

Shelach Lecha **Send for Yourself**
Torah: Numbers 13:1-15:41
Haftarah: Joshua 2:1-24
Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 3:7-4:11
Reading: Isaac p. 153 and Ps. 64. Jewish Hero: Hezekiah. Carrier: Amos
Quarterly Meeting. NOSH

Torah Meditation: **Beware of the Fatal: “yes, but” Cop Out**

In this pivotal portion, twelve spies are sent out from the staging point of the camp at Kadesh Barnea. They were leaders, or princes of the people, well recognized and well respected among the people. Their journey may have been intended to be a mapping expedition to plan the route of the people, as they took possession of the land. They were also to get an idea of the land's resources, so it could be divided equitably among the twelve tribes.

This happened midway through their second year out of Egypt and they were only three camps from the year they spend around the mountain, getting ready for this exciting journey, where they were to see Canaan fall as fully and as swiftly as mighty Egypt fell before the L-rd.

They arrived just before the fall harvest, where the best produce of the land would be ripe for the picking. The inhabitants of the land would have been aware of the camp, but probably did not yet feel threatened by it. Canaan was frequently invaded and had a mixed population, with the best of the land going to the latest invaders and various remnants of the conquered people hiding in their fortified positions, usually in the hills. It was also a trade route which lead to Mesopotamia and it was also the route the armies took when the great powers went to war. They were not yet really troubled by this latest arrival of ambitious strangers.

The twelve spies were instructed to give a detailed, balanced account of the land and its inhabitants. Their survey took 40 days, which is a symbol in Hebrew which means a long time. They were to cover every part of the Promised land.

Their report was a classic “Yes, but” cop out and they went beyond their reporting mandate and expressed two dangerous lies. First, by implication they said that G-d was not strong enough to give them victory over the land's powerful people and secondly, they said that the people were not strong enough to conquer the Promised Land, even with the help of the L-rd. It is one of the saddest portions in the Bible, because it snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory and turned what was to have been the glorious second stage of the Exodus, into one of the greatest defeats the people were ever to suffer.

They said that the land was full of giants who were armed to the teeth and dwelt in mighty fortresses. In 13:32 they even said that it was a country which devours its inhabitants. By this they meant that no group had ever been able to completely conquer the land and the best they could do was to add a new group to the regional melting pot.

The spies said they felt like grasshoppers by comparison to the people and they made at least four negative declarations. (1) First, they asked why they were not left to die in Egypt. (2) Second, they asked why they could not be left alone to die in the wilderness.

(3) third, they wanted to name a new leader and return to Egypt and (4) finally, they wanted to stone Moses and Aaron (and their leadership) for bringing this crisis upon them. Joshua and Caleb tried unsuccessfully to counter this evil speaking by saying that these giant people and this heavily fortified land were nothing, as long as the L-RD was with them.

When the fate of the camp was in a balance, suddenly, the glory of the L-rd appeared as a fire over the tent of meeting, perhaps with as much thunder and lightening as when it appeared on the mountain. It got the people's attention and Moses went into the tent of meeting and the people knew better than to try and follow him. They may have thought that he would get a better deal from G-d and give them other options. Never mistake what the L-rd commands as an option. The only option is to obey and be blessed, or to disobey and be disciplined.

YHVH wants to see where Moses' heart is and offers to destroy (incinerate) the people and to make from Moses (and the faithful leadership which stood with him) a new nation, greater and more powerful than the rebellious rabble of doubting Israel. It was not an idle threat – YHVH wanted to make sure Moses was still ready to lead this fractious people or whether he had had enough. G-d never pushes us beyond what we can stand in Him.

Moses reaffirms his willingness to lead this difficult people and calls upon the L-RD not to be mocked by the Egyptians, who would say that YHVH only brought the people out of Egypt to slay them in the wilderness. Moses also invokes the 13 attributes of Yahweh's name and asks Him to be slow to anger and merciful, even with this rebellious crowd.

The L-RD gives heed to Moses' plea and makes an executive decision to take the rebels back into the wilderness, until all the rebels who refused to go in, had died off. He delayed the blessing for a generation. They were to spend forty years in the wilderness, one year for each of the days the spies spent in the land. And the ten spies who gave a bad report were struck down with a fatal plague and died. The two faithful spies were spared.

