



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

11 Av, 5780 (01/08/20) **Messianic Bible Basics: Shabbat Nachamu (of Consolation)** J. M. Terrett

Va'Etchanan **And I Pleaded** **Shabbat Nachamu** **Restoring the Covenant**
Torah: Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11
Haftarah: Isaiah 40:1-26
Brit Chadashah: Matthew 23:31-39

As Moses prepares to bring the wilderness generation back into the covenant, he continues to explain why they got into this predicament. When they had asked for water, he was told to speak to the rock, but he struck it instead, thus disqualifying himself from leading the people into the Promised Land. He kept on asking the L-rd to let him lead the people and the L-rd actually said: "Do not speak to me anymore about this". When G-d says this, we should listen.

Twice in this passage, the people are warned not to add anything to the stipulations which they were being given, and certainly not to remove any of the content which was being shared with them (4:2; 5:22). G-d's Word should neither be diluted, nor should it be polluted. There is no such thing as the Oral Law where the Talmud was apparently whispered into Moses ear and transmitted orally over many generations until it was finally written down. Many churches also have a whole body of traditions which they feel are on par with G-d's Word.

In either case, they are wrong. No human words or collection of human words are on par with the Word of G-d. Halacha, or situational applications of the Law are merely generational strategies for applying the Word and should never be considered as part of the Law, When we mix His Word with our straw or our dirt, we are not creating extensions of the Word, we are merely blocking access to it from those who need to hear it.

As part of getting ready to share the Ten Words and make this generation into a covenant people, Moses reminds them of the plague that destroyed those who followed the priestesses of Moab. Throughout this portion He warns the people that just as He destroyed the idolaters who stood in their path, He would also destroy all and any of them who also became idolaters. G-d's mercy stands ready to receive the penitent, but His judgment stands ready to consume those who have become His enemies.

This covenant making process contains the same material as the one which was done around the holy mountain, but the structure is different. This is because the first giving of the Law followed an Egyptian covenant making formula, while the second one followed a Hittite covenant formula. Same content, different format. They are called to a generational observance of the covenant stipulations, so they never have to go back into the wilderness.

They are reminded that when they camped around the mountain, its flames ascended right up into the heavens. There was no need for a second demonstration of fire and thunder, because some of them who were children at Sinai would remember the awesome spectacle. Those who were not there at Sinai, had witnessed His miracles and saving deeds as they wandered through the wilderness and were well aware of His presence as the fire hovered over the tabernacle at night and as the cloud covered them during the day.

The Ten words are given again and we are not told if a third set of two tablets was inscribed by the finger of G-d. It is likely, the second set was brought out and shown to the people as the Ten Words were repeated.

They remain the essential covenant principles and are the basis of all theology and spirituality which the Bible contains. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

Scattered through this passage, frequent warnings against idolatry are given because the region was brimming with all kinds of sophisticated paganism that could easily overcome an unsuspecting disciple of YHVH. Criminal idolatry has risen up again in our darkening world, are you an unsuspecting disciple being dragged into it?

Our G-d is a devouring fire and He is jealous because He will not stand for any competition for our religious devotion. In fact, there is nothing in the world worthy of our religious devotion, so He is angry when His children fall for all the fakes and sophisticated imitations.

You see, our passage teaches us that G-d is not just the best G-d of a bunch of other gods. There are no other gods. They are all lies and myths and even when you look at the angels, there is no one and nothing like Him. He is **echad** (a plural singularity and a composite unity). He alone of all the gods has acted to free His people from slavery and helped them overcome many nations which were more powerful than them. He alone is the creator and sustainer of the universe and not some made up story by the feeble imagination of people making up stories to explain things they could not understand.

In the passage, Moses organizes the land of the 2 ½ tribes and once that is out of the way, he begins the second giving of the ten sacred words, to all the tribes who will now live on both sides of the Jordan. They have been living with enough fanfare for 40 years and now they are ready to become His covenant people again. The only major difference in the ten words is that on the plains of Moab, the Children of Israel are to remember the Sabbath because of their deliverance from Egypt. For the group at Sinai it was because of creation.

