

Vayikra **And He called Rituals of Accessibility**

Torah: Exodus 1:1-6:7 (5:26)

Haftarah: Isaiah 43:21-44:23

Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 10:1-18

Reading: Bernie Page 175 and Psalm 50. Jewish hero: Esau (Edom). Torah Carrier: Marie

Meditation:

The Book of Leviticus outlines the rituals of accessibility so that the people who had recently seen the Tabernacle set up and the Presence begin to hover over it, would know how to gain access to this Presence. In the ancient Middle East, pagans developed all kinds of rituals and ceremonies to try and influence and in fact gain control over their false gods. Many of them felt that they were feeding their gods and that the more numerous and elaborate their sacrifices were, the more likely they were to be heard and get what they wanted from their false gods.

This was not to be the case with Israel. The entire sacrificial system was designed to provide access to G-d so that a right relationship with G-d could be maintained and so that His sovereignty over the people could be renewed. Israel was to offer sacrifices as a way of submitting themselves to G-d and agreeing to walk with Him according to His Word. It was not set up so that the people could come to G-d with a wish list which they could check off – it was more Israel asking G-d what He would have them to do.

They were not feeding G-d, they were including Him in every part of their lives and declaring His kingship over them in every area of their lives. They were set up to be celebrations of His provision and of His forgiveness and atonement in full recognition that there was a ritual distance which had to be maintained between them and YHVH. This was for their protection, but it also opened a way for them to be in contact and in relationship with the Presence which was to remain the focal point of their lives and the centre around which their lives were to revolve.

The three big objectives of this system of spiritual accessibility were thanksgiving, forgiveness and atonement. They were to express thanksgiving for His provision and protection, and these sacrifices were shared with the Levites and a portion of them were eaten by the people in the presence of G-d. Thanksgiving was to be a tangible expression of gratitude for the goodness which G-d showed both the nation and the individual people.

At times when the people sinned or violated any of the moral or ritual stipulations which YHVH placed on them as covenant people, they were to seek for forgiveness, so that the fellowship which was broken could be restored and the people could move back into a position of positive submission under the L-rd's provision and protection.

Atonement sacrifices, which also means cleansing, were ceremonies where the stain and the pain of the sin or the defilement was removed – was scrubbed away, fully and completely. The rituals were both precise and intricate, in order to assure that the ritual and practical centrality of YHVH in the lives of the people. They celebrated the imminence of the Presence in their midst and His desire to be involved in their lives, not as a deity who could be controlled

or manipulated, but one who could be worshipped as the people learned to submit to His will and serve Him. It was also a system of positive spiritual hygiene where sin and problems could be dealt with so there were no barriers preventing the Presence from blessing, healing and guiding and directing the people on the paths of righteousness which lead to the green pastures, even in the presence of their enemies.

As we go through this technical book, we will be exploring some pretty complicated ritual behaviour which had to be followed so that the people could keep a safe ritual distance between themselves and YHVH and yet allow Him to be the central guiding light of their lives on their pilgrimage through this life.

The Haftarah portion in Isaiah reaffirms the objectives of this ritual behaviour. G-d wants to forgive them and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness as He proclaims that He is the only G-d and not just one of many gods. A description is given of the futility of idolatry, where people construct wooden idol and bow down to a portion of the wood, while they use the other portion of wood to cook their food with.

These people are crying out to a piece of wood and have closed their eyes and shut out understanding because they worship the creation and not the Creator. They forget that it is G-d who has formed them, forgiven them and who wants to save them and to deliver them, because He alone is G-d and none of the false gods or idols of the people are real or able to do anything for the people who made them.

The New Testament portion also speaks of the sacrificial system as granting ritual access to YHVH until the arrival of the Messiah of promise who dealt with sin once and for all and who wrote the Laws of G-d on our hearts. Our hearts become the place of meeting where this eternal forgiveness is renewed so that YHVH remains the centre around which our lives revolve. and since His blood brings us eternal life, the only sacrifices we bring to Him are those of praise and thanksgiving.

The rituals of accessibility remind us that He is in heaven and that we are on earth, and they give us a means of establishing contact with YHVH and keeping Him as the centre around which our lives revolve.

Before the arrival of the Messiah, this was accomplished by a system of rituals and sacrifices which has been fulfilled in our Messiah. In Leviticus we see a sacrificial system which kept the Presence at the centre of the people's lives, in anticipation of the one sacrifice which was to come. For us we look back and rejoice that He granted our people ritual access so they could express thanksgiving and remain in right relationship with the presence which hovered over them. For them they looked forward to the day when the Presence would turn their hearts into the place where the Presence meet with them. And we both look forward to the day when all things shall be fulfilled and full accessibility is granted and we both declare our need to keep Him and His Word as the centre around which our hearts and lives revolve. Join us in our pilgrimage through this amazing book which is all about access.

