

Acharei Mot/ Kedushim After the Death/Holy Ones

Torah: Leviticus 16:1-18:30/Leviticus 19:1-20:27
Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15; Ezekiel 22:16/Ezekiel 20:2-20
Brit Chadashah: I Corinthians 6:9-20/Matthew 5:43-48

Today's doubled Torah Portion covers a lot of territory. Remember all of this material was given to our people during the year they camped around the Holy Mountain. G-d wanted them to be fully equipped and totally purged of paganism, before they entered the Holy Land and had to deal with Canaanite paganism.

The first item on the agenda was to reiterate the renewable atonement procedures in order to both protect the Presence with holy distancing and to preserve the lives of the priests, so that they would know to keep their distance. Direct contact with the Presence that resided behind the veil was only allowed once a year on the 10th of Tishri. This date has the honour of being the only Sabbath where the people were allowed to afflict their souls.

The central message of the intricate Yom Kippur rituals is that our sins are both forgiven and also forgotten – chased into the wilderness, never to be heard of again. Even though the High Priest went behind the veil twice during the rituals, he never, ever, say the Presence. He placed a considerable quantity of incense on the brazier, which produced a thick cloud and totally concealed the Presence and prevented it from becoming lethal while he renewed the atonement cleansing rituals for another year.

Chapter seventeen begins by stipulating that offerings to the L-RD could only be made at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Away from the supervision of the priests, the people might succumb to paganism and make criminal sacrifices to pagan gods. As well, making a blood atonement sacrifice to the L-rd away from the sanctuary, made the person offering it guilty of a blood crime, equivalent to murder or idolatry.

This chapter also emphatically forbids the Children of Israel from eating the blood of their sacrifices. This was because it is the life of the sacrifice in the blood which makes the atonement. It was to be totally given to the L-RD and not snacked on by those making the offering. Yahweh did not want the people to copy the horrendous Canaanite custom of eating animals alive.

You could not take part of the life for yourself and give the rest to the L-RD. Even away from the sanctuary, sacrificial animals were not to be eaten alive. You had to take their life before you began to eat them. This grotesque, criminal act of paganism was totally and completely forbidden. We are never to copy the criminal paganism of the society which surrounds us.

Once the animal was killed, the life was no longer in the blood, but both the blood and the carcass were offered to the L-RD in their entirety and no part of the sacrifice could be harvested for personal use. With some sacrifices, once the animal was cooked the worshiper's portion could be eaten. The animal had to first be offered entirely to the L-rd, blood and flesh and the insides, with nothing held back. We should never hold back anything which belongs entirely to the L-RD. Are you holding out on the L-RD?

When dealing with non sacrificial animals which have been butchered for food, the blood did not have to be entirely drained, it just had to be killed before the people began to eat it. Life resides in the blood and the life had to be taken before any use could be made of the animal.

Chapter eighteen outlines the three boundaries placed on marital relations. The Bible always assumes that the only acceptable expression of human sexuality occurs exclusively in marriage. The first boundary stipulates that sex with people who belong to the same kinship group is totally forbidden and eighteen forbidden sexual activity are given. Having sex with a neighbour's wife or marrying your wife's sister is also forbidden

Next, the chapter absolutely forbids sex between people of the same gender and describes it as a criminal abomination. The practice of ritual homosexuality was a common Canaanite practice and the gang rape of unsuspecting men was not uncommon.

Thirdly, bestiality or having sex with animals is also to be considered a forbidden abomination which the Canaanites practiced. The passage also says that it is because the Canaanites practiced these violations of acceptable sexual practice that the land was going to vomit out its current inhabitants. The House of Israel was not to violate kinship, gender or species when they engaged in sexual activity. Sex was designed to be an act of bonding and procreation between one man and one woman, according to very specific boundaries. Polygamy was allowed but was never condoned. In the New Testament, polygamists were barred from leadership positions.

After having thoroughly forbidden any manifestation of paganism, chapter nineteen describes what practical holiness and righteousness should look like. Holiness and righteousness involve not only being totally separate from defilement and paganism, they should also be a practical application of the principles of G-d's Word into every area of our lives.

