



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

2 Eilul, 5780 (22/08/20) 4th Shabbat of Consolation : Heaven Bound in the Midst of Trials J. M. Terrett

Shoftim Judges, Kings, Witches, and the Prophet

Torah: Deuteronomy 16:18-21:9

Haftarah: Isaiah 51:12-52:12

Brit Chadashah: John 7:37-52

Today's portion mainly deals with four topics: Judges, Royalty, sorcery and the prophet who would be like Moses. People too often associate judges as those who supervise criminal or civil trials, but in Israel, their role was much broader than that. They were first teachers who would interpret the Law to the people, and make sure that no weird or foreign interpretations snuck into how the people viewed the Law. They would also help settle disputes and make sure that the rights of everyone in the community were protected. When someone broke the Law, they were brought before the judges so that the punishment fit the crime, and was not cruel or vindictive. They were in charge of making sure that the communities of the people were holy, safe places, totally free from paganism and lawlessness.

In more difficult cases, the judges would consult the priests and if necessary, the High Priest would consult YHVH. The penalty for not listening to the judges was death, because the community had to be kept free of sinfulness of any kind.

Once the people were established in the land, the L-RD knew that they would ask for a king to act as their battle leader when their enemies came against them. He was not to intervene in how the judges administered the Law, but in many respects; he was like the chief judge of appeals, under the direct supervision of the High Priest. The L-RD was to select the King, who had to be a Jew and not a stranger from the surrounding nations.

There were three more stipulations which the king had to adhere to. He was not to try and possess many horses and go down to Egypt to get more. At this time, the Egyptians would not trade mares and so when your male horse aged, you had to purchase a replacement from them. YHVH did not want the Egyptians to regain any influence over Israel.

The king was also forbidden to have many wives so that he would have to collect lots of silver and gold to pay for them. He would obviously have to levy taxes, but not for his own wealth, at the expense of the people's well-being.

Finally, the king was to get a copy of the Law from the priests and Levites so that he could read from it daily and conduct himself according to its teachings. He was not to be allowed to get haughty, as if some-how he was above the Law and could turn away from the commandments. Kings were to be established by G-d in order to live according to the Word of the L-RD.

The third concern was the practice of various kinds of witchcraft, including the issue of astrology and using various methods to predict the future and interpret signs as a means of obtaining good luck in various areas of their lives. Sorcery and witchcraft have never been limited to riding brooms or using magic wands, and magic has never been divided between black magic, which is bad, and white magic, which is supposedly good. Signs and miracles are not a form of magic, and believers are still forbidden to practice any kind of magic. Magic may be defined as the use of special rituals and magic phrases to obtain special spiritual power over people and places, and even major events in life. Believers should never pursue good like and should never wish bad luck on their enemies. Rather, we should seek the L-RD according to His Word and live under the influence of His blessings and protection.

Various forms of magic are still common today, such as using a divining rod to find ground water. Carrying around a rabbit's foot or a lucky penny, is also a forbidden form of magic. People still try to cast spells and bring down curses on their enemies, but we are forbidden from following suit. The Bible also says that spells and curses which are directed against us will boomerang back on those who try to use them against us.

Using the horoscope is also a form of magic because it tries to predict our future and warn us when danger is near. Relying on the L-rd is a much safer option. Various forms of superstition are used by athletes to improve their chances of success and one of the most damaging forms of magic are the various lotteries which people spend millions of dollars gambling on. Believers are not forbidden to card games, but we are forbidden to gamble for money. I have never bought a lottery ticket and I never will. It is a form of voluntary taxation which many groups use to raise funds and I may make a donation, but I will never buy a lottery ticket. You heard it here – gambling is a subtle form of witchcraft and we should never fall into it.

Another form of forbidden witchcraft is consulting spirits or trying to talk with the dead. Angels are the only good spirits in our world, but even though they may bring us messages from G-d, G-d alone should be consulted and not His messengers. Various churches pray to angels and they think that departed saints can help us and even answer our questions. There is a saint for nearly everything, including saint Jude who is the patron saint of lost causes. There is no such thing as patron saints, they are asleep until the resurrection and will never be active to help us during our pilgrimage through this life. Ghosts and hauntings are just demonic deceptions, as are all the false gods who are being worshiped around the world.

