

<b>Tazria/Metsora</b>	<b>She Bears Seed/Infected One</b>	<b>The Joys of Quarantine</b>
<b>Torah:</b>	Leviticus 12:1-13:59/14:1-15:33	
<b>Haftarah:</b>	2 Kings 4:42-5:19/2 Kings 7:3-20	
<b>Brit Chadashah:</b>	Luke 7:18-35/Matthew 23:16-24:2, 30, 31	

The annual Torah reading cycle is divided into 54 weekly portions, to make sure we read the entire Torah at least once a year. However, during the Festival Cycle, there are several times where the regular Torah portion is suspended and special passages are read. To compensate for this, several times during the year, portions are doubled, to make sure that there is no competition between the annual Torah reading cycle and the annual Festival cycle.

Today we have two portions to study and both portions are very technical and are not always easy to understand. They are especially relevant for us during the pandemic lock down, because they outline three important principles: hygiene, purification and quarantine. They deal with a variety of infectious diseases of the skin and without the benefit of modern vaccinations and antibiotics, none the less, YHVH expected His people to deal with physical infections so that neither the camp nor the tent of meeting became infected.

Because some of the words have no really clear modern equivalents, I consulted the notes from the Talmudic Chumash or rabbinic commentary on the Torah. Sometimes these are helpful, but at other times they fall into the category of fanciful concepts which have really got nothing to do with the text. This was the case when I tried to get clarity on the meaning of several words used in these four complex chapters.

The Talmudic rabbis feel that the passages refer to a special series of punishments for those who speak evil or engage in slander. These offenders were then quarantined and remained afflicted by various physical symptoms until they repented, at which point they were healed and went through the purification rituals. They said that this was both a testimony to their own repentance and a warning to others not to engage in speaking evil of others.

Nowhere in these chapters is there any reference to these conditions being a punishment and nowhere in these chapters is there any reference to evil speech. Over the centuries, as our people began speaking other languages, the exact meaning of some Hebrew words became unclear. When this happens, we need to either recover the original meaning or admit that the meaning of some words has been lost. Attaching additional meaning which is not the intention of the text, diminishes both that amount of meaning we can derive from the text and our ability to dig deeper and discover whatever meaning we can still derive from the text. Adding meaning or subtracting meaning is not a valid approach to understanding the meaning of any biblical text.

Too many Christians adopt this approach when it comes to understanding prophecy about the end times and the return of our blessed Messiah. We need to stand firm and proclaim, without reserve, that the Bible says what it means and means what it says. We need to avoid all and any attempts to add theological poppycock to the message of the Word.

Chapter twelve deals with recovering from child birth and the rituals of cleansing and purity are different for a male baby and a female baby.

The main event for a male baby is circumcision, which occurs on the eighth day, after the first 7 day isolation period of the mother. In Talmudic Judaism, while the mother attends the ceremony, she hands off the baby to her husband and to the godfather, who then hands it to the rabbi and his helpers. In this way, there is no direct contact between the mother who is not fully purified and those who are performing the ritual. This procedure is not outlined in the Bible and we do not endorse it on our performance of circumcision.

The mother has to fulfill another 33 days of purification beyond the first seven, which brings her isolation period to forty days. This gives both her immune system and her body as a whole, time to recover and avoid the possibility of any preventable complications.

In the case of a female child, she remains impure for 14 days and spends an additional 66 days before she is declared completely pure. The difference may stem from the mother's desire to purify her daughter, so that her first menstruation does not defile her. She would then enter adulthood already cleansed. The passage does not mean that girls are more unclean than boys or that they are any less important than their brothers.

What follows is three chapters which deal with skin diseases of various kinds, briefly divided between those which are deeper than the skin and produce open sores where the skin becomes an open wound and those which do not become open wounds, but which weep through the skin without producing an open wound or ulcer.

I am not entirely sure which exact conditions the chapters refer to, but the procedures are put into place, both to protect the afflicted ones and the camp, from which they are excluded. In the first case, if there is an ulcer which erupts and covers the body, when there is no living flesh anywhere on the affected skin, the disease has run its course and the sufferer is ready to go through the cleansing rituals. This particular condition turned the skin white which may refer to scabs which cover the wound and become dead skin when the disease no longer afflicts the sufferer.

When there is living skin in the midst of the white scab, the disease is still active and the person needs to be quarantined until the priests are sure that the disease has run its course and the person is neither sick nor contagious. It does not say whether the skin condition creates an open sore or whether the affliction just weeps through the skin.

