



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

13 Cheshvan, 5781 (31/10/20) **First Winter Series: Becoming a Shameless Student** J. M. Terrett

Lech Lecha **Go Forth Yourself**
Torah: **Gen. 12:1-17:27**
Haftarah: **Isaiah 40:27-41**
Brit Chadashah: **Romans 4:1-25**

After dealing with the redemptive scattering at Babel in the first two portions, this week's portion deals with Abraham and the beginning of the gathering together of all mankind. When Abraham was 75, G-d called him to leave his home in Haran and travel into Canaan. Abraham's father had left Haran to go to Canaan, but for some reason he only went part way and settled in Haran. We are always called to go all the way with G-d and not settle for half measures.

As part of the divine call to go to Canaan, G-d makes a double promise to Abraham which is still in effect today. He was told that he would become a great nation and that this nation would be a blessing. Later we learn that he was to become a blessing to all nations and that the land of Canaan would become a perpetual inheritance for his descendants.

His quite considerable entourage left Haran and came to the city of Shechem, which is where the L-RD first appeared to him in Canaan and promised to give the land of Canaan to his descendants. From there he moved his camp to a place between Bethel and Ai, where he built an altar and began to call upon YHVH. After this, he moved south.

A famine arose in Canaan and he went down to Egypt. His senior citizen wife was so pretty, that when he lied to Pharaoh and called her his sister, Pharaoh took her into his household. There was a long purification process for future wives and while this was going on, Pharaoh and his household were struck with a plague. Abraham was asked to leave Egypt and take both his wife and all the riches Pharaoh had given him.

Back in Canaan, the households of Lot and Abraham were too big to camp together, so Lot moved on the fertile grazing plains of the Jordan south of Canaan while Abraham stayed in Canaan. G-d then appeared to Abraham and repeated the double blessing, saying Abraham would become a large nation who would take possession of all of Canaan. Abraham set up a semi-permanent camp at Hebron and then the sparks began to fly.

The southern kings had been submitted to the Mesopotamian kings for thirteen years but suddenly five of them rebelled. Four Mesopotamian Kings cut a path of destruction on their way south to subdue the rebels. The armies of the five southern kings were destroyed and their conquerors looted all their treasures, as well as all their provisions. Lot had not taken part in the fighting, but was taken in captivity with all his considerable riches.

Abraham formed an armed coalition of his allies, defeated the four kings and rescued Lot. He also brought back all the treasures and supplies which had been looted. On the way home, he encounters one of the most mysterious characters in the Bible. The kings of Jerusalem were called Melchizedek or Adonai Tzedek and one of them was a priest of YHVH and he came out to meet Abraham's army with bread and wine. He is not named, but Abraham tithed to him from all the riches he had recuperated.

He then returned all the captives and the loot to the five kings and only kept what his men and his allies had eaten, minus a portion of the treasures his army claimed for itself. Afterwards, the L-RD appeared to Abraham in a vision and we learn that there were two keys to Abraham's success: faith and obedience. In conversation with YHVH, Abraham asked for a confirmation of the promises and they were turned into a covenant sealed by sacrifices.

Abraham prepared sacrificial animals and divided them in half, leaving a pathway between them. YHVH then put Abraham into a deep sleep and walks through the animals as a smokey flame. The smoke concealed the full glory of G-d from Abraham, while the fire of His presence acted like an altar and the animals were consumed. He mentions our captivity in Egypt and a time line is given for how long we shall be exiled into Egypt. While we were gone, there was many bloody upheavals in Canaan and we are promised that upon our return, YHVH would displace ten nations, so that we could take possession of an area which was once where the Garden of Eden stood before the flood.

After nearly eleven years in Canaan, Sarah still had not conceived the promised child, so she gave one of her servant girls to Abraham as a concubine, who did not have equal rights with Sarah. When she conceived, she initially despised her mistress, because obviously there was something wrong when a woman cannot conceive. She was mistreated and fled from Sarah. An angel of YHVH appeared before her and said G-d had heard her prays and that she should go back to Sarah. Ishmael was also given promises because he was a child of Abraham.

In the next chapter, G-d changes Abram's name from exalted father to father of a multitude or Abraham. He is given a second confirmation of the covenant in the form of circumcision and the promise of a son from Sarah is given. The future child's name, Yitzak, means laughter because both Sarah and Abraham laughed at the idea that a post-menopausal woman could conceive. Promises for Ishmael are re-affirmed but it is Isaac and his descendants who will be the covenant bearers.

