

Spring Series: Countdown to Harvest: How do We Handle Opposition?

B'midbar In the Wilderness: Rosh Chodesh Sivan

Torah: Num. 1:1-4:20

Packing up the Presence (Shekinah): Don't Leave Home Without It

Four things: (A) Census of the fighting men of the twelve tribes (minus Levi) 1:1-46. (B) Organizing the camp around the tabernacle (East – South – West - North) 1:47- 2:34. (C) Census of Priests and Levites and their camping positions around the tabernacle (W – S – N – E) 3:1-39. (D) Functions of Levites, Kehathites (covering the tabernacle).

1). 1:1 First day of the Second month of the Second year (Iyyar: - their first journey with the Tabernacle [10:35, 36] – at first camping site, Fire and Spirit fell – Num. 11).

2). 1:52, 3). 1:53. Camp divided into four hosts of three tribes each with a banner, around the Levites. Levites to camp around the tabernacle – a buffer zone of ritual observance so the presence of the L-rd did not consume the people.

4). 3:10 no stranger (uncircumcised) shall approach the Tabernacle and live – the rituals apply to Israel, to those who are delivered and who bear the mark of their deliverance (circumcision). First deliverance, then consecration and fellowship.

Haftarah: Hos.2:1-22

5) 2:16 Going back to the desert to find her heart – to get ready for the presence again

6) 2:21, 22 Sevenfold blessing of belonging (to the Presence): fiancé (forever), righteousness, justice, grace, mercy, faithfulness, acknowledge YHVH.

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 12:12-20 (L) Rom. 9:22-33 (F)

7). 9:24 we are called from two sources, to embrace the Presence: Jews and also Gentiles.

Rosh Chodesh Sivan: Art Scroll, pp. 288-293 – Kiddush Levanah: Welcoming the Presence (note p. 288, #5, p.291 (Ps. 121), #8, #9)

Sermon: Acts 20:29, 30 (2 Tim. 2:24-26) (Eccl. 9:11)

I see opposition coming from **three sources**, as we prepare for Harvest. And I define Harvest as the personal, generational embracing of the purposes of G-d, without allowing opposition to stall, or subvert our grasp of these purposes. So I have four things to say to you today – **three about opposition and one about our grasp of G-d's purposes** through this circumstantial static.

It would be nice if the truth about G-d and His Messiah, which the **(1)cosmos**, our **(2)conscience**, and even **(3)culture** and **(4)circumstances** allude to, was readily accepted by each person, generation and culture which the Gospel encountered (which story is a kind of **(5)curriculum vitae** of G-d's redemptive purposes – just to I get five “c”s), but it ain't gonna happen (John 16:33 ; I P. 4 12,13), and we should not take it personally, nor should we let it become the focus of our spiritual reaction to our episode of the drama (soap opera) of the generations.

As a matter of fact, *it is our response to opposition which may be the most significant aspect of our spirituality* (Is. 48:10 and I P. 1:6, 7), which is purer because it has been refined in fire. Now, I am not saying we should look for trouble and start panicking if things are going too good in our lives. It is our job to react from our understanding of spirituality (of G-d's redemptive purposes), and never to lose our grasp of the themes G-d is weaving into our lives and which He wants us to weave into our reactions to the whatever we are travelling through.

Let me say it another way. Long ago, G-d set a story in motion through one man and one woman, and our personal journey from the cradle to the grave is just one episode, and it is not our job to try and tell the director what to do. He has given us an **interactive script** which He wants us to interpret on the stage of our lives, without trying to stage manage our lives. Eccl. 9:11 is the stage, and the Gospel (the Ten and Calvary – the Shema and the L-rd's Prayer) is our interactive script.

He wants us to figure out what we need to do, how we need to respond, as He guides us through the events of our episode (daily and constantly). I am neither being fatalistic, nor optimistic – just spiritually realistic, because opposition is the will of G-d for each life – not defeat nor disaster (I Cor. 10:13).

So as we welcome Shavuot one more time, let us deal with part of what it means to countdown to Harvest and to walk with G-d in a sometimes less than friendly, less than receptive world. Three sources of opposition and one reaction, not complicated, but often excruciatingly annoying, when we don't get the part we want, and don't get the stage we think we deserve.

First Source of Opposition: Outside Interference (Acts 20:29)

G-d is at work in the lives of everyone, but not everyone is cooperative, and some people have a pretty weird idea of what G-d is trying to do – of the story He is telling five ways. This includes the many different versions of religious truth that clutter our world and the problems we have trying to understand the goodness of G-d, and His omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience in a world that does not always make sense.