Where there is an ulcer which ruptures the skin as an open sore which bleeds and produces puss, the person is declared unclean and is quarantined for seven days. If the wound does not extend deeply in the skin and does not grow during the seven day quarantine, the person is declared pure and goes through an elaborate cleansing ritual. If the wound begins to spread, the person remains unclean and the condition is called leprosy.

When a person is burned and an eruption appears deep into the skin, it is called leprosy and the person is isolated from the camp until there is an improvement in their condition. There was no quarantine until an improvement was seen.

If a spot appears on the skin, with no white hairs, the person was isolated for 7 days. If the spot spread, they were declared impure and had to wait until there was an improvement before they were allowed to go through the purification rituals and re-enter the camp. If it just remained as a scab, they were declared pure and went through the seven day cleansing rituals. There had to be a sign of improvement before they were re-integrated into the camp.

A discussion ensues concerning sores in the beard and on the scalp. When this occurred, the afflicted person was isolated for seven days and if the sore(s) did not spread, they went through the cleansing rituals and could re-enter the camp. Baldness is not considered unclean, unless a rash or a sore appears in the bald spot and spreads. Until it is resolved, the person is declared unclean and cannot enter the camp.

If there was mildew on an article of clothing, it was washed and isolated for 7 days. If the mildew did not re-appear, it was declared clean, but if the mildew re-appeared, it was declared unclean and was burned. A similar ritual was followed for mildew in a house.

The next chapter deals with the rituals which celebrated the recovery from various skin conditions and part of the rituals resembles the anointing procedure whereby Aaron and his sons were consecrated to the Lord. After going through a seven day isolation where they were symptom free, the recovering person had to wash their clothes and themselves and shave off all their body hair. But they were not yet allowed into the tent of meeting.

They had to be isolated for another seven days, where once again, they washed themselves and their clothes and once again shaved all their body hair, including their eyebrows. After another 7 days, The priest would then take oil and anoint their ear lobe, their thumb and their big toe. Then oil was poured into the palm of their hand. This oil was sprinkled 7 times before the Lord and the remainder was again placed on their ear lobe, their thumb and on their big toe. What they heard, what they did and where they went once again belonged to YHVH.

It was considered like a kind of guilt offering where fellowship with YHVH was being restored. In this case, physical defilement was treated like spiritual defilement and what was left of the oil was placed on the head of the person going through the cleansing. Provisions were made for the ritual sacrifices to be scaled down for poorer people. It was the same procedure, but the offerings were reduced.

The last chapter deals with a bleeding ulcer which was giving a constant discharge of blood and puss. Anything they touched was removed and was unclean until the evening. If they touched earthen vessels, these were broken. With wooden vessels, they were washed and remained unclean until the evening. When the sore healed, the person was isolated for seven days and on the eighth day, the cleansing rituals were performed and the person was re-integrated back into the camp. The same procedure was followed if a man had an emission of semen or a woman had a weeping wound that was not related to her monthlies.

All of these stipulations were designed to remove physical impurities from the people, so that no one soiled or defiled the tent of meeting. Weeping sores, ulcers and emissions of semen required both isolation and hygiene to prevent the spread of the condition and to give the body time to heal. Quarantine is a sound medical practice and in the text of the Torah, sickness is treated like a bodily defilement and is not attributed to either demonic activity or to a divine punishment.

In the New Testament, certain conditions were linked to demonic oppression and these were dealt with by a simple exorcism, which did not usually involve a lot of writhing and screaming. The present regulations to deal with the Covid pandemic reflect the 2 main measures found in our double portion today: hygiene and quarantine. Stopping the spread of an illness is an essential part of any treatment program which is designed to both help the sick person and to prevent the spread of any contagious infections into the general population.

