

9 Adar, 5778 (24/02/18) **Confidence in the Kingdom: In That Day At The End of the World** J. M. Terrett

Tetzaveh **You shall Command** **Intimacy at a distance**
Torah: Exodus 27:20-30:10
Haftarah: I Samuel 15:2-34
Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 13:10-15
Reading: Donna p. 137 and Ps.65. Jewish hero: Peter. Torah Carrier: Jack
Shabbat Zachor: Deuteronomy 25:17-19

This week's Torah Portion is very technical and deals with the sacred clothing of the High Priest and the consecration of Him and his sons, by some very intricate procedures. It begins with a discussion of the menorah which stood before the veil and ends with a discussion of the altar of Incense, which also stood before the veil. The menorah would remind the people of the fire on the mountain and the incense altar would remind them of the impenetrable darkness in which the L-rd's presence dwelt when it rested on the mountain.

The passage describes the eight priestly garments (six plus two) which the High Priest was to wear and they were decorated in the colours of the sky. His ephod, which he was to wear over his purple tunic was to be made of gold and lively colours with two onyx stones as epaulettes or shoulder straps. Each of the stones was to have the names of six of the tribes, engraved and listed according to their birth order. This was to be worn by the High Priest so he would remember the children of Israel while he performed his duties in the tabernacle.

While the exact form of each symbolic garment is not given, their proportions were to be worked creatively and they must have been beautiful to behold. There are some pretty fanciful descriptions of the clothing in the Talmud and we have to invoke Deut. 29:29 when we run out of biblical detail – because we should neither add to, nor take away from the Scriptural account. G-d tells us what He wants us to know. Is this good enough for you? It is for me.

The clothing was a symbolic reminder that, while G-d is totally separate and His full presence dwells in the heavenlies, He agreed to dwell in their midst, as long as they maintained a safe ritual distance from Him. They also had to approach Him through approved symbolic rituals that would both protect the worshippers and also reflect the awesome majesty of G-d.

Another piece of clothing the High Priest wore was a golden breastplate with four rows of three precious stones each, attached to it. Each stone was engraved with the name of one of the twelve tribes and they were worn as a reminder of the judgment or scrutiny they had to be subject to if they wanted to walk with the L-rd. The breastplate formed an enclosure shaped like a “v” and in this enclosure there were two mysterious, attached stones called the Urim (light) and the Thummim (completeness). When the people wanted to ask G-d a question, He would answer them with these stones.

The most reliable understanding of these special stones is that they were yes and no stones and when the Priest would put his hand into the “v”, G-d would guide him to the appropriate stone. Thus all questions had to be rendered into a “yes” and “no” format. But hold onto your seats and listen to how the Talmud explains how the Urim and Thummim worked, it is quite fantastic with no biblical evidence to back up what they said it did.

Supposedly, when the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) would ask a question, the Urim would light

up a series of letters in the engraved names of the twelve tribes and when they were read in the right sequence, the people would get a clear or complete (Thummim) message from G-d. So the High Priest had to know how to read them in the right sequence and we are not told how he was guided to this mystical sequence. This is an example of reading into the text, instead of letting the text say what it means.

Once the High Priest was all dressed up, He had one set of names on his shoulders and another on his heart. He was to remember the people as well as judge the people under the guidance of G-d. During his lifetime, Moses spoke directly to G-d and G-d answered him directly, but in the future, the High Priest would stand at the entrance of the tabernacle and answer questions the people brought to him, generation by generation.

The great altar was sanctified by the blood of a bull, as a sin offering, and its flesh was burned outside the tabernacle. Once the altar was sanctified, the first sacrifice of pleasing odour to be offered was a ram, which was cut to pieces and fully burnt on the altar.

Then Aaron and his sons were anointed with the blood of a second ram in three places. First on their right earlobe, next on the thumb of their right hand and lastly on the big toe of their right foot. What was left of the blood was spread on the altar along with most of the meat and a series of unleavened cakes and all of it was burned as a second offering of a pleasing odour to the L-rd. The chest of the ram was given to Aaron and his sons as their portion.

Perpetual sacrifices were to be offered in the big altar, each morning and each evening, in front of the entrance to the tent of meeting. These daily offerings were to be of meat, flour, oil and wine and were totally burned as a twice daily offering of a pleasing odour to the L-rd. It was at the entrance to the tent of meeting that the L-rd would meet with the people, through the agency of the High Priest and it was G-d's glory would sanctify the place. This is because the L-rd brought our people out of Egypt to dwell in their midst with intimacy at a distance.

