



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

4 Av, 5780 (25/07/20) **Black Sabbath: Living Peacefully on the Verge of Disaster** J. M. Terrett

Dt. 1:1-3:22. Is. 1:1-27. Acts 7:51-8:4 Bringing the New Generation up to Speed

As the new generation came out of the wilderness and camped on the plains of Moab, Moses wants to bring them up to speed, so that they do not follow in the footsteps of the generation which died in the wilderness. It was a close thing when the Moabite priestesses tried pulling the people into the same sexual sin they fell for during the incident of the golden calf.

Before Moses is ready give them the Law for a second time and turn them into a covenant people, he wants to review for them the set of events which has brought them to this crucial crossroads. They set up camp on the plains of Moab on the 40th year since leaving Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month (Shevat), two months before Passover. It was the 38 years from Kadesh, when they turned back into the wilderness, until they arrived on the Plains of Moab. In all they spent forty years camping in the wilderness, 38 years longer than they needed to.

As the new generation, they are encouraged by YHVH to rise up and take possession of the Holy Land and a brief description of its boundaries is given. Moses says they are as numerous as the stars, which is a figurative reference and not literal. Using another figurative reference, he asks that they would be blessed a thousand times more than have been to that date. He reminds them of the conflict resolution break down of the camp: leaders of 1,000, of 100, of 50 and of ten. If the problem could not be solved by the time it reached the leader of a thousand, it was taken before Moses. Justice was to be meted out without reference to the status of the people, the least was to receive the same level and kind of justice as the great. Fairness and being impartial are two biblical values we should all adhere to.

In this portion, we learn that sending out the spies was the people's idea and when they return, their report is used as an excuse for the people to not want to enter. When the two good spies attempt to rally the people failed, they were sentenced by G-d to a generational wilderness wandering. This perturbed the people who had not obeyed the order to enter, now this same group disobeys the order to turn back into the wilderness. They are slaughtered by their enemies, and they finally obey, so that their children will have the right to enter the land.

They spent the rest of their lives doing laps around Mount Seir and as they bring their wandering to a close, they are told to go around the lands of Edom (descendants of Esau, twin brother of Jacob), Moab and Ammon (descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot). The passage mentions that the last members of the rebel generation died on their way around Edom and Moab. The Talmud fancifully says that on the fortieth year, those who remained of the rebel generation just

dropped dead in their tracks. This is not what the scriptures teach. The hand of the L-rd was against them and without His blessing, the most likely scenario is that their health immediately began to fail in the wilderness and that the last of these sad people died, when their health finally gave out.

In passing, it is mentioned that the children of Ammon and Edom took their lands from a race of giants. It also recounts how the Philistines whom Israel knew before their journey to Egypt were conquered by a group of sea people who kept the name Philistine, even after they slaughtered those who first held the name. This powerful group of Minoan Greeks would later cause a lot of grief for Israel once they entered the land. David finally subdued them.

The portion goes on to mention the last two powerful enemies who stood in Israel's way to their launching camp on the plains of Moab. Both leaders were asked for permission to cross their lands and were given assurance that Israel would pay for any water or food they needed as they crossed their lands.

Later it is recorded that Og was the last remaining member of a race of giants also called the rephaim. There are many spurious accounts about who these people were and how they disappeared. The word for giants in Hebrew is rephaim and it either refers to men of great size or of men of great renown (Gen. 6:4). If there was a race of men of great size before the flood, they all would have perished in the flood.

The people of great size who lived in the ancient Middle East were defeated repeatedly over a length of time until the last of them, Og, was defeated by Israel when he blocked their way to the plains of Moab. It is uncertain whether his entire kingdom was composed of giants or he was just one of the last of his kind. This last option seems best, because the description of the size of his bed was considered something extraordinary. It was made of iron and was some 15 feet long and some 7 feet wide.

The last giant mentioned in the Bible was the Philistine warrior Goliath, who was some 9 feet tall, but he was not mentioned as belonging to the race of the rephaim. His stature was unusually big, but he was overcome by a man of small stature who came against him in the name of the L-rd. Walking with the L-rd and honoring the name of the L-rd make physical stature irrelevant. It is our spiritual stature which counts.

When Israel wanted to pass through the lands of both Sihon and Og, the account mentions that G-d hardened Sihon's heart in the same way that He hardened Pharaoh's heart. This does not mean that G-d caused Sihon to refuse so that Israel could destroy him. It just means that when Sihon was resolved not to let Israel pass through his land, the L-rd caused his resolve to harden, so that he reaped what he sowed.

