

17 Tammuz, 5776 (23/7/16) **He Will Turn Our Mourning and Fasting Into Joy** J. M. Terrett

**Balak**                                      **Destroyer**                                      **His Bullet Proof Love**

**Torah:**                                      Numbers 22:2-25:9

**Haftarah:**                                      Micah 5:6-6:8

**Brit Chadashah:**                                      Romans 11:25-32

Reading: Sharon, p. 165 and Ps. 79. Jewish hero: Micah; Torah carrier: Julie

Today's Torah Portion provides us with the background to the final military engagement which the new generation of Israel will engage in before they cross the Jordan and begin the conquest of Canaan and the punitive campaign against Moab. They have defeated two of the most powerful kingdoms in the region, Sihon and Og, and have taken possession of a very fertile strip of land which Moab has been driven out of while our people were sojourning in Egypt.

Three people groups in the region descend from Abraham: Edom, Moab and Ammon. Israel has no interest in their lands, but while the people were camping on the plains of Moab, listening to Moses teach the contents of the Book of Deuteronomy, a ruler of Moab sends emissaries to a prophet for hire and we are given the details of this attempted cursing of Israel by someone who is wrongly convinced that he and his people are their next target.

King Balak hires Balaam and we discover that G-d's love for His people is bullet proof. Balaam is eager for the honours and the money this campaign will provide him with, but there is something in this story which is not immediately evident. Balak knew that the children of Israel served the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so he sent for a prophet of YHVH to see if he could be persuaded to curse a people who was too powerful for him to confront militarily.

He selected three of the holiest sites in Moab which were fortress sanctuaries in the hills and which had withstood the attacks of the ancestors of Sihon and Og. There he performed sacrifices with the mistaken impression that prayers offered to G-d by one of His prophets could change G-d's mind and be used against His people, who appeared to be unstoppable.

Balaam had been warned by the L-rd through a donkey not to do or say anything on behalf of the L-rd, other than what the L-rd actually said. I wish more preachers would listen to their donkeys. He proceeds and gives a set of blessings upon Israel which not only speak to the current situation, but also extend to the time when our Messiah would come and establish His reign over all the kingdoms and nations and generations of mankind.

Balak and his elders have also invited the Amalekites, and their destruction is also foretold. After pronouncing four sets of blessing upon Israel, Balaam leaves to go home but we find out later that he returns and in his second campaign, he recommends a spiritual strategy which almost destroys Israel. G-d's love for His people is bulletproof, but when His people violate His Word, they self-destruct and they are only saved by a second violent intervention by the House of Levi, under the leadership of Phineas, Aaron's grandson.

After the incident of the Golden calf, when the Levites stood with Moses against the idolaters, they inherited the priesthood in the place of the first born sons of Israel. On the plains of Moab, when the Moabite prostitute priestesses entered the camp and convinced many Israelites to party with them, a plague broke out among the people and was only stopped when Phineas

executed one of the leaders of Israel who was engaging in idolatrous fornication with one of the leading priestesses of Midian (south Moab).

Because of this, Phineas is guaranteed a perpetual priesthood and he is one of the ancestors of our Messiah, because Mary was both of the House of David and related to the House of Aaron. The prophetic portion speaks of both the deportation to Babylon and of the impact of the Jewish people among the nations during the captivity. They are to bless all nations and to be freed from all and any criminal idolatry. The prophet also reminds them about G-d's bulletproof love, where He delivered them from bondage and refused to curse them.

The passage ends with a threefold summary of the kind of spirituality which will cause us to remain sheltered behind the bullet proof love of G-d and prevent us from self-destructing. We are to practise righteousness, love mercy and walk humbly with our G-d, no matter what storms or doldrums our lives are sailing through, generation by generation. His love is bulletproof; our spirituality has to be as well.

The New Testament portion deals with the sad mystery of Israel's spiritual hardening and the wonderful promise that, through the mercy we have obtained because of their disobedience, they may also find mercy when they return to obedience, because He never has, and never will, ever stop loving them – because the gifts of G-d's calling are irrevocable.

On the verge of great victory, Israel nearly snatches defeat out of the jaws of victory by violating the conditions of the covenant which G-d made with our people. Idolatry and fornication remain forbidden even when the practice of criminal sexuality is becoming enshrined worldwide as a constitutional right.

The practise of criminal idolatry places anyone and everyone outside the bulletproof love of G-d, whenever we take the evil advice of the politically correct modern prophets of Balaam who are on the payroll of any number of modern day Balaks. The double pronged modern Moabite attack on our faith targets both what we believe and the righteousness which these beliefs require if we are not to succumb to modern Moabite prostitution which is gaining worldwide momentum.

His love remains bulletproof and He seeks to bless Israel and all peoples who will abandon their folly and seek the bulletproof shelter which faith in His Word and the practice of biblical righteousness provide, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We need to be willing to listen to any donkey who speaks to us on behalf of the L-rd and who warns us of the imminent destruction which the practice of sinfulness will trigger. Don't let the deceptive and seductive voices of Moab and Balak or the traitorous voice of Balaam separate you from the bulletproof love of G-d in our beloved Messiah which He accomplished at such a great price.

