

3 Iyar, 5774 (3/5/14) **Counting the Omer: Training for Solid Food** J. M. Terrett

Emor **Say!** **I am ready for you, are you ready for Me?**

Torah: Lev. 21:1-24:23

(1) 21:21. No one with a physical deformity shall approach to offer to the L-rd the burnt offering or the food of His G-d. This is not an attempt to exclude handicapped people or to devalue them, but just as the offerings had to be free from flaw, so must the be who is offering them as a double sign that we serve a flawless G-d and that He both removes our stains and heals our wounds.

(2) 22:28. You shall not slaughter an animal and its little one on the same day. It is all about generations and sustainability and renew-ability. We need to maintain an ongoing, generational relationship with the L-rd and not make it all about us or about our particular situation. We want ongoing closure and we need to be able to come back for more and not give ourselves only one kick at the cat.

(3) 23:3. The seventh day is the sabbath (stopping), the day of rest. There shall be a holy gathering (on that day). You shall do no work – it is the sabbath of the L-RD in all of your dwellings. Paying our temporal tithe means building a life both around rest and worship, so that our spirituality and devotion to G-d remains the driving force of our lives, both as individuals and as community members.

(4) 24:22. You have the same law for the stranger as for the native born, for I am the L-RD your G-d. After the first complete recital of the feasts of the L-rd, an incident involving blasphemy occurred which had to be dealt with. Murder and woundings and the killing of someone else's animals is mentioned because you have to maintain a level playing field of righteousness as the practical flip side of festival observance. The L-rd wants faith and obedience, not just faith or obedience.

Haftarah: Ezek. 44:15-31

(5) 44:23 They must teach the difference between holy and profane and clean and unclean. All the symbolism teaches us what the L-rd is like and what He wants us to be like.

(6) 44:28 I will be there inheritance. The priests were to live from their priestly work and not let their service for the L-rd become a part-time endeavour, but a full time commitment. In ministry or in the work a day world, we serve the L-rd and we do what we do as unto Him and not as unto men.

Brit Chadashah: Luke 14:12-24

(7) 14:23. My house must be filled. Those who make excuses (whose lives are but a series of excuses) will be replaced by those who respond to the invitation, whatever condition they are in.

(Mike, p. 175) **Ps. 42. L-rd's Table** Jewish Hero: Heidi Reid

As we count down the Omer towards Shavuot (Pentecost), I want to give a number of sermons which speak about what I like to call **biblical preparedness**. I want to help us to become ready in our hearts and lives to receive the Word and not become stalled or sidetracked and by this I mean gaining an understanding of not only the main core teachings of the Word, but also of the central objectives which G-d wants to achieve as we become proficient in handling the Word of Truth.

I have selected Hebrews 5:11-14 as my passage to launch this discussion series:

“We have much to say about this (the nature of our Messiah and His heavenly ministry), and there are things which are difficult to explain because you have become slow to understand. Though by this time, when you should have become teachers, you need someone to teach you again the elementary truths of the oracles of G-d's Word all over again because you have arrived in a place where you need milk and not solid food. For whoever lives on milk does not have the experience of the Word of righteousness; for he is a child. But solid food is for the (spiritually) mature who by constant use have trained their faculties to discern that which is good and that which is bad.”

As we examine biblical preparedness, we need to understand what it means to train for solid food and this passage outlines four questions I would like to go over with you this morning as we prepare also to observe the L-rd's Table. First of all, the most obvious question from this passage is what are the elementary truths of the oracles of G-d? Here the word elementary does not mean food for babies and young children as much as it means the basic elements which make up the oracles of G-d's Word, similar to the elements which combine to make up our own physical universe (hydrogen, oxygen, sodium, iron etc). So when you melt it all down, what are the basic elements which combine to form or make the oracles of G-d? Two passages come to mind which help us to discover the under-girding truths which hold the Word or message of G-d together: Gen. 12: 2,3 and John 3:16.

The core of what the Bible teaches is in a word, redemption – the great nation was to bless all nations and this blessing was to deliver us from death and restore us to fellowship with G-d forever. The whole document, from Genesis to Revelation has this theme running through it and at the core of the redemption story, there are five basics which can neither be added to or subtracted from:

1. The Bible is the Word of G-d
2. Yeshua is G-d the Son (Son of G-d)
3. He was born of a virgin
4. He died on the cross for the sins of mankind.
5. He rose, ascended and will one day return.

Now if you think that these elemental truths which make up the redemption story of the Bible are simple, you have not understood them correctly, because you could spend a lifetime examining them and still only scratch the surface, but let me leave you with one very important detail. Water is made up of two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen, the two elements are a package deal which together make up water, but which separately make up two extremely volatile and flammable gases. The five fundamentals of our biblical faith are also a package deal which together make up the truth of what the Bible teaches and you cannot separate them or choose to exclude one or more of them or even add anything to this basic truth structure which under-girds all that G-d has to say.

Said another way, everything and anything (anyone or everyone) which challenges, or rejects any element of this atomic structure of truth, attacks the core, the essence of what the Bible teaches. So no prophecy of man or discovery of science which seeks to undo or add to this basic structure can be of G-d – can be finally true, real or relevant. So when you go on line or watch TV or listen to that low tech dinosaur (the radio), whether it is in teaching, entertainment or song, listen for the basics before you jump on any band waggon.

This leads us to our next question – how do you go about understanding the things which are difficult to explain? First you understand that there are things difficult to understand – mind blowing mysteries and secret things which belong to G-d and you ask yourself two very good questions: what is it they are saying, exactly? (clarification) and then how do they know it? (verification).

