

13 Av, 5774 (9/8/14) **Shabbat Nachamu: focusing on Hope** J. M. Terrett

Today is Shabbat Nachamu, the Sabbath of mercy, which follows Tisha B'Av, the anniversary of the destruction of both temples. The weekly Torah portion deals with the beginning of Deuteronomy and explains to the new generation both the objectives and the requirements of G-d as He prepares to take them into the Promised land.

As we celebrate our annual congregational picnic, I have three brief remarks to make about Shabbat Nachamu. First of all, we do not serve a G-d of wrath, but one who gives us and all the nations and generations of mankind time to repent and stop practising evil and immorality. Secondly, His mercy is focused on us learning to live lives of faithful righteousness and not just keep repeating the foolish mistakes which our race is so prone to make. Thirdly, His mercy also speaks to a coming day when He shall bring our universe to an end and deal with all the unfinished spiritual business of all the ages of mankind.

The Torah portion deals with the second giving of the Ten Commandments where the only change deals with why our people are called to observe the Sabbath. The generation which came out of Egypt were told to keep the Sabbath as a memorial to creation, where G-d rested from His works. The generation which came out of the wilderness are told to keep the Sabbath as a memorial of their deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. This change does not affect the commandment, but shifts the people's focus from a memorial of creation, which is still the major reason we are to keep the Sabbath and lets us acknowledge that only free people are allowed to rest and that we should both cherish and protect our freedom.

We are not told to choose between the two motivations for observing our weekly day of rest, as much as we are to remember both the finished creation and our deliverance from slavery. The rest of the Book of Deuteronomy gives instructions to the new generation so that they may avoid the errors of the lost generation and occupy the land as free people living an a blessed and abundant spirituality.

Lets go back to the first reason we observe Shabbat Nachamu – we serve a G-d of mercy, not of wrath. There is so much bloodshed and murder occurring around the globe, along with theft, rape and spiritual deception of every kind. How can G-d allow this to occur and not intervene? Two thoughts. If He did intervene, He would have to stop human history and bring all mankind into the final judgment, without any further opportunity for repentance. Also, what He allows, He does not approve of and yet He wants us to see all of this and not be pulled into it, not because it is no longer available to us, but because we willingly choose to live a totally different lifestyle.

G-d sent His Son, our Messiah to die on the cross for the sins of all mankind, so that no one has to perish, but that all can come to an acknowledgement of the truth. The violence, deception and suffering which seems to be escalating globally do not reflect the true nature of G-d, as much as it testifies to His great patience and kindness. Rather than judge now, He waits and gives us a change to come to faith and to live in righteousness, without unleashing His wrath, which this world so richly deserves.

As well and secondly, while some people portray G-d as a cross between the tooth fairy and our celestial sugar daddy in the sky, G-d does not smile on our foolishness and say: kids will be kids, don't worry all is forgiven, go and have some more foolish fun and feel free to commit all kinds of atrocities because I got you covered. When He looks down on places like Gaza,

Syria and Iraq, He does not sweep all the murder and hatred under the rug. He offers forgiveness so that people would learn not to be foolish and would learn not to commit atrocities.

Third, His mercy speaks of an eventual finality which the world continues to ignore and even make fun of. Evolutionists and those who promote all kinds of gross immorality and the murder of babies in their mother's wombs think that because they are getting away with it for the moment, that there is no judgement waiting where they shall be held to final account. Are they in for a big surprise. How about you?

Shabbat Nachamu should keep us in close relationship with His love and forgiveness so that we are empowered to try again to live lives of faithful obedience until we get it right His way.

I have three things to say today as we celebrate our annual congregational picnic on Shabbat Nachamu (The Sabbath of Consolation, Comfort and Mercy)

1. G-d is not a G-d of wrath
2. G-d is not a pushover (sugar daddy)
3. G-d will bring all things into judgment (we need to leave our unfinished business with Him)

With all that is going on in the Middle East – the bombing of Israel and the Christian genocide in Iraq and Syria – and around the world, instead of raging, we need to do what we can to help (prayer and pressure and practical help) and then commit our tears and our rage to Him.

In the smouldering ruins of both temples, the hope of the Jewish people was not extinguished and never will be. We are called to be a great nation and a blessing to all nations and this is the spiritual legacy which gives me hope and comfort in our crazy world.

Today's Torah portion covers the second giving of the Ten Commandments (Sabbath a double memorial – Creation and Exodus) and the prophetic portion is Is, 40:1-26 which is brimming over with comfort. The New Testament portion reminds us of the folly which brought on the destruction of both temples and speaks of that wonderful day when Israel as a people will acknowledge her true Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth.

Repeat three points. Close in prayer.