

6 Cheshvan, 5767 (Oct. 28, 2006) *First Winter Series: The Lighthouse (Prophecy)* J. M. Terrett

PARASHA NOACH **NOAH**
TORAH: Gen. 6:9-11:32
HAFTARAH: Is. 54:1-55:5
BRIT CHADASHAH: Mt. 24:36-46

I would like to base my message today on (1) **one paired concept** (focus/distraction), on (2) **three verses** and (3) on a little **review** from last week's sermon. You see, with the help of my wife and other positive detractors, I realize that sometimes, I cover a considerable amount of material very quickly and I am not always good at reviewing. So, this **preaching year**, I want to work on this. Let me explain why I preach like this (besides my own personal learning/preaching style).

Each Shabbat, I am speaking to a varied group of people who are all at different places in their lives and who listen with various learning styles. And I know that while not everything I say applies to everyone, something of what I say applies to everyone. As well, some people are missing and we all have **different attention spans** – so people are zooming in and spacing out throughout my message and I want to always give a full meal deal with lot's to think about – including some catch up for those who have been missing for a variety of reasons. However, this year, I want to try and do two radical things: I want to **slow down** and I want to **review**, without going longer or putting people to sleep.

So, let me (1) explain my **paired concept**, then (2) I will read the **three verses** with you and I will finish with (3) a little **review** from last week.

(1) Prophecy has more to do with **spiritual focus** and **spiritual distractions**, than it has to do with predictions – even though there is a significant element of authentic personal direction which we have to learn to discern and to access. One example: turn with me to 2 Sam. 2:1. David sought the L-rd for a specific direction in a particular situation, and he was given some definite direction, NOT because he didn't do his homework first (thinking, discussing and exploring biblically based possibilities), but because part of seeking the L-rd involves **prophetic confirmation** at **significant moments** of our lives **especially** when we have to make choices we are uncertain about.

However, I maintain that the L-RD is more concerned with the reasons we do things, than He is with the things we actually choose. You see we live in a world full of **distractions** which will try and pull us away from a **spiritual focus** and cause us to waste our time with things which have no real eternal value (see Luke 8:11-15 the Parable of the Sower). Now I am not saying that anything which is not directly related to the Gospel is a waste of time – far from it. What I am saying is that we only have a limited amount of **time** and **energy** and we need to be sure that what we do in this life is a **reflection** [integration] of our commitment to the life which is to come (Matt. 6:33).

This is a far more difficult stance to take than simply building walls around our community [or creating lengthy lists of rules] and severely limiting our interaction with the wild and weird **secular culture** which surrounds us – the world needs salt, light and the odour of the L-rd's presence, and it is only in **dynamic interaction** with the world that we can provide this necessary spiritual component. But it comes with a high price tag – the constant possibility of **spiritual compromise** (assimilation/distraction), which it is our duty to guard against, without losing the **redemptive contact and focus** which the world needs so desperately.

How do you accomplish this **necessary tension**? Carefully, prophetically and repeatedly (see Heb. 3:12, 13). You see, daily, weekly, and seasonally, we need to examine our **personal focus**

and make sure that our life is not being choked with **spiritual distractions** – which leads me into my **(2) three verses**, because they all deal with spiritual focus/distractions.

(I) Prov. 29:18. "When there is no revelation [vision], the people are out of control [perish]; blessed are they if they observe the Law!" **(How much of His control do you [do we] have in your [in our] life? How blessed are you [are we]?)**

(II) Jer. 6:16. "Thus says the L-ORD: Place yourselves at the Crossroads and look; and ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls [Matt. 11:28-30; Matt. 6:33]. But you said: 'We will not walk in it'. **Hey, what are you looking at? What are you asking for? What way are you walking in? How much rest are you [are we] finding for your [for our] soul? Are you in G-ds' way or just in the way?**

