



Minutes With Messiah

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ON SELECTING ELDERS

Have you ever been told to do something new, but not told how to do it? How do you react? Some people panic in such a situation, because they are afraid that if they don't do it exactly the way the person who assigned the task would do it, they will be wrong. Others jump in and do it their way, figuring that if nobody told them how, they had a choice in method. In between are an infinite number of options. Some people like to have freedom to experiment. Others like to be taught first, and then always do it that way.

These latter are like the guys on the side of the road. One fellow came along and saw them working. The first worker used a post-hole digger to prepare a hole. Then both would sit for a moment, and then the other guy would fill the hole. When the observer asked what they were doing they said they worked for the city, putting up fences. The guy watching said he didn't see a fence. The first fellow explained. "You see, I dig the holes. Then Fred puts in the posts, and Jerry, here, fills in the dirt around the post. Well, Fred called in sick today. But Jerry and I don't see why we shouldn't get paid just 'cause Fred's sick."

If we are told exactly how to do things, then when situations change, we have difficulty adapting. God sometimes gives specific instructions. At other times he tells us to do something and lets us figure out the best way. Perhaps that is how he dealt with the selection of elders in congregations.

Paul makes it clear in 1 Timothy and Titus that congregations were expected, whenever possible, to have elders (also called pastors/shepherds or bishops). He told both of these men the qualities that an elder must have. We know that Peter was not just an apostle, but also an elder. (1 Peter 5:1) So, possibly, was John. (2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1, although he could be referring to his age, not his office) In most places, though, we are not told how congregations get elders.

In my 60+ years, I have seen several methods used by congregations to select elders. Some are better than others, but all seem somewhat effective. Many congregations make a list of men that appear to qualify, then tell the congregation who the nominees are and ask if there is any reason these men should not be elders. While this seems to be the most common method in the Churches of Christ, it has its downside. On the one hand, some

people who might know disqualifying factors remain silent, afraid to upset the apple cart. (This is how we get elders who are family abusers.) On the other hand, someone might bring an accusation (false or not) that will subsequently destroy the reputation of a man. Some have called this method "deselection by shaming."

Other congregations use an election method. In one such, a slate of potential elders is presented to the congregation, and they elect a certain number of men, less than the number presented. In another variation, each member of the congregation is asked to list all the men they think should be elders, and those that are listed on a certain percentage of signed ballots, if any meet that percentage, are given the option to become elders.

Interestingly, the one option for choosing elders mentioned in the Bible is the one I have never seen. Paul's commission to Titus was to "set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city." (Tit 1:5) Apparently Paul thought that, at least in Crete, the best way to select elders was by use of an outside consultant. Since reputation outside the congregation is one of the qualifications (1 Tim 3:7), perhaps this is a good way to judge that quality. It is just strange that a group of people known for arguing that *a capella* music is the only acceptable music because it is the only kind specified in the New Testament should not also argue that choosing elders from outside a congregation is the only method, for the same reason.

Some congregations limit the eldership to a certain number of men. Others feel that anybody who is qualified should be named an elder, even if that is a majority of the men in the congregation. While scripture doesn't say which is correct, it seems that it would be wrong to deny a qualified man the opportunity to serve as an elder.

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IN PREPARATION

Any Boy Scout will be able to tell you the scout motto is, “Be Prepared.” Friends in the U.S. Coast Guard should be able to tell you the motto of the Coasties is *Semper Paratus* (“Always Prepared”). If preparation is held in such high regard by groups such as these, why isn’t there a holiday devoted to preparedness? Actually, there is, although readiness is not commonly a theme emphasized by followers of this holiday. Yet, at the original Passover, preparedness was the theme of the day.

Four days ahead of the Passover, the Israelites were told to

take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. (Ex 12:3-4)

Even days before the anticipated event, they were to prepare. And then came the day.

And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your

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Passover is the holiday of
freedom.

hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover. (Ex 12:11)

Preparation for the holiday

Preparation is an essential aspect of the Jewish celebration of *Pesach* (Passover). Because of the specific nature of the *seder*, many things have to be purchased: a lamb shankbone, horseradish or other bitter herb, matza, wine, and other items for the meal. Pillows must be found. *Haggadot* (the text of the *seder*) must be found for all who are to be present. And all of this is merely the normal preparation for a special meal. There is much more important preparation to be made.

Spring cleaning may be common among many peoples, but it is essential to the Jewish family. Part of the preparation for Passover is the command, “the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses.” (Ex 12:15) There are many specific rules about purging the house of *chametz*, but the specific one mentioned here is that all of it must be removed from the house. To do so, one must

clean the house thoroughly, to make sure every possible corner is cleared of leaven/*chametz*. This is so important that there is even a ceremony in which the last crumb of leaven is removed from the house the morning before Passover starts in the evening. Without such preparation, one will be “cut off” from his people, Israel.

Not everyone today eats with staff in hand. Some might even say, with the length of some Passover meals, that few eat it in haste. Nevertheless, even today preparedness is a watchword of Passover.