Sermon: **He Will Turn Our Mourning and Fasting Into Joy.**

**Passage: "Thus says YHVH of Hosts. The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month and the fast of the tenth month will change for the House of Judah into days of joy and gladness and festivals of rejoicing: therefore love truth and peace." (Zachariah 8:19)**

This verse mentions four fasts and speaks of the impact which our blessed Messiah will have

on the national mourning our people were experiencing as they went into Babylonian captivity. Today is officially the fast of the fourth month, since all dates in the Bible are calculated from Passover, which we celebrated four months ago. It is called the fast of the 17th of Tammuz and is one of the three fasts which culminate in Tisha B'Av – the black fast, which commemorates the destruction of the first and the second temples.

The fast of the seventh month is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and it is called the white fast. Whenever one of these fasts falls on a Sabbath, it is actually moved to the next day, Sunday, to prevent it from diminishing the joy of the Sabbath, which remains the staple, key festival of Israel. In fact, whenever one of the seven festivals of the L-rd falls on a day which is not a Sabbath, it becomes a special Sabbath, called a Great day in the Scriptures.

Three of these fasts deal with the events which surround the sad destruction of the first and the second temples. The 9th and 10th of Tevet (sunset to sunset) is the fast of the tenth month and was when the final siege of Jerusalem was set by the Babylonians. The 17th of Tammuz is the fast of the fourth month and was when the walls of Jerusalem were finally breached by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar. The 9th of Av is the fast of the fifth month and remembers when both of the temples were burned.

I wanted to check about the fast of Tammuz and was startled to find that the seventeenth of the month is not the date given in the Bible for when the walls were breached. Jeremiah 52:6 gives the ninth of Tammuz as the day when the walls were breached and Jer. 52:12 says that it was on the tenth of the month of Av when the holy temple was burned. I found some references in the Talmud and found that it was on the 17th of Tammuz when the walls of Jerusalem were breached just before the second temple was destroyed (Tannit IV 5).

Since both temples were destroyed about the same date on the Jewish calendar, and in an apparent effort to link the destruction of both temples to a single fast, the date for the fast of the fourth month was changed so that a single commemoration would remember a double disaster. The Talmud also discusses when the Messiah should be born and it is believed that He will be born on one of the fasts which commemorates the destruction of both temples.

The earliest date for the celebration of the birth of our Messiah by first century Messianic Jewish believers was on the fast of the 9th and 10th of Tevet, which sometimes falls on the 25th of December. This was during the census under Quirinius, which occurred outside the festival cycle, when Jews were travelling to Jerusalem and would not have been willing to go to their homes of origin to be counted by their Roman conquerors.

Well, a discussion of the original date for Christmas is something we will be dealing with in our Thursday Yeshiva, but I thought I would use it to gain perspective on how the Bible explains the impact of our Messiah on the national life of Israel. From the moment our people left Egypt, we were called to be a Sabbath powered and festival driven generational community, celebrating the goodness of G-d and this imperative was focused on the arrival of the Messiah of promise. Today I want to talk about how the joy of Israel in the Messiah was intended to also become the joy of all the nations and generations of all mankind.

You see, we need to remember how our people stumbled and fell, both on their way to Canaan and also during the time we dwelt in the Holy Land and especially during the exile (Galut) and the scattering (diaspora), which we have had to endure twice. But even more importantly, we

need to understand about His enduring love for Israel and for all believers, which I called His bulletproof love in my Torah Meditation.

Broadly speaking, modern Judaism teaches that there are two Messiahs who each come once. They believe that the Jewish people are a corporate Messiah, called Ben Joseph, who is suffering for the redemption of the world. At the end of the age, another mysterious character, the glorious Messiah Ben David, will come to establish G-d's everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

They are nearly right, but get no cigar, because there is only one Messiah who comes twice. Once as Ben Joseph to suffer for the sins of the world and achieve everlasting salvation for all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile; and once as Ben David to bring history to a close and inaugurate G-d's everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. These two aspects of His ministry are referred to in the passage which I selected today to speak to you about how He will turn our mourning and fasting into joy.

Zachariah is a very symbolic, prophetic book which deals with both the causes of the exile and also the promises of G-d about the Messiah who will do more than just restore Israel's ancient glory – He will also remove the stain and pain of Israel's disgrace which caused both the wilderness wandering and our generational wandering among the nations of the world. Yom Kippur is put into the mix because we understand that one day all the symbols of redemption and atonement which we celebrate during the High Holy Days were fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of our Messiah.

Our shame and disgrace is only for this life. Our joy and justification is forever, and in our Messiah, all loss and all pain and every stain is removed and swallowed up in the twinkling of an eye when all false gods shall be removed and the L-rd's name shall be one forevermore.

