

Today's Torah portion is called Naso (Elevate) and deals with Numbers 4:21-7:89. After having established the marching and camping order for the twelve tribes, Moses had to organize the Levitical clans who were going to set up, take down and transport the Ark and all the furnishings of the tent of meeting.

From this point on, the Ark was going to be the center around which the tribes camp and it was always going to walk at the head of their banners every time the Children of Israel moved. We cannot always determine what is going to happen to us as we wander through this life on our journey to our Father's house in glory. What we can control is how we walk during this amazing pilgrimage. He needs to be both the center around which our lives revolve and the guiding light we follow through all the ups and downs of this life.

Our spiritual organization and our inner harmony are what we are called to build and to sustain. We may go through great tribulation and suffer loss and even be martyred at the hands of those who wrongfully hate us. We may also lead peaceful lives of great abundance and joy. Either reality is only a temporary state we are only traveling through on our journey to our eternal home in the Kingdom of our beloved Messiah. We need to take our cues from Him and His Word so that we neither get stalled or sidetracked by the things which have no real eternal value.

In the Torah portion, the Levites are divided in three clans, each with specific functions to perform. Two of the clans were assigned to carry the heavier parts of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting, under the supervision of Ithamar, one of the sons of Aaron. At the end of the portion, we learn that much of this material was to be transported in carts donated by the twelve princes of Israel. The tabernacle and the tent of meeting were not small structures and everything had to be packed securely and then set up in an orderly manner at each new camp site.

When it came to the holy things inside the tabernacle, the sons of Aaron were assigned the job of wrapping up the ark and carrying it on their shoulders to the next camp site. The rest of the furnishings were to be carried by the third Levitical clan, the Kohathites. These were also to be carried on their shoulders, and were not placed in the carts.

The most difficult task was carrying the larger brazen altar of sacrifice, where meat, grain and wine were offered. It may have been that two men were stationed at each end of the four poles, so that eight people carried the altar and not just four.

The twelve princes of Israel made their prescribed offerings over a twelve day period. These included a specific number of sacrificial animals which were offered each day as part of the offering procedures. 36 animals were given for the burnt offering and 12 more were given for the atonement offering.

A further 204 animals were given as thanksgiving offerings which the people ate. These initial offerings were similar in kind and in number to the annual Sukkoth offerings, but at Sukkoth they were offered over 8 days and not over the twelve days of the prince's offerings. Whenever the people gathered unto the L-rd, there was always to be praise and feasting.

The Torah portion ends with a mention that once the tabernacle was set up, instead of going up the mountain or into his tent outside the camp, Moses would go into the tabernacle when he wanted to speak to G-d. G-d would speak to him from the mercy seat between the two golden cherubim. He was allowed to go behind the veil anytime he wanted to speak to G-d or was called to appear before G-d. The high priest was only allowed behind the veil once year as part of the Yom Kippur rituals.

In between the census of the levitical clans and the mention of the extensive offerings of the 12 princes, four other special functions are also mentioned. First of all, it was at this point in the organization of the camp that all the lepers and people with seeping issues of blood were told to leave the camp. Anyone who had been defiled by a dead body was also told to go out of the camp to prevent any infection from spreading. Then the portion deals with a strange ritual which a wife who was accused of secret infidelity had to be put through to determine her guilt or her innocence.

The key ingredient of the drink she was to swallow was dust from the floor of the tabernacle. She also made a special sacrifice and if she was innocent, the drink did not damage her body at all. If she was guilty, she would be made sick and would be considered a curse among the people. This was not some kind of magic ritual, but the dust of the tabernacle would discover the truth she may have been hiding inside. Everyone deserves the right to be proven innocent or guilty. Her accusing husband must have felt foolish when she was proven innocent.

Next comes the instructions concerning the nazirite vow of temporary separation, where either a man or a woman wanted to spend time apart seeking G-d. During this time, no alcohol was to be consumed and their hair would be allowed to grow without being cut. If they went near a dead person, the whole process would have to start over again. There were special sacrifices to offer and at the end of the nazirite period, the person would shave their head and add their hair to the other offerings. Samson and John the Baptist were called to be permanent Nazarites but only John properly fulfilled the conditions of his permanent separation.

Lastly, the wording of the Aaronic benediction is given as a means to bless the people by putting G-d's name on them. The name of YHVH was mentioned three times as a sign it was a sure thing and that the people would indeed be blessed. Once the camp was organized and eventually moved, the marching of the House of Israel must have been a majestic, orderly spectacle that would have greatly impressed anyone who had the privilege of witnessing it.

The way we walk through this life with the Messiah should also be a majestic, orderly spectacle which would be full of light and salt to draw our friends and neighbors to our glorious Messiah. It was not designed to be a way of showing off, it was designed to showcase the wonder and beauty of the G-d we serve. Have you found your marching place in our Messiah's Kingdom? How well are you keeping step with Him according to His Word?

Putting His name of anyone would only be effective as long as the person knew their marching order and was keeping pace with the L-rd and the other faithful members of G-d's Gospel parade.