## Sermon: A Biblical Approach to the Need for Civil Disobedience

**Passages: *“Peter and the apostles responded: We must obey G-d rather than men. Let every person be subject to higher authorities, for there no authority which does not come from G-d and the authorities which exist have been instituted by G-d. That is why the one who opposes authority, resists the order which G-d has established, and those who resist will bring a condemnation upon themselves. It is not for a good action, but for an evil action that the magistrate is to be feared. Do you wish not to respect authority? Do that which is good and you will have their approval. The magistrate is the servant of G-d for your good. But if you do that which is bad, be afraid; for it is not in vain that he carries the sword, being the servant of G-d to exercise vengeance and punish the one who does wrong. It is therefore necessary to be submitted, not only by fear of punishment, but also by reason of conscience. It is for this reason that you pay taxes. For the magistrates are the ministers of G-d who are entirely devoted to this function. Give them their due; taxes to the one you owe them to and tribute to the one you owe tribute to, respect to the one to whom you owe respect and honour to the one to whom you owe honour. (Acts 5:29 and Romans 13:1-7)***

Our two passages do not contradict each other, but there is a time and a set of circumstances where civil disobedience is both our duty and the valid expression of our submission to the laws of G-d. There are other times where lawlessness is promoted and some people, even some believers, feel that they do not have to be subject to any law or code which they disagree with.

The various groups which preach anarchy, say that there is no higher authority than our own conscience and every person is free to do what they feel is right. To give them their due, they feel that all and any disputes need to be worked out by agreement and never by force. There are some who feel force of any kind is wrong and, while they may believe in government, they do not believe in the use of force by that government to enforce its laws. These groups believe that human conscience and agreement are the only two principles believers should be subject to.

They do not feel obligated to follow speed limits or even housing codes and they believe that all people should be free to follow their own conscience and not be subject to any higher power which tries to dominate over them and place limits on what is acceptable conduct. This kind of complete lawlessness is also sometimes called antinomianism, which is a Greek term meaning:” against the law”.

As believers who follow the Scriptures and who want to serve our Messiah, we can never be either anarchists or followers of antinomianism. We believe that the Law of G-d is supreme and it is to this law that we owe our complete allegiance and submission. When the Sanhedrin forbade the preaching of the Gospel, the apostles did not feel obliged to obey this law, because it contradicted the Law of G-d and the commandments of our Messiah.

We do not feel that we are free to disobey all laws and ordinances which we disagree with, because we want to be those who uphold the Law of G-d. We are law abiding citizens who are fully and freely subjected to the Law of G-d, which is the highest law. It is only when any human law or ordinance or code contradicts the Law of G-d that there is a valid need for civil disobedience.

When Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans, he knew it would eventually be read by the Roman authorities and he did not want the early disciples to be branded as revolutionaries or anarchists. He makes a subtle observation that all authority comes from G-d alone and not from any earthly authority. He asserts that even Caesar rules on behalf of G-d and cunningly stipulates that any lawmaker or person in authority, needs to see themselves as servants of G-d who exist to punish evil and reward goodness.

At first it would appear that he is preaching submission to all and any laws which all and any magistrate should formulate. This is not the case. The Hebrew midwives and the Hebrew mothers disobeyed the unjust laws of Pharaoh and did not kill their newborn sons. Jews and early Christians refused to participate in emperor worship and negotiated an exception. They would pray for the emperor daily and agreed not to rebel. This came with the assumption that problems would go through established grievance procedures and would never result in open rebellion.

The mark of the beast was a document certifying that a Roman citizen had performed their annual emperor worship and could renew their license to buy and to sell. Jews got around this, but did not always allow Messianic believers to share in this protection. We uphold the need for any society to be governed by the rule of law and it is only when a law contradicts the higher authority of G-d's law that we are justified in rebelling.

The American colonies rebelled against the British crown because of an unjust set of laws that were forced on them. They first sent a petition pledging their eternal loyalty to the crown if these laws were revoked and if American lawmakers were allowed to participate in passing laws which affected America. They did not get a favorable answer, so even the Christians in their midst, felt that they were justified in rebelling.

A century before this, when the English King Charles wanted to disband parliament and rule as an absolute monarch, a civil war ensued and the king was executed as a criminal. Armed rebellion and resistance should only be a last resort when any government clearly violates its mandate to punish evil and reward the good. In the early 1800's there were a series of rebellions across Europe because so many royal governments felt it was their right to do exactly as they pleased and that people should passively obey them.

Every major country in Europe experienced a rebellion, except Great Britain, where the monarchs ruled according to the rule of constitutional law. They had learned their lesson and Karl Marx hated the British people. He called them a nation of shop keepers because, compared to other European countries, they had it good. Slavery was first abolished in Britain and voter suffrage or the right to vote, was extended to more and more people and eventually included the right for women to vote.

There may always be a level of government corruption, but as long as a government can be held accountable to some form of constitutional law, there is a need for reform, and not for rebellion. Also, if a government violates the basic human rights of its citizens, rebellion becomes a duty. They should not be told what to believe and they should not be denied the right to assemble, own property and conduct business on a level economic playing field.