This is too much for the fickle people and they want to go back on the fourfold negative declaration they had accepted from the ten spies. Rather than spend 40 years wandering, now they are ready to enter the land. They rebelled once against the command of the L-rd to go in and now they want to rebel against the L-rd's command not to go in.

Moses and the ark do not lead this rebellious motley crew as they sweep into the land and they are cut to ribbons and driven out of the land all the way into the wilderness. This was one of the saddest days for the people, but there was more to follow until the people learn that obedience is a requirement and is never an option, whether you like it or not.

Because the lost generation has children who need to grow up fearing the L-rd, a further description of the punishment of the rebels is suspended. Instead what follows is a discussion of rules regarding sacrifices which are to be made in the land, when the people inadvertently sin against the commandments of G-d. The L-RD would never allow things to get sloppy during this time of wandering and the people still had to walk in all the ways of the L-RD, even when they are told about things which will not apply, till their children enter the Promised Land. There was to be the same standard for both the House of Israel and for any strangers who dwelt in their midst.

The portion ends with two final concerns. First a punishment upon one who desecrates the Sabbath and the concept of memorial fringes on the edges of their garments is introduced. It is interesting to note that this was a stipulation which not only applied to men, but also to the ladies.

A man was gathering wood on the Sabbath and was detained in prison until after the Sabbath, when his case could be judged. Two considerations derive from this incident. First, the wilderness may not have had any significant ground water, but it had an abundance of trees and bushes and was not a true desert. Second, the same level and kind of holiness would apply during the the punitive years of wandering and the people were not being allowed to take a step back from complete holiness in any way shape or form.

In the Haftarah portion, the two spies who are send from the plains of Moab are not named and since Joshua already had a fair knowledge of the land, their mission was more limited. They were to spy out the people's first military objective – the fortress of Jericho, which was just across the river from their campsite.

Jericho was a mighty fortress with a double set of formidable walls which had not as yet ever been conquered. The spies enter the city and get lodging in the home of a temple prostitute, who as part of her temple functions, also operated a kind of inn. The king of Jericho heard that they were being lodged in Rachab's home and wanted to arrest them, probably to discover more about Joshua's battle plans. He was understandably nervous because the Canaanites already knew how Israel had exterminated both Og and Sihon and were afraid that they would be next. The strongest in the region had already been overcome.

Rachab lied to the king about their whereabouts and said they had left the city just before the gates were closed for the night. She hid them on her roof and just before they lay down to sleep, she came up and informed them about the condition of the people they were about to fight. She said that the people were terrified and knew that an invasion was coming, because Yahweh had given Canaan to Israel. She makes a solid profession of faith and gets a solid commitment that she and her family would be spared.

Her house is on the inner wall and she attaches a scarlet thread to the window of her house. All those who took refuge in her house would not be harmed. It was only the outer wall which fell. She tells them to hide in the mountain for three days before they return to Joshua. When they return to Joshua with the good news of the Canaanite's terror, the invasion plans are set in motion. It is the grown up children of the former rebels who are preparing to go into the land which their parents were excluded from.

In the Brit Chadashah portion, using the negative example of the unbelief of the generation which refused to go into the land from Kadesh Barnea, the author of Hebrews says that believers are called to two distinct, but related Sabbath rests. There is the rest of faith in this life where we believe the promises and act on them in our lives as we experience a life which flows with milk and honey, as if we were entering the Promised Land itself.

This is not to say that we will not encounter obstacles or experience set backs, but we will experience the same level of victory which our people experienced as they were faithful in their second generation to enter the land. This is the rest which is reserved for those whose faith does not falter before all and any obstacles we encounter in this life in our journey to our Father's Home in glory.

There is also the eternal rest of the celestial Sabbath which will burst forth upon the cosmos when our Messiah returns. Even though Yeshua's works were completed since the creation of the world, when we make Him our L-rd, we enter into His rest in this life, while we wait for the final rest to arrive.