Part of the reason for no fanfare is that the people around the mountain asked not to hear the thundering voice anymore and now, the new generation are charged with permanent obedience as a precondition to enter the land and take possession of it. Faith and obedience are the key to their continued occupation of the land. Things haven't changed much for us. If ever we lose faith (and delve into idolatry) or stop obeying (and slip into immorality), we lose our tenure and will be driven from the land.

The next section contains the prayer which is called the Shema and it outlines a generational Torah-centric devotion to G-d through His Word. First, we need to acknowledge that there are no other gods like YHVH. He is totally unique. Next, we are told to love Him with all of our being, leaving no time or energy for alternate religious devotion. His commandments have to

be in our inner most being and we are to teach them with diligence to our children and speak about them at all times. We are to surround ourselves with symbols which proclaim the truth of His Word so that He and His Word remain our primary, singular focus.

Once things settle down after the conquest and the people are living abundantly, they are warned not to forget about G-d. They are to keep Him as the central focus of their lives and not give any devotion to sticks and stones, because if we do, He will exterminate us from under the heavens. He wants us to take Him and His Word very seriously because this is the reason He is driving out the idolatrous, fornicating Canaanites. It is not to replace them with another group who repeat the same errors. Errors should be corrected, not repeated.

Canaan had seven nations more numerous and more powerful than Israel (collectively and not individually, though the land was rich enough to support a nation seven times more numerous than Israel). Israel was to dedicate this horrible group to destruction and not to make covenants with them. They murdered their babies and men and women practiced both criminal homosexuality, and also heinous bestiality along with ritual sexual murder.

Israel was not to give their sons and daughters in marriage to them or to take their children as spouses for their children. They had all been devoted to their criminal idols and would turn on Israel and drag them down into the same darkness and be destroyed by G-d just as these criminals were. They were to destroy their altars, smash their statues and idols and burn down their sacred images – many of which were gross beyond imagination.

The passage ends with G-d declaring that He loves Israel and also wanted to fulfill the oath He made to their fathers. He reserves enough mercy for thousands of generations of those who will love Him back and keep His commandments. But He never changes and reprisals against those who hate Him are no respecter of persons. Once the righteous core among the nations dissolves, His wrath will be released upon the darkness dwellers and upon the former light dwellers who have slidden back into the slime from which they were delivered.

Sermon: Shabbat Nachamu. The Sabbath of Consolation. Isaiah 40:1-6

Over the centuries, Jewish people have had very little to make them feel happy, and yet as a culture, we place a high value on happiness. I guess the question is what does it take to make you happy? Some pursue wealth, some seek for power, while others lose themselves in books. However, from the beginning of our nation, Jewish people have found great happiness in knowing G-d and in walking according to His Word, even when, all too frequently, we mix up G-d's Word and follow the Talmud.

One of the greatest sources of happiness and blessing is the knowledge that one day, Messiah is coming to establish His kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. I find great comfort in the fact that, though modern Judaism is fighting hard against recognizing Yeshua as the Messiah, increasingly, Jews are turning to their King and Saviour in record numbers. I am also comforted and rejoice that many Gentiles, with or without any historic connection to Judaism, consider Messianic Judaism as an amazing, acceptable context in which to walk with the Messiah from Nazareth and they want to join our ranks.

Not all Jews who find Yeshua, become Messianic, but we just rejoice that they are coming to faith. One of our objectives is to provide a biblical context where Jews can come to faith in Yeshua, without having to abandon their connection with Judaism.

Today is Shabbat Nachamu, the Sabbath of Consolation, and after the great sorrow of Tisha B'Av, we want to learn to take comfort in the L-RD, no matter which happenstances come barging through our lives. I have just been re-reading some books on Jewish history and I was reminded that since 70 AD, our people have been murdered and persecuted, as we have been hounded from one nation to another. When encountering all the trouble our people have seen, I want to view this ongoing trauma through biblical eyes, so that I keep a balanced, spiritual perspective on things. Through it all, we have remained the people of G-d and His hand is still on us, both when we come to faith and when we remain hardened and full of resistance.