He would remember them and judge them and teach them to be holy and would remain available to them through ritual sacrifices, conducted by designated priests. All of this was incredibly beautiful and aromatic as the people were to be filled with awe that their G-d would dwell in their midst. The same L-rd wants to dwell in our hearts and lives, to teach us faith and obedience as we travel through this life on our way home to our father's House in Glory.

The prophetic portion deals with the disobedience of Saul, who cheated G-d when he let the people keep the best of everything they took from the Amalekites, instead of offering it as a devoted to destruction burnt offering. Partial obedience is described as bad as the sin of witchcraft and Saul was rejected by G-d as the hereditary king of Israel.

The New Testament reminds us that just as the body of the bull for the sin offering was burned outside the camp, so our Messiah suffered outside of the walls of Jerusalem, even though He shed much blood within the walls. We are to go and join Him in His shame, because we have no permanent city in this world. We are offer to G-d the sacrifices of praise, generosity and good deeds, because these are the sacrifices which G-d is pleased with, now that the sacrifice of His Son has fulfilled all the other sacrifices.

Sermon: Confidence in the Kingdom: In That Day At the End of the World

Passage: *"In that day, there will be no light; there will be cold and ice. It will be a unique*

day, known to the L-rd, without daytime or nighttime; when evening comes, light shall appear. In that day, living waters shall flow out of Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea. It will be so summer and winter. The L-RD shall be King of all the earth; in that day, YHVH shall be the only YHVH and His name shall be the only name.” (Zechariah 14:6-9).

Next to the Book of Isaiah, the Book of Zachariah contains the most references to the Messiah in the Bible. It is one of the twelve minor prophets and is a post-exilic book, written over several years after the end of the Exile, when Jewish people were allowed to return to the Holy Land and rebuild the temple. It is not an easy book to read, because it is really a series of visions, where heavenly realities are expressed and where our earthly situation is constantly put into a heavenly perspective.

The last three chapters of Zechariah are part of what is called an Oracle, the Word of YHVH upon Israel. It contains an expression: “and on that day”, when it refers to events which will occur at the end of the age. It is Zachariah looking around from a heavenly perspective and trying to describe, not just the end of Israel's troubles, but the end of the world.

Many prophetic portions in the Old Testament begin by describing the current situation which the prophet finds himself in and moves through to describe the re-establishment of Israel back into the Holy Land. From this point, many prophecies also contain hints or pictures of the final state, once human history has been brought to a close and Messiah's eternal kingdom is established over all the nations and generations of mankind.

It is as if the prophet is given a beautiful picture of Israel's restoration, which then unfolds into the final state without dealing with the time frame between the restoration and the end of the world. In our world we might say it like this: “have a good look around and then fast forward to the end”. So at first, when we read Zachariah, it would appear that the reestablishment of Israel and the arrival of the end of the age happen as part of the same sequence of events, with not much time between the two events.

When you study prophecy, you must learn to distinguish between the restoration of Israel to the land after the Babylonian Captivity and the return of the exiles towards the end of the age when Jerusalem shall no longer be trodden underfoot of the nations. There are many prophetic portions which refer uniquely to the promised restoration of Israel, after the Babylonian exile and these promises were conditional upon Israel abandoning all forms of idolatry and returning a walk of faith and obedience with the L-rd, according to His Word.

After the return from Babylonian exile, there was no need for a second exile as long as Israel walked with their G-d according to His Word. The prophet Amos even said: “I (the L-rd) will plant them in their country, never again to be uprooted from the land which I have given them (Amos 9:15)”. Obviously something went seriously wrong and this second long diaspora (scattering) is only now, in our times, finally coming to a close, as the final Day of the L-rd and the end of the world, is preparing to appear.

It would take a lot of time to go through all the prophecies of the Tenach (Old Testament) and divide them into our three categories: (1) warnings about the first exile, (2) promises concerning the return from the first exile and finally, (3) promises concerning the end of the age and the end of the second exile and the return of our Messiah. To be faithful to the Bible, we have to understand that the prophets are seeing things from their perspective and there is a lot of

retrospect (hindsight) between what happened to them and where we are today. From where we stand, we can fill in a lot of detail they did not see coming and one of the greatest details is the second, long scattering of our people after the destruction of the second temple.

