

17 Shevat, 5774 (18/1/14) **Getting Organized in His Word** J. M. Terrett

Yitro **Jethro (Abundance)** Today I will be preaching from the Torah portion.

Torah: Exodus 18:1-20:26

Jethro's visit was to return Zipporah and the boys and to help get the camp organized in preparation to hear the Ten. The people first give unconditional obedience, then they sanctify themselves, and once the means of communication is established, the mountain is sanctified. The Ten are given, the people request a change in delivery and there are three addenda: no idols (how would you represent what they had just experienced?), personal altars of earth/unhewed stone (only using materials which He has created and which we have not altered), and modesty in worship (so it never becomes sexualized).

Haftarah: Is. 6:1-7:6

Isaiah's vision and response. The coming captivity outlined. The announcement of the failure of the attack by Syria and the northern kingdom. G-d's purposes shall be fulfilled, not the agenda of man.

Brit Chadashah: Matt. 5:8-20

Three Sections: The tenfold blessing of the Word. Our calling to be salt and light. Unedited obedience to the Law (Commandments) required.

John (p. 141) **Ps. 19** **Jewish Hero:** Ariel Sharon

Exodus 18:20- 22:

Teach them ordinances and laws and let them know the path which they should take and what they should do. Choose from among all the people capable men (people) who fear G-d and men of integrity, enemies of greed and establish them as leaders of one thousand, leaders of one hundred and leaders of ten. Let them judge the people at all times and let them bring before you the important matters, but let them pronounce upon the smaller concerns. Lighten your charge and let them carry it with you.

When we read the ten commandments from the scroll we acknowledged the place of principled obedience in our lives. In other words, we reviewed the spiritual objectives (imperatives) which G-d wants to establish as a foundation in our hearts and minds, without adding to or subtracting from the equation.

The Ten occupy a central position in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation and they need to be integrated into our lives as the only kind of obedience or submission which G-d will find acceptable.

Obedience has always been an inseparable application of faith, right from the beginning with our first parents and through the patriarchs; and whenever this relationship is threatened, a believer's life comes to a spiritual halt and begins to unravel while the flesh, the world and the enemy begin their penetration through the cracks and gaps which develop.

You see, faith and obedience are never a static possession, which we cling to once we have acquired them, whatever else is going on in our lives – they are both the foundation of our lives and the grid through which we see the world. They are the strategies we use to relate to the world through which we are travelling on our way home.

This morning I want to look at two things with you. First I want to help you understand that the term “law” or “commandment” has both a general and a specific meaning and then I want to explore the qualifications believers need to possess as they grow in their ability to handle the Word of truth.

Right from the beginning, our first ancestors were assigned limits which they were told not to violate and with the first mention of sacrifice, they were also given instructions on how they were to worship G-d.

In the New Testament we are told that all people possess a basic copy of the Law in their conscience and that even before the encounter the Law of G-d (understood to be the ten), they are arranging or ordering their lives to reflect either a commitment to obedience or to disobedience (Romans 2:13-16).

People who are in the habit of listening to their conscience understand the meaning of obedience and want to learn more about how to walk in the light and how to bring order and harmony to their lives. We do not have to wait until we come to a full understanding of the Law of G-d before we learn obedience – in fact the habit of obedience is one of the things which will draw us to G-d – and the lack of obedience will be one of the things which sends us scurrying to the shelter of G-d – so that we may learn obedience.

The terms law and commandments are used in the Scriptures to refer both to the Ten and also to all and any directives we have received from G-d which we are to obey so that we are ready to grow in both our faith and obedience until we are ready to hear the Ten Commandments. They are a package deal and they describe the principles upon which a walk with G-d is based.

So when we encounter the word Law in the Bible we have to look at the context to see whether or not it is referring to the Ten; but whatever it is referring to it always involves a call to obedience – to establishing and protecting boundaries and limits.

This does not restrict us or prevent us from exploring new ideas and never smothers our creativity. On the contrary, it sets us free to explore without pulling down or muddying the water by creating chaos or by making our conscience one of the things we need to be delivered from, instead of seeing it as the source of our deliverance.

The patriarchs listened to G-d and had faith in the promises He gave to them and which they knew applied to future generations and their obedience allowed them to be guardians of these promises and not much has changed. Our obedience allows our faith to function and to be passed on until His kingdom comes.

The terms law and commandments (precepts, ordinances, prescriptions) refer to the principles upon which we base a growing obedience and it is this obedience which draws us closer and closer to the L-rd until we are ready to hear His Word and discover His Ten Commandments and which are the ultimate expression of His will for mankind on our pilgrimage through this life.

