

Nitzavim/vaYeLech You Are Standing/And He Went

Torah: Deut. 29:10-31:30
Haftarah: Is. 60:10-63:9
Brit Chadashah: John 15:1-11 (F), Rom. 10:1-3 (L)

We have arrived at the last Shabbat of Consolation and at the second last Torah Portion of the year 5764. The next time we gather together, on Rosh Hashanah, it will be 5765, another year for us to walk with the L-rd according to His Word. There are for us, as Messianic Jews and Gentiles, three special features from this week's readings.

First of all, the **Haftarah** portion is part of the same passage Yeshua read from as He preached His first public sermon at the very beginning of His ministry (Luke 4:16-30). Second of all, the Torah portion speaks of the purposes of G-d which will be accomplished *even through the stubborn failures of His people* – failures which He anticipated and whose impact He built into His purposes, which shall never be thwarted but fully accomplished – even THROUGH His people.

Third, unlike traditional Judaism, and many elements of traditional and evangelical Christianity, which try to re-interpret the clear sayings of the Torah, *we celebrate the grammatical/syntaxual meaning of the Bible, which is found in the words of the text, and never in any supposed hidden or deeper meaning* (Deut. 29:29) – in other words, we believe that G-d said what He meant, the way He meant it to be said and that any meaning we derive from the text needs to be found in the ordinary meaning of the words, in the text itself – which is what Deut. 30:11-14 says.

So as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, we need to take comfort in His Word and understand that no matter what is going on in our lives, or in the world around us, *G-d's purposes are being fulfilled and history is on track.* All we have to decide is whether we want to part of that fulfillment and whether our "history" is on track with the L-rd. How do we do this? Let's examine my three points and allow the L-rd to search us and to examine us, to free us from any hidden wickedness, as He leads us in the Way Everlasting for another year (Ps. 139:23, 24).

When we look at the passage in Luke 4, we notice that Yeshua reads from a portion of the text which comes before the portion which is used as the passage for the seventh Shabbat of Consolation. We need to consider two things concerning the Haftarah readings and the Torah portions. The selection of the both the Torah and Haftarah passages did not become firmly established and standardized until the fifth or sixth century of the Common Era, and even then, there are still some variations between the different strands of Judaism.

We all read from the same Torah and same Tanach, but the reading cycle represents our human desire to make our lives, day by day and generation by generation, stay centered on G-d's Word and His time schedule. So, only the text of the Bible and the celebration of the Festivals are inspired features of what G-d handed down to His people through Moshe, the prophets and the apostles, and especially through our Messiah. *Differences in the readings and any changes to the readings which developed should not trouble us as long as we do not change the text or try and change the Festival Cycle.*

Secondly, it is the timing of the launching of our Messiah's ministry which should concern us in the passage, because the place where the rabbis chose to begin the passage is right in the middle of a prophetic declaration which Messiah is making concerning both *His ministry and the fulfillment of the final purposes of G-d.* These messianic declarations are sometimes called the *Servant Songs of Isaiah* and Yeshua began the reading at the beginning of the song, not in the second stanza.

The first part of the song, Isaiah 61:1-9, speaks of what Messiah will do when He comes, and how the comforted, renewed Israel will become, once again the people whom G-d blesses, and through whom He blesses the world, just as He promised to our father Abraham (Gen. 12:2,3).

The rabbis pick up the story where the song goes on to deal with this *glorious restoration* of Israel and of the arrival of *the eternal Kingdom of G-d on earth*, which we understand to be the second part, the next stage of the ministry of the Messiah. He began the first stage of His earthly ministry on the Shabbat just before *Rosh Hashanah*, which is a festival of G-d's coming judgment. He fulfilled all the promises concerning redemption during the festival of *Passover*, where He was crucified, died and rose from the dead.

He fulfilled the last stage of His earthly ministry on the *Day of Pentecost*, when He released the Holy Spirit so that His redeemed people, both Jews and Gentiles, could take His message to the ends of the earth, generation to generation until His return. But why begin on Rosh Hashanah? It is not a difficult question to answer, but the answer is very difficult to live with, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

G-d's ministry in our lives, and the fulfillment of His purposes in our lives, begins with His judgment of us and of our lives, just as we see in today's Torah portion. He wants us to examine our lives and return to the faith and obedience He has always called us to, so that forgiven, cleansed and empowered, we can be the instrument through which He can accomplish His purposes in a lost, blinded and sinful world. He wants us to be lights which burn with a clear, clean flame, which people can see from far away, and to do that He has to judge us, and teach us how to judge ourselves. (I Cor. 11:31, 32) This is the focus of *Rosh Hashanah*.

Yeshua proclaimed that His life and ministry was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah, because the purposes of G-d are always on schedule, whether or not His people are prepared to acknowledge His timing, which brings me to my second point.

