

26 Sivan, 5776 (2/7/16) ***The Fervent Effectual Prayer That G-d Answers*** J. M. Terrett

**Shelach Lecha**                      **Send for Yourself**      **Partial obedience equals partial disobedience**

**Torah:**                                      Numbers 13:1-15:41

**Haftarah:**                                Joshua 2:1-24

**Brit Chadashah:**                      Hebrews 3:7-4:11

Summary:

This Torah portion deals with the sending of the twelve spies who bring back a negative report which functionally says that G-d is not strong enough to lead them into the Promised Land – which, although it is fortified, is nowhere near as strong an adversary as Egypt (and most of it was nominally under Egyptian control). The people refuse to go and want to return to Egypt or to die in the wilderness. Moses averts the great wrath of G-d and He grants their request. The generation of warriors who refuse to go in, will die in the wilderness and the people will wander around in the wilderness until those 20 years and older die. The ten spies die of a plague and the people rashly attempt to enter without G-d's blessing and are cut to pieces. The portion ends with instructions about offerings which were to be offered once they entered the Promised Land. One particular generation of Israel may place itself outside the blessing and protection of G-d, but He has and will continue to bless the House of Israel in all our generations.

The Haftarah portion deals with the two spies sneaking into the land and observing the terror of the L-rd. Rahab helps them and she is promised a mini Passover under the protection of the scarlet thread. The spies return to Joshua with an excellent report; the land is ripe for conquest.

The Brit Chadashah portion deals with an application of this rebellion to the lives of believers who are told not to follow in the footsteps of their disobedience. Three levels of Sabbath are referred to: the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbath of faith and obedience which provides rest as we walk with the L-rd, and the eventual, eternal Sabbath which is waiting for all believers who keep the Sabbath of faith and obedience.

Meditation:

The spies were selected from the leadership of each tribe. They are not the princes which brought the offerings, but they are senior leaders from each tribe. Leaders are selected from both Ephraim and Manasseh, since no Levites are to be sent as spies and they are told to go and evaluate the land – its strengths and its weaknesses. There is nothing wrong with their report, but everything is wrong with their recommendation. We are not told whether the seventy elders or the princes joined in the revolt, but Moses is initially unable to convince the people to stop rebelling and to prepare to obey G-d.

In 14:10 the glory of the L-rd appears over the tent of meeting and Moses goes in to speak with the L-rd. It likely went from hovering above the tent to coming down and surrounding the tent as a special summons to Moses and also as a clear testimony to the people that Moses still had the ear and the blessing of G-d. The people perhaps thought that a new plan of action was in the making – one where the L-rd struck the land with plagues and emptied it of their enemies, so they could just walk in and possess it, but that was not the intention of the G-d who never

negotiates the terms of obedience to a direct command.

In 14:12, the L-rd asks Moses to step aside so He can destroy the guilty people, minus perhaps the Levites, the elders and the children, but perhaps with no exceptions. Moses intercedes in the same way he did during the incident of the golden calf and the L-rd accepts his intercession and only those who refused to fight will die in the desert, just as they requested.

In 14:20 there is a prophecy that the glory of the L-rd will fill the earth, since there is no enemy too big nor any situation too complicated for Him to completely and fully handle according to His Word. Two things will happen to this generation as they wander in the wilderness. First their bodies will drop dead, not from a plague, but from age and perhaps discouragement. Secondly, they will be deprived of the Presence of the L-rd. Oh, the cloud and the fire will still be there and they will still be fed manna and quail and their feet will not swell and their clothes will not wear out, but G-d has nothing more to say to them and will have nothing more to do with them. The excitement of the plagues in Egypt and the flight through the wilderness to the quaking mountain and the building of the tabernacle and of the first few camps has been replaced with a foreboding hopelessness because of lost opportunity.

After a couple of more attempted putsches (attempts to overthrow Moses), they settle in to their wandering and there is no record that they dispersed or returned to Egypt. They accepted their punishment and prepared their children for the great task which they were unable to fulfil.

In Joshua, we have a smaller task force sent into the land at the strongest point, across the fords from Jericho. They do not go through much of the land because all they need to hear, they are told by the prostitute Rahab and before they return to prepare for their invasion of the land, they covenant with her a divine deliverance similar to the one our people experienced at Passover. Instead of the lambs' blood, a scarlet thread will protect all those who are in the house as the hosts of G-d pass through the city and annihilate its population. She will be spared and she and her family become an integral part of Israel.

The New Testament portion speaks of this generation's sad destiny as a lesson for all believers and likens the conquest of the land to entering into a Sabbath rest, because faith which is followed through with obedience places us at rest in the L-rd. As we rest in the L-rd, we peacefully await our final Sabbath rest and learn to obey as the inescapable flip side of belief, so that we do not join the ranks of those whose application for discipleship is rejected because of our unbelief (which is another form of disobedience). You see partial obedience equals partial disobedience and prevents us from really walking with the L-rd.

