

Emor **Say!** **Holiness and wholeness are discussed.**

Torah: Leviticus 21:1-24:23

Haftarah: Ezekiel 44:15-31

Brit Chadashah: Luke 14:12-24

The first chapter of this week's Torah portion deals with special restrictions which were placed on the priests among the Levites. Going near and touching a dead person as part of a funeral, would defile the priest and require completing another full cleansing and consecration ritual. This passage forbids the priests from participating in mourning rituals which would require some contact with a dead person, unless it was for a very close family member.

They were also not to cut their hair or make cuts in their flesh as part of the grieving rituals. There were also restrictions placed on the women they could marry because they handled holy things, and in this passage, the offerings are called the food of their G-d.

If it was the High Priest, he could not mourn, even for his closest relations, because the anointing oil had been placed on him. Even more restrictions were placed on the woman he could marry. No son of Aaron with any bodily deformity could serve in the tabernacle. The priests had to be holy and whole in order to perform the rituals which would cleanse the people and separate them from defilement.

If an Aaronite became impure, he could not handle holy things for as long as he remained impure. The list of that which could make a priest to become impure is quite extensive. A portion of many sacrifices were given to the priests as their food and restrictions were made as to which members of their households could eat of this food, because it was considered holy. It was because the priests made offerings for the people, that they themselves had to be pure and free from any bodily deformities. Both the priests and the sacrificial animals had to be free of any bodily deformity.

They were considered a spiritual elite which had both special privileges and special restrictions. They could not be a link between the people and G-d if they possessed any defilement or deformity. They were kind like a special kind of spiritual soldiers who prevented any defilement of any kind from coming into the sanctuary and troubling the Presence. G-d takes sin and defilement very seriously and wants His people to have nothing to do with it. How seriously do you take sin and defilement and how much of an effort do you make so that none of it is allowed to creep into your life?

Chapter 23 is the first mention of the complete festival cycle, which was to stretch from the first harvest in the spring until the last harvest in the fall. The weekly Sabbath is still the first festival of the L-rd and there were seven other special Sabbaths where the people were to gather and celebrate the protection and provision of the L-rd.

Passover and the week long festival of Unleavened Bread, initiate the appointed times of the L-RD as a reminder of our deliverance from the slavery of Egypt and of the time it took our people to walk out of Egyptian held territory. We were made into a free people and every year we had to remember the great deliverance which gave us this freedom.

After the Seder and the other sacrifices connected to Passover, the festival of First Fruits was to be observed. It was the first of three pilgrimage festivals where the people brought in their agricultural tithes. It was sometimes called the Barley Harvest because this was the first grain to ripen.

Seven weeks had to be counted after the Barley Harvest and then it was time to harvest the wheat and to bring the second agricultural tithe to the tabernacle. This is called Shavuot (weeks) in Hebrew and Pentecost (fifty) in English. In between these special gatherings, the people could make any number of sacrifices and offerings, but three times a year the people were to gather around the tabernacle and celebrate the provision of G-d.

After the summer, in the seventh month from Passover, a second grain harvest occurred along with a fruit harvest. This period of time had three separate celebrations, beginning with the Festival of Trumpets, which also became known as the Head of the Year (Rosh Hashanah). It looks ahead to the coming judgment of the whole world. This festival eventually became known as the New Year for the year.

There are five new year's in Judaism. Passover is the new year in the L-RD and for the king. The kings counted the years of their reign from Passover. After the destruction of the second temple, the 33rd day of the counting between First fruits and Pentecost became known as new year's for the scholars. Rosh Hashanah is the fourth new year's and once winter begins to lose its grip on the Holy Land, in the month of Tevet, it is the new year's for the trees.

On the tenth day of the seventh month, the day of Atonement is observed. It was the only time the High Priest could go behind the veil and it is the most solemn of all the Festivals. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, at the full moon, the last festival, Sukkot, is celebrated after the grain and the fruit are harvested. Once in the land, during the week of Sukkot, the people were to dwell in booths or tents and they were to have nothing but joy.