You see, the real tragedy was not the wilderness wandering, and as strange as it might seem, it was also not the destruction of either the first or the second temples. There remain for Jews and Gentiles two mountains which stipulate how G-d will respond to His people according to how they respond to Him and to His Word – either with faith and obedience or with various forms of idolatry and fornication.

By the time the holy shechinah presence of G-d was picked up by the fiery chariot which had wheels within wheels, the holy temple had lost its glory as the house where His eternal presence dwelt on earth in the midst of His people. The downward slide with Solomon culminated in the criminal revolt of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah, and the beautiful building which had stood so long on Mount Moriah was demolished – not once but twice.

The loss of all the holy objects should never be seen as the greatest tragedy. It was the loss of holiness which reduced the holy temple into just a piece of highly decorated rock and wood and metal. Even when Herod refurbished the crumbling second temple and turned it into the biggest building in the ancient world, it was only a national symbol of what was supposed to be a national reality – holiness based on both faith in His promises and obedience to His Word.

It is right and fitting for us to remember the past mistakes of our people so that we do not repeat them and do not wander hopelessly for generations until the scales fall from our eyes and we

see the glory of G-d in the face of our Messiah.

He will erase the shame of the black fast and turn our eyes towards the Heavenly Temple which will one day soon burst out of the clouds and descend to dwell with all the nations and generations of mankind forever. He has already fulfilled the symbols of redemption and atonement and will one day return to gift us with our new bodies when all the elements and atoms of this current universe melt away to make room for the glory which is to come.

And we can rejoice that all the light affliction we have endured over the generations, from the time our first ancestors were excluded from the garden, even if it were all tallied, is not worthy to be compared to the measureless weight of glory which is reserved for us in the world to come.

So even if the fast of the 17th of Tammuz has been moved a day so as not to diminish our joyful rest on this the last Sabbath before the three Sabbaths of Affliction which precede the fast of the 9th of Av (Tisha B'Av), as Messianic believers, we can rejoice with exceeding joy today and every day, that all the pain and stain and disgrace which all of us and any of us has experienced and so richly deserved, has been forever removed before G-d and we will never have to be reminded of it throughout the blissful eternity which is awaiting all the nations and generations of believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

He will one day turn all of our mourning and fasting into joy because of the power of His cross and the wonder of His resurrection and even though I may be saddened by all the violence and horror which the inhabitants of this planet seem to love to wallow in generationally, I will never let it diminish or dim my anticipation of the immeasurable glory which is standing at the door, waiting to burst forth on the foolish and unsuspecting darkness dwellers we dwell amongst.

I am saddened when I hear of another mass shooting in Germany and the mass arrests after the failed coup in Turkey and the I know things are set to get worse before they get better. I am not discouraged because these are only the birth pangs of the Messianic Age of which we are permanent citizens. I am not discouraged when our government, at all levels, tries to impose evolutionary inspired immorality upon our children as it moves to disenfranchise and silence believers, both Jews and Gentiles.

I am not really concerned that Brexit may trigger a worldwide depression and make things even worse than things have been with depressed oil prices in a province which once had the strongest economy in Canada.

You see, good times and bad times may come and go, but these are only temporary stages through which we are passing and which should give us increased opportunities to trust G-d and express our confidence in Him during both the good times and the bad times.

We are only strangers and pilgrims passing through this world and though the ride has too often been bumpy, both personally, nationally and generationally, we can always rejoice because we are on the winning team and when He returns, our Messiah will turn all of our sorrow and fasting into days of joy and happiness and celebration. And this, as long as we love the truth and love the peace of G-d which passes all understanding and which shall, in our Messiah keep our hearts and minds as we walk with the King according to His Word.

I am sorry that both holy temples were burned. I am sorry that a pagan mosque was erected

on the site where these two holy buildings stood. I am sorry that so many who claim to be believers are abandoning the truth of G-d's Word and embracing evolutionary gobbledygook and the criminal immorality which goes along with it. Liberal theology which doubts the truth of G-d's Word is a traitorous fifth column which makes enemies of those who claim to belong to the same household of faith as we do.

I am angry beyond words at the slaughter of infants in their mother's wombs and the worldwide promotion of sexual immorality and crass materialism which falsely promise the joy and satisfaction which only obedience and faith can provide.

Instead of making things worse by physically assaulting the darkness dwellers who have been victimized by the enemy of their souls, instead, I want to rejoice in the L-rd whose kingdom released me from the darkness which nearly swallowed me as a young person.

Even as we come to the fast of Tammuz, we need to let our King turn our sorrow into gladness and teach us the wisdom we need not to repeat the errors of the past and not to remove ourselves from the protection of the bulletproof love of G-d. The loss of a building was tragic. The loss of a homeland was terrible. The proliferation of nuclear weapons of mass destruction is very unsettling.

But the loss of souls at the hands of radicalized false religions and the loss of biblical holiness among believers remains the real tragedy and the one we should mourn, even as we rejoice in the power and wonder of the world which is to come. Shabbat shalom.