We should never try to be lucky. Instead we should walk according to the Word and be blessed. We should also avoid any form of demonic deception because the only spiritual power we should seek must come from G-d alone, according to His Word. We should avoid games of chance, which are subtle form of witchcraft. We need to worship G-d alone and He is the only one we should pray to. We should let the dead rest in peace because they are not able to talk to us.

The last major issue in the portion deals with the Jewish prophet who will look like Moses. It does not mean the prophet will look like Moses. It means the prophet will speak the Word of G-d, but with a difference. Moses spoke what he heard, the prophet will speak directly from G-d because, He shall be the Word incarnate. This is a prophecy concerning Yeshua and in the meantime, we are told how to evaluate prophets who claim to speak for G-d. If what they say doesn't happen, they are false prophets who should not be listened to.

I would apply this to all the preachers who have set a date for the return of the Messiah and have been proven wrong. They are false prophets and should neither be listened to or respected. We have to exercise great caution when we hear various teachings about the return of the L-rd. We are to stand on the Word and not on the false predictions of those who indulge in a bizarre guessing game. The return will only happen when everything is ready.

Sermon: Heaven Bound in the Midst of Trials Isaiah 51:12-52:12

When I hear the way some believers worry, I am concerned that they do not fully realize who G-d is and what He is capable of. When Isaiah was speaking to the Jews who were languishing in captivity, he wanted the people to get their eyes off their dire circumstances and contemplate all the wonder of who G-d and what He is capable of doing.

In the first part of the Haftarah portion, the prophet gives the people a little lesson in theology. Yes, they were defeated and dragged into captivity, but it was because of their folly and not because G-d was not powerful enough to protect them. YHVH is the one who stretched forth the heavens and created the earth and compared to Him, their enemies are functionally powerless and insignificant. We have all been going through the Covid 19 crisis, but once it passes, other problems will surface, but they will all be less than meaningless compared to the power and might of YHVH.

He is not only the Creator of all things; He is also the one who causes the seas to rise up and its waves to roar. He is the one we should be worrying about, because if we are under His protection, we are heaven bound, no matter what valleys we have to wander through, and no matter what mountains we have to climb. It is too easy for believers to lose perspective when we come face to face with small or great challenges. We often think that the whole world is crumbling when our personal world is being shaken.

Israel has endured and survived no matter which enemies have arisen against us, and no matter how many times the enemy has tried to destroy us. G-d will keep His eye on us and will make sure that we will survive until His kingdom is established over all the nations and generations of mankind.

When we become discouraged and think that the end of the world is near, we should lift up our eyes and be comforted, because in His time, the world will really end and the prophet reminds us that YHVH will stretch forth a new heaven and found a new earth, once His purposes have been fulfilled in the world we currently live in. Jewish people remain the people of G-d and His hand will always shade them, even when the Romans slaughtered us and when the Nazis were feeding us into gas chambers.

Many of us may suffer greatly, but the people of Israel will never be totally destroyed and we shall always rise from the ashes and continue with our mandate to be a light to the nations. The same can be said of the Gospel. It has been under attack from the very beginning, but no one has ever been able to destroy our message, no matter how hard they try. Once Messianic Jews were driven out and persecuted by their gentile brethren, a lot of nonsense polluted the New Testament message which the apostles shared. G-d has always had His hand on His church and will continue bringing it back to the Word, no matter how far believers wander and no matter how much silliness they let creep into what they claim is walking with the Messiah.