Isaiah the prophet maintained a balanced, spiritual perspective during his long ministry, which spanned the reigns of four kings. Now, among many theologians, much has been made about how different the first 39 chapters of Isaiah are from the last 27 chapters. The book is actually a compilation of many prophecies and though some claim there are multiple authors, there is more than ample evidence that though the books speaks about a host of topics, it was one man who wrote every part of it.

The first 39 chapters of Isaiah express both the reasons for the captivity and the various judgments which were going to bring this tragedy about. The remaining 27 chapters speak great comfort and remind the people how amazingly satisfying it is to trust in YHVH and walk according to His Word. Their captivity was not permanent and G-d still loved them and would eventually bring them home to the Promised Land. We are Heaven bound pilgrims!

In the first two verses of chapter forty, G-d instructs Isaiah to comfort His people because, not only is their captivity about to be complete, but also their iniquity is paid for. This is one of many references to Messiah's future sacrifice on the cross. So, at the time of Isaiah's writing, these were still future events, but the anticipation of these glorious events, brought great comfort to those still in captivity.

Their captivity did come to an end and the payment for their sins was made by Messiah's atoning death on the cross. Even if they did not receive this reality, it should still be a great comfort for us all who are patiently waiting for Messiah's coming kingdom. Being given a vision of a glorious future can bring great comfort to people dealing with a troubled present.

The next two verses speak about the irresistible straight highway which will be made for the arrival of the eternal Messianic Kingdom. Mountains will be flattened and valleys will rise up, as crooked places will be straightened out because His kingdom is irresistible. No barriers can stop this blessed event from bursting forth upon our darkening world and bringing it to an end. These words were written thousands of years ago to give many generations of believers hope, because we know the end of the story, even if our chapter of the story is not very pleasant.

The passage moves on to proclaim that the flesh is like a flower that withers, while G-d's Word will endure forever. All the glory of the world and all of its beauty will one day wither and disappear, along with all the troubles which come our way. No matter what season our life is passing through, we need to keep our eyes stubbornly focused on the world to come.

In the verses which follow, the prophet speaks of the Good News that Adonai YHVH is coming and commands His arm (which is our blessed Messiah). When He comes, He will bring both rewards and judgments, as this sorry, old-world melts away with great noise and heat. Along the way, He will still be the Good Shepherd to His people and carry the lambs upon His shoulders. This is such a peaceful image, even in the midst of a turbulent and uncertain present. We may receive violent, rough treatment as we wander through this world, but as we walk in faithful obedience, we will never receive it from G-d. We will always be His flock and woe to anyone who dares to touch the apple of His eye. We live in two worlds at once. There is the turbulent world we are only passing through and the peaceful heavenly realm, from which, one day, the Eternal Kingdom of our blessed Messiah shall proceed. We are heaven bound for glory, so it doesn't really matter how bumpy the ride becomes, because He will never leave us, nor forsake us.

He and His Word are our treasure on our journey through this life and it does not matter what is going on, on the outside, He is our peace, and that, even when we are chased, beaten and even killed. We need to learn to take comfort in Him, especially since He walks with us and shows us the glorious end of the story.

The passage goes on to describe G-d as much greater than the sum total of our mighty cosmos. He is infinite and though the universe may reflect His glory, our G-d is far greater than even this vast expanse. All of creation dwindles in comparison to the wonder and power of our G-d.

Further, He is all knowing and He is truly wisdom incarnate. Nothing escapes His attention and He is more than aware of all that is happening throughout the ages. He alone is so powerful and so unique. Even the nations who rage and who ravage Israel, are merely a drop in the bucket in the grand scheme of things. They are dust that is not even thick enough to be measured on a weigh scale. In other words, in the grand scheme of things they are meaningless ripples that neither last long or have any real impact on the direction of how things are going in our world.

The worst that they can do is kill us and even if they torture us before they kill us, it will only increase the measureless weight of glory which is building up for us in Heaven. We need to constantly remind ourselves that He is infinitely mightier than all the feeble, temporary circumstances of our lives. Compared to Him, all the troubles this old world has seen, are functionally less than nothing in light of eternity.