Sermon: Messianic Bible Basics: Understanding the Sovereignty of G-d

As a Messianic Jewish believer, I am firmly convinced about the sovereignty of G-d. I believe

what the Bible teaches and it says that G-d is in final control of all that happens everywhere in our universe. He is also in final control of everything which happens in our lives. However, this does not mean that only good things will happen to believers and that only bad things will happen to unbelievers and bad people.

Job tried to unravel the mystery of suffering when bad things happen to good people through no fault of their own. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon also tried to unravel some of the more disturbing occurrences that happen to good people who have really done nothing to deserve some of the harsh treatment we sometimes encounter. At the end of the discussion, he made three statements which bring me much comfort when the raging storms of life try to knock down the house of my faith.

First he said that no matter what is going on in our lives, we should learn to fear G-d as a major reaction to all that life may throw at us. He went on to say that we should always keep the commandments because eternal realities are always more important than the temporary circumstances which we may find ourselves in. Finally, he affirms that eventually, G-d will bring everything into judgment, including the secret things, be they ever so good or ever so bad.

So instead of raging about all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, we need to hold firm to our faith and to our obedience. We should never let the circumstances of our lives tell us how we should live. We are, after all, heaven bound pilgrims only passing through this life.

Now, I am also a firm believer in both the provision and the protection of G-d and I know that He will always have my best interests at heart. But this does not exempt me from the trials and tribulations which will come upon all believers who want to walk on the straight and narrow in our darkening world. Not everyone agrees with what the Bible teaches.

Some "name it and claim it" believers falsely assert that if you have enough faith, nothing bad or unfortunate will be allowed to enter your life. They are also called the prosperity Gospel people who say that only a lack of faith allows sickness or poverty to trouble your life. These people are really just a cross between those who believe in the power of positive thinking and those unfortunate Christian Science people who say that sickness is just the result of mistaken thinking and will go away when you learn to think correctly.

Don't get me wrong, I believe in divine healing and I have seen it happen in the lives of many believers. As well, my needs have always been met in our Messiah, but not always in the way which I expected.

You see, G-d can use even the most grotesque horror for good in our lives as we store up a measureless weight of glory in our hearts to take with us into the next life. Some time look at what the victorious Spirit filled life is supposed to look like in the way which the apostle Paul described it in 2 Corinthians 11:22-33. The flesh, the world and the enemy can generate any amount of static to slow us down and derail us, if we are not ready for the times of trouble when they strike.

Paul experienced relentless persecution and heartbreaking trials because he refused to give up the ministry he was called to as a good soldier fighting the good fight. G-d used all of these trials for Paul's good and He will also use all and any of the dire circumstances of our lives for our good.

This does not mean that only good things will happen to us as we walk with the L-rd or that all the bad things in our lives will eventually turn out for the best in this life. You see, we live in two different worlds simultaneously. We live first in the outer world which is withering and will eventually pass away. Next we live in the inner world where our increasing spiritual riches keep us focused on the eternal joy which will burst forth when Messiah's kingdom finally breaks forth. Believing in the sovereignty of G-d affirms that G-d will use everything which He allows to stumble into our lives for our eternal spiritual good.

Said another way, believing in the sovereignty of G-d affirms that nothing is allowed into our lives without His express permission and He always attaches to these happenstances an act of faithful obedience He wants us to respond with. We need to exercise faith and obedience as our first and final response to everything which He allows to come our way.

YHVH wants us to remain firmly focused on both our spiritual duty and on our spiritual destiny, whether we grow rich and plump or are starved and beaten and then tossed into the fires of Auschwitz.

He wants to give us the inner drive to accomplish His will and also the ability to accomplish it. This spiritual empowering should always remain the enduring focus of our lives on our earthly pilgrimage. It is also true that we are saved by grace. When we come to faith, we become His workmanship, designed and empowered for the good works which His Word and His Spirit are calling us to perform.

Because of His calling and His empowering, we do not need to envy rich or powerful people. We do not need to envy talented athletes or those who are in incredible shape. We should not even envy those mighty intellects who are stuffed to the brim with amazing and complicated knowledge. We should be happy to be the person who G-d made us to be and be happy to do the things which He has gifted us with the ability to accomplish.

The sovereignty of G-d means that His finished work of creation always functions the way it should, free of flaw and free of any chaos or disorder. Believing in the sovereignty of G-d also means that we understand that He placed a copy of His Law in our conscience. It also affirms that His Spirit stands at the entrance of the noisiest bars and causes the voice of His conviction to be heard, even if few people actually like what it says.

Believing in the sovereignty of G-d means that we understand that He is at work in the darkest of human hearts to bring even the most stubborn people to a place of decision so that they would desire to seek His face.

His sovereignty remains intact even in the midst of all the incredible criminal violence which has all too frequently plagued our planet throughout history. The flesh, the world and the enemy have never yet succeeded in drowning out His voice and they will never succeed in derailing any of His kingdom purposes.

