

Tazria-Metzora**She Bears Seed- Infected One A Time to Heal****Torah:**

Leviticus 12:1-15:33

Segregating infected people who could be at risk or who could put the community at risk. Giving mothers time to recover. Dealing with infections of the skin, and mold on clothes and in houses to see if it is permanent or temporary –balancing care of the individual with care of the community. The person declared pure receives same blood anointing as the priests (14:25). Cleansing bird (14:53). Making sure the infection does not spread (15:31) and giving people time to heal.

Haftarah:

2 Ki. 4:42-5:19; 7:3-20

First multiplication of the bread. Healing of Naaman (5:15). Four lepers. (7:9)

Brit Chadashah:

Luke 7:18-35; Mt. 23:16-24:2; 30, 31

John the Baptist (7:28); Woes of Matthew (23:23), negative prophetic legacy

L-rd's Table:**Jewish Hero: Students of Winnipeg University****Psalm 106/120 (Patti)**

From now until Shavuot, I want to give you a series of messages which talk about the Word and its role in the life of believers and in the life of those who are considering coming to faith. One of the primary functions of the Word is to both convict us of the truth and point out all and any areas where we have either departed from this truth or have been fooling ourselves into adopting various deceptions, instead of making our lives into personal pilgrimages in the truth.

One of the key passages on the Word, Matt. 7:24-27, is found in the New Testament at the conclusion of our Messiah's teaching which is sometimes called the Sermon on the Mount. This was a series of teachings to both correct teachings which falsely claimed biblical support and to teach about the authentic spirituality which the Torah has always required from sincere, honest believers.

At the end of this major introduction to His teachings, the Messiah both identifies His rock solid teachings as the weather proof Word and says that those who hear them, without taking action are setting themselves up for great loss and ruin – not because of any set of happenstances which strike all people without partiality, but because of the failure to live a life as an extended reaction to the truth of the Word.

Let's have a look at the passage as we examine how to build rock solid, weather proof lives.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and who puts them into practice, will be like a wise man who built his house upon rock. The rain fell, the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice, will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall.

This passage is talking to believers and speaks about hearing the Word and practicing the Word. James spoke of forgetful hearers and patient integrators of the Word. The Palmist likens a faithful practitioner of the Word to a fruitful tree well connected to a regular water source. Towards the conclusion of Deuteronomy, Moses reminded the people that what was given to them was not a light thing – not something optional to be put on the back burner and ignored, it was their life – he even went further and said that he was placing before them two options – life and death and strongly recommend that they choose life – that they choose the Word and put it into practice.

However, nowhere in the Bible is obedience to the Word spoken of as only being valid or possible when we do not make mistakes or where we all too frequently have to learn things the hard way. A life dedicated to the Word, to the Torah, is committed to both knowing the truth and to embracing it and this is sometimes best accomplished by learning from our mistakes and turning every major experience into an opportunity for faith and obedience to keep us walking on the straight and narrow path, instead of straying from it or being distracted into neglecting its teachings.

Our passage today speaks of two kinds of men – wise and foolish – who both hear the same Word, but who have two different reactions. We are not told if there was a difference in their levels of intelligence or in their gifting and we are not even told about the backgrounds they may have come from with all the advantages and disadvantages which our personal baggage can equip us or disable us with. They are both exposed to the same kind of teaching which they both obviously understood, but only one of them actually puts the teachings into practice.

They both go about building a life, but with two radically different foundations. I am often troubled by the number of people who come to faith and who do not survive when it comes time to apply their faith to their lives. Luke says that some are destroyed by doubt; others are withered by temptations, while others are choked by the cares, the riches and the pleasures of life. It is as if the reality of our faith is challenged by various aspects of the realities of life, to see which reality we will adopt and live for.

Some are affected by doubt, where what the Bible says about G-d and about creation are called into question while others are affected by disobedience, where biblical morality is called into question and violated, often because people do not always understand that repentance is an essential aspect of proactive, positive obedience. Sometimes we have to grow in strength and courage before we are ready to confront and dismantle some of the Canaanite fortresses of the enemy in our lives and this patient process of growth is as valid a form of obedience as any other.

It took Israel time to complete the conquest of the Holy Land for two main reasons, one positive and the other negative. They had to grow in strength and numbers, which is a positive form of repentance and obedience and they had to forsake the negative Egyptian and Canaanite habits (fornication and idolatry) in order to have the spiritual strength to expel these negative forces from their lives.

How about you? Are you growing in strength and is your life increasingly coming under the influence of the teachings of the Torah, or are you giving in to the negative influences which have set up fortresses in your heart and taken over large sections of your life?

Let's get back to our passage as we address these questions.

While we are not told specifically what kinds of issues and challenges each man had to deal with, we are shown that the same kind of weather attacks the two houses: rain, floods and wind. So it is not that one has an easier time and the other a more difficult time. It is not even that the one who practices the Word is spared any of the weather the other one has to endure; it is just a question of different foundations and different agendas.

