

*Learning to Use The Sword of the Spirit*

Shoftim Judges Getting Things Sorted Out

Torah: Deut. 16:18-21:9

(1) **17:19.** *He shall always have a copy of this law with him and he should read it every day, in order that he would learn to fear the L-RD his G-d and to observe and put into practice all the words of this Law and all its ordinances.* Royalty in the L-rd does not exist to impose its own ideas or its own will on the people, but only to ensure that His Word is followed and put into practice – this is both the goal of authority and what is wrong with it in our world today.

(2) **18:18.** *I shall raise up for them a prophet from among their brethren, a prophet like you and I shall put My words in His mouth and He shall tell them all that I shall command Him.* There were still things which the L-rd wanted to say to His people that He had not already said through Moses that He was not going to say in the prophet's ears, but out of his mouth. The indwelling Word who will confirm and extend what has already been said.

(3) **19:9.** *As long as you observe and put into practice all the commandments which I prescribe to you today – that you love the L-RD your G-d and that you always walk in His ways – then you shall add three more cities to the first three.* You cannot separate loving the L-rd from obeying His Word and spiritual growth occurs when obedience grows. Israel was promised victory when she walked in loving obedience (or in obedient love). The two cannot be separated, but always work (walk) in tandem.

(4) **19:19.** *Then you shall treat him as he purposed to treat his brother and thus you shall remove the evil from the midst of you.* When someone was found to try and use judgment to hurt or attack someone, the judgment was to be a boomerang so that the damage would be done to the one who sought to damage his brother (and the community).

Haftarah: Is. 51:12-52:12

(5) **51:12.** *It is I, it is I who console you, who are you to be afraid of mortal men, of the sons of man who are like the grass?* Fear and consolation are put side by side – not because they cancel each other out, but because you can rely upon the one and should not indulge the other. Once you are able to realize who the L-RD is, then your human enemies and your problems are put into proper perspective. We need to learn to live in consolation and not in fear.

(6) **52:10.** *The L-RD uncovers the arm of His holiness in the eyes of all the nations and all the extremities of the earth shall see it.* Israel was always intended to have an international impact, not because of our intelligence or because of our contributions to human progress, but because of the activity of the L-RD on our behalf and how this activity impacts all the nations of the world.

Brit Chadashah: Matt. 3:1-17

(7) **3:8. Bring forth fruit worthy of repentance.** Change is what contact with G-d and His word fosters. Before we ask the L-rd to do anything for us, we need to realize that His primary agenda is to change us, not to entertain us, or enrich us. What He wants to do to us should always be more important to us than what we want Him to do for us.

## Psalm 17

### Jewish Hero: teachers who tell you the truth

All of the armour we have looked at so far in this series has been **defensive** so that the attacks of the enemy cannot hurt us, but we are not called to be **sitting ducks**, or **fortified targets** waiting for assaults that we are to spend our lives repelling as if dynamic spiritual martial arts was all about **survival** and not also about defeating the enemy and driving him out of territory which the L-rd wants us to occupy.

There are two weapons we are to use in offensive action: the **sword of the Spirit** and **prayer** – the first is to be used in hand to hand spiritual combat and the other is to be used for long distance bombardment. Today I want to talk to you about **hand to hand combat** and I want to say three things about it.

**You have to know what the Word says in order to use it** – and that also means knowing what it does not say. Last week, I talked about the five fundamentals of our faith, which summarize the **core teachings** of the Bible and which need to form the foundation of our own spirituality and walk with the L-rd.

In today's multi-media, **online world** it would be too easy to get sidetracked into believing things which the Bible does not teach and also sidetracked into abandoning what the Bible does teach.

There are many cults and cult like groups which claim biblical authority for the **nonsense** they teach and instead of giving you a list of errors, I want to keep encouraging you to study the Bible and to recognize a departure from core biblical truth. There are two basic areas where a biblical core is put at risk: basic **beliefs** and basic **morality**. Here is a little overview of both.

I am a **biblical creationist** who affirms the **universal flood** in the times of Noah. I am a convinced Jewish **Trinitarian** who believes in the **inerrancy** of the Bible, in **life after death** and in the **coming judgment** which will precede the establishment of G-d's **eternal Kingdom** over all the nations and generations of mankind in the new creation which will remove all the folly and pain of this current one.

I do not want my understanding of what the Bible teaches to be **deficient** and when I dialogue with people who challenge the Bible, I rejoice in the opportunity to closely examine its teachings and not join the multitudes that twist and misrepresent its teachings. (Acts 17:11 and 2 Tim. 2:15).