Since Passover was one of the three holidays for which all men were to travel to Jerusalem, by the first century CE, many residents of Jerusalem apparently made the preparations for those who would be traveling. Some made rooms available, and perhaps prepared the meal.

And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. (Mk 14:12-16)

Why Pesach?

Of all the holidays of the Jewish people, why is preparation so ingrained into this one? It seems logical to expect that preparedness would be a theme of *Rosh HaShanah*, the beginning of the year. At the approach of *Yom Kippur* one might expect to prepare for atonement and a new start. Even *Shavuot* (Pentecost) might be associated with preparation as it celebrates the giving of the Law. And yet it is *Pesach* that is the holiday of preparedness. Why?

There is an old saying that freedom isn’t free. Passover is the holiday of freedom. It celebrates the seven days from the actual Passover and the order to evacuate Egypt through the crossing of the Reed Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army. After hundreds of years of spiritual downward spiral, you cannot free a nation without preparing them. Some rabbis say that the requirement to select the lamb four days before Passover symbolizes the preparation needed to bring the nation back to God. They needed to suffer the first of the plagues

for the same reason. They needed to be prepared for freedom. On the morning after the Passover, they experienced freedom, but seven days later were ready to go back into slavery. “Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness.” (Ex 14:12) Even after tasting freedom they were begging to return to slavery.

That may be one reason the Jewish people consider it so important that children participate in the *seder*. Children need to understand the cost of freedom, before they experience it. People are told to experience the story “as if you were there.” The preparation, the flight, and the crossing. Experience it now, so that you will be prepared when given various degrees of freedom. If you learn what freedom cost, then perhaps you will be more appreciative of it.

Be prepared

The holidays are not just moments in time. The new year is not just a day, it is a year. *Sukkos* is not just living semi-outdoors for a week; it is reliance on God for a lifetime. In the same way, the preparation (and other aspects) of *Pesach* are not isolated incidents; they are meant to be followed throughout the year. If Passover is a celebration of preparedness, how does that affect our lives?

The Preacher advocated readiness to listen to God. He even rates it above acts of worship. “Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.” (Eccl 5:1) It would appear that there is a certain amount of preparation required before even study of God’s word. Steve Allen, one time TV personality and advocate for reading, used to speak of “readiness” for a book. He said that you will never enjoy a book unless you are culturally and emotionally ready for it. That is why some people have a hard time with required readings in school, but love the same books later in life. They understand the books when they have the “readiness” to read them. In the same way, God’s word is only open to those who are prepared to study. Otherwise, they “have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house.” (Ezek 12:2)

David was told that he would not actually build the Temple that he desired. Nevertheless, he felt the need to be prepared for the building. After all, you don’t even build a shed without some preparation, much less a house for God.

And David prepared iron in abundance for the nails for the doors of the gates, and for the joinings; and brass in abundance without weight; Also cedar trees in abundance: for the Zidonians and they of Tyre brought much cedar wood to David. And David said, Solomon my son is young and tender,

and the house that is to be builded for the LORD must be exceeding magnifical, of fame and of glory throughout all countries: I will therefore now make preparation for it. So David prepared abundantly before his death. (1 Chron 22:3-5)

God himself is apparently concerned with preparation. Four times the book of Jonah mentions things that God had prepared: a great fish, a gourd, a worm, and an east wind. Some rabbis argue that God finished creation on the sixth day. Therefore, they say, the great fish that swallowed Jonah was created in the beginning just for the purpose of swallowing Jonah thousands of years later. The same would also apply to the gourd and the worm. That is a long time ahead in which to prepare something, but for God time is no object. The great fish, or the descendant of the original great fish was ready at the time for which it was prepared.

Preparation is also a watchword for Christians. The followers of Jesus are admonished to be ready for

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many things.

During the middle of the first century CE, there was a drought in Palestine. The churches of Europe and Asia Minor were determined to help by sending money. This was why Paul told the Corinthians to set aside money on the first of the week “so that there be no gatherings when I come.” (1 Cor 16:1-2) He had to remind them a year later to have their contribution ready, so that they would not be embarrassed by a lack of preparation. (2 Cor 9:1-5)

Titus was sent to Crete with a commission to establish elders. Paul felt it necessary, though, that he remind the Cretans of certain things. One of these was “to be ready to every good work.” Even good work requires preparation. We never know when good works will be required, so must be prepared at all times.

Peter; wrote his first recorded letter to encourage Christians to endure suffering. In the third chapter (by our divisions) he reminds them not to be troubled by hardships on behalf of the Lord, but to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.” (1 Pet 3:15)

Preparation permeates our existence. Without it we are as precarious as a fiddler on a roof. The holiday of *Pesach* reminds us that preparation for an event is an integral part of the event itself. Part of the telling of the story is the spring cleaning that precedes it.

(*Passover is April 23-30 in 2016*)

ANOMALY

An - y-time you look at me You will - see an a nom-a - ly, Some-one not quite ord-'na-ry.

I am a-dop-ted by God, you see. Don't con-form to this world's kind, But be changed by

a new mind. Then, like me, you'll sure-ly be Proud to - be an a nom-a - ly.

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