Government should exist to regulate the lives of its citizens according to the established principles of constitutional law for the good and safety of its citizens.

Too many nations around the world are governed by dictatorial regimes which exist for the benefit of a small ruling elite at the expense of the needs of all of its citizens. Paul was not calling for believers to blindly submit to all and any forms of tyranny where the laws of the country are made and enforced at the whim of a single man or an elite group of men who want to dominate over the people and not exercise their duty to protect the people and care for their basic needs.

Rome brought peace to the ancient world for the first time. They built roads, dug wells and did much to improve the lives of all their citizens. They conquered most of the ancient Middle East, but established a fairly good set of laws where the human rights of their citizens were protected. It was to this kind of law which Paul preached submission and it was this kind of law that believers should both uphold and establish for the good of the people and to protect citizens from the violence of evil doers.

We are only to disobey laws which violate the scriptural mandate of government, and we are to do so in order to re-establish the rule of law according to this mandate.

I am getting pretty fed up with frequent Facebook posts from those who claim to be believers and who are preaching civil disobedience to the Covid restrictions, even though the right to set up these restrictions falls well within the general mandate of government. They are not taking away any of our religious rights and they are not attacking our beliefs. They are not trying to set up some kind of global dictatorship as a preparation for the manifestation of the final beast.

It is their duty to regulate our society for our good and for our protection. Covid had the potential to kill even hundreds of millions of people if restrictions were not put in place. Being obliged to wear a face mask in public and to maintain social distancing is not a violation of our rights. Shutting down public gatherings or placing limits on the numbers of people who can gather is also not a violation of our basic rights. If none of these restrictions were put in place, there could have been as many as 100 times the number of infections and the nations of the world would once again be ravaged by a plague in the proportions of all the other global pandemics which have struck our planet.

The government is not trying to take over our lives, nor is it trying to destroy or damage our faith. It has not forbidden worship in any way, it has just placed a protective limit on how many can gather. The global infection rate would rise exponentially if these restrictions were removed prematurely.

Disobedience to these restrictions is not either our spiritual duty, nor our spiritual right. I disagree with all the playground zones which turn vehicles into snails and there are other codes and regulations which I feel are silly. But we need to protest through established channels and not just obey when we get our own way. Quebec forbids right hand turns on a red light, which is silly, but it is within the mandate of the government to make laws like this for public safety.

So we should not rise up in rebellion against the Covid restrictions, nor should we listen to experts who make wild and unfounded statements. To date over a million Albertans have received at least one dose.

One doctor reported that there were 103 adverse reactions to the vaccine in our fair province. That is less than .01 percent. The instances of blood clots with one of the vaccines is just as low, if not lower. Several years ago, one doctor published a paper saying that all vaccines were dangerous. He falsified his research and was eventually disbarred.

The advent of Covid is not a sign of the end of the world and it is not a covert attack on our faith or our basic human rights. It is a valid government response to an international medical emergency. If you disagree, stay home. If you violate the restrictions, you have no biblical justification to do so. Protest, vote, dialogue. Keep a balanced perspective and pray for our government at all levels. Pray also for those who have contracted the virus and who are battling for their lives. Pray also for those who have fallen prey to radical, unbalanced perspectives and who are falsely claiming that they have a spiritual right to not follow the Covid restrictions.

Sometimes civil disobedience is warranted. I would have fought against racial segregation and I am a supporter of native rights. I support the rule of law and want our government to take firm stances to both protect our rights and protect the more vulnerable in our society. I am willing to agree to do anything and everything to defeat Covid and get back to a more normal life.

If they want to violate my basic rights, I will protest. If they want to restrict my religious freedom, I will protest and disobey any law which tried to stop me from being a believer who serves the resurrected Messiah. I do not feel my rights are being violated by having to wear a mask. I wore one for 15 years and now that I no longer need one, the joke is on me, because now everyone is wearing them.

There are over 12,000 physicians in Alberta and over 91,000 in Canada as a whole. The vast majority support the Covid restrictions and they have done their homework. Do not be taken in by those few who either manipulate the facts or who just ignore them.

***“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing personal opinion”***  
(Proverbs 18:2)

Have blessed week. Follow Covid guidelines and may G-d protect you from contracting Covid and may He bless all of those who are struggling with this infection. May he bless the front line workers who place their lives at risk to help the sick.

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.