

11 Elul, 5777 (11/09/17) **Fifth of Consolation: The Case of the Missing Arm** J. M. Terrett

Ki Tetse **When You Go Out**

Torah: Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

Haftarah: Isaiah (52:13-53:12) 54:1-10

Brit Chadashah: I Corinthians 5:1-5

Reading: Marie pp. 151,153 and Ps. 32. Jewish Hero: David. Torah carrier: Donna

Today is the fifth Shabbat of Consolation and for our shortened service, I will be basing my sermon around the prophetic portion. The Torah portion is another long one and re-emphasizes some of the principles the Children of Israel were to live by and enforce, once they took possession of the Promised Land. They were both to eradicate all the ludicrous perverted religious practices of the Canaanites and to make sure that they did not likewise fill the land with uncleanness by the way they chose to live.

Two verses stand out that need some cultural contextualization: 24:18 and 25:11. They were not to allow any Israelite to become a female of a male religious prostitute and they were not to use the price of prostitution in the fulfillment of any vow. The sexual perversion of a male prostitute and the salary of His fornication is euphemistically referred to as the price of a dog. They were never to dignify any form of ritual fornication as an acceptable religious practice since this was an abomination to YHVH. Fornication can never be exalted to the level of spirituality whether it is heterosexual or homosexual.

Next, we have to understand why a woman who came to her husband's aid in a fight by seizing his opponent's private parts (shameful parts), should have her hand cut off. In Ancient Israel there was a unique custom whereby one man made a solemn oath with another man by putting his hand under the other's thigh. This is a euphemism for grabbing hold of the other's privates. The only acceptable reason for a man's privates to be grabbed was as part of a solemn sealing of an oath. Grabbing them as part of a fight debased this practice and gave it needless, unwanted sexual overtones.

There was a variation of this practice in Ancient Rome. When a man was certifying that his testimony was valid, he would grab his own testicles as he gave evidence. The word "testify" is derived from this practice. We may find this practice incredibly offensive and some even deny that this practice occurred, even though the words come from the same root word, but we should never impose our sense of propriety on practices from another culture or from another age.

Neither practice had any sexual connotations and the woman's violation of a solemn oath taking procedure, lead to the seemingly harsh punishment of losing her hand.

The New Testament portion stipulates that when anyone practices gross violations of sexual morality, they were to be excluded from the community and thus be delivered into to the enemy, who inspired this blatant violation of G-d's Word.

This practice of exclusion was used by the Catholic inquisition to justify putting to death those who were considered heretics. Community exclusion or shunning is the only punishment this passage is referring to. Taking Bible verses out of their context and assigning meanings to them

which are not intended by the text can never be justified as an acceptable way to handle the Bible.

Sermon: The Case of The Missing Arm

The Bible is full references which give aspects of G-d, human-like characteristics. In theology this is called being anthropomorphic – assigning human characteristics to beings who are not human. People with pets are sometimes prone to this application of human virtues to our animal friends. If the truth be told as it concerns humanity and our G-d, we are made in His image and not the other way round, so in fact we are theopomorphic and our understanding of G-d is not anthropomorphic.

Even though we understand that G-d does not have actual feet or arms or hands or eyes, or even a heart, we assign these characteristics to Him so we can better understand who He is and how He works in our midst. Isaiah 53:1 asks who has recognized the arm of G-d. This expression is used at least 37 times in the Scriptures and each time it occurs, it is referring to an aspect of how G-d himself behaves in His dealings with us.

In the context of Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the one who is identified as the servant, a tender plant and a root, is also referred to as the arm of YHVH. There is no real way of understanding this reference other than it specifies that the Messiah is G-d dwelling among us for the specific purpose of obtaining our eternal redemption through His death where He absorbs the punishment for our sins.

After the destruction of the first temple, the remnants of our people received many references that both assured them of G-d's enduring redeeming love and His promise that they would be restored to the Holy Land. We are told to forget our shame as we wait for G-d's redemptive purposes to be fulfilled in our midst.

In order to express our sorrow at the destruction of both temples because of our folly, as part of the annual reading cycle, Jewish people have included a way for us not to become overwhelmed at the horrors and catastrophes which the House of Jacob has suffered over the centuries. In between the fast of the 17th of Tammuz (when the walls of Jerusalem were breached) and the Fast of the 9th of Av (date when both temples were burned), there are three Sabbaths of Affliction, followed by seven Shabbats of consolation.

During these seven Shabbats, comforting passages from Isaiah are studied, which apply the promises of the restoration of Israel to every generation of Israel until Messiah comes to establish His eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. In today's passage terms like great compassion and eternal love are used to comfort our hearts and to turn our eyes away from the serial distresses of this current age and focus them on the love of G-d and His coming Kingdom.

Today's passage in Isaiah is the shortest of the seven passages of comfort and though passages on both sides of chapter 53 (actually 52:13-53:12– chapters 49, 50, 51, 52 and 54 and 55), are used, why is chapter 53 ignored or passed over? In my brief meditation this morning, I want to suggest three reasons for this omission which I believe was intentional.