Sermon: Passover Mini-series: Beware of Bushwhackers

Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey when you came out of Egypt, how he encountered you on the way and without any fear of G-d, he fell upon you from behind, upon those who lagged behind when you were weary and faint. Therefore when the L-

RD has given you rest after having delivered you from all the enemies who surround you, in the country which the L-RD gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the Heavens: do not forget. (Deut. 25:17-19)

As we come to the season of Passover and recount once again, the glorious story of our people's deliverance from Egyptian bondage, I am giving you a mini-Series which deals with the journey from Egypt to our camping around the Holy Mountain. Our people had to make the transition from living as slaves to becoming the covenant people of YHVH, ready to hear His word and put it into practice in every area of their lives.

In a very real sense, we are also called to make the same transition and we can use some of the features of their journey to make sure that we live intact lives, free from the stains and influences of the world through which we are travelling, but to which we never belong. I have already spoken with you about the cleansing waters of Mara, where all the parasites of Egypt were purged from our people and we need to be reminded that we also need purging whenever the spiritual infections of the world try to take up residence in our hearts and lives.

I also spoke about the Sabbath as our main gig, because even as our people wandered towards the mountain, they had to learn to trust in His provision and not allow the oppression of the morbid eventuality to rob them of their confidence in His ability to meet their needs. The Sabbath is our weekly Heaven break where the things of this world cease to be our focus so that we can be renewed, healed and empowered to face anything and everything which crosses our path on our journey to our Final Home.

As the people were getting used to eating manna and adjusting to the daily shade of the cloud and the sight of the fire each night, there was another spiritual reality which hit them when they least expected it – the bushwhacking Amalekites. Without warning and without provocation this group of people attacked from behind and targeted the stragglers who were the weakest and most vulnerable members of the camp.

This was the first military encounter the people had to face and a short, violent campaign drove off these attackers and likely rescued any prisoners they may have taken. The full campaign against these enemies was not to be undertaken until the land was fully conquered and secured from all other enemies who stood in their way. There are three lessons which can learn about handling bushwhackers who would try to divert our attention from the purposes of G-d in our lives. First of all, none of us are excluded from any number of the sudden unprovoked attacks, even when we are fully walking with the L-rd with our eyes focused on the things of His Kingdom. Secondly we have to deal with these attacks to the extent that their influence in our lives is removed, even if we are not ready to fully deal with their potential to cause us trouble at some future date.

Lastly, no matter how many enemies rise up against the kingdom during our pilgrimage towards our Father's House, we must remain kingdom focused and not allow any issue or issues to become the central focus of our lives and or our pilgrimage.

I am in my fifth decade of walking with the L-rd and I have survived any number of spiritual assassination plots which have tried to sink me and my ministry (and my marriage and my family and my health and my joy and victory). I have too often felt like David who was startled and troubled by all the people who became his enemies for no good reason and ho hated him,

even though he had never done him any harm.

Patti and I have sheltered troubled youth in our home and have engaged in intensive intervention and counselling with a broad spectrum of hurting, broken people and sadly and suddenly, we have seen people turn on us as if we were the ones who caused their pain. It is called transference and occurs when people become angry with those who have hurt them and they strike out at those who are in close range, even when the original perpetrators are gone and are no longer part of their lives.

we have helped them to learn to forgive and to rebuild stability and joy and peace in their lives and seemed to be making considerable progress, when out of the blue we become the enemy who not only needs to be cut off from the lives we were helping, but who also needs to be prevented from becoming involved with other troubled lives. This does not always happen, but it has often happened with no warning and without any provocation.

The House of Jacob had no designs on the land of the Amalekites and were actually walking around it and not through it, so they had no reason to attack Israel but they had obviously spying out their camp's weak spots and took advantage when the people were not expecting to be attacked. People who have no real business being our enemies and whom we have not harmed, both outsiders and insiders, will suddenly take it into their heads to bushwhack us when we least expect it.

When this happens, instead of recriminating ourselves by saying we should have seen it coming, when no warning was given that it was going to come, we need to see that unprovoked attacks will happen even when we are fully walking with the L-rd and doing everything the way we should be doing things – and are trying to maintain the bonds of unity in love and to resolve all and any conflicts according to biblical guidelines for conflict resolution. The enemy of our souls will try and stall us and stop us and distract us and one of the most heinous of these strategies are unprovoked bushwhacking when we least expect it.

If there is one consistent trigger we could identify in the process, it would be one or a series of unresolved issues which, when uncloaked, will do their best to act like good Amalekites and strike out with no fear of G-d and hit from behind when we do not expect an attack from that direction. Some people's hearts and lives are like so many Pandora's boxes, where pain and evil are lurking in disguise waiting for the right moment or the wrong moment to spring forth and try to wreck havoc in the camp.

Our Vision Statement invites the scrutiny of G-d's Word so that these boxes can be opened and their contents dealt with redemptively to enrich the lives who experience resolution.

However, we need to understand that there are Amalekites who do not want to resolve and be healed, but who want to fight and cause dissension and they want to make us feel that it is our problem, even though we had no part in creating the problem or doing any of the damage. May the L-rd help us not to be harbouring any Pandora's boxes in our hearts and lives so that we do not suddenly become Amalekites attacking and backbiting and gossiping because we would rather indulge our anger and pain, than deal with it.