### **Sermon: *The Fervent Effectual Prayer that G-d Answers***

**Passage: *Do not worry about anything, but in everything, let your needs be made known to G-d by prayers and supplications with thanksgiving and the peace of G-d which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Yeshua HaMashiach.*** (Phil. 4:6, 7) ***Cast all your cares upon Him, for He Himself takes care of you.*** (I Peter 5:7) ***Exalt the L-RD with me and let us all celebrate His Name. I sought the L-RD and He heard me and delivered me from all my fears*** (Ps. 34:3,4)

As we spend time this summer examining how to best nurture our souls in a community which

is Sabbath powered and Festival driven, one of the joyful disciplines we want to explore is fervent prayer and supplication. We live in a world brimming over with information overload and where any numbers of influences are constantly vying for our attention. In the midst of this contest for our time and focus, it is not an easy thing to let the things of the L-rd be the basis upon which we build and maintain our perspective.

Authentic, healthy spirituality from a Messianic Jewish perspective, is based on complete faith in Him and in His Word and is expressed by total obedience, so that no matter what is going on in our lives we always stay in close, personal touch with the L-rd as we learn to persistently seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. This is a pretty tall order and it is one which will always need constant revision and renewal in a world where so many voices are clamouring for our allegiance.

This is where fervent effectual prayer comes in. James encourages people to call upon the elders to come and anoint the sick and those who are in distress, because fervent, effectual prayer is what G-d answers. Fervent means from the heart with all of our strength and focus. Effectual means something which is capable of producing the desired effect. So prayer is not just something we say before we eat or as a way to begin or end our meetings.

It is a cry of the heart to G-d when we encounter something which troubles our hearts and minds and even though this kind of crying out is the one which G-d will most readily answer, it is not primarily geared towards getting the desired answer from G-d. Its primary focus will always be to allow us to be uplifted by both seeing things G-d's way and by understanding that He is still in control and is still worthy of our allegiance. It is kind of like going into a huddle so the captain can tell us what we need to do next so the opposing team does not walk all over us and steal away our victory.

This kind of insistent prayer requires sustained frequency, because it does not function well with only occasional use. This kind of fervent prayer has as its goal being heard and being answered, but it is not limited to only receiving one particular answer. It is more focused on providing us with the strength and the strategy we need to apply His Word in every area of our lives. Finally, this kind of prayer lifts us up above the noise of life and shelters us under the wings of the Almighty, even when we know that the same challenges and problems will be waiting for us once our heaven break is over.

You all know that after several months of forced inactivity, I am again starting to get around on my faithful bicycle. Before the blood clot, a ride from my house to the university was just a warm up, now it is a workout and hills I used to climb with no problem are now a real challenge for me. Why is that? I have been cycling regularly for most of my adult life, and especially since my perfume sensitivity has meant that driving is not always a safe option in our toxically aromatic world.

While I was unable to cycle, my muscles lost some of their strength and much of their endurance and I have to build this back up slowly and painfully. You see, you cannot rush from enforced inactivity to full physical fitness, because it takes time and effort to get into shape and to remain in shape. The same is true of prayer. Unless it is a constant habit and unless it is the usual place where you seek G-d and work out the issues and challenges of your life, little concerns will leave you breathless and big concerns will wipe you out because this is not the way you are used to handling what you encounter on your pilgrimage through this life. Don't let your

prayer life get out of shape!

You see, prayer does not have to be a long, protracted activity where you lock yourself away for hours at a time. It can be a dialogue with G-d where you talk over what is going on in your life and where you learn to see things from His perspective, so that when a big storm hits you are not so out of shape that you are overwhelmed, snared and taken.

Prayer is first a personal activity in our hearts and in our closet where we keep short tabs with G-d and offer up our desires and fears to Him so that nothing and no one comes between us and our Saviour. It is also a group activity where community members seek the L-rd for the needs of a congregation and often the biggest need is to make sure we stay on the same page together in the L-rd and fulfil His agenda for us, rather than always trying to do things our own way. It is also something which we need to do before meals and to begin and close our meetings. Praise and worship is a vital form of prayer and we need to engage in this productive activity as a principle means of staying in shape spiritually.

If we want to be ready to face whatever comes our way, we need to make sure that walking in the ways of the L-rd keeps us spiritually fit so that our hearts and minds are regularly being kept by Him and we always live poised to do His will. One of the features of walking through this life is to be constantly aware that the choices we make will have more of an impact on our spirituality than any of the actual events which come our way. And whether we like it or not, G-d will not always warn us about what is coming our way and we have to build up a series of personal spiritual reflexes that can move into action at a moment's notice.

I came to faith in an evangelical context and moved into the Charismatic world of powerful worship and joyful prayer where talking to G-d and hearing from G-d were considered to be daily norms that all believers should be involved in. I still want to always be regularly engaging with G-d but far too often this can become a one way street where what we want from G-d takes centre stage away from what G-d wants from us. It would seem that for some believers the only kind of acceptably answered prayer involves always getting what you want from G-d and not stopping praying until this eventuality occurs.