Both the 90 year old Abraham and his 13 year old son are circumcised along with every male in the camp, whether they were born in the camp or acquired by purchase. From the previous account, we know that at least 318 men of his household were circumcised. They would be considered a part of the covenant bearing community, but the actual covenant would be passed on through the descendants of the yet to be born Isaac. Israel has always welcomed sojourners who either just dwelt in the camp as strangers or joined the camp as Jews, when they were circumcised. The native born Jews and their converts have always been considered equal members of the covenant community.

From a very tumultuous beginning where Abraham had to face a war and a famine, Abraham now settles into the land to await the arrival of the child of promise who will be the heir to the covenant promises. He sees that while YHVH can also bless shortcuts, YHVH wants to bless what He has promised and He has never failed to make good on any of His promises.

They are rarely, if ever, fulfilled according to any time line we establish, but they will all be fulfilled according to G-d's timeline. He will always be faithful to His Word, as well as to His promises. While we are waiting for the coming kingdom, our generational job is have faith in G-d, through His promises and walk with Him in obedience to His Word. This is what Abraham was doing and it is the reason G-d blessed him and continues to bless his children, even through the terrible trials we have often encountered on our way home to the father's home.

First Winter Series: The Two Sides of Deut. 29:29 (1) Becoming a Shameless Student

There are spiritually compromised people who seem to specialize in causing problems with congregations and their people and often their end goal is disrupt and destroy communities. They justify it by a whole spectrum of excuses that are nothing more than spiritually sounding works of the flesh. They identify real or imagined weaknesses in the communities which they are determined to sink. Nothing is ever good enough and once they have done their dirty work, they move on to destroy other congregations.

They pretend they just want things done biblically and no one ever seems able to measure up to their arbitrary, judgmental standards. Over the years, we have had our fair share of carnal critics who find us too Jewish, or not Jewish enough. Some find our services too long or too liturgical. When they find a way to be disruptive, under the guise exhorting with all longsuffering and doctrine, they go looking for the blood of their victims.

Not all of our visitors fall into this category, but because we are a specialized community, we will always attract pernicious believers with more than one ax to grind. Please do not feel that I am saying that all those who have joined our community in the past and have left, fall into this category, but some of them do. I will not mention names from the pulpit, but I want to use the pulpit to empower us to both recognize and protect ourselves when troublemakers show up and begin their campaign of undermining us.

One common false allegation is that how we conduct our services and how we live our lives are supposedly not biblical. You see, there is nothing wrong with establishing personal and communal customs as a diverse way of finding new and improved strategies to help us apply the eternal, changeless principles of G-d's Word in our midst. Problems only happen when local customs or traditions are given equal status with the Bible. This what has happened in both traditional Christianity and traditional Judaism. It will never happen here.

Despite some of the weird and wonderful things Martin Luther believed, he said that were three pillars which we should build our spirituality on: *sola gratia, sola fide and sola scriptura*. Only by grace, only by faith and only by the Scriptures. Adding to or subtracting from these core values will not do our faith or our obedience any good.

At the same time, it is not necessarily wrong to disagree on some aspects of what we are convinced that the Bible is teaching. Let me give you a few examples. The Catholic church teaches transubstantiation, which says that when we take communion we are actually eating

the actual flesh and drinking the actual blood of the Messiah. They misinterpret a situation in John chapter 6, where people who had been miraculously fed previously, came back to get another free meal. Yeshua grossed them out, but the apostles understand that we need to feast on the Word of the Messiah, because He has the words of everlasting life.

In another instance, I like many of the positions which the Union Messianic Jewish Congregations have designed over the years. Some find some of them to be problematic and many congregations have left over them. The rule of thumb, there is a scale with the majority position at one end of the spectrum and the minority position at the other end. As long as we are somewhere between these two positions, we are considered to not be slipping into error. There are two positions which have been the most problematic and have caused the UMJC to shrink considerably. The role of Gentiles in our midst and ordaining women as leaders. As a community, we affirm that both Jews and Gentiles are equal partners in our midst. We go one step further and affirm that if a Gentile wants to identify as a Jew in our midst, this is something we will permit. If a Jew wishes to identify as a Gentile, this is also permissible. Both groups are fellow citizens with the Israel of G-d. The only limit we place on this unity is that our services and our lifestyle will remain Jewish from a biblical perspective.