The biggest snare we need to learn to avoid, as we study about the end of the world and as we grow in our confidence in the coming Kingdom, is not to take the promises of the first return from Babylonian captivity and apply them blindly to the events of the second return from the long exile of our people among the nations. You see, in the best of all possible worlds, our people should have been able to stay peacefully in their land and once they recognized the Messiah of promise, from the safety and security of Israel, they could have sent emissaries around the world to announce the Kingdom of G-d and His righteousness.

When they did not acknowledge the time of their visitation and did not accept the Messiah of Promise, the second temple was destroyed and they began the long exile among the nations until the time of the nations is fulfilled and Jerusalem is not longer trodden underfoot by the Gentiles. It is in our days that we are finally seeing the end of the long exile.

So where does that leave us with the last three chapters of Zechariah and the arrival of the Day of the L-rd? The expression: "On that Day" appears fifteen times in these chapters, and the expression: "The Day of the L-rd" appears once at the beginning of chapter 14.

A close reading of these chapters reveals that once the people have returned to the land, they will experience a number of catastrophes before the arrival of the Day of the L-rd, which will bring our temporary world to its final end. I would go even further and say that all the catastrophes which Israel has experienced, after they returned from the Babylonian captivity, are violent birth pangs in the enemy's relentless pursuit of Israel, after she gave birth to the Manchild who was taken up to heaven. His hatred is always first directed against the Jews.

Zachariah sees all of this and does not fully grasp what he is seeing, but is faithful in reporting His visions. By the time of Zachariah's writing, Jerusalem had already been destroyed once and the first temple was already burned. He does see a second attack on Jerusalem, when she is surrounded by all the nations of the earth and he describes the magnitude of the events which will accompany the arrival of the Day of the L-rd – as they are seen from his perspective.

The passage I selected speaks of running water (living water means running water) flowing out of Jerusalem all year long and not just during the rainy season. He speaks of the Messiah landing on the mount of Olives and splitting it in two, to give the people a place to hide when Jerusalem is again surrounded by the nations.

He also sees another pillaging of Jerusalem where two thirds of the people perish and one third is purified in the fires of affliction.

He also sees the complete destruction of the armies which will be coming against Jerusalem, along with all of their pack animals.

He then sees a permanent harmony where Jerusalem shall be the centre of a peaceful worldwide kingdom, where those who formerly attacked her, becoming worshippers of G-d, making annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem, in order to avoid being struck by the same plagues which formerly decimated their armies.

Jerusalem is to become exalted and the whole of the land is to become level, like a fertile plain and Jerusalem will never again be destroyed and everyone shall live in peaceful security.

As part of what will happen, there will be no more night and day, but a permanent day, where living waters will forever flow from out of Jerusalem to water and bless the entire earth. There will only be one YHVH and after the great lamenting of Israel because they pierced YHVH through His Son (12:10-14), all idolatry shall be forever removed – and once the final battle is over, peace shall reign forever over all the earth.

Let me be very clear. There is only one Day of the L-rd and one end of the world and the various pictures which Zachariah gives us concerning the glorious return of our Messiah take us from the first return from exile to the second return from the longer exile. He then takes us to the permanent establishment of G-d's everlasting Messianic Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. The temple is only mentioned once, in the final verse of the book, and Zachariah indicates that there will no longer be any merchants (or Canaanites) in the House of the L-rd, only renewed, joyful worship.

The visions given to Zachariah, bounce around to look at the single day of the L-rd from a number of different perspectives and clearly indicate a number of events which have to occur as part of the end of the world scenario he is being shown. It is like he has been given sixteen pieces of the final puzzle and it is up to us to fit them all together, so that our confidence in the Kingdom is not shaken by all the violence and confusion which will precede the arrival of the Day of the L-rd. His Kingdom's coming can never be thwarted.

There will be a final assault of Jerusalem once our people return from the second scattering and it will be violent, as the armies of the enemies of our people suffer a decimating plague and the final permanent rule of the New Jerusalem will be worldwide, once all opposition to it has been fully and completely crushed, forever.

It is likely that Zachariah thought that these events would begin to happen in his lifetime, but well over 2,000 years have elapsed since the time of his writing, and we are still waiting for all the pieces of the puzzle to come together, so that the singular, final Day of the L-rd can come and establish His eternal reign over all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We may be closer than Zachariah was, but we are not home yet.

Some have taken the last part of Zachariah to mean that the feast of Tabernacles will be celebrated throughout eternity – and that those among the nations who do not celebrate it annually, will be deprived of rain and suffer the same decimating plagues which came upon those who foolishly attacked Jerusalem.

