

Tetzaveh **You Shall Command** **Redemption is a Beautiful, Awesome Reality**

Torah: Exodus 27:20-30:10

Haftarah: Ezekiel 43:10-27

Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 13:10-16

(Donna p. 41) **Ps. 65** Torah carrier: Colette Jewish Hero: Elisha

This passage describes both the clothing of the High Priest and the sanctification of the priests. Priests were the Aaronic branch of the Levites who were charged with the operation of the sacrifices of the tabernacle. The rest of the Levites were to scatter among the people and teach them both to observe the Law and remain faithful to the Festival Cycle.

There are three observations which I want to make about this awesome passage. The first is concerning the redemptive wardrobe of the High Priest. Besides his hat and his belt, the High Priest was to wear three layers of clothing: a linen under robe, an outer robe and the ephod or outer vest. The outer ephod (or vest) was to be made of blue, purple and crimson thread interwoven with golden thread and the robe of the ephod was to be made of blue fabric with a bottom border of 72 golden bells, so the people knew the high priest was alive behind the veil.

Over top of the ephod, he was to wear a breastplate (pectoral) with two things on it. First the urim and the thummin (yes and no stones), then twelve precious stones with the names of the twelve tribes engraved on them. The top of the ephod was to have a golden clasp with two onyx stones on either side, engraved with the names of the tribes in their birth order six to a side.

The engravings were a double remembrance of Israel before the L-rd, one of judgment (the breastplate) to hold the people accountable, the other of remembrance so the High Priest would always understand that his mission was to carry the people before G-d and intercede for them. He was not to look scary in order to frighten the people, but beautiful so they could understand that the heavenly G-d was in their midst to teach them His ways and save and protect them AND that He was and is beautiful beyond description.

The passage moves on to describe the consecration of the priests and it was accomplished by a series of blood sacrifices that culminated in placing the blood on their right ear lobes, their right thumb and on their right big toe. There are two insights from this ceremony. First of all, the blood allowed them to rise above death and minister life from the L-rd unto the people. Secondly, they were consecrated in all that they heard, all that they did, and everywhere that they went - as a sign that the L-rd wants all of us to be consecrated to Him so that no part of our lives is outside of His protection. The Right here is symbolic and is not against left handed people.

Our portion concludes with a description of the two kinds of perpetual sacrifice, one on the altar of sacrifice and the other on the altar of perfume.

Both of these were to be performed daily so that we understand that He wants to be with us daily and never wants us to wander far from Him. The daily blood sacrifice was a sign that He wants us to be forgiven and washed daily and the perfume offering, which was performed inside

the holy place, away from the gaze of the people, reminded the people that the invisible G-d hears prayer and is not far from each of us.

The passage in Ezekiel deals with the consecration of the new temple and rather than get into the controversy about whether this amazing temple is still to be built, we should understand the purpose of the tabernacle, the temple and the priesthood. G-d wants to be present in the lives of believers on His terms, so that we can be daily forgiven, cleansed and holy. This is His will for all believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The passage from Hebrews speaks of the Heavenly tabernacle of which both the tabernacle and the temples were only earthly reflections of this heavenly reality. It speaks of our permanent identity in Heaven in the midst of our temporary sojourn in this life and ends with an outline of our double mandate based on the wonderful, awesome and beautiful redemption which we have experienced: a sacrifice of praise and a sacrifice of generosity.

The physical sacrifices were symbols of our ability to contact G-d and access the benefits of His redemption and now that we are redeemed we can offer praise to the invisible, wonderful G-d based on the fulfilment which our Messiah won for us. Also, since we have benefited from His generosity, we are called to be generous and kind in our dealings with each other and with the world in which we live.

The beautiful symbolism of the tabernacle and the sacrificial system teaches us that the invisible, heavenly G-d wishes to be present in our lives to cleanse us and to empower us to walk with Him according to His Word. Praise is now our constant contact with Him in every place we wander and good deeds are the sacrifices which we offer to Him and with which He is well pleased. Redemption is still an awesome beautiful reality. How real are we letting it be in our lives as we praise Him and express our faith in Him through the generosity of good deeds to which we are called?