Even here in sunny Alberta, we know that it is never the weather we have to endure that is the issue and even in our lovely spring weather it really never is if we are prepared for it. One man was prepared, one wasn't prepared. As a rabbi and as a father and a grandfather I know that the storms of life can be very severe and we should never allow the happenstances of our lives to determine either their direction or their success.

Some people with all the advantages of wealth, talent and power see their lives collapse and fall apart, while others with limited resources and little talent seem to succeed, not because they have an easier time, but because their foundation is strong and not fragile. When people ask us how life is treating us, we ought to be able to answer with a description of how we are treating life.

Life will always be full of shake ups – our shul has known its fair share over the years but there are two keys to surviving and to thriving in all kinds of weather: hearing and acting on what we hear. Our lives are full of limited windows of opportunity when it comes to the Word and it is more our reaction to the Word than the circumstances of our lives which will determine our spiritual success. It is never easy to act on the Word, but it is only as we act on the Word that we are equipped to overcome the weather of life.

Let's look at the weather which our Lord describes and we have to keep in mind He is talking about weather conditions in the Holy Land where violent rain, frequent floods and strong winds were seasonal hazards the people had to be adequately prepared to deal with if they did not want their homes and their fields to be destroyed by the seasonal assaults of the climate they lived in.

The Holy Land has two main rainy seasons and most of her rivers are seasonal, flowing during the rainy season and drying up for the rest of the year. Unless you build a home strong enough to withstand rain and in a place where it would not be washed away by sudden flash floods or knocked down by the sudden gusts of strong winds, then it was actually your lack of wisdom and not the weather which caused you ruin.

There will be sudden rainy seasons in our lives where we will either be determined to react by practicing the Word or we will be carried away by circumstances instead of standing firm through circumstances. There will be sudden and possibly devastating floods which will wash away all of our natural support system and cause our world to collapse, unless we are living by the rules of the world to come and understand what true loss means.

There will also be sudden gusts of opposition where we temporarily lose sight of everything which matters and are caught unawares, but if our lives are built on practicing the Word, then a different set of reflexes will cause us to see through the sand and the dirt and walk according to the Word even when we temporarily do not understand or are caught off guard. What kinds of reflexes are you building? Does the success of your life depend on things like the lottery, like luck and being in the right place at the right time or do you live in the right place all the time?

Are you setting yourself up for spiritual ruin because you do not have a strong foundation and are hoping to somehow scrape by wheeling and dealing and relying on circumstances and opportunities instead of hearing and practicing the Word?

What kind of relationship do you have with the Word? Hearing is a good first step, but acting on it hooks us up to its power and protection. We all need to have an ongoing relationship with the Word because the more contact His Word has with our lives, the more weather proof our lives become.

What kind of acting on or practicing is the Messiah talking about and I want to close with this. I am a strong proponent of taking verses in their context, instead of out of their context and this passage comes at the end of a series of teachings which fall into three categories. The first deals with moving from you have heard it said to the more reliable I say unto you.

We need to learn to take what people say about the Bible with more than a pinch of salt and make sure we do not base our faith on what people say, but on what the Bible actually says – do you search the Scriptures whenever people start teaching you or do you take the time to see if what is being said is actually in the Bible. Now this can be a two edged sword, because some people have their favorite verses and will take what a portion of the Scriptures teach as the whole truth of the Torah – and if you want to know more about this kind of pitfall, come and ask me about at our Thursday Yeshiva study.

Matthew six moves on to authentic piety – which really means practical spirituality which both rises up against hypocrisy and overcomes both arrogance and materialism to make our walk with the L-rd about Him and His Word and not about promoting ourselves and using our faith to get material or social advantage. Does your faith seek to both get His attention and learn about Him or is it all about you being the centre of attention and making the issues of your life what your life is all about?

Matthew seven deals with false spirituality or infected spirituality where harsh judgments and spiritual violence turn faith into a nightmare of endless conflicts, instead of being the peaceful pursuit of righteousness, mercy and justice. Some believers have so many chips on their shoulders they are always looking for a fight and going from extreme to extreme, instead of bearing peaceful fruit as they walk on the straight path through the straight gate. Is your spiritual life conflict based or resolution based – do you cause endless disturbances or are you making peace in joy and love, with lots of patience and goodness and kindness and faithfulness and gentleness and self control?

You can never rely upon the weather to teach you where to go and how to live, but you need to be prepared to face it, if you want to live for the L-rd and not be a spiritual vagabond pushed around by life, by the enemy and the flesh (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life).

How you weather the storms of life says more about your life than the storms and while hearing the Word is the first stage in building a weather proof life, taking the time conquer Canaan and cast down the fortresses of the flesh, the enemy and the world should be our first priority and this obedience needs to be the centre around which our lives revolve, whatever weather we are slogging through.

May the L-rd grant you wisdom as you build on the rock and deliver you from any foolishness – any sandy places in your life.

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Let's pray.