Let me deal with three considerations and I will close. First, none of the other festivals are mentioned, just the one which deals with the end of the festival cycle and which has come to be understood as announcing the end of the world. Secondly, the Jerusalem which is described in this portion will be the centre of a permanent Messianic Kingdom and when it comes, there will be no more distinctions between the various grafted-in national groups which form the one new man in our Messiah. We will form a redeemed global community.

At the Festival of Tabernacles, we all form one huge camp around the tabernacle, we read the Torah and rejoice that the Year of Jubilee which was proclaimed on Yom Kippur. These are part of our symbolic anticipation of the coming Kingdom and they will be fulfilled once the glorious Day of the L-rd finally arrives and the new Jerusalem comes out Heaven to be set up

on the new earth. It is describing a final end and a kingdom which can never be overthrown.

Lastly, these final chapters deal with events at the end of the Age as seen from the perspective of a post-exilic prophet and we must look beyond the symbols he uses to their meaning, and balance them with other prophetic portions of Scripture. Zachariah saw a partial picture of a permanent kingdom, but he saw the same kingdom which was seen by any number of prophets, both in the Old and the New Testaments.

He saw the Day of the L-rd and said that there was only one day of the L-rd and not two or three. There is only one ending and not several endings.

We need to take what he says about the Day of the L-rd and use other Scriptures to build a fuller, more complete picture, without adding to or taking away from what he saw or what he said. This is not an easy task and will require much study and rethinking on the part of any serious student of the Bible. Without doing this, we risk slipping down any number of rabbit holes which twist and turn aside what the Bible teaches and replace it with various traditions of men.

There will always be some elements of the picture which are secrets which G-d has not revealed, but as we study His Word and draw close to Him, especially as we see the Day of the L-rd approaching, our confidence in the Kingdom will grow. This is especially true because we know the end of the story and are only passing through this life on our way home to our father's House in Glory. How is your homeward bound journey doing?

When the end finally comes, then we shall know as completely as we are now completely known by the L-rd. Everything, including what we understand and what we do not understand, will be brought to judgment and all the foolishness and darkness of this fading world will finally be over. People will all be judged by our Messiah, who is the only way to G-d and all the lies and deceptions of the flesh, the world and the enemy will be laid bare and disappear forever.

All of our tears will be dried and all of our trials will be over and we shall be rewarded according to the baggage of reactions we have been packing and storing in the suitcase of our hearts. They can be gold, silver and precious stones, when we are sowing in the spirit or just hay, wood and stubble when we are sowing according to the flesh.

We are truly living in the Kingdom in the here and now, but our true life is still hidden with our Messiah in Glory. We may not be able to figure out the exact timing of His Return, but as long as we are confident that He will always eventually overcome each and every barrier which tries to stand in the way of the coming of His kingdom, neither the way we live, nor what we believe will every be allowed to stand in the way of His kingdom either.

We are either walking in His way or getting in His way, depending on how we live our lives and how we respond to the happenstances of our lives. Are you walking in His way or are you just getting in the way?

Purim is next week and Passover is just over a month away. Is your heart and life Sabbath powered and festival driven? What will your heart look like once the Kingdom comes and its contents are all revealed?

How seriously do you take His kingdom and His righteousness in your life?

Are our lamps trimmed and filled with oil? Is His Word a treasure house we have built into our hearts and lives and from which we can take both things old and things new?

Are we going about the Master's business as trees which are bearing good fruit or do we need some pruning? If we always give the things of the kingdom first place in our lives, then everything else will fall into place, whether it happens sooner or later.

May we never be found to be spiritually asleep when our Groom finally knocks on the door and may we learn to always both hear and to heed His voice, not only in our hearts when we pray, but especially in His Word when we read and study.

We will either heed His Word in our lives as we prepare for the arrival of His Son's eternal kingdom or we will see what we have given our lives to go up in smoke because neither the lust of the flesh, nor the lust of eyes and especially not the pride of life, come from the Father. Our life is either a well watered, pruned garden where the fruit of the Spirit flourish and blossom or it is a tangled jungle where the works of the flesh ravage us and rob us of any ability to walk peacefully and joyfully with our L-rd.

How we live is up to us, because the fulfilment of the purposes of G-d and the arrival of our Messiah's kingdom are not dependent on our participation for them to come about. Having confidence in the Kingdom and in the Day of the L-rd at the end of the world will set us free from the pull of this darkening world and help us prepare for the arrival of our final, glorious home.

Is this how you are living? Is this what you are waiting for? Is this what is waiting for you?

Shabbat shalom, campers and may you have an excellent week (Shavua Tov).