Sermon: **A Place You Can Call Home Where Everyone Knows Your Name**

He has given to some to be apostles (messengers), some to be prophets (construction foremen), some to be evangelists (recruiters) and others to be pastors and teachers (equipping shepherds), for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministering and building up the body of Messiah until we all arrive at the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of G-d, to maturity and the measure of the full stature of Messiah; thus we will no longer be children (immature), floating and carried away by the wind of doctrine (like pieces of driftwood), by the trickery of men and their craftiness in deceitful scheming, but professing the truth in love, we would grow up in every way in the One who is the chief (head), Messiah. From whom the whole body, joined and knit together, by every ligament by which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, and edifies itself in love.

Probably the most challenging feature of our membership in the body of our Messiah is belonging to a local body of believers. Our movement has sometimes been called the "messy-antic" movement because too many people's faith shipwrecks by a failure to deal with baggage and learn to work through the static and spiritual resistance until we recognize the body of our Messiah in our midst and work for its growth and edification. This is our singular high calling and one we should pursue together with all of our community strength and energy.

In the world people say that familiarity breeds contempt and this means that as we get to know people we lose respect for them when we discover their imperfections and limitations. It is as if we have to remain mysterious so that people will not discover that we are just flawed people with both an extremely talented upside and an incredibly flawed downside, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, to the rabbi first and also to the flock.

One of the reasons why we are instituting formal membership is to pull people together so that we can escape from the confusion and the spiritual resistance of the world and realize our full community potential in our Messiah. You see, as a flock we have an incredible base of talented individuals and we want to pull together and grow and not fall apart and scatter.

As we come to appreciate each other's measure, we will see that the task involved in pulling for growth belongs to a concerted team effort which is not without its potential drawbacks. One basic, rock bottom aspect of our personal, individual spiritual identity is that in the L-rd we are like so many pieces of Lego – solidly made but unable to reach our full potential until we snap together to build a wonderful house in the L-rd. In the L-rd, we receive a corporate mandate which calls us to become sheep that are part of a flock and not free radicals which float around without ever being able to settle down for long.

Learning to be part of a redemptive community is an important feature of learning to walk with the L-rd. Said another way, there is a kind of spiritual growth which cannot occur, except as part of a dynamic team which is building the body of Messiah together. Said yet another way, we cannot truly advance beyond spiritual immaturity outside of a full participation in a local assembly – until we have found a place we can call home, where everyone knows our name.

In this portion of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, he is describing how a local assembly should function, speaking the truth in love as each member is mutually joined and growing into the mature stature of the Messiah. He warns about deceit and trickery where the winds of doctrine which is opposed to the truth of the Bible schemes to scatter the sheepfold and knock us off one by one.

It reminds me of the tactics of wolves who attack herds of bison or musk ox. As long as the herd keeps together, the wolves go without lunch, but whenever they can panic or split the herd, the younger and the weaker ones become lunch. Every community will go through times when we have those who come and those who go, for both good and regrettable reasons. We want to provide as welcoming and as redemptive a community as possible so that all the willing pieces of Lego can fit together with us as we build the body of our Messiah in our midst.

There will be the winds of false doctrine which will blow as we are growing. There will also be scheming and trickery that will try and pull us apart. There will be those who will build up a contempt for us as they become familiar with us, because as talented as we all are, we have to come to grips with our downsides and imperfections if we are going to be able to maximize our community potential. Not all of our visitors will find what they are looking for when they are shopping for a spiritual home and some may even want to pull us apart with strange ideas and an inability to speak the truth in love.

Learning to cooperate as part of a spiritual team is an essential spiritual discipline for a healthy, vibrant spiritual community. We are setting up formal membership, not to exclude anyone from the life of our community, but to let those who are interested in us discover what kind of team members we are looking for.

