the price he paid to deliver you.

## Tuesday of Holy Week

### PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE

*“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter” (Isaiah 5:20).*

There is an odd-looking but very tasty mixture on the table before us. After unleavened bread, parsley and horseradish, this food is a delightful surprise. Called *charoseth* (khah-ROH-seth), it is a mixture of apples, honey, nuts, cinnamon and wine ground together almost into a paste. Though not a food commanded to be on the table in Scripture, it is a part of the Jewish Passover celebration nevertheless.

It is another reminder of bondage. The *charoseth* is to remind us of the mortar that the Israelites used to build Pharaoh’s cities. The question is often asked, “Why do we use something so sweet to remind us of something so bitter?” In the words of Tevye, the Jewish father trying to preserve tradition in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*, “I’ll tell you. I don’t know. But it’s a tradition.” The *charoseth* is eaten together with the horseradish during the *Seder*, and perhaps it is done first to make the horseradish more palatable. Rabbi Hillel instructed his students to make what we call a “Hillel sandwich” out of the horseradish, the *charoseth* and the *matzoh*. Why? Again, I don’t know. But I think the Hillel sandwich is a picture of life. Even life following Jesus.

On the path we have walked together, there have been sweet times and there have been bitter times. Life is like that. During the bitter times we are comforted by the sweetness of the Gospel as we are assured that we are children of God, saved by faith, and that Jesus carries our burdens. During the sweet times, we thank God and are reminded that there are many who do not know the sweetness of God’s love and live bitter lives apart from His love and salvation.

**Prayer:** Lord God, I praise You for carrying me in those times that I am most challenged to see the good You have for me. Help me to learn from bitter times, and praise You for sweet times. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As we take the bitter with the sweet, let it teach us to thank God at all times.

## Wednesday of Holy Week PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE

*“An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD’s Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born” (Numbers 9:14).*

God’s Word never limits deliverance to the Jewish people. His works of grace bring salvation to all who believe--whether alien, or native-born; wild or natural olive branch. God chose the Jewish people to be a blessing to the gentiles, bringing forth the One who would be sacrificed for all people.

It is clear from Scripture that there were aliens living among the Jews who celebrated the Passover. This has led to another tradition in Jewish homes. As a child, my family often invited a non-Jewish friend to share the Passover *Seder* with us. It was our attempt to include the “alien among us.” Often this friend was a Christian. Many who ate with us said they were blessed by the meal and the remembrance. When we finished the meal saying, “next year in Jerusalem,” that was a prayer of hope for the coming of Messiah. And yet, not one of these believers ever shared with us that He had indeed already come.

Tomorrow night is the Passover meal. As we come closer in our walk to this festive meal, we come closer to the truth that the Passover story also foretells the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

**Prayer:** Father in heaven, tonight we prepare for the last Passover Your Son will eat. Prepare our hearts to come to the table and receive His gifts. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Are you perhaps the alien who has been invited to a friend’s *Seder*? If so, find ways to share the rest of the story. If not, how about inviting them to a *Seder* of your own?



## **Maundy Thursday**

### **PASSOVER--THE LORD'S SUPPER**

*“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and give it to His disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat: this is My body.’ Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:26-28).*

This is an account that we have heard many times in our walk. Let’s examine it through the eyes of Jesus at the Passover *Seder*.

Jesus sent His disciples ahead of Him to prepare the Passover, probably to check the house for any signs of leaven. Presumably, the person to whose house Jesus is going has already cleaned it and removed the leavened bread, but the disciples must be sure.

That night, Jesus was reclining. We recline at Passover to show that we are no longer slaves in Egypt, but freed men. Then He began the meal. When Jesus remarked about Judas “dipping his hand in the bowl” with Him, He was probably referring to either the *karpas*, which is dipped in salt water, or the horseradish, which is sometimes dipped into the *charoseth*.

Then He took bread, broke it and gave it to His disciples. Jesus declared this bread, the *matzoh*, free of leaven, free of sin to be His body. Then He took wine. The Apostle Paul remarks that it is the cup “after supper” (1 Corinthians 11:17-26). This would be the third cup of four cups of wine taken during the covenant in His blood. Then the disciples knew that the covenant prophesied by Jeremiah 600 years before had come to pass (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Through this same meal, God offers us forgiveness for our wickedness, and remembers our sins no more. The cup of redemption has redeemed us all.

**Prayer:** God of our fathers, thank You for this gift of Your blood and body, which You have given to redeem me. May it always strengthen me in faith for works of service in Your kingdom. Guard my heart that I may never take this meal for granted. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Tonight as you come for worship, go back in time to the upper room and see this meal the way that it was given. Pray that through Jesus’ eyes, this meal will have new meaning for you in the context of Passover.

## Good Friday PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE

*“Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5).*

You have heard me say that God has deposited His truth in the traditions of His people. And there is much more to the unleavened bread than we have seen already.

Before Passover, the bread is prepared in a very special way. It is rolled out into flat sheets and pierced by a large wooden wheel with pins in it. The bread has no yeast and therefore will not rise. It is pierced to allow the heat from the baking to rise through the bread and avoid burning. The baking process gives it dark stripes between the rows of holes.

Prior to the Passover *Seder*, three sheets of *matzoh* are placed in a special linen that has three compartments. This *matzoh tosh* (MAHT-zuh tahsh) is a tradition for which no one has an explanation. Some say it represents the patriarchy: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Some say it represents the temple, the priests and the Levites. Neither of these explains the source of the tradition, but the ritual itself is very clear.

As the *Seder* begins, the head of the house takes out the middle *matzoh* from the *tosh*, breaks it, wraps half of it in linen and hides it away.