During the battle with Sihon, he and his people were devoted to destruction, but the people of Israel were allowed to keep all of their livestock and the treasures which their cities contained. They had some impressive fortresses, but when the defeated army fled into these fortresses, none of them were strong enough to resist Israel. They had no reason to attack Israel except for maybe feeling that their gods were stronger than YHVH and they paid for this insult with their lives.

During these two final campaigns neither the territory of Ammon or that of Balak was molested. Israel was removing obstacles which blocked their path to the Holy Land and they were not looking for land to settle on this side of the Jordan river.

From the context of the account, as the last of the giants, Og was more powerful than Sihon and though it is not stated, the people would have asked for permission to cross his lands and pay for whatever food they needed and for whatever water they drank. Their refusal and unwarranted attack meant they were treated the same way Sihon was. The two and one-half tribes settle onto the land of these kings and Joshua is told that G-d will do to the Canaanites what He did to these two kings. Therefore; Joshua is told not to be afraid. Compared to the defeat of these two kings, the conquest of Canaan was going to be a piece of cake.

Sermon: Messianic Basics: Living Peacefully on the verge of Disaster (Black Sabbath)

I want to deal with two passages of Scripture this morning. First the Haftarah (prophetic) portion which is usually read on Black Sabbath, Isaiah 1:1-27. Then I want to deal with a portion in Second Corinthians which describes the amazing ups and downs we will encounter as we do our best to live peacefully on the verge of any disasters which waltz into our lives.

Many of you may know that there was a rock band in the 1960's called Black Sabbath and it is uncertain if they knew about this sad day in Judaism. It is said that they took this name because a movie by this name was drawing large crowds. They wanted to take a sensational name and it just so happened to be the name of a Sabbath of mourning in Judaism.

Our passage in Isaiah begins by saying that Isaiah ministered through the reigns of four kings of Judah and gives backsliding as the source of all of Israel's woes. It also says that backslidden Israel would have entirely perished if the L-rd had not left them a few survivors. One of the L-RD's biggest complaints about His people was that they felt as long as they maintained stringent sacrificial worship, then they felt that it did not matter what they did with the rest of their lives, even to the extent of practicing criminal idolatry and gross sexual sins. It does not matter how careful you are about worshiping G-d according to all the rules, if you do not follow His rules in the rest of your life, your worship is null and void. He is a G-d of truth, not a god of deceit.

One of the best calls to repentance in the Bible is found in verses 16-20 of chapter one. The people are called to stop practicing four kinds of sin and are encouraged to start practicing five kinds of righteousness. If your sins are scarlet, they can become white as snow. G-d can restore the most vile and broken sinner who repents, but the people would not abandon their sinfulness. G-d sent them into captivity for the sake of the righteous core that had not yet succumbed to the criminal sinfulness of the majority of the people. They formed the largest group which went into captivity.

The Isaiah portion depicts the horrible state that backslidden people are in because they fallen away from G-d and the amazing stubbornness of former believers who refuse to abandon their sinfulness. It should be a warning to us because worshiping G-d is not enough if our lives do not reflect aggressive and sincere repentance which leads to total obedience. They are going into a captivity of their own making, but despite the extreme retribution which they have brought upon themselves, G-d always has His eye on the small righteous core that still wants to seek His face. If this too vanishes, then the sinful people will be as thoroughly annihilated as Sodom and Gomorrah were after the departure of Lot and his family.

If people are not willing to walk with G-d in their daily lives, then He is not prepared to accept a devotion which is being used as a smoke screen for sinfulness. However, G-d's intervention is never totally hopeless, because even in our sinfulness, He still loves us and wants to forgive us and cleanse us, so

that once we are released from the power and stain of sin, we can learn to rebuild our lives as we learn to apply His Word to every area of our lives. He is always ready to forgive the gravest sin and to cleanse us from the darkest stain with which sin has branded us.

On Black Sabbath we mourn the failure of the people to seek for the forgiveness which G-d was willing to bestow and if the people had only abandoned their sin and returned to the L-rd, neither temples would have been destroyed. In reality it was the sinfulness of the people that destroyed both temples and not the power of the enemy which has gathered against the Jews and Jerusalem.

On Black Sabbath, we remember the sad state that our people had fallen into voluntarily. But we also remember His promise of restoration for those who are willing to fully abandon their sin and return to the L-rd. Just like the wilderness generation could not avoid the wandering years, the penitent people may not have been able to avoid being dragged off into captivity.