There will be messengers – people who hear from G-d and who are giving insights which will heal and help our community to grow. There will be construction foremen who will come forward with ideas and plans to help us grow in various ministries of our shul. There will be recruiters who will bring interested newcomers into our community and want them to find their place of service in our midst. There will be people with a burden to care for the sheep in our midst and who have a burden for teaching and equipping people so they can excel and learn to develop their talents - and minimize their downsides.

All of this needs to function under the leadership of the head of our community, who is our Messiah. It is not as difficult as some people would have us suppose, to be able to hear from the L-rd. The L-rd wants to bring people into the light of His love and build up the freshly redeemed pieces of Lego into a temple which will show forth His love and His joy and shine like a beacon to a dark and dying world.

None of His commandments are burdensome and learning to function in redemptive intimacy in a community of believers is not as hard as it may seem. It just means learning to maximize our talents and minimize our imperfections as we stick together as a healthy, growing flock and to not panic or scatter even when the wolf is howling around our edges trying to find a way to grab stragglers or break the bonds of our unity.

As a festival driven shul, we want to plan our year so that we do the best job of celebrating the goodness of G-d, both as a community and as individuals who go through any number of stages and experience any number of challenges and who want to do so from the security of a safe place which we can call home and where everyone knows our name.

Next week is our AGM and we will activate formal membership because we are all members of the universal body of our Messiah. All of us are also members of the generational body of our Messiah and are part of the greatest international enterprise this world has ever known. We also need to be active members of our local community so that we grow and are enriched as we find our place of service in the local chapter of our Messiah's body in our midst.

We have gifts for each other and we need to both give them and receive them and learn how to work out our differences when the static and the howling winds want to quench our light and divide us and prevent us from growing up together as a corporate expression of the kind of redeemed community the L-rd wants to build wherever the Gospel is preached.

We will never be perfect and will always have challenges to face and problems to solve, because that is just the nature of what it means to relate to each other as imperfect human beings. However, the great Shepherd is able to work wonders in our midst when we attain and maintain a unity of spirit among the Lego blocks He is calling to Himself.

We never lose any of our individuality as we become involved in the local body of our Messiah. We gain a corporate identity and become healthy sheep whose unity and love remain wolf proof,

wind proof and deception proof.

This is the sole objective we have in activating formal membership. We do not want to form an exclusive club or an elite clique that thinks of themselves as better than everyone else. We want to come together to discover our gifts and to protect ourselves against the forces which are working against what the L-rd is building in our midst.

We have a joyful enterprise to engage in as we cycle through the festivals and through the life cycles and life events which our community experiences as our members move from concept to the grave and beyond. We want to know the L-rd better and be strong in His love and grace. A large feature of what this means practically is our redemptive involvement in our local community which will always be a safe place where everybody knows your name.

Community spirituality is as important as individual spirituality and the two should never be seen as working against each other. In the L-rd they work together. Redemptive means allowing the L-rd to turn us into a solid piece of spiritual Lego where we are cleansed and equipped for service, first towards each other and then as an outreach from our community of faith to the world in which we live.

Only a solid community can remain wolf proof. Only a growing community can remain wind proof. Only a cohesive, connected community can remain deception proof. Our community is growing, both in numbers and in spiritual depth. These last two months we have been talking about membership because we realize that caring for the shul needs to be a group effort so that each and every one of us has a safe place and is cared for as an important member of the flock which the L-rd is building and blessing.

Membership in our midst means nothing more and nothing less. This is the place which I call home and where everyone knows my name. Next week as we activate formal membership and strengthen our ability to be a truly redemptive safe place for the flock, we would invite you to join in the community building which B'nai Chayim is called to give our best and strongest efforts towards. Finding your place in a local body is one of the most joyful experiences in the L-rd because it is the will of the L-rd for each of us and all of us. Spiritual Lego blocks, unite! We are a safe place which you can call home and where everyone knows your name.