This means not making idols and caring for the poor. It also means not lying or cheating and loving your neighbour as yourself. Along with this, justice must be administered without any kind of favoritism. We are also warned against spreading any kind of falsehood among the people. Hatred is forbidden. Pagan practices associated with witchcraft and mediums are also forbidden so that our lives can be pure and revolve around the Sabbath and the sanctuary. This means that G-d and His Word must always be the centre around which our lives revolve. Anything less is unacceptable, even among us in our day.

Paganism is more virulent than we give it credit for, so we must be constantly on guard against. It is so easy to become re-infected. It is the worst and most contagious pandemic on the planet.

Chapter twenty outlines a series of punishments for specific crimes, many of which are considered capital offenses. One of the most severe punishments occurred when a man married both a mother and her daughter – they were to be burned alive. Alongside the death penalty sterility is listed as a divine punishment for those who enter forbidden marital bonds.

The rationale behind the punishments is to prevent the people from becoming re-infected with paganism as they conquer a land which the L-RD was going to cleanse. We must never give any kind of paganism a foothold in our lives. We do not share pagan beliefs or values. While this book was never intended for public consumption, its technical details included the firm condemnation of anything pagan which might infect the community.

Sermon: Sharing Your Faith Without Scaring People Away

As we sojourn through our current Covid 19 socially distant isolation, I want to continue preaching about some of the basic beliefs and strategies which will keep us spiritually healthy and will inoculate us against the filthy darkness which continues to infest our fading world. With all the extra time we have to reflect, I want us to be reflecting on basic biblical truths.

You know that I readily share my faith with anyone who is interested and who will listen, but I never want to behave like a bull in a china shop. You see, many evangelism strategies are ineffective and counter productive. Many also needlessly and unwisely cause unnecessary offense. Reaching out to total strangers with aggressive expressions of our faith, does not have a high success rate. Yelling out: "turn or burn you filthy wretch" is not a good way to make friends and influence people to become believers.

Sometimes when believers are setting up a new congregation among strangers, strategies like knocking on doors may be required at first. In the long run this technique offends more people than it reaches. Missionaries are obliged to start from scratch, but even then, they try to build conversations about the faith, rather than adopting a cold turkey approach which can be intrusive and make people want to argue, unless you use a lot of wisdom.

In our presentation, once we identify ourselves and what we are doing, we need people's agreement to continue, or, in most cases, they will just shut us down. Being intrusive makes people defensive and too many Jewish people have been targeted by this aggressive approach. Many remain sensitive when the topic of religion comes up because they have been burned in the past. Making friends with them and respectfully opening a faith dialogue is a much better approach. When we respect them, they will respect us.

Personally, I will share my faith with anyone, anywhere and at any time, but I am out to get results and not just see how many different people I can turn off and offend in the process. Unless you can build a voluntary two way dialogue, you are rarely going to get a hearing, unless somehow G-d is already at work in their lives.

Sometimes we have to be aggressively salty and very shiny, before we are granted an opportunity to engage with people about our faith. I firmly believe that G-d brings us into contact with certain people who are already open to the Gospel and the Torah. I must just learn to wait until the other ones have been worked over enough by G-d to be ready to open up. Successfully sharing our faith often means being in the right place at the right time, talking in the right way to people who are ready to listen.

Having a brief, tense discussion with a stranger or handing out unsolicited religious tracts is rarely effective and is frequently counterproductive. We have to patiently win a hearing and develop a spiritual dialogue if we really want to reach people. When we invite people to an evangelistic rally and they agree to come, we still have to show meekness and respect if we want our message to have a maximum effect.

Soon, I want to compose a brochure which would explain how a person can give their heart to the L-RD. But even then, I would not pressure them into taking it, if they were not already open to receive it. Being aggressive like a car salesman those door knocking Jehovah's Witnesses is not a good way to successfully share your faith and get results.

I am not in a panic that unless I get the Gospel out to everyone I come into contact with, that

they might not come to faith before they die and I would be guilty for their lost soul on the Day of Judgment. In His timing G-d will bring people to Himself, even if it takes more than one kick at the cat to do so. I do not want to become a kamikaze evangelist who immediately wants to get the soul saved, before their ship sinks into the waters of eternity.

