

18 Elul, 5777 (09/09/17) **Learning How to Behave in the House of the L-rd** J. M. Terrett
Digging Deep into His Word

Ki Tavo **When You Enter In** **Its all about Choices**
Torah: Deuteronomy 26:1-29:9(8)
Havdallah: Isaiah 60:1-22
Brit Chadashah: Luke 24:44-53
Reading: Bernie p. 153 and Ps. 51 Jewish Hero: Samuel. Torah Carrier: Teresa

The Torah portion deals with the first covenant obligation the people were to perform once they entered the land and had completed their conquest of it. Two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, are situated roughly half way between the River of Egypt (a seasonal wadi) and Mount Hermon. This new generation were given the same task as their fathers had been given and these requirements do not change. They were to conquer the land and learn to walk in faithful obedience to G-d's Word, avoiding the carnal paganism of the Canaanites.

To remind them of the seriousness of this mandate, they were to camp in the space between these two mountains (Ebal and Gerizim) and split the tribes into two groups, six on Mountain Ebal and six on Mount Gerizim. While the Holy Land was to be a place of joy and plenty, where they could shine as a beacon to the nations, it was also a place where choices had to be made. Their success or their failure was not going to depend on the strength or weakness of their enemies, or on any set of favourable or unfortunate circumstances.

It was going to depend solely and completely on either their obedience or on their disobedience. We have the advantage of knowing beforehand how the story was going to unfold and their successes and failures should be object lessons for us. They were equipped with everything they needed for their entrance into the land. They brought with them the memory of how the L-rd looked after them during the wandering years and how all of their needs were met.

They took with them a spiritual and a military mandate which stipulated how they were to live in the land. They were to drive out and kill the inhabitants of the land and not adopt any features of their paganism. G-d had given these people 430 years to repent and they had not done so they were to perform a one time only punitive military campaign where they people were given the change of leaving the land or being exterminated in the land. Those who stayed were to be treated as strangers who were not allowed to practice their former criminal idolatry which would have become a snare for Israel.

We have to understand that all ancient pagan religions were sophisticated combinations of criminal idol worship and perverted sexuality and things haven't changed much since then. Instead of conquering our planet, we are to reach out to the pagan unbelievers we live amongst and conquer their hearts and pull down all of their fortresses which rise up against the knowledge of G-d. We are not to join in with them in any of their pagan pursuits either in their view of reality or in their perverted pagan practices.

Our spiritual success or our spiritual defeat, will not be based on the strength or the weakness of our enemies, but it will solely be based on our faithful obedience to G-d through His Word. Instead of being influenced by the world through which we are passing, we need to be an influence and draw our entire strength and guidance from the L-rd.

Many unwise and unstable believers, and their conspiracy theorists in the world, are far too quick to view natural disasters either as the judgment of G-d or as a result of our supposed mismanagement or our global resources. The annual hurricane season is an example. Two massive storms have struck at the US and several Caribbean countries, but there is no need to try and see them as judgments from G-d or as direct results of global warming or pollution.

Volcanic eruptions have an infinitely greater impact on global warming and climate change than how humans are impacting the planet. Deforestation does negatively impact our air quality and also contributes to soil erosion and desertification, but this is not a direct divine intervention to punish the wicked and get them to repent of their sins.

Before G-d punishes a people, He first repeatedly warns them and gives them the clear option to repent and avert disaster, or to continue on the downward path and embrace disaster. No such warnings were given before either hurricane and neither storm was really something out of the ordinary for the region. The storms may be bigger than usual, but if we look back in the historical record, they have been devastating the region for thousands of years.

We should take neither the warnings nor the promises given to Israel and apply them outside of their historical context as if they were also talking about future, modern disasters. It is true that we will reap what we sow and deforestation and industrial pollution are negatively impacting our environment, but this does not directly cause earthquakes and hurricanes – or even earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. We need to distinguish between naturally occurring phenomena and divine retribution which occurs when warnings are not heeded.

There are general principles which will bring social and military disaster when they are abused or violated, and there are divine promises and warnings given to G-d's people as they were in this case – nothing more nothing less. What are you sowing in your life? What are you reaping in your life?

The passage in Isaiah is the second last Shabbat of consolation and speaks of the eventual return of Israel to their land, but with a twist. Israel is called to be a light to the nations and to bring them out of darkness into the light of the L-rd. This mission will go on until the world ends and G-d's everlasting kingdom is finally established, when the new earth and the new heavens bring this worn out old world to a close. These end of the world references are given in conjunction with the promises of the return and the restoration of Israel, but they must be seen in the broader context of G-d's global plan for the nations. The length of time between Israel's restoration after their Babylonian captivity and the end of the world is not specified. The end of the world will come when G-d's purposes are fulfilled, both with Israel and also with all the nations and generations of mankind. Nothing more, nothing less.