In this life, He is our Sabbath rest while we firmly grip our faith and do not backslide like the lost generation, which spent forty years wandering in the wilderness. You will either be resting in Him, firm in your faith or you will lose faith and wander in a wilderness of your own making. Wandering is not the same thing as walking. We are called to walk and not wander.

They did not believe G-d could give them victory when He called them to enter a fortified land full of giants. If the truth be told, all of our adversaries are less than grasshoppers beneath the feet of those whose faith does not waiver and whose obedience does not falter. The Kingdom is coming – are you resting or are you wandering? Are you solid in your faith or are you riddled with doubts? Are you a “yes, but” believer or are you fully persuaded that He is able to keep that which you committed unto Him until that day? Be fully persuaded and never dissuaded. We need to learn the rest of faith in this life, while we wait for the next life to dawn.

Sermon: Courage Under Fire: Lacking Nothing

Passage: “ *My brethren, consider it a subject of complete joy, when you are exposed to diverse trials. Knowing that the trial of your faith produces patience (perseverance) and this patience must completely accomplish its work, in order that you would be mature and complete, lacking nothing (without failing in anything).* (James 1:2-4)

This passage calls for complete joy, which we need to see as an essential, mature spiritual perspective, especially when we are under fire. Diverse trials fall into two broad categories. There are first the attacks on your faith, from such adversaries as evolution (which is a heinous form of idolatry) and then there are assaults on your obedience, where one or all of the last five of the Ten commandments comes under fire. Both abortion and homosexuality fall into this category - abortion is murder and homosexuality is a forbidden form of fornication.

When patience is factored in as a guiding feature of whatever trial of your faith you are facing, you are lifted above the tumult and are able to see the eventual provision of G-d and you learn what it means to hunker down and endure temporary trials that repeatedly try and sink you. Your faith needs to become weather proof and storm proof.

Part of allowing trials to perfectly accomplishing its work, means that patience builds up a backlog of successful strategies and restoration techniques. After having helped us to overcome and succeed when we were making our way through whatever minefields life threw at us, this legacy gives us confidence that whenever new troubles surface, we can say with full confidence: “been there done that”.

But why do we have to consider trials a subject of complete joy – how can that make sense? There are basically seven reasons why the Scriptures want us to adopt this counter intuitive perspective. First (1) in everything we need to firmly acknowledge the overall superintendence of G-d. He is never at a loss and has never really lost control of any situation, even when both temples were burning and when our people were being fed into the ovens at Auschwitz. He will always protect us and uphold us, even when He allows horrible things to happen to us. He is with us and He is still L-rd, over and above the apparent chaos and slaughter than has all too frequently engulfed our planet.

Related to this (2) complete joy comes from the excitement we experience as we watch and see how He is going to get us out of this one. He will never leave us nor forsake us and even when some of us or many of us perish, He will always make a way for our generations to survive and eventually thrive.

(3) Part of this is seeing in action, that truly, greater is He who is in us, than the one who is in the world. Our final victory is coming and all along the way He will guide direct and help us to overcome. We need to see each trial as fresh material for His purposes to be fulfilled through.

As well (4), we need to grow to the place where we see that our minor suffering of this temporary moment, is not worthy to be compared to the immeasurable weight of glory which is waiting for us in the world to come. As we suffer, and as we endure, we become aware that His presence is with us through every valley of the shadow of death we are walking through. This is because (5) nothing and no one can separate us from the love of our Mashiach and this love is by far the greatest treasure we can possess, as we are passing through this fading valley of tears. In Him we can endure all things because He is always there to strengthen us.

And even in the midst of the most horrendous tribulation, He is still at work in us to give us the desire and the strength to accomplish His good pleasure. And part of understanding that He is always at work in us, means that we acknowledge (6) that we have made the enemy of our souls mad and he is striking out at us with every cheap shot he has up his sleeve. Through all of this, G-d is working to give us the ability to recognize bona fide, authentic spiritual attacks and to respond to them with the entire arsenal of the spiritual weaponry He places at our disposal.