But they were dragged away with the certain hope of restoration and return, because their turning back to G-d would remove all the pain and the stain of their sinful past and give them a new beginning, once they returned to the land. Especially when things are not going in our favour, we need to learn to live by faith and not by sight and know that in YHVH we can recover from any disaster we encounter.

Living peacefully on the verge of disaster is what believers are called to do when events beyond our control bring our world crashing down around us. This may be called the dark flip side of walking in the light and we need to be living peacefully when the forces of evil are getting an ever-stronger hold on our darkening world. The righteous core of Judah and the faithful prophets of G-d watched in horror as the people slipped further into darkness and things went from bad to worse. There was nothing they could do to remediate the situation, except to continue walking with YHVH and waiting for a better day as their world crumbled into ruin around them.

The memory of the horror that saw our people slaughtered and the survivors brutally carried off into captivity, should stand as a double warning for us. First, we too could slip into darkness, just as thoroughly, if ever we allowed sin and darkness to get a foothold in our lives. Secondly, it should give us hope that G-d will never give up on us, as long as the righteous core, both in Israel and among the nations of the world, remains intact.

Black Sabbath also remembers with great sadness the last Sabbath services which were held in Solomon's temple just before it was destroyed. It also remembers the last Sabbath services which were held in Herod's temple before it too was destroyed. In both cases, the people were fighting a hopeless battle against the forces which besieged Jerusalem. In either case, the people should have laid down their weapons and perhaps neither temple would have been destroyed.

It may seem to be a strange thing to say, but both the Babylonians and the Romans were fighting with right on their side, while the rebellious people of G-d were supporting an unrighteous cause. Be careful about which causes you fight for and what you get talked into supporting. The whole point of divine retribution is to punish the sinful and to free the righteous core from the power and influence of sin. Those who cling to their sinfulness and rebellion will share in the destruction which both Jerusalem and the temple suffered, not once, but twice.

Our modern world is darkening at an alarming rate and is heading for an imminent destruction because of the sinfulness which more and more people are embracing. Some may feel that since we are getting richer and because the number of medical breakthroughs is escalating, that we are on the verge of a brave new world in which political correctness will soon overthrow ignorance and all the backwards thinking of Bible believers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

You see the fabric of our families is tearing and more and more the perceived goal of life is to gather as big a fortune as we can. More and more people want to get higher and higher on that false promise satisfaction beyond their wildest dreams. Some people, from the dwindling righteous core are pushing back, but the perverted sexual revolution is not slowing down and new age evolutionism is gaining more ground at an alarming rate. We do not live in a spiritually safe world.

Believers are fighting an uphill battle and the greatest danger we face does not come from the outside. It comes when we abandon or compromise either our biblical faith or our biblical morality. More and more mainline churches and synagogues are sliding down the slippery slope to become secular humanists who only use a spiritual sounding vocabulary, when in fact they have abandoned nearly every aspect of a biblical faith. They are wearing a spiritual looking disguise that fools no one. It was the same for the corrupt temple officials who still performed the correct rituals, even though they had embraced some of the most pernicious paganism imaginable. Some of the people must have seen through this trickery, but most of the people either ignored it or, worse, embraced it. There is no room for paganism of any kind if we truly want to walk with the Messiah according to His Word.

As these spiritual attacks escalate and as our biblical spirituality is viewed with increasing hostility, we need to remind ourselves that the provision and the protection of G-d is still able to preserve His righteous core, as the rest of the world goes up in flames around them. Our main task is to continue to resist the constant tugging of the enemy, the world and the flesh because they will never stop trying to overthrow our faith. In the midst of all this, our lives can be an oasis of peacefulness, even as disasters multiply around us.

I want to give our observance of Black Sabbath a little twist. I have always said that our reactions matter much more than the circumstances we encounter as we wander through this life. It must have been horrible for the people who knew they were doomed and it was too late to surrender. The only thing we must never surrender is our faith and confidence in G-d. Like Job, we need to say: though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him (Job. 3:15). I want to talk to you about a solid believer who never lost his faith and confidence.

The Apostle Paul is often held up as an example of a victorious believer who overcame incredible opposition and never lost his positive kingdom focus. In all that he suffered, and with all the terrible resistance he encountered, he remained a peaceful believer with his eyes glued to the coming Kingdom. For countless centuries, living on the verge of disaster has been a generational reality which believers still need to come to terms with, without allowing negative circumstances to panic us into joining the ranks of all those who have succumbed to paganism in how they live.

In his second letter to the Corinthian congregation, Paul described the kinds of turmoil which await believers, as well as outlining how we should respond to it. Let's read the passage.