Please understand that I am proud of the way our Jewish people have survived in the face of

overwhelming hatred and persecution. Our people have stood in defence of G-d's Word and have made it the centre of their religious and spiritual devotion. Sabbath observance and adhering to the annual festival cycle are at the core of what it means to be a practising, observant Jew.

However, we have also picked up a considerable weight of tradition which has made us blind to portions of the Scriptures which do not fit in with our theology. This is especially true in relation to how we view both the timing and the nature of Messiah's ministry, as He prepares to usher in G-d's everlasting Kingdom. I do not mean to be overly critical of traditional rabbinic Judaism, but when push comes to shove, I will stand on the Bible and on the Bible alone. All other ground is sinking sand.

This often puts the Messianic movement on a collision course with various beliefs and practises of the Gentile church, as well of those of traditional synagogues. Most of the differences relate to what I consider to be both deficient views of G-d and of His Word. This is the first reason why this passage was not included in the cycle of Shabbats of Consolation.

You see, from an objective study of Judaism as it appears in the Bible and indeed how it appears even in traditional synagogues, all of Judaism is based on the expectation of Messiah's rule when the Kingdom of G-d is established over all the nations and generations of mankind. The conflict arises when you consider how and when this is to occur.

Our passage clearly points to a Saviour who will take upon Himself all of our sins and win redemption for us, both by dying on the cross to pay the price of our sins and by resurrecting to grant us the benefits of forgiveness and everlasting life. Our Messiah came at the appointed hour and prepared and performed His sacrifice in the manner prescribed by the Bible. Any idea about who the Messiah is and how He accomplished His Mission must be fully derived from the Scriptures, and from the Scriptures alone.

This is my second point, because even as we strive to walk with the L-rd in authentic Jewish space, being both Sabbath powered and Festival driven, we want to do so exclusively according to all which the Bible teaches concerning this unique, powerful mandate to be a part of Messianic Judaism. You cannot change the Word of G-d by ignoring the parts which do not fit into your understanding of who G-d is and how He does what He does.

You see, the saddest reality about the destruction of both temples is that the root cause of these disasters was the disobedience and folly of our people. The final penalty of this folly has already fallen upon our Messiah who was G-d's suffering Servant and all that is needed for the redemption of our people has already been won by the power of G-d's love.

Daily, weekly and yearly, I mourn for the blindness of our people and while I mourn for all the atrocities which have been committed against them, I can take comfort in the finished work of our blessed Messiah and pray for an increased spiritual openness among our people.

I have named this the Sabbath of the missing arm, not because G-d has somehow been misplaced or incapacitated and He needs our help to reassemble Him so that, once He is liberated by our prayers and good deeds, He can do what is necessary to inaugurate the Kingdom we have been waiting so long for. He has already done everything which is needed for the inauguration of His everlasting Kingdom. But He is waiting patiently for the righteous core of humanity, both Jew and Gentile, to move out of the spiritual darkness of this world and

to enter the light of the world to come.

Who has believed our report? He was despised and forsaken, a man of suffering, acquainted with grief. He was wounded for our transgressions and broken by our sins. He went to the cross as a silent lamb being taken to the butchers, even though He committed no offence and was innocent of any transgression. This is why He was exalted and has taken His seat among the mighty, after having delivered Himself to death to justify many men. He bore the sins of Israel even though He was despised and rejected by His generation.

What I have said is pretty clear, mainline Gospel, but it was all taken from portions of Isaiah chapter 53, without using a single verse from the New Testament. As we climb out of sadness because of the destruction of both temples and the double exile of our people, we do not despair because He continues to reach out to our people with great compassion and an everlasting love.

We practice a form of Judaism which acknowledges the Messiah and seeks to walk with Him according to the Scriptures which were entrusted to our people and to the Gentiles who walk with us. We have solved the mystery of the missing arm and we want to pray and be used by G-d to help more of our people join us in the light. We want to lead by example and not confuse authentic evangelism with cheap confrontationalism. Join us as we continue to build spiritual momentum for the Fall Feasts as we inaugurate another year in the L-rd.

In our Messiah, we have the assurance that though He has already done great things for our people and for all the peoples of our planet and though we face such an alarming array of opposition to the truth of G-d's Word and to the righteousness which it stipulates, we ain't seen nothing yet! His love and compassion are more solid than the mountains and hills which surround Jerusalem and His is ruling and reigning until He has put all enemies under His foot and His Kingdom's coming is more sure than the daily rising and setting of the sun.

Our congregation has not always had an easy time as a stable link between the church and the synagogue and we have seen more than our fair share of people coming and people going, but His arm which has always upheld us, will both uplift and sustain us, and still guide and renew us, because we are determined to keep walking with Him according to His Word. We rejoice in the privilege we have to walk with Him as Messianic Jewish and Gentile believers. We have solved the mystery of the missing arm, have you?