While I do want to hear from G-d and while I do have things I want to see happen in my life which can only come from G-d, fervent effectual prayer should be seen more as a sifting through all the gimme, gimme's until we reach a place of neutrality and can say, not my will but Yours be done. Prayer is more about putting G-d in charge than being in charge.

You see, we will not always have time to stop and pull over and seek the L-rd at length and if we mistakenly consider answered prayer primarily as getting what we want from G-d, then we will sadly become more interested in getting what we want instead of finding out what G-d wants from us. What we should be in the habit of doing is expressing what we want from G-d so we can get it out of the way and have all of our cards on the table so we are ready to do what He tells us to do, once we have settled down enough to listen.

Prayer is more about hearing from G-d than it is about making sure that G-d hears from us because we are not trying to get Him to do what we want; we are trying to learn what it is He wants us to do. What He is saying to us is more important than what we are saying to Him.

As I teach on answered prayer, I learn more about listening to G-d and see prayer as a means

of putting aside the immediate so that we can see and do what is really important. Let me review my five answers to prayer with you and see if they are working for you. The most common answer to prayer is "no", because prayer is a petition where we ask G-d for something and is never an order where we expect Him to do for us what we have told Him to do. Prayer never put us in the driver's seat; it seats us beside the driver.

Sometimes He says "yes", especially when we have done our homework and have learned not to ask for the wrong things and have stopped trying to push our weight around and tell Him what to do. All too frequently He will say: "wait" or "not yet" and instead of having the feeling that we have come away empty, we need to see that staying in contact with Him through His Word is more important than any simple eventuality we are concerned about.

More frequently than we like to admit He tells us: "none of your business" because we are only told details from our own story and are not permitted to access details that are really not our concern as we learn to mind our own spiritual business. Again we have to learn that prayer is not focusing G-d's attention on things which are important to us; it is learning to be focused on things which are important to Him. Too often, we get it backwards.

Related to this is a special answer to prayer where G-d says: "you do not know enough yet to understand, you have to grow and learn more before I can tell you any more". Prayer is primarily for us to remain in constant contact with G-d and to learn to rise up above the noise of life and discern how He wants us to behave because we trust in Him and in His over lordship in every area of our lives. To quote an American president, do not ask what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. The same applies to prayer.

Finally, there is a renewal and rest aspect to prayer which has got very little to do with tangible results and has a lot to do with catching your breath and taking a "Mary" break, sitting at the feet of the Saviour, instead of rushing around until, like Martha, you are exhausted.

Ever since our first ancestors began their lives on our planet, we have been on a generational journey to the next life and in every generation, the things of this life, continue to fade and pass away until our time is over and we join those who are resting in the dust, waiting for the next life to dawn. Since we are on a journey to our permanent lives and since nothing that happens to us in this life is permanent, be it ever so good or ever so bad, prayer can help us keep things in perspective and give us regular "eternity breaks" so that the things of this life never crowd out the things of the life to come and render us spiritually dim.

This is not a call for mystic revelation or trances where we experience visions like John and Daniel and Ezekiel. It is a call for us to learn to be at ease in the presence of the L-rd because this presence is both our destination and the place our spirits can recharge when life begins to suck the heath out of our bones. Life is a struggle where we have to be constantly making choices and are always facing challenges, both when we are young and when we begin to age. Life never seems to stand still, but one day we all know it will be over. So it should remain something we are passing through and not something we feel we are stuck with, as if there were not something better waiting for us once the dust settles.

Prayer can lift us to a sheltered place under His wings where His voice can speak to us of the life which is to come and remind us who it is we belong to, so that our hearts and minds are not overwhelmed by the busyness of life to the point of losing touch with the life which is to come.

There is a lot to do in this life as we seek to speak up on behalf of the orphan and the oppressed and as we seek to proclaim the kingdom to people who are snared by the lies of evolution and who have mistaken the secular for the sacred – and the politically correct for that which is righteous and holy.

Mercy seeks to set the captive free and to heal the broken hearted and to shine a light into the dark, broken corners of our world. It does not aim to make people feel good about themselves as they violate the principles of divine justice in favour of carnal satisfaction and folly. Prayer lifts us above the perspective of the darkness of this world and renews our connection with eternity, both in what we believe and in the spirituality and morality we endorse. Prayer should keep us connected with eternity on a daily basis.

Have you let prayer become an occasional habit, instead of a constant discipline? Are you comfortable in the presence of the Lord so that you are able to settle down and listen instead of constantly wanting to be heard? Do you really want your prayers answered or do you just want to get your own way? Is the shelter of His wings a place of renewal which you constantly access so that the things of this life do not drown out the reality of the life which is to come? Is your prayer life helping you to prepare for the life which is to come as you make sheltering under His wings a regular source of renewal and strength? Are your prayers fervent and effectual and do you sense that they are being answered and not ignored?

As we grow our prayer lives, we nurture our souls and renew our spirit and prevent this world which is withering and passing away, from dragging us down with it, instead of being the salty light it so badly needs. Prayer should energize our souls and enrich our lives. The effectual, fervent kind always will. Let's pray.