During these seven special Sabbaths the people could do no servile labour as they celebrated the goodness of G-d through another harvest cycle. They needed to understand that it was not by their efforts that they were being blessed, it was by the protection and provision of the L-RD.

The portion ends with some more discussion about how the tabernacle was to be cared for. Lamps had to burn from sundown to sun up in the tabernacle because no darkness was ever allowed to come near the Presence. Twelve special, freshly baked loaves, were waved and put before the L-RD every day. These were to later be eaten by the priests. These loaves are remembered in the challah we eat at the conclusion of our services.

The priests had to act as judges and had to deal with the son of an Egyptian man and a Jewish woman who blasphemed the G-d of Israel. This is not the same thing as using foul language. He openly spoke against G-d and it was judged to be a capital offense and he was stoned to death. The people were reminded that capital offenses required capital punishment and the priests were the ones to judge and to assign an appropriate punishment. The portion ends with a reminder that total compliance to the stipulations of G-d was required. Even for us today, obedience should never be seen as optional or partial, but complete and fully based on the stipulations of His Word.

Sermon: Ode to Creation, Twice.

Today, I want to deal with the two creation accounts in the first two chapters of Genesis. I also want to dispel some extravagant myths which have grown up around the origin of the devil and the fallen angels. Let me begin with what is called the Gap Theory, which says that between verses one and two of Genesis chapter one, the devil apparently messed up G-d's first creation and He had to start again. This never occurred.

Verse one introduces the topic of creation and verse two begins the description of the wonder and beauty of creation. The devil does not have the ability to mess with creation and we will discuss both his origin and purpose later on. There are two creation accounts in the Bible. There is first chapter one, which begins with the cosmos and ends with the creation of man and the institution of the Sabbath. Then there is chapter two which begins with the cosmos and ends with the mystery of gender.

Now, let me stipulate firmly that I believe in a literal creation of the cosmos by G-d, but neither how He did it or how long it took, are really discussed in the Bible. What is given are two odes to this wonderful creation. An ode is a poem which tells a story with vivid imagery and powerful symbolism. It is a literary description of a literal event. But why is the order of creation different between the two accounts? With an Hebraic story telling mode, details are not always chronological and are arranged to emphasize an important statement.

The two creation accounts in the Bible each has a distinct purpose. Chapter one is divided into seven days, even though the conclusion was cut off from chapter one and stuck onto the beginning of chapter two, where it does not belong. This was likely done to diminish the status of the seventh day Sabbath as the crowning glory of creation, where we are called to stop and reflect on the majestic splendor of the finished work of creation, as we pay homage to our amazing Creator. It is a temporal testimony to His finished creation.

The second account introduces the marvelous mystery of gender. In the first account, man and woman are created last of all the living species and have the honour of being the only one which bears the image of G-d. In chapter two, man, by himself, was created before any other life form and no suitable work companion was found for him. So G-d drew forth woman from man, and not only are they both equally the image of G-d, but the mystery of the trinity is reflected when the two become one (echad). One interesting feature of the second creation account is that there is no mention of aquatic life, because this detail did not fit in to the message of this account. Be careful about reading in unintended meaning into omissions.

Lets take a closer look at the first account. It is divided into the six active days of creation, followed by the seven day Sabbath conclusion. Each of the first five days begins with G-d "saying", G-d "doing" (or the work getting done) and each day ends with G-d "seeing" that the work was good. Day six has G-d "saying" twice, once for the creation of animal life, which he says is good, and then again for the creation of mankind (male and female) who are given a special status among all living things. We are the bearers of the divine image of our Creator.

In each of the days but one, G-d says that the accomplished work was good. He does not say that day two is good, but He says twice that day three is good. Finally, looking back on all He has created He says that it was all very good. Then comes the Sabbath rest.

