

16 Av, 5776 (20/8/16) **The Whole Truth and Nothing But The Truth** J. M. Terrett

VaEtchanan	And I Plead
Torah:	Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11
Haftarah:	Is. 40:1-26
Brit Chadashah:	Matthew 23:31-39

Today is the first of the Seven Shabbats of Consolation which will take us out of the depths of sadness concerning the destruction of the two temples and other disasters which have befallen our people over the centuries and lead us to Rosh Hashanah and another new year to serve the L-rd and be cherished, chastened and guided by Him through His Word.

I selected the title: the whole truth and nothing but the truth because it reflected one of the aspects of the title of this week's Torah portion – pleading which is part of every court case where evidence is presented and evaluated before a judgment is pronounced. Deuteronomy is in fact a double pleading – Moses is pleading with the L-rd on behalf of the people and he is pleading with the people on behalf of the L-rd.

The generation which grew up in the wilderness needed to learn the lessons which would prevent it from being rejected as the generation of the exodus was. The eternal fate of those warriors of the lost generation is a question which could be discussed at length during our weekly Yeshiva (and we are starting to fill up all the seats around the table in the conference room, but we could still accommodate many more!).

Today, I would like to once more combine my sermon with the Torah portion as I plead with you to consider how we, as individuals and as a congregation, can stand for the whole truth and nothing but the truth and not be relegated to doing laps around whatever mountains or issues in our lives prevent us from moving ahead and growing to maturity in the L-rd through His Word.

Let me first summarize the three portions before I launch into the pleading I want to present for you this morning.

This is one of the longer Torah portions and it could be broken down into five sections, which are all related to one another. First, Moses pleads unsuccessfully with the L-rd to be able to lead the people into Canaan and be buried among his people. Next he pleads with the people to attach themselves to the Word and turn their lives into a singular context where all aspects of its teachings are fully applied.

He moves in to present the Ten Commandments in the new context because he is not addressing former slaves who have recently escaped from Egypt, but a new generation which has recently come out of wandering in the wilderness. The exodus generation was called to remember the Sabbath because of Creation and this new generation is to remember the Sabbath because they are no longer slaves, but a people set free by G-d.

It is this freedom which allowed them rest in Him and serve Him. We are to observe the Sabbath for both reasons as we learn to rest in our Creator and learn not to allow any slave habits to pull us away from serving the King who set us free from the Egypt of this world.

The next section gives the Shema and reminds us that the Law of G-d is our primary inheritance and putting it into practice in every area of our lives remains our primary task. The portion ends with the exhortation to chase out all the Canaanites and not to allow any of their corrupting religious influences to infect the people and spoil their victory as they take possession off he land. Accommodation to new and varied situations is a necessary, wholesome endeavour and is never the same thing as assimilating into the foreign beliefs and pagan practices of the nations we are called to be a witness to.

The prophetic portion is one of the most comforting passages in the Bible and reminds us that G-d remains sovereign over and above the changes in our lives, be they ever so good or ever so bad. This is the chapter where Isaiah shifts from warning the people that they are going to go into captivity because of their iniquities and concentrates on comforting them because the redemptive work of our King whose purposes will restore them to the purposes we were called to fulfil. No matter who we are, or where we are, G-d can restore us and overcome all and any barriers to His grace and His comfort in our lives.

The New Testament portion is both a judgement upon the generation of Israel which rejected our Messiah and a plea to this same group to forsake their spiritual digressions and seek refuge under the wings of the Almighty. It also says that they will not see the Messiah again until they recognize Him for who He is as the only One who comes in the name of the L-rd. We may sometimes mistakenly assume that we can own the Word of G-d, when in fact it is the other way around – G-d's Word wants to own us and teach us that on certain things, He will not budge, no matter how long it takes us to come around.

I want to use one verse from the Torah portion to launch my discussion of the whole truth and nothing but the truth:

***You shall add nothing to that which I prescribe unto you and you shall take away nothing from it; but you shall observe the commandments of YHVH your G-d in the manner in which He prescribed them to you*** (Deut. 4:2)

The word prescribe is related to the word prescription, where not only the type, but the amount and frequency of medication is outlined and should not be altered, if it is to be able to get its work down and accomplish the healing for which it was given. The new generation needed to be reminded that while their circumstances may be altered, their need to both study the Word and to put it into practice unaltered and undiluted remained their primary spiritual duty.

This remains our primary spiritual duty today, just as it has been in every generation of believers, both Jewish and Gentile, since the commandments were originally given.