When Jesus says of this bread, “this is My body,” He is being very literal. His body is sinless, and on Good Friday is striped and pierced as He is whipped and crucified. Dead now, He is wrapped in linen, and laid away in a tomb. Is the *matzoh tosh* somehow a picture of the Trinity, showing the second part, the Son, taken and sacrificed? Is God trying to teach His people even in this man-made tradition?

**Prayer:** Lord of Truth, teach us by Your Word and open our eyes to the truths “hidden” in the traditions of men. May our eyes be clear to see, and our tongues strong to teach others. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As we grieve the death of our Messiah, even as we look forward to His resurrection, we also grieve the death of those who die without faith in Him.

## Saturday of Holy Week

### PASSOVER AND THE EASTER VIGIL

*“As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away” (Matthew 27:57-60).*

There is more to examine in the tradition of the *matzoh tosh*. Our walk is not yet finished; Jesus has paid our penalty, but the tomb remains sealed.

In the Passover *Seder*, half of the middle *matzoh* has been removed from the *matzoh tosh*, wrapped in linen and hidden away. This is called the *afikomen* (ah-fee-KOH-men), which means “that which comes after.” This has been interpreted as the last thing that is eaten at the Passover meal. It is traditional to hide this linen-wrapped bread somewhere in the house and during the meal all the children search the house for the *afikomen*. (The one who finds it and presents it to papa receives a gift, but the child must wait 50 days to receive the gift, which is presented at the festival of *Shavuot*. The gift is usually their first Hebrew Scriptures.) Then papa takes the *afikomen*, unwraps it, breaks it and distributes it with the third cup of wine after the meal. It is the *afikomen* and the cup of redemption that symbolize our redemption by God from slavery.

It is likely that the *afikomen* was the bread that Jesus shared on His last night at the meal. After all, whose body is it that lies hidden away, wrapped in linen, waiting to be found by those who would search? Those who find Jesus also will receive a gift at the festival of *Shavuot*, which is also called Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes into those who believe in Jesus.

**Prayer:** Abba, Father, thank You for the gift of Your Holy Spirit. You have guided me on this walk, and blessed me through Your Son, my Messiah. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** As we look forward to the glorious resurrection, remember someone who has never seen the empty tomb. Invite them to join you on your walk tomorrow.

## **Easter Sunday**

### **PASSOVER--DELIVERANCE**

*“The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; He has risen, just as He said. Come and see the place where He lay’” (Matthew 28:5-6).*

He is risen! He is risen, indeed! We can imagine the shouts of both women as they ran throughout the city. Jesus the Messiah has risen from the grave and is alive today! Because of this, we have the promise of eternal life. Hallelujah!

This should be the final message of the Passover meal. It should end with shouts of joy. Our redemption is won! He is risen indeed!

Sadly, the truth is still hidden from the hearts of most of those who share this meal. Every year they set a place for Elijah, and pour a cup of wine for him. The door is left ajar and the children are sent out to see if he is coming. God’s Word tells us that Elijah will be back and announce that Messiah is come. But every year, the wine is untouched, the children are disappointed and the meal is finished on a note of empty hope. Maybe next year?

What a joy that you can announce to them, “Elijah HAS come!” Jesus declared that John the Baptist was “the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send My messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you . . . And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come’” (Matthew 11:10, 14). That “Elijah” came to do one thing: Point us to the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

**Prayer:** Our Father in heaven, thank You for this journey. Guard my steps as I walk on, and help me to be Your witness to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. In Y’shua’s name, Amen.

**Ponder the path:** Pray that the families who share this meal will come to know that Elijah has come and that they will believe in Y’shua our Messiah. Our journey does not end here, but carries us onward bearing the good news to all people-- Jesus, Messiah, has come! Amen.

If you would like some help in sharing your faith with Jewish people, call us at (314) 645-4456, or e-mail me at [RevKeveye@gmail.com](mailto:RevKeveye@gmail.com). We have a gospel tract

written especially for people celebrating Passover and other resources that you can use on your journey.

# BURNING BUSH MINISTRIES



**BRINGING Y'SHUA TO JEWISH PEOPLE,  
BRINGING Y'SHUA TO THE CHURCH!**

The vision of LIJE is two-fold.

- First, LIJE seeks to engage in intentional evangelism within every significant Jewish community in the United States, sharing Y'shua (Jesus) with all people and especially the Jewish people.
- Secondly, LIJE seeks to connect congregations for training in evangelism and to help our churches understand the Jewish roots of their faith.

LUTHERANS IN JEWISH EVANGELISM  
BURNING BUSH MINISTRIES  
REV. KEVIN PARVIZ, EXEC. DIRECTOR  
6327 CLAYTON AVE., ST. LOUIS, MO 63139  
[WWW.LIJE.ORG](http://WWW.LIJE.ORG)  
[REVKEVYE@AOL.COM](mailto:REVKEVYE@AOL.COM)

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Rom 1:16, ESV)

## Ponder the Path

Lent is a journey of preparation. Each day of the Lenten season takes us one step closer to the sacrifice that atoned for our sins once and for all, to the cross and the empty tomb. At the end of the journey is Easter, the glorious celebration of Jesus' resurrection and victory over death.

Our Lord's life and ministry is a journey, too. These devotions use the journey of the Jewish festival year to provide insight into Jesus' life over 2000 years ago. Follow Him on the path to the cross and the tomb. Visit the festivals that were part of His life, and let them guide you as you ponder your own path through life.

Take the journey of Lent: Forty days, forty steps leading up the hill to the cross and down again to the empty tomb.

Walk with Jesus. Stand in His steps. Ponder the path.