His Word cannot be overthrown and believers will always rise up again from the ashes until all of His purposes are fulfilled and it is time for the kingdom to come. And even though His people have been scattered among the nations for centuries, He has always kept His eyes on them and one day they will acknowledge the Messiah He sent to them. I am so excited that our people are going home to Israel. Coming home to the Messiah is the next stage. Our Jewish people suffered greatly when we rebelled against Babylon and again when we rebelled more than once against the Romans – and we are talking in the millions here. The Holocaust wiped out most of the Jews in Europe and we have just now regained our numbers, despite the enemy's attempt to wipe us out completely. If Hitler had won the war, he would have rounded up all the Jews he did not have the chance to liquidate and the fires of the gas chambers would have destroyed us all. But it did not happen and it will not happen. Hamas and the PLO may plot against Israel and fire all the missiles that their aid money has paid for, but we will never be driven from our homeland again.

This is not because of defense systems like the iron dome, or because we have one of the best armed forces in the world. It is because the hand of YHVH is on His people and because the time of the gentiles is drawing to a close. Antisemitism is still cropping up like the poisonous weed that it is, and murderous acts of violence are still targeting Jewish people wherever we live. Our real enemy hates us because we gave Messiah to the world and he will always be coming up with new and improved horrendous schemes for our destruction.

The Book of Revelation says that the enemy hates two groups of people with a vengeance: the Jews and believers who have the testimony of Yeshua. He schemes will always have a double focus. First, he will always want to kill us and second, he will always try to destroy our faith, either by infecting it with lies or by influencing us to abandon the faith completely.

As the prophet is encouraging the people, he is not minimizing their suffering, because they have been through a horrible time, as many of them were slaughtered. The survivors are described by Isaiah as punch drunk, stunned and stumbling by all that has happened to them.

Now while I do not claim to completely understand all the purposes of G-d, the prophet is promising the people a bright future when they return to the land and the impression is given that they will never be driven from it again. All of this is still predicated on them having faith and walking with the L-RD according to His Word. The people had a pretty rough time when they returned from captivity, but they eventually recovered their numbers as they welcomed thousands and even millions of converts from all around the ancient world.

There were more Jews alive before the revolt against the Romans than are alive today. I have said it before and I will say it again that if they had not rebelled, then the Roman empire would have become Jewish long before the Christian church was big enough to make a difference.

The prophet gives the captives two wonderful visions of the future, even as they were still recovering from the captivity they were subjected to. First, he spoke of the coming kingdom with the new Heavens and on a new earth and then he spoke about the peace and prosperity of the return. The second, scattering did not erase or contradict the promises which were made about the first return and it was when the majority of the people did not recognize the Messiah, that our Messiah prophesied about the second scattering, which would last until the time of the nations was over.

All of G-d's promises are conditional and if we violate the conditions which are outlined in His Word, we will reap what we sow. The devil devised two tragedies to increase the suffering of the Jewish people and to be used as a possible means of wiping us from the face of the world we are only traveling through. These two tragedies are Christian antisemitism, and the rise of Islam, as a counterfeit of both Judaism and Christianity. Mohamed falsely claimed to be the prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy, but the passage in questions says that the prophet has to be Jewish and it is referring to our Messiah. After our people rose up against the Romans, the Gentile Christian church falsely claimed to replace Judaism as the people of G-d, claiming that we had been rejected by G-d for rejecting His Messiah. We did not reject the Messiah, just a portion of our people did and they paid for it dearly during the rebellions against Rome.

The church turned on the survivors of what was once the largest, and most numerous religion's in the ancient world. Even though we are commanded to love them, Christian antisemitism caused our people to be slaughtered on a regular basis. All the promises which were made to our people about the return from Babylon have been fulfilled and cannot be re-applied to our people's modern return to our homeland. We did not have to be ejected from the land a second time and now that the time of the Nations is ending, our people are prospering in the land in much the same way they did when we returned from Babylon.

It is true that the blessing of G-d will always haunt the steps of His beleaguered and we have never ceased being a great nation, no matter how many times we have been beaten up and killed. Don't fall into the trap of applying promises which were given to the captives in Babylon to those of our people who are returning to our homeland in modern times. They have returned because of the blessing of G-d and according to the prophesy made by their Messiah.