The days of creation are not intended to be taken as literal 24 hour terrestrial periods of time. They are indications that G-d built time into the fabric of the cosmos and they serve four purposes. First the days speak to the wonder of the finished work of creation, where no chaos exists. Next they declare the absolute lordship of YHVH over every aspect of creation. Related to this, they also proclaim that YHVH is the sustainer of everything and that everything is under His direct control through the laws which He put into play and which hold the whole thing together. Colossians affirms that the Messiah is the glue which holds creation together. Are you letting Him be the glue which holds you together?

Finally, the days ask us a question – how long did it take G-d to make time? Again, He built time into the moving fabric of the cosmos and nothing stands still or is static. Universal cosmic motion is moving creation to its ultimate conclusion, when we know that Messiah shall return and set up His everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Well, why is the order of creation reversed in the second account? In the first, man and woman are the last life forms to be created and in the second, man by himself is the first life form to be created. Chapter one is a hymn to creation where the Sabbath is the ultimate conclusion. Chapter two is a hymn to the mystery of gender. In both accounts, men and women are still equally the image of G-d, but each gender is distinct from the other. So each account has a different purpose, but communicates the same message.

In the first account it says three times that G-d created. First, at the very beginning, next, when animals were created and finally when mankind was created. No mention of the creation of angels is given and we have to be careful not to use the absence of G-d saying day two was good, as an indication that these beings were created on that day. If you are going to attach a special significance to the absence of the word “good” in day two, then you would have to make something of the absence of the word “good” when the creation of mankind is introduced, just before YHVH declared that all He had created was very good.

The art of interpretation is twofold. First, one must never read into a text something it does not mean, and secondly, one should not derive meaning out of the text which was not intended. The Ode to creation gives a beautiful description of the harmonious whole which we know as creation, free of flaw and free of chaos.

Well, if neither account mentions the creation of the angels, when did these spiritual beings come into existence and when did a third of them fall? When more information or detail is desired than the Bible gives, we need to invoke Deut. 29:29 because there are some things which are really none of our business. We need to concentrate on the details which are given and leave what we cannot know in the capable hands of our Creator.

Having said that, there are a handful of verses which speak about the origin of the devil (John 8:44; Is. 45:7; Prov. 16:4 and I John. 3:8). There is one place which discusses the fall of 1/3 of the angels, without specifying when it occurred (Rev. 12:4). There are also two passages which talk about arrogant rulers who made extravagant claims to deity, but who died like all mankind does (Is. 14 and Ezek. 28). Neither speaks about the supposed fall of the devil.

There is no mention of the devil actually falling and claims that he was once G-d's right hand servant, come from the two passages which discuss arrogant human rulers and not the enemy of our souls. He was never a glorious angel who fell from his heavenly estate.

Our Messiah says that he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning and though the Apostle Paul says he can disguise himself as an angel of light, nowhere in the Scriptures does it ever say that he was once indeed a real angel of light who fell from an exalted position. As there is no darkness in G-d, there is no light in the enemy. There never was any.

We know that when our Messiah died and rose, there was a change in how the enemy was able to operate. He was thrown out of the heavens and restricted to earth (Rev. 12:7-9), where he roams as a roaring lion, seeking for victims to devour (I Peter 5:8).

So we can safely say with certainty, that the enemy was evil from the beginning and that in conjunction with his conflict with the messianic purposes of G-d, one third of the created angels changed sides. They either joined the ranks of demons and evil spirits who were already somehow servants or colleagues of the enemy, or they became the horde which the enemy leads.

I do not think that because day two was not called good, that this is when the devil was created, along with other evil spirits and demons. Since he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, there was no point at which he began to rebel against G-d. Gen. 3:1 does say that the serpent was created and I feel that our G-d allowed actual evil to come into existence so that we would be able to resist it and fight against it (Gen. 4:6, 7) and not just serve YHVH because we had no other choice or didn't know any better.

The devil is not an eternal being who has always existed and while his origin and the origin of demons and evil spirits is not given in the Bible, we are told how to successfully defeat these enemies of our soul, when we do not succumb to the lies and perversions the true dark side is spreading among all the nations and generations of mankind. The forces of darkness have a three pronged attack when they try and defeat us and pull us into the darkness where they dwell. First there is **temptation** where we are influenced to do that which we know is wrong. Then there is **condemnation** where our defeat is used to motivate us to give up on trying to be good. Lastly, there is **confusion** where various versions of "has G-d really said" keep cropping up and this is where the true battle for the souls of mankind occurs.