The New Testament portion deals with the Messiah explaining to the disciples that His death and resurrection occurred according to the promises made in the Scriptures. From this we can learn that with all the ups and downs of human history across our globe, two things alone will impact how things eventually turn out in our world. They are first the superintending hand of G-d, who is in final control of the events of our world, even when they are beyond our ability to understand. Secondly, for how things turn out for us, it is all about the choices we make. Good choices have always brought blessings to Israel and poor choices have brought on disaster and dispersion.

After the Fall Feasts, I want to talk to you about prophecy and how we should understand what is happening in our world in light of the promises of G-d, both on a global and on an individual scale. In either scenario, it is all about choices and the sovereign hand of G-d as He works to bring about His everlasting Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. Are you making choices which will have a positive impact on your eternal destiny? Learn from example of Israel, because it is really all about choices. G-d's will, will be done, is it being done in your life?

Sermon: Digging Deeper into His Word.

Passage: “Study to show yourself approved unto G-d, rightly dispensing the Word of Truth” (2 Timothy 2:15)

As we draw this series to a close, it has been my overall objective that we re-affirm our commitment to knowing how to behave in the House of the L-rd. I wanted to show you why our services as designed the way they are and to help you to get the most out of them. They are arranged around five priorities: worship, Bible Study, prayer, fellowship and outreach. There are five more elements in our service which I want to briefly discuss with you this morning and I would like you to see how each works to fulfil one or more of these core objectives.

A while ago, I composed a list of some 90 Jewish heroes from the Bible and after our worship and prayer time, we call our children forward and I talk to them about how our weekly Jewish hero can help them to walk in the light as they grow and learn in our midst. We extend my tallit over them as a sign that we are all praying for them, so it is both a form of Bible Study and outreach. We do not want to lose them as they plunge into the turbulent years of adolescence and the best way to avoid this is for them to have a solid foundation in the Word of G-d.

Next we send them down for Shabbat school which we should take as seriously as our own Torah Meditation. We are not just keeping them occupied while we study G-d's Word, we are modelling for them their lifelong need to always be digging deep into His Word. I want to really emphasize our Shabbat School ministry over the coming year and I want you to join me in praying for this vital ministry of our Messianic community. How well do you know the children in our midst? How involved are you willing to be in their lives. I agree that it takes a village to raise a child and we need to all be part of that village for our children's sake.

While our treasured children are being taught and cherished downstairs, the older crowd are digging deep into G-d's Word as we follow the annual Torah reading cycle. We go where we have often gone before and like a wise store manager, we bring amazingly good things out of our treasures, some new and some old. How is your storehouse doing? Is it full of G-d's treasures or is it understocked?

Sometime between the two temples, the annual Torah cycle was established and tweaked. When the Babylonians took our people into captivity, they took away everything of monetary value and surprisingly left our people with the only treasure of any spiritual value – the scrolls of G-d's Word. They sifted through all the manuscripts under the guidance of Shimon haTzadik (Simon the Righteous) and came up with a collection which we call the canon of the Old Testament or the Tenach in Hebrew.

The scrolls they accepted as the word of G-d mention slightly over two hundred other scrolls

which did not survive, but should any of them surface, they would either be those which the Tenach mentions or would have similar content to that which we find in this amazing document. It is divided into many sections and could be unwieldy to handle if we did not establish a regular reading cycle to go through its content systematically.

As you know, the five books of the Torah were originally divided into 500 sections (parashat in Hebrew), then into 250 and finally into the 54 portions (parashiot) that we have today. It is possible to read through the Torah on an annual basis or on a triennial basis (once every three years). So for us there are two cycles which should drive our lives: the Festival cycle and the Torah cycle.

It is impossible to get at the entire content of each weekly passage and I always encourage you to read all of it and bring your insight and your questions to our weekly Yeshiva Bible Study. Along with our Haftarah portions, the weekly Psalm and the Brit Chadashah portions, we encourage you to explore many of the other portions of the Bible which are not part of the annual cycle. It is not true that the more you study the Bible the less you get out of it, because the opposite is true.

Every week, we are both reminded of the things which we ought to know and encouraged to dig deeper to find the things which will enrich what we already know. This does not mean that we assign arbitrary spiritualized meanings to the text which are somehow hidden under the surface of the regular meaning of the words of the text. The Bible says what it means and means what it says and though everything it says is not always explained (Deut. 29:29), the evident plain meaning of the text gives us more than enough to chew on during our annual pilgrimage through the sacred text.

It is like walking down a familiar path with the objective of both reacquainting ourselves with the surroundings we are familiar with and of looking for things we may have missed. If we walk this same path at different times of the year, we will see the same things differently and if we also walk down this same path at different seasons in the circumstances of our lives, we will also gain new insights to renew and encourage us in our pilgrimage to our Eternal home. The point is to keep walking this familiar path, so that we will not be pulled away from it into dangerous, uncharted territory and lose our way (Jeremiah 6:16). It is not so much that we are afraid of new places, new insights and new ideas, it is more that we know that we can never exhaust the healing and guiding potential of the straight and narrow path of the Scriptures. We are never closing our minds to keep out the light, rather we are closing our doors to keep the darkness out.