G-d's purposes are never blocked by the disobedience or lack of cooperation of His people, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. In fact as we read in today's Torah portion, part of the fulfillment of those purposes is to give His people the *first chance* to repent and get their lives in shape and be used by Him to reach out to all the nations and generations of all mankind.

Nearly two thousand years ago, the Gospel was taken up by a segment of His people, who wept when they saw the destruction of the Second Temple and the murder and scattering of Israel for second time. They did not lose heart, nor give up and wonder why G-d had allowed this to happen, when it did not have to happen that way, any more than Moshe did when he took Israel back into the wilderness for a whole generation, or when He prophesied that the House of Jacob would again become rebellious and disobedient many times in the future.

You see all the promises of G-d come with conditions and with consequences. His love is limitless and does not ever waver and it never will. Neither will His call upon our lives, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. At Rosh Hashanah we get to decide what part we will play as we watch the unfailing purposes of G-d unfold in the world around us, generation by generation, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

What kind of reaction do you have to the call of G-d in your life? How is your faith doing? How is your obedience doing? As we come to another year in the *relentless fulfillment of the purposes of G-d*, we need let His judgment free us from the judgment which is about to come on the whole world when our Messiah returns. You will notice that I am not talking about the effect which circumstances may have on our lives, because in failure and in success we are called to walk in faith and in obedience, not matter what, through all the whatever of this life (see 2Cor. 6:4-10). He is always more concerned with how we respond to the whatever of life than He is about making sure we get the kind of life we really had hoped for.

Which brings me my third point - how we determine the actual meaning of the texts we read every week in Shul, and which are read every week in shuls around the world. This is both way easier than it seems and incredibly more complicated than anyone can imagine. Why?

Because G-d always reveals His purposes for us and for our lives, but He never reveals exactly how He is going to fulfill these purposes through our lives and through the lives of all the nations and generations of mankind. Sure He tells us the beginning and He tells us the ending and He even tells us what our part needs to be in the middle, but **the actual details of how He is going to bring us through from the beginning to the end will always remain a mystery under His direct and flawless supervision.** Why? Because we know that: "the secret things belong to G-d and the things He has revealed belong to us and to our children forever, so that we may put them into practice." We know what He wants us to do and by faith we understand that He will always do what He says He will, whether He does so in a way we understand or not.

How is the scattered House of Jacob going to come home? It's started already. How is the scattered House of Jacob going to come home spiritually to the Messiah? This is also starting already and we need to be sure we are part of this returning. **How do we do this?** We do this by being light and being salt, both as individuals and as a community, generation by generation, and situation by situation. In today's portion Moshe said that this call to faith and to obedience is not a light thing, it is our life, our purpose, **because all of us, Jew and Gentile were present when He spoke these words for the very first time.**

No, I have not gone crazy - that happened years ago. Deut. 29:10 speaks of seven categories of people present when Moshe spoke these words and **Gentiles were the seventh category.** As well, Deut. 29:15 says that the covenant applies beyond those who were actually physically there **to those who will one day come into this relationship of faith and obedience,** because one day all the generations and nations of believers of all mankind will transformed into the great crowd of the redeemed of the Lamb, as we dance our way into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

This is reflected in the Haftarah portion where we see the restored House of Jacob become **the glory of the whole earth,** and the instrument through which both the message of His love and the message of His judgment will go forth to the ends of the earth. **This is G-d's agenda and His people will always be the means by which His purposes shall be fulfilled.** Therefore the returning of Israel into the Gospel needs to be the focus of our prayer as we have faith and as we obey, whether or not we see this mighty returning unfolding as quickly as we would like or not.

On this the Shabbat before we come to the end of another cycle of Festival observance, we need to take comfort in the certainty of the **eternal purposes of G-d.** We also need to learn to take comfort in how G-d chooses to bring those purposes to fulfillment. Finally, we also need to decide what part we will play in the cycle of this fulfillment - that is whether our faith and our obedience becomes a vehicle of this fulfillment, or whether we are passed over because of our disobedience or our lack of faith, and He raises up others to walk according to His word. **You see our part in His purposes is really up to us and He has built this choice into the fulfillment of His purposes.**

They will either come through us, through the light of our faith and of our obedience, or they will come through others who have chosen to walk by faith and by obedience, day by day, year by year, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. You see, mishpocah, **nitzavim** - you are standing - **how will you be walking in the coming year?** You see, Mishpocah, **vaYelech** and Moshe went and spoke these words - **where are you going with the spoken word of our L-rd?** His Kingdom is coming and our Messiah's return is more sure than the daily rising of the sun and more certain than the monthly cycles of the moon. We need to walk in this consolation, by faith and by obedience.

Let's pray.