There are so many voices out there trying to teach us so many things and the internet is burgeoning into an almost limitless minefield of possibilities, and when I encounter ministries and teachings, I ask those two simple questions and give what is being taught the fivefold elementary litmus test and you would be surprised how much fog lifts and how many truth claims are debunked. For us probably the most tempting or dangerous are those teachings which claim to give us details about events or people in the Bible which the Bible does give us – and here are some of my favourites: the lost tribes, the location of the ark of the covenant (the location of Noah's ark is given by the Bible), the burial veil of our Messiah (the true cross, the holy grail, the robe he wore) and rediscovering the lost books of both the Old and New Testament.

These tantalizing rabbit trails can quickly morph into controversial spiritual urban myths, because these details were not considered important enough for the Bible to record and they can become holy relics (idols) which we spend time defending and arguing over, instead of maintaining a strong grip on the basic elements as we learn the next stage of our spiritual growth – which is learning what does means to be spiritually mature.

Our passage uses to phrase which indicate which direction we look in: the word of righteousness and discerning good and evil. Spiritual maturity is all about righteousness and discerning good and evil. I was recently unfriended on Facebook because of my support of the biblical condemnation of homosexuality as an abomination.

In response, I said it is sad when merely upholding the clear teachings of the Bible is now branded as teaching hatred and intolerance – and the gay lobby has done a good job of turning the tables on us if we fall for what they are trying to accomplish.

Our spirituality and our morality as inseparable and we cannot have the one (what we believe about the wonderful grace and forgiveness and love of our blessed Redeemer) without the other (the morality which both condemns sin and which promotes righteousness). People want to be spiritual without having to be held accountable to solid standards of biblical righteousness and there is a growing trend today to have the Bible declared hate literature and our response needs to be firm and wise.

Biblical righteousness is that which protects and gives credibility to spirituality and any form of spirituality which does not have as one of its basic functions the drive to discern both good and evil, has succumbed to evil and abandoned good. Being judgemental and condemning is when you unfairly accuse and do not give the accused a chance to speak, but the need to cherish good and refuse evil remains foundational if we want to become spiritually mature and not be stuck with milk because we have failed to understand what true spirituality is all about.

Now those of you who know me, understand that I have a deep passion for mythology of any kind because I see it as part of the history of people of our planet stumbling along in the dark in search of light. There are basic elements in mythology which try to explain both where we came from, why are we here and how can we be redeemed and I find that exciting. But do not let our sophisticated pseudo scientific popular culture relegate the truth we believe to the junk yard of mythology.

Three quick things then we will move on to my last point and our observance of the Lord's Table.

Nothing which the Bible teaches contradicts the natural order we see around us – it describes an orderly universe functioning according to universal laws which cannot be violated. Every major place in the Bible can be found on a map because our faith is firmly rooted in time and space and history. Lastly, our creation story is the only one where the Creator exists before chaos and who does not arise out of chaos (the cosmic slime) – He alone is without beginning and without end, beyond time and space – and the one who ordered time and space. We have no hobgoblins and emotionally disturbed deities fighting with fantastic monsters in an endless cycle of disturbing confusion.

Being spiritually mature understands that a firm grasp of the basic elements of our faith allows us to exercise our discernment to discover both good and evil, as we pursue a life searching for righteousness – and which is based on authentic faith which gives us spiritual life and thoughtful obedience which gives us spiritual health.

Our passage asks one more question, which is closely related to an understanding of authentic spiritual maturity – what is solid food and how does this diet relate to the Word of righteousness and to the discernment of good and evil?

I have been preaching steadily for more than 30 years in a number of unique cultural settings across our fair nation and yet I always want to live on a steady diet of solid spiritual food without running out of things to preach and falling into a rut of constantly repeating myself, because I have obviously covered the entire Bible several times over in my preaching career.

Solid food is a commitment to what i have been talking to you about today where we live lives based on the elementary principles of G-d's Word and pursue righteousness and continue to discern both good and evil. Solid food is allergic to spiritual junk food of any kind and it seeks to avoid poisoned or polluted sources of spiritual sustenance. There are so many voices out there in an exploding spiritual marketplace and I want to conclude by making three final comments.

First of all only eat that which you can trust and always begin with local food, with community grown truth and not the extravagant concoctions which are little more than spiritual infomercials who want to sell you an endless bill of goods of spiritual gadgets which you really don't need and which will just clutter up your heart and home. Secondly learn to be a critical thinker who asks good questions and who is not impressed by fantastic claims and which is not attracted to the spiritually based conspiracy theories (we will teach you the turth everybody else is hiding and which you will not find anywhere else).

And lastly, we need to learn to live spiritual lives based on a firm and simple devotion to Bible study, prayer, worship, good fellowship and a dialogue based outreach (being as wise a serpents and as harmless as doves). There is a video which is creating quite a stir on line – it is called the Jew Who died For You and it mixes scenes from the Nazi death camps with Jesus dragging a cross through a death camp on the way to His execution. It was produced by Jews for Jesus and it is a damaging and counterproductive. It lacks both spiritual discernment and spiritual maturity.

May we grow up out of our spiritually immature diet of milk and learn to flourish on a diet of solid food and this next series on biblical preparedness will have this double focus (spiritual maturity and spiritual discernment). Bring your questions to Yeshiva! Email them to me! Make an appointment to talk to me! Let's pray.

Communion:

transubstantiation,

consubstantiation,

non-substantiation: a monthly community reality, accountability check and a renewed commitment to repentance (forgiveness) and atonement (righteousness – clean living).