According to the Bible, men and women are equal in G-d's eyes and while ladies bear the shame of causing the fall, they are released from that shame through motherhood. Not every woman needs to become a mother to be released from the shame and we place no barriers to ladies in leadership in our midst. The three rabbis' wives of our member shuls are ordained alongside their husbands.

Many of the misunderstandings and disputes which trouble our movement arise when Messianic Jews who have come out of a broad variety of denominations, do not re-examine many doctrinal positions which they brought with them. Some even have not re-examined doctrinal stances, which they brought with them when they came out of traditional Talmudic Judaism. At the same time, we need to be strict followers of the Bible and not seek the approval of either Talmudic Judaism or traditional Christianity. We seek G-d's approval alone.

Carnal behaviour which promotes the works of the flesh and chokes out the fruit of the Spirit will try and join forces in our midst to clog or defile our community and even attempt to turn us away from being a Torah based, Spirit filled community of Messianic Jews and Gentiles. It ain't gonna happen on our watch.

In this new series we may cover some familiar ground. We may also develop new ways of understanding the Word, as we keep on applying the unchanging principles of YHVH's Word. YHVH's Word remains both Spirit breathed and completely free of error.

As we re-examine our positions and the traditions we practice, our biggest challenge remains to avoid arguing (2 Tim. 2:24-26) and tearing each other apart when we disagree (Gal. 5:15). Even in the healthiest congregations, too many fractious believers break fellowship over things which should be part of a friendly, respectful, ongoing dialogue. Differences of opinion should never be allowed to trigger angry accusations where communication and fellowship break down.

When I was in Montreal, one of my elders and I spent a couple of years in dialogue about whether or not angels have wings. I remain convinced that cherubim and seraphim have wings, but not ordinary angels. With another leader, we had a lively dialogue about whether once you

are saved, you remain saved and cannot lose your salvation. I affirm that while it very hard to lose your salvation, the Bible teaches us that it is possible to backslide to a point where this can happen. But, sick ain't dead and if ever you slip into a spiritual coma, with no signs of life, you need to snap out of it and repent your way back to spiritual health. When this does not occur in this life, on the Day of Judgment, some spiritually comatose believers will snap out of it and enter eternity, though in a radically diminished capacity.

I miss our Yeshiva Bible Studies and we may be able to set something up on Zoom with firm rules to avoid a cat fight among those who relish interrupting or who are verbal steamrollers who come with their eyes closed and their ears plugged. When believers are ready to rumble, they should take up cage fighting and not start fights in our midst.

With this being said, we should never try and change people's minds by the strength or the volume of our arguments or even by how convinced we are about our position. These should be resolved by how well we can demonstrate and communicate our positions in order to show their value from a clear scriptural position. You see, it has always been more about why we believe something than it has been about what we actually believe. We may keep in house disagreements going for a long time, as long as in house, biblical resolution rules are respected and the carnal works of the flesh are avoided.

One further point to note. There will always be more to say on a topic than can be said in a single sermon or even in a series of sermons. So we may have to keep revisiting a topic many times over a long period of time before consensus is reached, even if the best we can do is agree to disagree – or have to invoke Deut. 29:29. Now lets move on to our first passage in this series.

Becoming a Shameless Student of the Word

Passage: “Study to do your best to present yourself to G-d as a man approved by Him and as a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly explaining and sharing the Word of Truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

I have always been a big fan of good Bible teaching and over the years I have heard some amazing preachers and teachers who explain the Bible and make it come alive as they teach it. Some have been eloquent and a pleasure to listen to, while others spoke with such simple conviction that their words were made to sting.

However, I have heard others who seemed bent on raising money and on promising riches and ease if you but followed their strange formulas which only give one side of the equation. G-d cannot be put into a box or be obliged to act in any way which either violates His sovereign will or His Word. Our faith is not the key to great riches, nor to living on a rosy cloud of ease as we float our way to the next life. Sometimes we are dancing on the mountain top, other times we are stumbling through the valley. In both scenarios, we need to trust G-d and respond according to His Word.

When your are watching or listening to any preacher and your spiritual spidey sense begins to tingle, watch out. When something does not feel right, something is not right. If you do not agree with what is being said, sometimes they can make it seem like what the Bible teaches. When this happens, we better take a closer look at what we believe and maybe modify our perspective and make it line up closer to what the Bible actually teaches.