I know many ministries do various forms of aggressive outreach, while others adopt more of a dialogue approach, but even with his massive evangelistic rallies, Billy Graham made a surprising admission. One year after people have come forward to make a salvation decision, only about 10% of his converts were still walking with the L-rd as committed believers.

Several years ago a survey was done asking newcomers why they started coming to the church which they attended. Roughly 80% said they were brought by a friend. Less than 5% came after hearing a formal Gospel presentation. Starting a two way dialogue which is driven by asking questions and dealing with answers is a far more efficient means of sharing our faith. If you know where people are coming from and can ask them key questions about what they believe, then you have set the ground work for a successful presentation of the Gospel.

I know there are many tracts which clearly present the Gospel in a simplified formula, but by their own statistics, tract societies admit that it takes around ten thousand tracts to get one convert. It takes considerable ground work to bring a person to the place where they are ready to hear and ready to give their lives to our Messiah. Again, it is different when we are dealing with a missionary setting, rather than sharing our faith among people we work with and who know us.

Our western world has become post-Christian for the most part and liberalism among both Jews and Gentiles has watered down the Gospel and the teachings of the Torah to the point where they want people to believe that all other religions are totally acceptable. They also wrongly affirm that those who practice immorality which the Bible forbids, should be welcomed without judgment because we have to accept that standards of right and wrong have changed. In G-d's eyes, they have not and they never will.

However, dealing with a backslidden society full of former believers and their children, who have been inoculated against the truth, is different than sharing with people who have never heard the Good News. In the one case, you are building bridges to bring people to a biblical understanding, in the other, you are having to storm fortresses and breakdown false understandings about the nature of truth, so that they come to understand who G-d really is.

We need to be prepared to engage in sincere discussions with those who feel that our faith is something which belongs to the past and which our society has grown out of. Our basic message has not changed, we just have to change the way we present it. We are facing a form of paganism which thinks it has disproved our message and which has little or no respect for those who believe it and who want to share it. You see many people know what we believe, they just have no respect for our faith or for us.

There is a modern mythology which embraces silly ideas which fly in the face of authentic scientific evidence, but it is not us, it is the society which embraces evolutionary humanism. So increasingly, we are facing an hostile audience and have to speak to their folly as part of the process of sharing the biblical truth of our Gospel and Torah message.

When we share, we do not let them take the initiative, but we gear our responses and

statements to their questions and their objections. We may not be able to satisfactorily answer all of their objections, but everyone's belief structure eventually runs up against the wall of the unknowable. This is where I invoke Deut. 29:29 and say: "The secret things belong to G-d, but the things which He has revealed belong to us and to our children, forever, that we may put them into practice." We deal in knowable truths and accept the unknowable.

There are usually five objections we will have to deal with as we share and I am not shy about them. They are: biblical creationism, the fall of mankind, the universal flood, the death and resurrection of our beloved Messiah and finally His eventual return. I let people know that the two creation accounts in the Bible are symbolic poems which affirm that Creation occurred under the strict supervision of G-d. I also affirm that he is in total and final control of all that occurs in the cosmos. The accounts speak of order, not of chaos and the ridiculous versions of the big bang theory have no basis in objective evidence – there is no evidence that this magical event ever occurred. It is the greatest myth in the history of the world.

When I talk about the fall of mankind, I affirm that the Bible teaches that mankind are sinners by choice and not by nature, and all of human history is full of countless examples of the wicked choices which mankind has made. There are also considerable examples of some of the good choices people have made over the centuries. So the Bible teaches that sin is the product of bad choices people made and is not something which G-d built into our human nature. We were born to choose and live to suffer the consequences of those choices.

When it comes to the universal flood, I divide the discussion into two categories – the age of the heavens and the age of the earth. There is evidence to suggest that the heavens have existed for a considerable length of time, but there is also evidence to suggest that the earth is not very old. Fossil evidence is all water formed and once there is no more carbon residue on these relics, it is impossible to assign great age to them, except as a baseless speculation. Continental drift also suggests that once the earth was a single continent and our current continents continue their drifting.