Along the way, we also understand that His sovereignty is not a guarantee that we will always float to Heaven on a rose coloured cloud of ease. Walking with the Messiah also does not mean that we will suffer relentlessly in an endless stream of painful troubles, as if we were stuck in an endless series of frightening storms which will not ever give us a moment of peace and

quiet.

He will give us rest when we need it and will never allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to resist, always providing us with a way of escape – which may or may not be to our liking. Believing in His sovereignty gives us great comfort and the strength to face the whatever good or whatever bad or whatever ugly, that storms through our lives.

We are never lost. We are never abandoned or forsaken. Our Good Shepherd will always guide us through all of life's trials and traumas. as if we were merely peacefully grazing in the most abundant of green pastures.

However, as I have said before, He will never be our celestial sugar daddy whom we serve in order to get the sweetest deal in every circumstance of our lives. He does place limits on whatever He allows to wander into our lives and though sometimes cruel and vicious pagans rage at us and even slaughter some of His sheep, our final destiny remains firmly planted in His kingdom purposes, which He is working on throughout our lost and dying world.

I am not overly troubled by the current Covid 19 crisis. Neither am I really afraid because the tide of radical Muslim terrorism is on the rise. I am saddened by the lack of integrity which too many believers have allowed to creep into the carnal way they live their lives. The current wave of racial hatred and racial violence, along with the rise of antisemitism are merely the birth pangs of the coming messianic Kingdom. The sovereignty of G-d has not lost its grip on the crazy ebb and flow of human history and nothing which is going on in the world should cause us to fear and lose sleep over.

If there is anything which we should lose sleep over, it is the coming kingdom when all the nations and generations of mankind will be gathered together to stand before our Sovereign L-rd. They shall receive an eternal sentence from which there is not escape and the truth they have suppressed and tried to hide from, will be painfully and permanently revealed to them. His sovereignty is alive and well and working for that day which will soon come, no matter how hard this foolish world fights against it.

We live in a universe which is fully and firmly under His unwavering sovereign control. No amount of folly and sinfulness can ever change this. No amount of mockery and false arguments will overpower our Messiah's sovereignty. We know that He worked in the lives of all believers, even before they knew Him, in order to bring them to faith in His Messiah. He is still at work doing this, even among all the false religions and the cults which plague our modern internet world.

We need to always remember that He is in firm control over all that He allows into our lives. When we respond to all the circumstances of our lives with faith in Him and with obedience to His Word, His faithfulness and sovereignty will guide us through whatever life throws at us until we reach the eternal safety of His Home in glory. It may be a bumpy ride sometimes, but both the journey and the destination are as certain as the daily rising and setting of the sun.

We should rejoice that we know who He is and what He is like. We also believe in His awesome power which both sustains our immense universe and shadows believers as we face any number of trials.

We affirm that both Judgment Day and His Messianic kingdom are coming. Unbelievers should tremble with terror because of the horrible fate which is awaiting for them, whether they see it or believe it or not. G-d has not lost control over our increasingly complex and wicked world and none of the criminal acts or vicious lies which our global village is generating, will impact how the purposes of G-d unfold.

As believers who understand the sovereignty of G-d and who understand that Messiah's Kingdom will one day arrive, we should tremble with joy because of the incredibly wonderful fate which is awaiting us. Evolution and secular materialism are causing many liberal Christians and Jews to wander far away from the Bible and their souls are rotting away with the folly they have embraced.

They have lost their way, but they have done nothing which can challenge the sovereignty of G-d. They have blinded their eyes and blocked their ears and they roar against the truths of the Bible, but all they are succeeding in doing is to dig the hole they are in, deeper and deeper. In the Psalms, David said that he knew there was no place he could escape to far from the presence of G-d. Neither the depths of the sea nor the highest heights in the sky are beyond the L-rd's presence and there is nowhere and nothing which is not under His final control.

We were all born to both choose and to suffer the consequences of our choices and sometimes the consequences of other's choices. Over and above these choices both the power and the purposes of G-d stand firm and cannot be shaken or even troubled. False religions may continue to spring up like weeds and strange people may continue to say strange things about G-d. But the G-d of the Bible remains changeless and His sovereign control of everything and everyone remains firm and flawless.

What He allows, He never loses control over and, again, neither the flesh, nor the world and certainly not the enemy, can overpower His sovereignty, because He will never be stalled or stopped. We live in an increasingly complex and sophisticated world and the world's people are growing increasingly cynical and negative when it comes to those who still retain their faith in the G-d of the Bible.

They will make no more progress than the hordes who ignored the preaching of Noah during the construction of the ark and who drowned because of their folly. There was enough room on board for more than the eight people who boarded the ark and there will always be enough room in the purposes of G-d for anyone who repents and comes to faith, so that they do not drown in the coming wrath of the Messiah.

As we wander through this Corona pandemic, may we continue to take shelter under His eternal wings and have confidence that His sovereignty will make sure we are kept safe through all and any storms. This is because He will never leave us nor forsake us and nobody will ever be able to snatch us out of His divine hands. Do realize how mighty G-d is and what an amazing privilege it is to serve Him. Shabbat shalom and shavuah tov (have an amazingly good week).