(II) Is. 28:9-13 (see also Heb. 5:11-14) "To whom is it He is trying to teach wisdom? To whom is He explaining His message? To children [just] weaned from their [mother's] smilk, to those who has just been taken from their mother's breast? For it [the path of wisdom and His message] is: **precept upon precept, precept upon precept, rule upon rule, rule upon rule, a little here and a little there.** Very well then, it is through men with stammering lips and a strange tongue that the L-RD will speak to this people, to whom He said, Here is the rest [Matt. 11:28-30; Deut. 32:47, 47], let the weary one rest. Here is the place of rest! But they did not want to listen. So then, the word of the L-RD shall be for them: **precept upon precept, precept upon precept, rule upon rule, rule upon rule, a little here and a little there** – so that in walking, they will fall backwards and be broken – In order that they would be snared and taken." **What is His word to you [to us]? We will either make progress [and move on from milk to more solid food] or we will fall backwards until we do it His way, because, His way is the Highway.**

Which series of questions, leads me into **(3) my review** from last week, and I will end with this.

Last week, I said that: "I see that we have been building a **congregational momentum** and are moving towards maintaining a **dynamic stability**. **Stability comes from understanding that spirituality is really a series of rhythms and cycles which we must maintain, if we do not want our faith to be eroded and our obedience to become stale and rotten. Dynamic** means that: "unless our personal and congregational 'technology/halacha/way of operating' keeps pace with the altered conditions (new challenges) of our lives (both as individuals and as a community), we face spiritual erosion and eventual extinction – **Is your [our] spirituality becoming an endangered species?"**

"Spiritual [congregational] momentum means allowing the spiritual cycles to turn until we have fulfilled the agenda which G-d has set for us as a community of Jewish and Gentile believers [Phil. 2:13; Eph. 2:10]. Frequently as we grow in the L-rd, He reveals (exposes) areas of [personal and congregational spiritual] growth where we have not been very successful. You know, **dark little corners** and **piles of disorder**, where we have tried to avoid dealing with things that we don't want to face – the **nitty-gritty** G-d will not let us forget until we have dealt with things to His satisfaction."

I then outlined for ministry priorities for the coming year:

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| (1) | the Rebbe | organized |
| (2) | the leadership | effectively prioritized |
| (3) | our congregational life | fresh, relevant and powerful |
| (4) | our outreach. | Wise, effective and bold |

Last week, I concluded with the following assertion:

"We are also involved in the lives of the people we work and live among and it is **the reality of our spirituality** which will draw people to us – even more than the clarity of our message! (*breakthroughs* and *battles*). We will grow when we learn what a **combined congregational effort** means. *The L-rd is bringing people in according to His timetable. As long as we our best to order our personal and congregational lives according to His timetable, we will see progress in all of the four areas I outlined. "*

So let me review: (1) Today I spoke of focus/distraction as the primary thrust of prophetic ministry. **How spiritually focused are you, in whatever you are going through?** (2) I then outlined from three verses how this focus is to be maintained and how this distraction tendency is to be dealt with. **How much of your life is under His control? What path or paths are you asking for and walking in? Are you struggling with milk – have you hit a wall, or are you learning to walk in the precepts, rules and little bits here and there in the L-RD?**

(3) I concluded with a review of two concepts which will be central to my teaching on the **Vision Statement** which we developed last spring: "**congregational momentum**" which is really our collective [corporate] commitment to weekly Shabbat observance and to our annual celebration of the festivals of the L-rd. **How is your personal commitment to our congregational momentum doing?** and "**dynamic stability**" which means making sure that the way we observe and build congregational momentum meets the particular set of needs we possess as a varied community of individuals at different stages of life and dealing a broad spectrum of life issues individually and simultaneously. **Are your needs being met by how we do what we do? [whether you need support, reminders, or reproof]**

We cannot please everybody, and we cannot meet every need, but we want to be sure that we are learning to be effective and that we are growing and learning together, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, to rebbe and also to the flock.

Focus people! Do you know what the L-rd is doing in your life and are you fighting and falling, or growing and feeding? Momentum and stability is what spirituality is all about, at least at B'nai Chayim. How about you?

Let's pray and observe the L-rd's Table together.