I once heard someone teach that we should never make our congregational life all about problem solving, because worship and love and joy and peace are what we should always be about and I agree. Sometimes we will have to hold our arms up and fight off these attacks so

that peace is restored and our journey home can be upheld as our primary focus once again.

Over the years, we have seen people come and people go, but our congregational life will always be about worship and love and joy and peace. And if the truth be told, we have seen many lives turned around and healed because we want to always provide a safe place for people to grow in the L-rd as they learn to expect His providence. We need to refuse to be distracted when we are bushwhacked and our objective is to drive off the attack, without making our congregational life all about the attacks which suddenly spring up in our path.

We are not called to resolve issues which refuse to be resolved and sometimes all we should do is send the attackers on their way until we are in a place of being able to successfully address issues which spring up in our midst. The camp did not stop and plan a full assault on the bushwhackers because nothing was to be allowed to distract the journey to the Holy Mountain and eventually to Canaan. We may not always be allowed to have the last word and we may not be able to defend ourselves or address all the accusations which are made against us and we may have to live in the midst of a good and a bad reputation.

Instead of wondering what we could have done better, we have to understand that sometimes doing better would not have influenced the outcome, because for some people will cling to their Pandora's box until they are finally willing to abandon their pain and darkness and walk in the light. And as we come to terms with bushwhacking, we need to avoid listening to what is said behind people's backs and focus on the L-rd through His word and not be drawn into conflicts which are none of our business.

Finally, even with the many moral and spiritual dilemmas we are facing on our pilgrimage through enemy held territory on our way home, we need to aggressively refuse to let any one issue distract us from our central purpose, which is celebrating and anticipating the coming Kingdom and dealing with our own baggage so that we do not get any unpleasant surprises on Judgment Day.

What is considered right and wrong is being altered as what we believe is sidelined more and more and even portrayed as irrelevant, outdated and primitive. Issues such as abortion, gay rights and the rising tide of evolutionary humanism should to be addressed from a biblical perspective which is kingdom focused. The civil rights movement, which used to tackle racism and prejudice against visible minorities, including attempts to deprive women of equal pay for equal work, has adopted as issues worth defending which the Bible defines as unacceptable and even as abominable.

It goes a step further to wrongly define the upholding of biblical standards of morality as a form of abuse which deprives supposedly vulnerable people of their basic human rights. There are a whole series of modern day Amalekites who are bushwhacking us and calling for us to accept and protect forbidden sexual practices. Across our globe, babies are being slaughtered in their mother's wombs as a right, even though it involves the loss of a life at this vital stage of human development.

However, this encroaching darkness is only a part of the Amalekite bushwhacking we will have to contend with as we refuse to lose our kingdom focus and make our lives all about our King and not about the human folly we have been delivered from. Immorality is becoming a steam roller and Pandora's boxes are springing open all around us at an increasingly alarming rate, but as we come once again to the season of Pesach, we are not going to let these attacks on

us become the focus of our pilgrimage through this life.

I accepted the L-rd during the season of Passover in 1972 and I have been walking with Him ever since, despite the relentless attacks of various Amalekites who keep springing up to capture me, stall me or slow me down. I know that I may not be able to fully deal many of the generational Amalekites who keep bushwhacking me on my journey to my Father's Home in glory.

All I can do is to keep focused on Him through His Word and not let any one particular issue of any particular group of attacks distract me from my central purpose, which is to live each day for the Kingdom which is to come and to allow His righteousness to remain rooted and grow deeper and stronger in my life, every day and in every way. I want Him to empty and resolve all and any contents of my personal Pandora's box, even if I have to dodge and duck those who would attempt to dump the contents of their Pandora's boxes into my life and into our community.

When I say that we need to beware of bushwhackers and not let their sudden attacks trouble us overly or derail us from our journey, this is actually a commandment from the L-rd. Until we are in a place to deal with any and all Amalekites who suddenly spring up and get in our faces, or swoop down on us when we are not looking, we should lift up our hands, drive them off and continue on our journey, daily and constantly, towards our Father's House. This is how our blessed Messiah handled everything which was thrown at Him – He walked through a minefield of possibilities without being blown out of the water because G-d will always provide a way of escape even when (especially when) we are bushwhacked.

Walking with the L-rd is our calling and His Word is our mandate and its strategies are the responses He wants us to endorse as we wander through this life. He will always equip us to fight off the bushwhackers as we set straight paths for our feet and refuse to be sidetracked away from our kingdom focus. There is an Amalek who is trying to derail us personally, globally and generationally, but as long as we walk with the L-rd according to His Word and make our lives all about Him and the Kingdom, day by day and year by year and issue by issue, then we will always be able to rise above the sudden storms which strike us. His word warns us to watch out for Amalekites, without making Amalekites our focus. As we come to Passover for another year, how is your kingdom focus doing? Never let the bushwhackers scare you or distract you, they are temporary, Him and His kingdom are forever.