We are not against learning or culture or the arts in any category and we are free to appreciate some of the finer things of life, as long as this appreciation does not pull u away from the finest thing in this life, which is the coming kingdom of G-d according to the Word of G-d. There are so many sections of the Bible which offer such a broad scope of advice and teaching that we do not want to neglect our privilege of studying this treasure house of spirituality. It needs to remain our principle source of spiritual nourishment and the reality grid through which we pass every aspect of our lives, so that no lingering darkness creeps in.

I am aware of a lot of popular culture and there is nothing inherently evil about being connected with these trends, as long they do not rise up in opposition to our primary connection which is to the Kingdom of G-d through the Word of G-d.

In our shul, we approach our need to remain immersed in G-d's word three ways: Shabbat School, the Torah Meditation and the weekly sermon. Along with the ministry of sound fellowship in our midst, our life in the Word serves four special functions which work in tandem with each other and with the service objectives we have already outlined. The effect of indulging in the spiritual life of our community through: prayer, worship, Bible Study, outreach and fellowship is that this renewal will first act as a pace setter in our spiritual lives.

We cannot do everything all at once every time that we meet and we need to listen to the voice of the Spirit who is speaking to our inner man about the pace He wants to set so that we neither burn out or get stalled in our walk with the Messiah. Yeshua worked hard to show His apostles and followers their need to pace themselves in a life which steadily revolved around the Word of G-d, instead of being driven by whatever circumstances they were facing.

Along with being apace setter, a community life in His Word will function as a reaction stabilizer, whether we are caught in a vicious series of hurricanes or feel the impact of the rising and falling of the loonie. When something wonderful happens in our lives or when we encounter tragedy or loss, our life in the Bible will help us to stabilize our reactions so that we see the whatevers we encounter, as part of G-d's bigger picture.

It may take time to come to terms with various experiences in our lives, but if we are able to keep our focus on the bigger picture, we will not panic or become discouraged until it is really the end of the world. It may be appropriate to run, or even to fight or hide or to rebuild, but as long as we have a vital devotional life in the Word of G-d, we will be set free to do what we know we have to do and not let the circumstances of our lives tell us why to do or how to react. We need to be constantly reminded that we are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth, passing through this world, without ever really becoming part of the world.

Part of this stabilizing, is letting our life in the Word help us to relate to the circumstances of our lives and integrate them into the bigger picture, kind of like composing our own personal story or song of praise. I have often said that life is a journey where we are packing the suitcases of our hearts as we get ready for eternity. How we integrate these experiences into our hearts and lives, will impact the collection of attitudes and responses, which are the only things from this world which we will be able to take with us as, we stand in judgment before we enter the new world.

In other words, it is not so much a question of what kinds of things have happened to us throughout our lives, as it is how we relate to them in the long term. The older and the more mature we become in the L-rd, the more our responses to what happens in our lives impacts us in life than the circumstances themselves. It is not such that we learn to see the world through rose coloured glasses, where everything which happens always turns out for the best in the best of all possible worlds. It is more that we see how we should respond to the circumstances of our loves and turn them over to G-d, be they ever so good or ever so bad.

We neither live under the oppression of the morbid eventuality, always convinced that all the misfortunes of the world are ready to pounce on us, nor do we fill our Hearts with so much bitterness and regret that we poison our lives, no matter what comes our way. We remain focused on the L-rd and on the priorities of His Kingdom and see our individual and community lives as part of His greater picture. We learn to relate to our lives as an integrated part of G-d's

bigger picture and do not let ourselves become stalled or distracted, as if we expected everything that happens to us to revolve around our hopes and fears instead of around G-d's promises and His Word.

Finally the Torah meditation, shabbat school and Sermon portions of our services function to act like perspective guardians in the midst of all the enemy, the world and the flesh can throw at us. With so many influences vying for our attention and trying to get control of our lives, a regular dose of the Word is all the tonic we need to rise about the noise of this life and contemplate the wonderful music of the world to come.

May we always be digging deeply into G-d's Word, so that we can keep the storehouse of our hearts well stocked with the treasures of His kingdom and not allow our lives to become clogged with the junk of this world. To seal this objective, we celebrate kiddish so that what we have learned can be digested into our lives as we drink the juice and partake of the challah. He always wants us to have a good taste in our lives so they remain on track even as we travel through all the twists and turns of life on our journey homeward.

Finally, we chant the Aaronic benediction so that His Word is put on us and remains in us and part of our lives, week by week and day by day. The lessons we learn in shul, have a heart impact which gives them a longer shelf life so that the things of the world continue to draw strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. What are you digging deeply into, day by day and week by week? Learning how to behave in the House of the L-rd is the overall stated objective of each element of our services and we want to regularly reminded of this objective, both corporately and individually. How ready are you for the Fall Feast?