Trends may come, and empires may rise up and come crashing down as new and wonderful

challenges in our lives clamour for our attention. G-d, through His Word, should always have our primary and undivided attention, if we do not wish to wander from the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

There may come moments where we find ourselves in situations that have started to pull us away from walking with the L-rd as we wander through this life on our way home to our Father's house in glory. Whenever we become aware of this, we need to realign our hearts and turn our feet back towards the path of His Word, because walking on it is the only way home for our lost, darkening and dying world.

There are two extremes which our passage calls us to avoid, because we are neither to add to the Word which we have received, nor are we to delete anything from it. It is the whole truth and it is nothing but the truth and does not wither, nor will it ever pass away.

In our modern world we have access to an almost endless number of voices which want to inform us and influence us and too many believers get caught in traps where they are either persuaded to add to the Word (the "yes, but, has G-d really said" approach) or they are convinced that only certain portions of it still apply in our brave new world.

As we wind up our current year and prepare to welcome a new year, we need to understand that our greatest challenge will always be keeping our houses firmly on the rock of His Word and our trees planted by the rivers of water that flow from His Word. I want to caution you this morning against many modern versions of old problems which always fall into the two categories which Moses warned the people to avoid: adding to or taking away from the Word.

In order to accomplish this great task, we need to realize that it is our responsibility to make sure that what we are feeding our souls on is in fact nourishment for our souls and not some counterfeit or some junk food which will weaken us and try to choke His Word out of us.

Now with everything which is available on line, on TV and through books, seminars and even spiritual infomercials, we have a lot to wade through and it would be impossible for one person or one community to be aware of all of it. But here in lies the danger which is ever so subtle. We are often told: how do you know if it is any good unless you examine it? This sounds quite reasonable and in many cases, when people have asked me to look into a group or a new teaching, I have done so with mixed results.

There are ever so many sincere, valid ministries doing a good work, but not always in areas where we are trying to work and we have to be wise with the use of our time and our resources. There are also other ministries whose agenda challenges the truths of G-d's Word and who want us to leave where we are currently and join with them as they make what appears to be a heroic stance which they claim not everybody is willing to take.

I want to avoid being too naive and too critical as we wade through these concerns.

Two verses in Luke's gospel may help us as we endeavour to be fair and balanced as we

approach our need for the whole truth and nothing but the truth:

***Do not hinder them, for the one who is not against you is for you. (Luke 9:50)  
The one who is not with Me is against Me and the one who does not gather with Me, scatters. (Luke 11:23).***

Sincere, biblically balanced ministries do not need our permission or even our approval to continue to do a fine work in our darkening world and if they are not against us, we can consider that they are for us. In the same token, there are others who are against us and not for us and the impact they have upon the work we are trying to accomplish is to scatter and not gather, because they have somehow taken a stand against the teaching of the Bible (either to add or to take away).

Coupled with this, while we have to have a firm, sincere grasp of the truth, sincerity is not always a measure of the truth. Last week, I discovered that a young man I was sharing with in the sauna was a Mormon and I was introduced to one of his religion teachers. He impressed me as someone who was quite sincere and honestly believed in the spurious claims of Joseph Smith and his followers. I did not immediately engage in a confrontation because I deemed it would not be helpful until I got to know him better and I did not want the young man I am sharing with to be turned off by my hostility to something he holds dear.

It does not mean that I am open to accepting Mormonism, or the false teachings of other groups who add to the Bible, like the Jehovah's Witnesses, or who take away from it like Scientology, and others who offer alternate explanations for the origin and the meaning of life. While I want to be open to discuss, I never want my openness to be perceived as spiritual uncertainty when I become aware that either something is being added to the Word or taken away from it.

In Messianic circles, we have our fair share of those who want to add to the Word and influence us to accept the teachings of the Talmud as on par with the Bible, when they are not. We have others who want to remove distinctions which the Bible clearly teaches between Jewish and Gentile believers and either have us reject anything and everything Jewish or have us adopt everything and anything Jewish, rather than looking at what the Bible teaches.

Whenever you encounter a ministry or a teaching which sounds good, before you sign up and begin to promote it, or before you go gunning for it, you need to ask yourself three questions.

First does anything which is taught try to add to what the Bible says and thus subtly undermine our single source of authority for faith and practice? While we understand that every community and every individual will naturally develop traditions which help us to express and pass on our faith, we always need to draw a clear distinction between the clear teachings of the Bible and how we are making accommodations in our context to make sure that the word is fully and faithfully applied in our lives.