If we are in the habit of obedience, we are ready to hear His Word and to move from the inner copy of the law (our personal pre-law) to His unchanging law (the generational anchor for our souls) which leads me to a discussion of the qualifications which we need if we are going to handle the Word and be able to use it with any degree of credibility.

Moses outlines four characteristics which we need to look for both as we handle the Word in our own lives and especially as we establish leaders in our midst. People must first be capable and then they must fear G-d and be people of integrity and enemies of greed.

To be capable means both a level of understanding of the Word (of obedience) and the ability to apply it to various situations in life so that the prescription we design is both what the situation calls for and is present in the right amounts over the appropriate amounts of time. This takes practice and being capable really means being experienced more than anything else. The more we are practised in the Word, the better we become at applying it to our lives.

There will be setbacks and failures and a learning curve until we look at the events and happenstances of our lives as the raw materials of obedience so that we can express our faith and the principles of G-d's Law to every area of our lives.

Even our unsuccessful attempts to obey and to set limits and establish order in our lives can serve us well if we learn from them and learn the power of repentance and the lessons of humility and perseverance.

But what should this ability to be capable be based on? What does the fear of the L-rd mean?

Too many people lose their way in life and avoid being accountable and get the impression that success in life depends on how much you can get away with as you build the biggest bundle and protect it with all you are worth.

The fear of G-d is the freedom to recognize that we live in His world and that just as there are natural principles which govern how we function in the physical universe, there are also principles which should govern how we live in our spiritual (social) world.

It is all about accountability and not trying to do what is to our advantage at the expense of others. It is also learning that eventually all of us will stand before G-d and be held accountable for our lives, so we are either building up for a big bonfire or we are establishing a firm grip on His kingdom as we apply its rules to every area of our lives as we wait for the next life to begin and for rewards to be given.

This brings us to integrity, which is kind like a label which guarantees that the contents are pure and do not contain any impurities. Integrity means that what we say is what we do and that we can be counted on to act from principle and not from personal gain or fear or vengeance. It means that we will not cave under pressure and listen to the loudest or most persistent voice.

Spiritual integrity is a commitment to be the guardians of G-d's truth in how we relate to the world and indicates a consistency which has no other agenda than the one which G-d outlines in His Word. It shares His objectives as the only goals worthy of our hearts energy and our life's work – and from which we refuse to be distracted under any circumstances, be they ever so good or ever so bad.

This leaves us with being enemies of greed which the New Testament calls serving mammon and not G-d. Now there is nothing wrong with wealth and there is no shame in poverty, but with a knowledge of the coming Kingdom and an understanding of the principles upon which G-d wants us to build a life, we do not have time to build our own little kingdom and try to get as much as we can, as if material gain were the whole point to life.

The tabernacle and the temple were built with many precious and expensive materials but they were used to express the people's commitment to a G-d whose Word is more precious than gold, than much fine gold. Certain professions will lead to great wealth, but the only great wealth which is worthy of believers cannot be measured in physical terms.

The earth is the L-rd's and we cannot really ever own anything physical permanently. Naked we came and wrinkled we go and all that we possess in between, we are only temporary guardians of. Someone who has not understood this cannot really be a guardian of either authentic faith or valid obedience because godliness with contentment is of great gain.

To handle the Word and get organized in the L-rd, we have to first be in the habit of growing obedience so that when we come to G-d's ultimate expression of obedience we will not try and pick and choose (has G-d really said?) or sidestep by trying to figure out which commandments are more important than others so we can have a form of prioritized, limited obedience, like the scribes and pharisees.

Obedience and faith are inseparable and as we grow in both, we draw closer to G-d and if we falter in either, we wander from the light and from the blood and from the Saviour.

Getting organized requires an acquired strength of character and a successful experience in applying the Word to every area of our lives. This is what learning to handle the Word of truth really means.

Being capable of applying the Word and possessing a solid commitment to accountability (which is what the fear of G-d means) will lead us closer to the King and will make our light shine and not sputter.

Integrity with no double standards will also allow us not to water down or pollute our lives with things that are not worthy of our calling. Being an enemy of carnal greed will also give us a hunger for spiritual, eternal gain. We have read from the scroll today and we know the mind of G-d.

How successful we are at making our lives revolve around that mind and how successful we are in making our lives be an application of the principles of G-d's Word will be determined by our commitment to making His Word the grid we use to conduct our lives by. Moses told the people this – that they were going to move into a new level of obedience and faith.

The same level of obedience and faith is opened unto us, both as people and as a community to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

As we cycle through the readings and the festivals and the seasons, my our lives continually be expressions of the kind of spiritual organization which we are called to as believers, also to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let's pray.