The discussion shifts to the futility of idols, because any attempt to describe or represent YHVH would be less than useless and could never even come close to displaying the smallest portion of His wonder. Idols are an attempt to build a picture of false deities who don't really exist and are sinful, vain foolishness. With respect, I would also place all the devotional statues, paintings and icons in this category, even when they are made with the best intentions. We are called to never pray to or even through the works of our hands.

He is beautiful beyond description and any attempt to make a likeness to represent Him would be vain and foolish. Idolatry is an attempt to contain and control G-d and this attempt is vain, because He can never be put in a box. There were no images of G-d in the tabernacle or in the temple and the ark was a place of encounter. He did not actually live behind the veil or on top of the fiery mountain. Solomon said the universe was His footstool. Isaiah describes G-d

as totally “other”, far beyond our feeble ability to describe Him or contain Him.

We need to remember that He is infinitely larger than the entire cosmos and even the combined majesty of human history will be reduced to nothing, once His Kingdom comes. People come and people go. Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall. Troubles come and troubles go. Compared to Him, everything in our frail universe is at best temporary and holds no lasting meaning. It is only the coming Kingdom which matters in the long run. The might of our mighty G-d will endure throughout eternity.

There is nothing and no one worthy to be compared to Him. Yet, He chooses to love us, Jew and Gentile and wants to be our guide through this fitful world that is not our home. This is really too awesome for words and is such an incredible comfort for us, as we make our way through this fading world towards our amazing final destination.

Our G-d created the universe and set it in motion and it is flawless, even with its black holes and enormous expanding cosmic dust clouds. And yet, all of this is just small potatoes compared to the wonder of all that He is and all that he does.

There is so much in Him to take comfort in. His wonder and beauty would blow our minds, if ever we saw a tiny portion of, like our people did when they saw the mountain flame and shake, when they camped around it.

To those in captivity and to those about to go into captivity, Isaiah's words and his descriptions, brought great comfort as He described things from a heavenly perspective. And even as we grumble and stumble our way through this Covid 19 crisis, let's keep things in perspective. Having to wear a face mask and having to regularly disinfect our hands should not be seen as the beginning of the final, great tribulation. If they banned coffee and chocolate that would be a great trial indeed!

We should always look at what is going on in the world through the eyes of faith which are focused on eternity. G-d has never lost control of how events are turning out. He never lost control when Israel went into captivity and He is well aware of all the trials and tribulations which bushwhack and trouble believers on our journey to our Father's house in glory.

People have put together supposed international plots and elaborate conspiracy theories which paint the world with fear and panic. In consequence, many fearful believers are getting ready to stampede into the mountains to escape the troubles which they are convinced are getting ready to strike. Jews in various Russian territories hid for years in the woods to escape being liquidated by the Nazi monsters who relentlessly hunted them.

Be careful that you are not allowing imaginary monsters to panic you prematurely before the final troubles actually begin to happen. Dangerous days are certainly ahead for believers, even in the peaceful safety of Western Canada, but we need to be able to recognize them when they finally are upon us. We have to avoid living in a constant state of panic because we are convinced every problem we face is really the beginning of the end of the world. The end times actually began when our Messiah rose from the dead and ascended in Heaven and while things are definitely heating up globally, sometimes a flat tire is just a flat tire. This pandemic is not a fulfillment of prophecy to herald our times of trouble.

Be careful that well-meaning, enthusiastic people do not make you jump the gun, so that you are blindsided when the final troubles actually arrive. In fact, there are two great dangers for us as we walk through our troubled world. The first is to lose our biblical faith and backslide into the world we were delivered from. Stand firm on the promises. The next would be to get so paranoid that we exhaust our red alert resources before any real troubles come our way.

Isaiah's world was falling apart and he had to comfort the people, so that they would know that their set of circumstances was not the end of the world. Part of that comfort was to assure them that the end of the world was going to come and that they had better walk with the L-rd, if they wanted to see it coming. I believe more in the return of our Messiah than I do in the rising and setting of the sun each day, but it is going to be a while before the end makes its appearance. Have faith. Walk according to His Word. Learn to live in His comfort and let His love sustain you on your journey through this world. Shabbat shalom and Shavua Tov.