I am also a firm believer in **biblical morality**, so I oppose all forms of **sexual immorality** and the **murder of babies** in their mother's wombs. I reject **materialism** and oppose all and any violations of the principles of **justice** which the Bible outlines.

I believe in telling the **truth** and do not support the use of **violence** to resolve conflicts, and yet I support the need for **civic authority**, as long as it does not violate the mandate which the Bible gives it.

This is only a **little summary** of the **beliefs** of the Bible and of the **righteousness and morality** it requires its followers to adopt and uphold – but unless what I believe and what I uphold has a **firm biblical base**, then my house will only have a sandy foundation and will collapse, either in this life or in the next. How is your foundation doing?

The next thing I want to say about this amazing sword is that it remains the sword of the Spirit and should **never be used as a personal weapon or a toy**. It is not a collection of verses we can browse through to find what we want and to **ignore** what we do not want, like some kind of **cosmic buffet**.

One of the reasons I am grateful that we follow an annual reading cycle is that it prevents me from forgetting what the Bible says and it also prevents me from proof texting the Bible so that I can do and say what I want and appear to have a biblical foundation.

I am a strong advocate of **Bible Study** where we look both at the **content** of the word and at the **context** of the way it is said. I am not afraid to say that Deut. 29:29 is more than just a cute saying to impress people – it is an admission that the Bible is not an **exhaustive outline** of all G-d has said and done – it is a **focused collection** of what He wants to say us about just two things: the **purpose of life** and about **our place** in it.

Any use of the Bible which does not focus on this **double purpose** and which does not acknowledge the **limits** of what it wants to teach us, runs the risk of not using it as a tool for the Spirit, but as a carnal weapon, which leads me to my last point.

It takes wisdom to handle a sword so that you do not **cut** yourself or **wound** your fellow soldiers. In the past I have spoken about what is called “**lucky dipping**”, which is a kind of **silly proof texting** – where we just flip the Bible open and take the first thing we see as a message from G-d. If you go the cupboard and grab the first thing you see, you will end up with some pretty **strange meals**.

Now I am willing to admit that G-d can speak to us this way when we are in **distress** or when we need a **swift kick**, but He wants us to develop and maintain a **devotional grasp** of the Bible **so that we do not take everything is says to everyone in every situation as a message for us.**

When I go grocery shopping, I do not start at one end of the store and put one of everything in my cart until it is full, otherwise I would not get what I really need. We need to learn how to **handle** the Word so that we are familiar with its contents and are able to be guided to the **passages** and to the **principles** we need and which others need – so we do not hurt ourselves or others with verses which we might take out of context and not use in the right situation.

I do not ask G-d for a verse for **every decision** of my life and I do not want to just throw verses at people who come to me for guidance. I want to guide people into **examining** the Scriptures and discovering the principles which will guide and comfort them, without turning them into unwise **lucky dippers** who are just looking to get a verse that says what they want it to say, or to tell them what to do when they haven't taken the time to **pray** things through, **think** things through and seek for **godly counsel**.

As you walk with the L-rd with us throughout the **festival year** and through the **stages** and **circumstances** of your life, are you getting to know what the Bible says so that you are not sidetracked away from its core **teachings** or its core **morality**?

Do you come to the Bible to find **guidance** and **direction** or do you want to use it a source of **proof texts** which would allow you to do your own thing and appear to be biblical?

How good are you at using your sword as a weapon against the **enemy** and not against yourself or other soldiers of the L-rd?

I encourage Bible study as a lifelong discipline – I have been doing it for forty plus years and I have neither exhausted it as a source of knowledge and guidance, nor have I used it as a place to store my **pet ideas** and **prejudices**.

How well do you know your Bible? (yes, this is a plug for Yeshiva) David refused to use a sword he did not know when he went against Goliath.

If your Bible is an unknown quantity, then someone or some set of circumstances may be able to **wrestle it away from you** or you from it. **Don't let the enemy or the world disarm you and use the bible as a weapon against you.**

Here's summary of how to use the Bible as the sword of the Spirit:

- (1) You have to know what it says and what it does not say
- (2) You have avoid using it like a personal toy or a personal tool (making it say what you want when you want it to and avoiding what it says when you don't want to listen to it).
- (3) You have to know how to use it so you do not hurt yourself or other soldiers – there is lots of advice in the book, you have to be able to know how to discern which advice applies to you or to others in the various situations you encounter and in the various passages you read.

How is your sword doing? How are you doing with your sword?

Let's pray.