

24 Sivan, 5774 (24/5/14) **First Summer Series Biblical Preparedness:** J. M. Terrett
Experiencing the G-d of the Bible

Bamidbar

In The Wilderness Getting the Camping Gear Ready

Initial question: what became of the mixed multitude? After the incident of the golden calf, they are never mentioned again. Over the history of Judaism, strangers have been welcomed in and sadly, Jews have wandered out of Judaism. We have become a phratry (a group of related people without a common ancestor) who practice endogamy (marriage within our extended community) and exogamy (marriage outside our immediate kinship group). Here is the listing of the hosts of the L-rd (and their families) as our people moved from around the mountain to journey to the Promised Land.

Torah: Numbers 1:1-4:20

(1) 1:5-15. The census takers are listed according to the matriarchs from whom they descend: Leah (first six), Rachel (next two, three), Bilha (9th and 11th) and Zilpa (10th and 12th). The matriarchs of Judaism are just as important as the patriarchs and there are four (six) of them (Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Bilha and Zilpa).

(2) 1:53. The Aaronites were to take down and cover the ark of the covenant and the Levites were to take down and put up the sanctuary, so that the glory of G-d did not break out and destroy the camp in the midst of which it was camping.

(3) 2:3, 19, 18, 25. The census was taken according to the camping order of the four banners of Judah, Reuben, Ephraim and Dan. Judah is mentioned first in the camping order (the second mention of the numbers taken in the census), but Reuben is mentioned first in the actual taking of the census. Their birth order is no longer as important as their camping order and as the matriarchs from whom they descend.

(4) 3:29. The number of the Levites does not add up. What happened to the 300 who were counted, but who did not count when the first born of Israel were being redeemed? Rashi indicates that they were the first born of the Levites and also had to be redeemed.

Haftarah: Hosea 2:1-22 (1:10-2:20 Gentile Bibles)

(5) 2:16. In was in the wilderness that the L-rd weaned His people away from their idolatry and fornication and it was in the captivity that He called them back to Himself – and it is in the diaspora of our people that He is leading them back to their Messiah and His Word. His position is immovable and we need to find our place in Him (and in His camp). We will either be assimilated into the world or integrated into His Word. The choice is ours.

(6) 2:20-22. A twelve fold restoration so that the people can find their place once more in the generational, international camp of the L-RD. Have you found yours?

Brit Chadashah: Romans 9:22-33 (the mystery of the hardening of Israel)

(7) 9:24. G-d's call will always be to the Jew first and also the Gentile and His true people will always be composed of those who have heeded the call, Jew and Gentile and for whom the Messiah becomes the chief cornerstone and not the stone of stumbling.

(Sherri, pp. 31, 33) **Ps. 67 Jewish Hero:** David Ben Gurion (first Prime Minister of Israel)

In two weeks, we will be celebrating Shavuot (Pentecost), so this is our second last message on biblical preparedness – on being prepared to receive the Word, both as an initial experience and as a lifelong discipline. Too many people today either question the truth of the Bible and launch out in weird and wonderful forms of strange spirituality or they give lip service to the Bible, but actually place more confidence in their own spiritual experience than they do in what the Word of G-d teaches.

Where to you place your primary spiritual confidence?

Is it in the Word of G-d or is it in your own spiritual experience?

Now it is true that we need to experience the G-d of the Bible as we come to personal faith in the Messiah, Yeshua, but in order for that experience to have real spiritual validity, it needs to be based on the teachings of the Bible and not just something we make up as we go along.

One of the distinguishing features of biblical spirituality which has not been adhered to very closely by either the synagogue or the church is that all and every feature of how we experience G-d and the things of the Spirit, needs to be based solely on the teachings of the Bible.

This is not to restrict or to impede our spiritual growth, but to make sure that our spirituality does not become choked with weeds or lead us into spiritual paths that lead away from a singular devotion to the G-d of the Bible.

He calls Himself a jealous G-d, not because He is afraid that we will find a better deal with some other deity, but because He is the only true G-d and there really is no better spiritual deal out there that does not involve deception and a departure from the spiritual truths and realities which undergird the very fabric of the universe.

In a very real sense, all the ancient mythologies and modern religious systems which do not acknowledge the G-d of the Bible, involve serious departures from the universal spiritual truths which actually hold our universe together.

This is not an arrogant statement as much as it is a statement of fact about the changeless nature of G-d and the universe which He created and which He upholds by the power of His word.

There are as many competing systems of belief today which are trying just as hard to recruit us as there were in the times of the New Testament and even in the times of Moses and the Patriarchs. And we have to be careful to have a solid biblical basis for our spiritual experience so that we are not carried away or overpowered by spiritual counterfeits which seek to pull us away from the only real spiritual truth which exists in the world today – G-d's Holy Word.

Lets look at our passage for this morning and examine how we can be sure to place our primary confidence in His Word and not in our own spiritual experience:

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our L-rd Yeshua HaMashiach, but we were eye witnesses of His Majesty. For He received honour and power from G-d when that voice was conveyed to Him by the Majestic Glory, saying: This is My Son, My Beloved, with Whom I am well pleased (or in whom I have placed all My Affection). We ourselves heard this voice come from heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain. But we hold for much more certain the prophetic Word and which you would do well to pay attention to as a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture can be a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men (and women) moved by the Holy Spirit, spoke from G-d" (2 Peter 1:16-21)

How prepared are you (are we) to place our primary spiritual confidence in the prophetic Word of G-d? This passage speaks of at least four issues: First the cunning myths which circulate and which make all kinds of weird and wonderful claims which are just made up (myths and legends).

Secondly, the power and wonder of the personal confirmation which the three apostles heard on the holy mountain (and which other first century disciples also received at various times and in various places).