All of this can be explained by a universal flood where the fountains of the deep opened up and the weight of the water pushed up mountain ranges and created great chasms for the water to sink into – we call these gorges the oceans. I go on and explain that the bottom line definition of a species is a gene pool which can procreate successfully. The many subspecies we see today are of recent development and did not take millions of years to evolve. Most fossils do not exist according to the evolutionary categories and a sudden great water catastrophe seems to have caused the massive extinction which the fossils speak of.

The death of the Messiah is well cataloged and His resurrection was well witnessed. How it occurred is something which we cannot explain, but then there are many things in this life which exist and which we also cannot explain. His ascension was also witnessed and as we accept His death, His resurrection and His ascension, then the promise of His return becomes a reasonable part of the equation. Our faith is not irrational and is not based on fictitious fables and when we present what we believe as reasonable solutions for the mysteries of life, we put the ball in their court, because evolutionary nonsense is so full of exaggerated faith statements like: we believe, we think that, it is possible that and various versions of: it has to have happened that way and one day we will find evidence of it and finally be able to explain our theory. Statements of possibility are not statements of fact.

The missing links of evolution number in the millions and come straight out of the Looking Glass

and the diseased imaginations of people who want to explain the universe in a way which excludes the G-d of the Bible. Their attempts just sink further and further into speculation and folly and they keep violently clapping their hands to keep their evolutionary Tinker Bell alive, even though, deep down, they know she does not exist.

In the midst of all the exploding speculative folly where true and false knowledge is expanding so rapidly that it doubles every few years, we have to keep our heads clear so that the howling of the heathen does not drown out the still, small voice of our Creator. Three things and we will bring this broadcast to a close.

First, I firmly believe that G-d is at work in everyone's life, from my next door neighbour to the most flagrant pagans in the wilds of New Guinea or the ones in the bars and clubs of cities like New York. You can run, but you can't hide and turning up the volume of sin and fabricating serial lies about how all of this started and where it is headed, doesn't change a single thing in our objective universe. A change of perception does not change what is true.

G-d will keep on working in people's lives so that they either move towards the unchanging truths of His Word or they fall off the edge of the abyss into the incredible darkness of sin. We are fishing for members of the righteous core who are seeking for truth and we realize that every year, this shrinking core comes under ever increasing attack from the lies of the enemy of our souls and his henchmen. The voice of G-d's Spirit will always make itself heard, even as sinners scream louder in a vain attempt to drown out its call.

Secondly, I believe in G-d's timing which will always overcome the devil's confusion and his spiritual static which always tries to overturn our faith, our morality and especially our spiritual credibility. Engaging in arguments about our faith is always counterproductive and when those close to me shut me down, I will still be their friend and continue to shine at them like a salty light which they cannot extinguish. They have to listen to who I am, even if they will not listen to my words. When we can't talk them into it, we can live them into it!

Lastly, I understand that giving a basic Gospel, Torah presentation is only the first step in sharing my faith. If I have done my job well, there will follow a wonderful series of questions and answers that will reel them in as we build a bridge over the gap which separates them from coming to faith in the G-d of the Bible. What does a basic presentation of biblical truth look like? There are only five concepts: (1) the Bible is the Word of G-d. (2) Jesus (Yeshua) is the Son of G-d (G-d the Son). (3) He was born of a virgin. (4) He died on the cross for the sins of the world. And (5) He rose, ascended and will one day return.

I like to engage with people who are not yet believers and their sincere objections actually invigorate my faith as I share my faith with them, without scaring them away. This approach applies to pagans who belong to no faith community and to those who are trapped in other religions which we know are false. We show respect and base our approach on their questions and on the answers we are able to give to them. When we hit the wall of the unknowable, we freely admit there are things which no one can know. This is not a cop out, but is an admission that human knowledge cannot embrace all the mysteries of the universe and some things we just have to accept by faith. Our faith has answers about the meaning and purpose of life and when we share our faith, we should concentrate on these. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov, campers.