"We do not want to scandalize anyone in anything, so that the ministry would not become an object of blame. But as servants of G-d, we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech and the power of G-d; with the defensive and offensive weapons of righteousness; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying and see – we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything." (2 Corinthians 6:3-19)

I am saddened with disasters happen to anyone, even if it is their own fault. When we truly walk with the L-RD we can live peacefully on the edge of disaster and know that any disaster which may befall us is not our own fault; and even if it were, we should always adopt the survival strategies of G-d's Word and not allow what is happening to determine how we should live. Paul outlines both the horrendous things that sometimes happen to believers and the redemptive strategies which will help us to both overcome in trials and survive when our world is falling apart.

The first thing he says is that we do not want to scandalize anyone by either our speech or by our conduct. If they are scandalized or take offense, we want to be innocent and not the real cause of their anger. We want to be our own recommendation where what we say and how we live present the Gospel in a good light, even with those who are blinded to it because of their own folly. He then lists ten negative happenstances which can happen to us through no fault of our own. The enemy of our souls hates us and will use every carnal weapon at his disposal to try and destroy us and discredit us.

Some-day, we might be imprisoned or we may be physically beaten because of our faith. We may have to live through riots or have sleepless nights because of the troubles which come our way. And though the Messiah promises to always look after us, at times we may suffer from hunger as we pass through tribulations and distress. When this is happening, we can still live peacefully on the inside and not let the horrors which befall us trouble the inner peacefulness that is our birth right. David did.

We need to focus our efforts on the things which really matter as we travel through this life. Things like purity and knowledge where we refuse to let the garbage and the darkness of this life trouble us. We need to be nice people who always respond with patience and kindness and not with an anger which seeks revenge. We need to have a holiness of spirit and show genuine love, because we want to be authentic and not just be putting on a show. We need to speak the truth, though sometimes we may refuse to speak when it is nobody's business to be told things which are none of their concern.

We need to exercise the power of G-d which makes us strong in distress, even when we are suffering and experiencing things which are terrible. We need to learn to use both the defensive and the offensive weapons of righteousness. This means we have to be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks a reason for the hope that is within and also be able to silence those who spout folly and tell them we refuse to believe their nonsense.

Sometimes we will be honored by good, sincere people who appreciate the message we bring and the lifestyle which we live. At other times we will be dishonored by darkness dwellers who want to shut us down and discredit our message. When I taught school, I used to say I would rather be despised by the despicable than be worshiped by fools and thieves. Once a very troublesome student tried to make feel bad by telling me that he did not like me. I responded by saying that I did not want him to like me, otherwise I would be like him.

Sometimes we will have a good reputation with those who appreciate the upright way we walk. Sometimes we will have a bad reputation with those who do not like being reminded about the twisted and dark way they are walking. Frequently in my ministry, I have been treated like an impostor, even though I have always stood for biblical truth and biblical values. I have been attacked by those who want to destroy my reputation as a way of shutting down what the L-rd is trying to say to them through my words and my life. These are called ad hominem attacks, where you attack the character of the speaker so that you do not have to deal with the truth which they are speaking. Some will say that we are such bad people that no one should listen to us or anything which we are trying to say.

Sometimes we will be treated as worthless nobodies, even though we are very well known to G-d and to people of good faith. Sometimes it may seem like we are dying and yet we live. Some of us may indeed be killed for the good message we want to share, but it will never be because we are in fact evil doers. The death of His beloved is precious in G-d's eyes because they leave behind this darkening world and ascend into His light as we wait for the kingdom to arrive.

Sometimes we may be sorrowful when we look at the sad state of this world and the foolish people who live in it. And even worse, sometimes we may be sad because of the foolish way people behave who claim to be believers. They are truly the ones who stall the progress of the Gospel. And yet, at the same time we are always rejoicing because of the goodness of YHVH as we live filled with the fruit of His Spirit, in anticipation of His coming Kingdom.

Because we have not given our lives over to the acquisition of wealth as our life goal, it may appear as if we have nothing, but by sharing our faith and showing our love and joy and peace, we continually enrich many people. In fact, it may appear that we possess nothing. But we truly possess everything which is important.

Today is Black Sabbath which was a very dark day in the history of Judaism, not once, but twice. Whenever the whatever's of life scream into our lives and try to rattle us and destroy us, we should access the spiritual resources of G-d through His Word and continue to live peacefully on the verge of all and any disasters. Our faith and our eternity are permanent. Troubles are only temporary. Live for that which is permanent and stand firm on His promises. All the rest don't make no never mind! Shabbat shalom and shavua tov!