Third, the absolute primacy of the received, written Word, as both the source and the judge of our spiritual experiences. And lastly the power and majesty which believers receive when this same light of the Scriptures rises in our hearts (takes up residence in our lives), so that we can experience the same level and kind of amazing encounter which the apostle testifies to.

Lets look at the first issue which deals with the firm difference between belief and make believe, between actual spiritual encounter and the world of imagination where dreams and legends entertain us and try and teach us good values but which are not really supposed to be taken as stories which actually happened and which are about people who really lived.

In the ancient world, there were any number of fantastic tales about heroes and monsters and the apostle wants to draw a clear line between the power and majesty of the truth which we believe and these imaginary tales which a serious mind could not believe – kind of like the difference between video games and their virtual reality and the real world we actually live in.

We are not just adding one more set of amazing stories to the rich traditions of myth and make believe which filled the world before scientific truth arrived and weaned us away from the childish legends we no longer need because we understand how the universe really works. Nothing could be farther from the truth and it is this accusation which is aimed at our faith under the guise of political correctness: “all faiths speak different versions of the same universal truths which find their mature expression in our modern scientific world.”

The events of the Bible, from creation through the flood, the exodus, the virgin birth, the death and resurrection of our L-rd all happened in time and space and were not the imaginative revelling of master storytellers who specialized in telling really big whoppers, but who did not really expect to be believed, except by little children and the simple minded.

Authentic faith and imaginative fiction are not related in any way and while I may find various ancient myths and modern religious systems both amusing and interesting, I base my faith and my life upon the solid foundation of the truth of G-d's Word and not upon the fairy tails and legends which have masqueraded as religious truth in the past and which continue to do so in our modern world.

Secondly, all the events recorded in the Bible, especially concerning the lives of the apostles actually happened and were not made up for effect. They were with Him when He performed miracles and they saw Him die and they met Him after He rose from the dead and they were there when He ascended into heaven. None of the Gospel accounts were made up and even though there are any number of amazing legends which have cropped up over the years, we are called to believe the apostolic record and not to believe the legends which grew up after the real events transpired.

We need to base our faith in time and space and not in legend and make believe, however, our third point deals with the primacy of the Word of G-d as a more sure guide than even our personal experience.

If I had been on the mountain, I would have been blown away by the voice and never doubted for the rest of my life. But there is a problem with experience – it cannot always be repeated and when people come to us to talk about their experiences, we have to have a way of measuring where or not they are just making things up or have actually had some of the experiences which they claim to have had.

I would take it one step further and say we need to measure whether or not the experiences which people claim to have had are the kinds of experiences we should be seeking to have for ourselves or whether they fall into of the realm of the experiences which the Bible neither condones nor recommends.

There are many sources of spiritual inspiration which do not have a heavenly source and I want to receive all my spiritual experiences from the Holy Spirit and not from any strange or friendly spirits which want to enrich my life with their perverted nonsense, which leads me to

my fourth point and my conclusion.

The lamp of G-d's Word has as one of its missions to bring us to the place where the day star or morning star (Yeshua) rises in our hearts and lives with the same power and impact which the voice on the holy mountain had on the lives of the apostles. We cannot duplicate the experience of the transfiguration, any more than we can duplicate the experience which our fathers had on Mount Sinai, but we can have just as intense and real an experience with G-d through our blessed Messiah as they had, because G-d wants to speak to us just as powerfully and as personally as he spoke with them.

Three things and I will close. First we need to learn to distinguish between the power of our imaginations and the power of the truths of G-d's Word. We do not have to make things up or become evangel-istic and exaggerate or embroider extra details into our accounts of our spiritual experiences.

Secondly we need to know what kinds of spiritual experiences we are to seek to have and not claim biblical sanction for such silliness as seances and spirit guides because they are of pagan and even satanic origin. And the only spiritual contact we are supposed to have in this life is with the Holy Spirit of G-d.

I will deal with angelic contact in another sermon, but let me just say that all and any supposed angelic contact needs to both be biblical and to teach us and lead us in biblical directions, nothing more and nothing less.

Lastly, there is an authentic, dynamic biblical spirituality which believers are called to both seek and experience which has all the bells and whistles which the apostles encountered, but not necessarily in the same places or in the same ways.

Authentic spirituality is a journey with the G-d of the Bible, free from seductive myths and legends, and which leads us closer to the truths of His Word as we travel through this life on our way home to His House in Glory – and as we wait for that final cosmic event to shatter all the bondage and foolishness of this current age – and I am referring to the return of our blessed Redeemer.

Is your spirituality helping you to experience more of the G-d of the Bible or are you just after goose bumps as you explore the weird and wonderful world of your imagination?

When people speak with you about their spiritual experiences, are you able to discern the difference between the cunning fables of expert story tellers and the actual accounts of biblical spirituality?

There are many kinds of authentic spiritual encounters, just as there are many kinds of counterfeits and deceptions and a solid knowledge of the Bible is the key to distinguishing between the two categories.

Israel was being given a written guide to authentic spirituality and the early church was being given a dynamic guide to bring them to the wonderful experiences which the written Word promised to believers in the resurrected L-rd.

Are you experiencing the G-d of the Bible?

Has the Morning Star risen in your heart?

Is the lamp of His Word shining in your heart and life?

Are you learning to avoid the myths and legends which the traditions of men, Jews and Gentile, have invented and which the enemy is trying to clutter your life with?

We are a festival driven shul which holds firmly onto the prophetic Word and which does not attempt to assign new and strange personal interpretations to the teachings of the Bible.

This is because we want to continue to hear from the true King and L-rd of the cosmos and not become trapped in the deceitfulness of men and their cunning tales and legends.

Two more weeks to go and then Shavuot – how is your biblical preparedness doing?