As we bring this message to a close, there are three things which I want to say concerning the Ode to Creation, Twice. First, neither account is intended to be taken literally, but each account uses exquisite symbolism and vivid imagery to speak about the wonder and harmony of the finished creation which is under G-d's absolute and final control.

Next, they both outline several major themes which were never composed to be exhaustive. In our modern age, we are only now beginning to discover the irrevocable, universal laws of physics which He put into motion from the beginning and which will continue to govern the cosmos until the Kingdom comes.

Lastly, the devil did not spoil creation, we did. Because of our ancestor's fall the universe is wearing out at an accelerated pace. But was it created to last forever, or did it come with a divinely determined expiry date? The real spiritual battle of the ages is being fought right here on earth between the hordes of demonic darkness and the children of light seekers. And don't forget there are twice as many angels who support us than the number who fell and who oppose us. There was an angelic fall, followed by a demonic defeat and as we speak, the final generational battle between the light and darkness has been engaged and is intensifying with every passing year.

One of the most subtle perversions of light is Islam which is a demonic counterfeit of both Judaism and Christianity. We know that the gods of both Hinduism and Buddhism are really demons, along with all the gods of other religions, past and present, which have troubled humanity since our scattering at the tower of Babel. Judaism is the only faith which has always proclaimed the truth, even though pagan elements have crept in when they did not acknowledge their true Messiah. Pagan elements of any kind should have no place in our life.

In conclusion, I fully accept the spiritual authority of both creation accounts and understand that they are two true accounts of the same story. The biblical account is true and free of any error and it is the only account which can be fully trusted. Evolutionism joins the ranks of all other false religions as the product of the diseased imaginations of those who prefer darkness instead of seeking for the light. Newer versions of the same old lies from the same source.

The Bible describes both G-d and the cosmos He created, with poetic accuracy and calls all of mankind everywhere to abandon their futile darkness and come to the light. Our Messiah is that light. While there are still many questions about how G-d brought creation into being, we are given enough of the bigger picture to understand that we have to learn walk in our Creator's world according to the stipulations His amazing Word, the Bible.

We live in a chaos free universe which functions according to the orderly laws which G-d put into place. The only chaos which exists in the universe, is to be found in the muddled and contradictory nonsense which passes for truth among those who do not accept the truth or the authority of G-d's Word. His majestic creation testifies of His power and deity and He has also placed a testimony in human culture and in the human conscience. He also works in each person's life to bring them to the truth of His Word, no matter how hard they flip around as He reels them in.

I accept both creation accounts for what they are - poetic descriptions of eternal truth. There is no way to reconcile either account with the false theories of evolution. The Big Bang is not a scientific theory, neither is evolution through progressive mutations over millions of years. The fossil record testifies to the universal flood in the days of Noah, nothing more and nothing less. G-d's Word is true and should be only foundation we build our lives on.

Even as a second great darkness prepares to engulf our world, there are still many light seekers, wandering and stumbling through the darkness, as they try to find a way out. At the same time, whole cultures are progressively succumbing to this returning darkness as they cease to believe in the supernatural as the source of all being. This is also occurring among religions who continue to lose adherents to various versions of modern lies which pretend that they are in fact scientific. This is being spurred on by the dictatorial fascism of politically correct secularism which requires that we accept everyone and do not judge anyone.

The Bible is a fully integrated description of divine truth which speaks to each generation and nation of mankind, and outlines what the final destiny of all mankind will be. We should add nothing to what it teaches. We should delete nothing from what it teaches. We should apply everything which applies to us and adopt both a wholesome faith and a wholesome obedience, as the only valid response to what it teaches. Those who walk on this path will suffer no substantial collateral spiritual loss when we all stand before the King and will be richly rewarded when the current shooting match of the ages is finally over. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.