

19 Tamuz, 5766 (July 15, 2006)

Summer Cycle: First Sabbath of Affliction

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Parasha Pinchas **Dark Skinned**
Torah: **Num. 25:10-30:1**
Haftarah: **I Kings 18:46-19:21**
Brit Chadashah: **John 2:13-22(L) 13-25 (F)**
Haftarah of Affliction: **Jer. 1:1-2:3**

In historical Judaism, the summer cycle leads down to Tisha B'Av (the ninth of Av, called the black fast and traditionally the date when Messiah was supposed to be born) and afterwards climbs back up towards Rosh Hashanah. The regular Torah portions are still read, but the regular Haftarah (prophetic) portions are replaced with special readings, first from Jeremiah, then from Isaiah.

To add to the complexity of the Torah cycle, there are five New Year's in Judaism, but really only three dates. That is, Pesach, which always occurs at the first new moon of spring, is both the New Year's for the Lord and for the kings, and all dates in the Scriptures are calculated from Passover. Rosh Hashanah, which always occurs at the first new moon of the fall, is the New Year for the year and all dates on the calendar are calculated from this date. There is a New Year's for counting harvests which occurs during the High Holy Days and a separate one for trees, Tu B'Shevat (the fifteenth of the month of Shevat), which always occurs at the second full moon after Chanukah.

This is why we tell new comers that it usually takes a few times through the reading cycle to get used to the calendar, and the variations in the Torah cycle, because they make sense, from both an historical and a seasonal perspective. Thus Tisha B'Av is called the fast of the fifth month, even though it occurs during the eleventh calendar month and Yom Kippur (the white fast) is called the fast of the seventh month, even though it occurs during the first calendar month.

In our culture, people look forward to summer, chiefly because most people take their holidays during this time and the warmer weather permits a host of outside leisure activities which we look forward to all year. In the Bible, it was the time when the kings went to war and when most of the disasters occurred which have afflicted Judaism since the fall of the first temple. So as we "chill" in the heat and slow down before the busy fall season, we need to realize two things as we go through this series.

First of all, whatever we let grow in our lives, will grow and send down roots into both our hearts and in our lives. What are permitting to grow in your life? Secondly, to take a line from a movie: "everybody's bill eventually comes due". There will come an accounting for what we have growing in our lives and for believers that is a triple harvest. First of all, we live on the edge of eternity and know that we shall all give an account before the High King of Heaven for the heart reasons behind the decisions we have made in our lives.

Secondly, we will either enjoy the fruits of obedience in a spiritually peaceful and spiritually fruitful life, no matter if this spiritual abundance is experienced in the midst of great enduring trials and much pain and loss – or we will have the opposite experience. Our spirituality can become an enduring trial with much spiritual pain and incredible temporal and eternal spiritual loss, with no spiritual peace or spiritual fruitfulness. How are your insides doing? Are the losses you are encountering spiritual or temporal – are your tempests on the inside or on the outside – is your life beautiful in the sight of our King, gathering treasures beyond measure, or is it an eternal disaster without any true substance or meaning?

This leads me to the third harvest, which is generational and communal, since we are all only one generation on a personal pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave. We will either have a positive impact on our community and on our family, or we will become part of the third or fourth generation negative impact which has plagued this planet since our first ancestors walked away from the path of righteousness. What kind of legacy are you building? Let's look at the first haftarah of affliction: **Jer. 1:1-2:3** and I have eight remarks to make as we study this passage.

1. **Ch. 1:2, 3** Jeremiah had a long ministry both as a priest and as a prophet. Whether your life is long or short, when you walk with the L-rd, He will ensure that His will is done and that His Word is spoken. Whether it is listened to or not is not our business.
2. **1:6.** It is not a matter of great talent or great training (though both of these are important), because the L-rd will always equip us with both the ability and the energy we need to fulfill His will in our lives – not our own (Phil. 2:13 and Eph. 2:10).
3. **1:9.** The L-rd put His word in Jeremiah's mouth (Jer. 15:16) and Jeremiah spoke what he received. He was a priest, instructed in the Torah and it was in the context of teaching and preaching where his words were delivered. It was because he was well versed in the word that the L-rd could "put" His words in Jeremiah's mouth. If we want the L-rd to put His words in our mouth, we have to have His Word in our hearts (Matt. 13:52).
4. **1:10.** Jeremiah had a sevenfold ministry. He was (1) established over nations and kingdoms to (2) rip up and (3) knock down. He was called to (4) ruin and (5) to destroy. Finally he was called (6) to build and (7) to plant. John 15:1-5 speaks of the L-rd's weeding function in our lives and I Cor. 3:9-15 speaks of His building function in our lives. He will not cause His word to grow (Ps. 1:1-3) in a garden full of weeds – what is He trying to get you to uproot in your heart and life? He cannot build His kingdom in a life cluttered with the wrong kind of furniture – what is trying to get you to remove from your life (I Cor. 6:19, 20). We have to respond to both aspects of His work in our lives, the pruning, tearing down and the planting and the building. What is He doing in your heart and life?
5. **1:11, 12.** G-d will make sure His word is fulfilled, either in what it blesses or in what it judges. We have to depend on Him, the sad reality in many believers' lives is that He cannot rely upon us, so He uses (blesses) someone else. Terach was called to Canaan, but did not go – may the L-rd lead us to Canaan in our spiritual lives and may we heed the call.
6. **1:14.** The L-rd is in control of history and superintends not just our lives (and the lives of all mankind), but also the way history unfolds. The question for us is what aspect of His history do we want to be unfolding in our lives?
7. **1:19.** Some of our greatest opposition will come from disobedient believers, both individually and corporately. However, though we be martyred, betrayed, slandered and beaten, no-one will be able to defeat the purposes of G-d in us (2 Cor. 6:3-10 and 11:23-28 – 28 twice!). As long as His purposes are being fulfilled in us, we are winners, because we understand that it is only the long run which counts, both in the short term and forever.
8. **2:2,3.** Our L-rd is a G-d of love, stubborn tough love with only one agenda – 2 Pe. 3:5-10 and John 3:16. His wrath is but for a moment, but His love endures forever (Jer.31:3). We can fight, deny, disobey and run away from Him, but eventually and finally, His purposes will be accomplished in our lives, one way or another.

This summer and this fall, may we examine which purposes are being accomplished in us, both as individuals and as a community. If we need some weeding or some renovating, may it be because we are willing to let Him plant and build. May He be the theme of our lives and may His Word guide our footsteps (Ps. 119:105), whether we limp (Heb. 12:13), stumble (Prov. 24:16), stray (Phil. 3:15) until we learn to march together in tune to His purposes (Phil. 3:16, 17). Amen, let's pray.