If they wander beyond what the Bible teaches and move into the realm of Deut. 29:29 and even make claims of special knowledge, be careful you are not being lead down the garden path or being made to slide down a rabbit hole into the Wonderland of false teaching and bad theology. A pleasant voice, a good presentation and a compelling argument should never replace a firm biblical foundation.

Any modern version of: "Has G-d really said?" should be avoided like the plague. Let us always strive to do our best before G-d and before His Word, not to stray from the truth, even if this puts us at odds with whatever new, weird theological positions crop up and clamor for our attention.

Do we really grasp what it means to be approved by G-d? It does not mean that we come across always ready to fight and cut down anyone who dares to disagree with us. We need to be in full possession of the fruit of the Spirit and not always be looking for a fight. It also means that we have made sure that what we say and how we live are based upon the core teachings of His Word or are at least an application of its core principles. When we are not sure, we need to do our homework and keep on digging until we are sure, or until we have to admit Deuteronomy 29:29.

Being approved by G-d does not mean that we are perfect or sinless or that we have cause to boast. It means that both in how we handle His Word and how we live our lives, we have learned to do things according to the principles outlined in His Word. I would rather be approved by G-d and disapproved by men, than the other way around. Being approved by G-d does not mean that we are always totally right or that we are constantly at odds with people. It means that we have firmly and humbly drawn a line which we will defend whenever anyone tries to cross it. We will do this without anger, accusations or character defamation.

When it comes to the Bible, we are not just a motley crew of independent spiritual contractors, each carving out and defending our own private turf. Instead, we are workers contracted by His Word who need to be held to the highest standards of biblical credibility and resolution that dwell together inside the circle draw by the five fundamentals of biblical faith (1). the Bible is the Word of G-d. (2) Yeshua is the Son of G-d. (3) He was born of a virgin. (4) He died on the cross for the sins of the world. (5) He arose, ascended into Heaven and will one day return.) . We need to learn to dwell peacefully within the circle of these fundamentals.

We also need to present a spiritually united front while we defend our faith and when we are engaged in dialoguing about our differences with meekness and respect. Differences do not have to lead to disunity and disputes. Whenever we slip into angry disputes we are no longer workers He approves of and sadly all we are doing in such a case is gathering a whole bunch of negative baggage for which we should be ashamed.

It is not an easy task to be rightly explaining the Word of Truth and sharing it peacefully. However it is a vital task to which we are called. We know that sometimes our best and most respectful explanations will fall on deaf ears and sometimes even on hostile ears. When this happens, we may need to rework our explanations and not allow ourselves to be pulled into a war of words where winning at any cost destroys any possibility of further dialogue. When people do not want to hear, what we may need to concentrate on is both evaluating how effective our presentation was and how clear our material was. We also need to look at how wisely and gently we have behaved.

We can even learn from our failed presentations and work through our bruises with the L-rd because we are determined to let Him show us how to do better next time. Sometimes it may mean learning to just walk away and even severing contact with those who do not want to listen. Often it may be the difficult questions we are asked that can challenge us the most and they can also stimulate us to go deeper in our investigations, so that we better understand what we are trying to say and learn to say it more clearly in the process. Learning not to argue is a hard but necessary discipline to learn, if we want to be approved by G-d and not be ashamed when we handle the Word.

Explaining and sharing the Word should be a lifetime commitment that can also be used to purge any carnal foolishness and unbiblical intrusions which may have crept into our lives. Being approved by G-d is not a competition to see who gets the carrot first. It is a shared endeavor to constantly update our presentation of the Word of Truth so that it is attractive to our listeners and meaningful to each new generation of our lost and dying world.

In the process we never try to sugar coat the Word to give it the most positive spin we can muster. We want to be clear about both what it says and what it means. In the process, we also need to get rid of any chips which try to hitch a ride on our shoulders. Also when someone gets our goat, we need to realize that we shouldn't really have one.

Being friendly and showing respect are two of the best bridges we can build for sharing our faith and having productive dialogues with other believers whom we might disagree with. We need to learn to avoid being ashamed, either by introducing that which is not supported by the Bible, or by arguing and fighting whenever we try and work out our differences. It is G-d's approval we should seek and it comes from both sharing His Word clearly and accurately and by learning not to turn discussions about our differences into a series of endless battlefields.

Shabbat shalom and shavua tov, mishpocah.