There is a great deal of spiritual flexibility in the Gospel so it can be applied generationally in a large number of different contexts as long as we do not burden the simple message with our

traditions, which is the biggest dilemma Jewish people have unsuccessfully struggled with over the centuries. The Torah stands alone, unable to be changed or added to by those who sincerely want to walk with G-d according to His clear stipulations.

Secondly, is anything taught or promoted which takes away from the clear teachings of Scripture to make room for content which contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture? Any acceptance of evolutionary mythology or of politically correct immorality takes away from what the Bible teaches and cannot be endorsed by believers, no matter how sincere and convincing our modern secular society may try to sound. Taking away from what the Bible teaches sets up those who do so to eventually completely remove and overthrow our only guide to faith and practice. If what they say sounds good, let's look at the teachings in light of the Word and refuse to be duped by the enemy who hates us and the Word so much.

There is a third question we need to ask. Once we have established that a particular ministry or teaching has validity and neither takes away from the Word nor adds to it, we have to ask whether our involvement with the group will take away from our own lives and ministries and consume resources which should be applied where we are called to labour.

When the apostle Paul (Rav Sh'aul) outlines the nine fruit of the spirit there are two of them which apply to our discussion here: goodness and kindness. Briefly, goodness may be defined as what we do, while kindness may describe our desire to wish others well, when we are unable to get involved in the good which they are doing.

We only have so much time and energy and when Moses was prepping the new generation to enter the Holy Land, he wanted them to understand that they were going into the land with only one spiritual mandate – to put into practice the Word which they received, without adding to it or deleting from it. This remains our primary spiritual focus in our globalizing world where so many voices are clamouring for our attention and our allegiance.

Our spiritual success or our spiritual failure will always only be measured by how firmly we grip the Word, without adding to it or deleting from it. King David prayed asking the L-rd to search him and try him and see if there was any wicked way in him, so that he could jettison everything and anything which kept him from being led by the L-rd in the way everlasting, the path which leads to eternity.

You are not responsible for all the voices you hear and all the influences which you encounter, you only become responsible for the voices you listen to and the influences you allow into your lives. I would love to go into more detail and warn you about those voices I know of which are pernicious and which want to detach you from the Word of our King, but I never want to spend too much time teaching about what you should *not* believe or about the things which you should *not* put into practice. I want to concentrate on what we *should* believe and what we *should* put into practice, so by way of review, here is my guide to evaluating teaching which you encounter before you get involved with them or allow them to influence your life.

This forms part of a teaching system which I developed over the years and which I used to call

5-5-5. Briefly there are five beliefs for your head, five assurances for your heart and five disciplines for your life – and I have added five covenants for your generations. Ask for your copy of Word Alive where these are outlined and we will have some good discussions about authentic biblical spirituality in a modern world that is sliding back down the garden path into the same kind of foolishness and deceit which took over the world in the days of Noah in the lead up to the universal flood.

Let me give you the 5 beliefs so that when you encounter a teaching or a position, you can ask yourself whether it is biblically kosher and worthy of your allegiance. Do they agree that:

1. **The Bible is the word of G-d** – and no other document.
2. **Yeshua is the son of G-d** and there is no other Saviour.
3. **He was born of a virgin** and He alone is called, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty G-d, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.
4. **He died on the cross for the sins of the world.** It was no accident and it was not a defeat, His human nature was the perfect sacrifice which His divine nature applies to the hearts of all believers in every generation.
5. **He was buried, risen, He ascended into Heaven and He will one day return** to set up G-d's everlasting Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. Nothing less than this Kingdom is worthy of our allegiance or our time and our resources.

Only a five out of five is good enough for believers who want to walk with the L-rd, but there are two final considerations before we close the service and promenade the Torah. Does this teaching or ministry enrich or supplement where we are called to serve the L-rd or will it divide our loyalty and split our resources? Secondly, we recognize that there are any number of good ministries which we will not be able to support, but for which we can pray and from which we can draw encouragement as we see the hand of the L-rd active in any number of contexts across the globe, other than our own.

We need to live for the truth and nothing but the truth, without adding to the Word or subtracting from it. There are those who are not against us but whose ministry we are not involved in and there are those who are definitely against us and who want to separate us from our firm grasp of His Word. Also, we cannot be involved with every good thing which other ministries are doing and while we can wish them well, we need to be careful to apply our resources to the context we have been called to as our place of service in His Kingdom.

Are you using this kind of wisdom as you make sure that your life is all about the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Shabbat shalom.