Also, we sometimes need to learn (7) that a flat tire is just a flat tire and not an attack from the enemy. Some believers see every trial they are going through as a personal attack, when it is just part of the business of living we all have to face. They expend enormous energy constantly sounding red alert, when there is no actual threat. They exhaust themselves and expend all their resources, so that when an actual threat occurs, they collapse. They have not spent their time building up their defenses and building up their reserves and suffer from an acute form of spiritual paranoia and spiritual unpreparedness.

I want to learn to face trials with complete joy because I am homeward bound and the protection and provision of our Messiah is the place I want to learn to live in. I want this to be true, even though, in our Messiah, we do not get a say, in what comes our way and have to acknowledge that it is through many trials and tribulation that we must enter the kingdom.

This darkening world is not kingdom friendly and because we are no longer citizens of its darkness, we are actually swimming upstream, against the current which is trying to wash us back downstream, back into the world we have been delivered from. We live our lives always going against the flow and when we build our house upon the solid rock, the storms of this life will try and demolish us. This is because our faith is an insult to the flesh, the world and the enemy and they will never stop targeting us and the L-rd is at work to help us stay in training as seasoned spiritual warriors, so that we can be more than overcomers in our Messiah.

The enemy is looking for any weak spots in our spiritual armor or any loop holes through which he can spew his lies and derail our faith. G-d will use these attacks to train us and and prepare us, so that not even a sneak attack can overwhelm us.

He wants us to be combat ready and spiritually flexible, so that when we encounter the new and improved versions of the whatever's of life, our faith will remain solid and unshakable. He wants us to reach the place we we no longer see trials as life threatening encounters which we should be afraid of or that we shy away from.

He wants us to view them as par for the course, normal occurrences, like the elements of a spiritual obstacle course that we have to train for, so that these unwanted guests will make us stronger and not weaker. They are part of the course we have to run in this life.

The only way to grow and become actually complete and lacking in nothing is to learn how to overcome when we are facing trials, knowing that the worst they can do is kill us. Actually, the worst they can do is to pull us away from the L-rd and His Word. When we recognize this as their endgame, we can learn how to face various trials with the full resources of the Word and see that we are building up heavenly rewards for the next life by remaining unshakable.

We need to see storms as opportunities to experience both the protection and the provision of G-d and to demonstrate our confidence in Him, even when things are getting rough. So instead of letting trials and tribulations wear us down to the point where we feel like quitting, we need to let the L-rd train us and prepare us so that we are made stronger through trials and not made weaker. He does not want to torture you – he wants to train you for victory.

We need to consider it all joy when we go through diverse trials because part of our faith in the resurrected Messiah, recognizes that whatever happens to us has to get His approval first. Attached to that approval is a way of escape or a series of provisions which will strengthen us and not overwhelm us. They are always there whether we see them or not.

Our passage does not mean that we should seek out trials and tribulations in order to grow spiritually and be blessed by the L-rd. It means that part of what it means to walk on the bumpy straight and narrow in the L-rd, will always include trials and tribulations which He allows to come into our lives. Instead of being terrified or angry, we need to see three things and I will close with this.

First, we need to acknowledge Him in the trials and seek His face and acknowledge that no matter what, He is L-rd and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Next we need to look for His hand, for His ways of escape so that we can endure and overcome. Part of that is for us to design a way to express our obedience to the teachings of His Word in the midst of whatever destructive life earthquake or emotionally damaging tornado, bursts into our lives when we least expect it. Trials will always be an opportunity for obedience.

Instead of saying: “why me”, we need to say the L-rd gives and the L-rd takes away, blessed be the name of the L-rd. Part of this is to look for the point of obedience He wants us to exercise. We need to learn to say: “what do you want me to do and say in this situation?” Once a building is rendered earthquake proof, there is no promise that earthquakes will no longer attempt to bring the building down, it just means that they can longer cause it any substantial damage. Trials will come, we just have to learn not to let them rattle us.

How earthquake proof is your life? Do you see trials as joyful learning experiences that G-d is using to render you unshakable and to reaffirm the storm proofing your faith has acquired, as you have proven His care and provision again and again? He does some of His best work in the deepest valleys. Are you letting Him do His best work in your life? May He continue to work on you until you are steadfast, and lacking in nothing. We can either be all shook up, or we can be unshakable in Him. The choice is ours. Which one will you choose?