You see prophecies were given about the return from Babylon and they usually contained at least two added assurances. First, as long as the returning people kept the faith and walked according to the Word of G-d, they would live peacefully in the land and never be driven from it again. Secondly, they were told about the coming of the eternal kingdom when the world would be recreated and peace and prosperity would be spread to all the nations and generations of mankind.

Sadly, our people were slaughtered and the survivors were scattered among the nations and they were even driven from one nation to another nation because of Christian antisemitism which denied their special status as the special people of G-d. G-d does not play favorites, but He keeps His Word, especially concerning the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I do not think that there is another group of people in the history of the world who have suffered as much as the Jewish people. I also think that there has never been another group of people who have been as blessed as the Jewish people.

It is not a contradiction, it is just a spiritual reality, because our mission has always been to speak of the coming kingdom among all the nations of the earth. With Christianity you have heard me say that they have the right Saviour, but the wrong approach. You have also heard me say that Islam has the right approach, but the wrong saviour. Despite all of the centuries of relentless attacks on the people of G-d, the will of G-d will always be done, as it has from the beginning of creation until the end of the world, when His eternal kingdom will finally be forever established under the reign of His Messiah.

He will always comfort His people, Jew and Gentile, and our duty as we wander through this tumultuous world, is to make sure that the Messiah reigns in our hearts, as we walk with Him according to the Word of G-d.

The last 27 chapters of Isaiah contain some of the most wonderful comforting words in the Bible. This is because G-d loves us, Jew and Gentile, and wants to use the example of Israel to show us how to walk with Him and also how not to walk with Him. We may encounter lethal disasters where our personal worlds are smashed into pieces by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Sometimes it will be due to our own folly and rebelliousness and sometimes it will just be our enemy who will do all he can do to make our lives as miserable as possible.

Sometimes the birth pangs of the Messiah will bring earthquakes, floods and even famines. There will also be wars and rumours of wars, because we have always been a cantankerous race, full of pride, rage and greed. But the end times started when our Messiah arose and ascended into Heaven and not according to the strange and wonderful myths that too many evangelicals have been fabricating for hundreds of years.

Be careful not to go beyond that which is written and make sure that what you believe about the coming end of the world lines us squarely with His Word. If you want more details than are found in the Word, you are going to be disappointed because: "The secret things belong to G-d and the things which He has revealed belong to us and to our children forever that we may put them into practice." (Deut. 29:29).

When we go through trials, we need to understand that G-d has not forgotten us and certainly has not forsaken us. His Word reminds us that it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of G-d (Acts 14:22) and as our world continues to darken, we should not expect to ride to glory on a rose coloured cloud of ease. Christians and Jews in the Americas have had a good time for several centuries and we may begin to experience increasing persecution at the hands of the politically correct evolutionary fascists.

As Messianic believers, both Jews and Gentiles, we truly need to see ourselves as heaven bound, even in the midst of trials. And though some may feel the coming of the final kingdom is taking too long, I am comforted that with each passing year, it is drawing nearer and nearer. The Fall Feasts will soon be upon us and we will use this special time to make sure our spirituality is in good repair and that our focus remains biblical in every area of our lives.

I want our congregational motto to be a reality in all of our lives so that we can truly be Sabbath powered and Festival driven. When I read about the troubles of Israel in the Bible, I am comforted by at least three things. First, G-d will never, ever let us be completely destroyed by our enemies or by the enemy of our souls. Secondly, G-d will never cease to love them and He will never cease loving us, no matter how much mischief we get up to. And finally, we will always be able to rise from the ashes, no matter how pieces we have been torn into.

You know, the worst thing that can happen to us is to be killed, but as long as we walk with the Messiah according to His Word, even this will not be a real tragedy, because instant death equals instant glory. Isaiah's words of comfort, encouraged the captives in Babylonian exile and they can also comfort us as we sojourn in the exile of this world, waiting for the final deliverance that we continue to joyfully and patiently wait for. In Messiah, everything and anything that can happen to us don't make no never-mind, because each day and in every way, we are heaven bound pilgrims. Shabbat shalom and shavua tov.