What do we do with people who refuse to listen to the curriculum vitae we call the Bible? How do we explain pain, suffering and injustice? Deut. 29:29 and Acts 1:7, 8. G-d's eternal purposes are moving towards their fulfillment with as much certainty as the steady motion of the Heavens which declare his Glory. G-d is moving the story from point A to point B (I can't believe I just used a mathematical allusion), how we respond to this movement is our business – the movement itself remains His business.

So when people tell us they do not believe, or when they knock on our doors and try to recruit us, or worse, when they try and get us to accept what everybody says as equally valid, then we respond two ways. First of all, we listen and show respect, and try to understand where they are coming from. Then we share where we are coming from (I P. 3:15) and shine, and be salty with those whom G-d is calling into our midst, and with those among whom it is our job to shine and to be salty.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel, and I find when people challenge me on various aspects of what it teaches, and what it does not teach, I am enriched by the exchange, if I do not argue, but look for what G-d is teaching them and me through this exchange. Their response is not my business, mine is. More about this in another series.

Second Source of Opposition: Inner Turmoil (Acts 20:30; 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

Our worst enemies have come from the inside, teaching nonsense – theological nonsense or spiritual nonsense. Either silly things about G-d and His creation, or silly responses to G-d and to His creation. It is my job to participate in tikkun olam (the healing of the world), but it is not my job to fix everything that comes my way.

The community of Israel and of the nations who have come into the Gospel get pretty weird sometimes and the Day of Judgment will sort it all out (I Cor. 4:5 and Eccl. 12:14). It is our job to build and to maintain the bond of unity in the spirit of love, and not to lose this focus when a good fight and a prolonged war is what our flesh would really like to see.

If we cannot forgive, we are not forgiven. If we cannot love, we are worthless. If we cannot let go and move on, we are trapped by the adversary. I believe in justice and want to see the right thing happen, but frequently, as in Israel and in the church (look at Corinth), wrong will prevail and pain and hurt will continue. Sometimes our best friends can become our worst enemies. Our job is to be no-one's enemy. We are called to read the script and to do our part, not try and stage manage how the scene is turning out.

Third Source of Opposition: Unfriendly Eventualities (Eccl. 9:11)

I wish people were not sick, injured, hungry and oppressed, and I will be that good Samaritan whenever I can be. But I am not called to be a ditch patrol. I have baggage. Our community and our country and our world have baggage. If ever the baggage becomes our focus, we become baggage, and this is the downfall of many proponents of the social Gospel. If ever we ignore baggage and refuse to do anything but read the curriculum vitae and pretend that this is the whole duty of man, we have encountered the downfall of believers who think they preach the pure, the fundamentalist Gospel.

We are called to be a light and to be salt, wherever we are through whatever happens to us, helping where we can, teaching whoever will listen, and trusting in the One who is the cosmic stage manager. More about this in another series.

One Reaction: Matt. 6:33, 34 Read the Script

I wish all of you great joy and peace in the Messiah of Israel, and this is your right and your privilege, indeed it is the will of G-d for each and every one of us, as our generation moves from the cradle to the grave and beyond. Seek first His kingdom (the Message) and His righteousness (our reaction, our spirituality) and all these things will be added, cause they really do not matter _ Jer. 9:23, 24.

Give your life to that which matters, and do not let the opposition move you away from the purposes of G-d in the episodes of your life. We all have different gifts and have all suffered different woundings, and it ain't over yet. But the fivefold witness of G-d will not go away (cosmos, conscience, culture, circumstance and curriculum vitae), and when we encounter opposition to any aspect of this witness, it is our job not to go away either.

It may take us time to work it out. We may not get it right the first time, or the millionth time. We may not read our lines very well, nor finish all of the script the Cosmic Stage Director has set before us. But Shavuot is about Harvest, and our lives are part of the Cosmic Harvest. It is our bottom line, never to lose sight of this understanding, even if so much in our lives and in our world do not make sense and continue to cause us opposition.

We are members of G-d's government, G-d's Kingdom, it is our job not to become members of the opposition (with apologies to the four more or less excellent parties who occupy this role in our country). Harvest, Shavuot is about focus and integration, nothing more nothing less. Outsiders, insiders and life circumstances are not worthy of our spiritual attention, except as contexts to apply, to integrate the focus which our faith gives to us.

Let us pray.