

It is so good to be back in shul. I missed all of you immensely and it is nice to see the people I have been praying for! I am getting slowly stronger, but I am not used to having such limited strength. I am doing all I can to build my strength back up. Thank you for your prayers and your support. It is good to have a strong community supporting you.

Some people have asked me if I was scared while I was so sick and the answer is a firm: "no". We have seen several assaults on my health in the last few years, but G-d's Kingdom in our beloved Messiah marches on, plowing through everything which rises up to resist its final victory. I have never considered myself irreplaceable because G-d's purposes are both global and generational and as long as He is with us, that is all that matters as we plod through valleys and scale high mountains. If I get to go home early, so be it!

Our particular congregation actually began in 1984 in a basement in Millwoods. It was a house fellowship group began by Cal and Jan Goldberg and it met for worship and for Bible Study. People came and people went and gradually, despite much resistance, the group became one of the first Messianic congregations in Canada and took the name Beit Mashiach.

I was aware of the congregation from the very beginning and while I was working with the Pentecostals, I visited the congregation on several occasions. It moved around a lot from one location to another and some very unique people joined its ranks over the years. They came and stayed for varying lengths of time. Some of them were amazing believers, while others were less so. It seemed to me that people who could have made a difference and helped the shul to grow, made trouble instead and a whole series of them tried to hijack the congregation. Critical fault finders and grumpy fight starters do not make a shul grow.

For the most part, they operated in the works of the flesh and felt persecuted whenever they were challenged. But throughout this difficult period, it was actually those who manifest the fruit of the Spirit who actually held the shul together when so many other carnal troublemakers were trying to rip it to shreds. The core of good, honest souls.

When Cal moved to Calgary, the shul soldiered on, but core of faithful disciples kept shrinking. When I took the congregation in 1996, it was almost in the process of dissolving and had barely more than a dozen adherents. Believers do not often readily grasp that carnal infighting in a community is often the greatest enemy any congregation has to face. They also too often fail to realize that unresolved spiritual baggage and carnal habits are the Trojan horse which keeps too many congregations from stabilizing and growing to their full potential. Congregations cannot move on until their members do. We do not want anything holding us back and in 2021 we want to resolve and grow and rejoice because that is our only calling.

While we worked to stabilize the congregation, it slowly began to grow and to recover and at least once, our numbers almost reached 100. Spiritually and financially, things had never been better. Then, suddenly, without much warning, a carnal leadership power play erupted and caused a split and what was once a strong, thriving community dwindled into two smaller communities and we lost nearly half our people.

Once B'nai Chayim formed, we wanted to put the past behind us and we did our best to heal and to allow the Messiah to have His way in our midst. A couple of times in 18 years of existence, our numbers have grown more than once to nearly 80 souls and we have seen some exceptionally talented people come through the shul. G-d has always been faithful.

Unfortunately, once our numbers grew, the enemy targeted us and too many of our number were unable or unwilling to grow beyond their unresolved spiritual baggage and abandon carnal habits which soured their spirituality. Sadly, too many have pulled up stakes and moved on, when they should have sent down roots and grown in grace and in love and resolved the issues that kept them from growing spiritually. We have never claimed to be perfect, but as we surrender our flaws and our failures to the Messiah, He reaches down and builds wonderful things among His peace who are learning to trust in Him through His Word.

Through it all, we have not grown discouraged, because as long as we keep sowing in the Spirit, we will eventually reap the growth and victory which we have come so close to over the years. Soon everything which is getting in the way of our progress will crumble before the wonder and the power of the Messiah and we shall begin the joyful process of growing to our full potential. Walking with our King has always been worth it, whether we have seen victories or have survived setbacks. We serve the coming kingdom and His Word and His Spirit are unstoppable, even if we are not having as good a time as we could, just yet.

One of our recent hurdles has been financial and January has been one of the worst months we have yet survived. But even that is turning around! Years back, when I had to quit teaching because I got so sick, I received a word from YHVH which lifted my spirits and helped me to soldier on: "We will do what we have to do and I will bless you." When we do what we know we have to keep on doing, we are sowing the seed of eventual victory.

Spiritual warfare comes in many kinds of attacks, but as long as we trust in the Messiah in faith and live according to His Word, we shall overcome. This is both our objective and the reality we are living in. Over the years, I have frequently committed the future of BNC to the Messiah, because, unless the Messiah builds a house, those who labour, labour in vain.

Over the last couple of years, it seems that whenever we are on the verge of substantial growth and stability, the enemy exploits weaknesses and some of our folk head over the hill for any number of reasons. Again, we have never claimed to be perfect, but we are building and maintaining a garden where the fruit of the Spirit are cherished and where the works of the flesh are weeded out. We will always set straight paths for our feet in His Word.

It seems that people come and immediately love the congregation and start becoming rooted in our midst, but they need to understand that there is a backlash coming from the enemy who doesn't want them to settle into our dynamic community. As they settle, they come under intense spiritual attack, but if they can overcome, in our midst, there are green pastures and still waters waiting to bring spiritual growth and great fulfillment their way.

As we welcome all the amazing newcomers who come our way, I am impressed by at least two things. First, I am impressed by the surprising and creative means by which the enemy tries to create conflict in our midst. You can never really predict where he will assault us next. Maybe next time I will come down with bubonic plague or maybe leprosy! However, I am even more impressed when the hand of the Messiah intervenes and we more than survive.

So far, none of the damage we have incurred has been fatal and as long as we trust in Him, our boat will never sink – and if it does we will walk to Him on the water. So in a way, I sense that despite all the opposition which may come our way, we may be getting ready to break out of whatever has been preventing us from growing. This is because we have always remained faithful to His Word and have never allowed ourselves to be pulled into the spiritual cat fights where carnal believers bite and devour each other into oblivion.

Through all the valleys and over all the mountains, like the apostle Paul, our shul lives and thrives in the midst of a good and an evil reputation, but as long as we sow in the Spirit, we will be OK. In the Messiah, we will have peace, but as we travel on through this fading world, we shall have more trials and tribulations than a camel has fleas – for the Scriptures say that it is through much tribulation that we must enter the Kingdom of G-d (Acts 14:22).

Who is sufficient for all of this? All those who walk in faith according to His Word and who keep their eyes glued to the majesty of the coming Kingdom and who proclaim: “Greater is He who is in us than the one who is in the world”. We are more than conquerors in Him!

Three things and we will move on to today's Torah Portion. I Tim. 5:22 says: “Do not promote someone into leadership too quickly and do not participate in the sins of others – keep your own self pure.” When believers misbehave and slip into the carnal works of the flesh, we must never follow suit. In Messiah, our first job is to keep our own nose clean. Secondly, we need to steadfastly determine to use biblical conflict resolution strategies, no matter how many times people play dirty tricks on us and taunt us to join them in their folly.

In all of this, we need to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. When we are uncertain how to respond, we need to examine the Scriptures and consult with people who are on a similar path. Along the way, we may suffer loss and be wounded, but walking with the Messiah is always worth it. Some time read 2 Corinthians 11:16-32, as you count the cost of walking by faith in the Spirit and according to His Word. Being wounded in the Messiah is a privilege, but slipping back into the flesh and the world is a spiritual disaster.

Third, we need to have patience and let the Messiah show us how to get back up and how to keep walking, so that we remain part of the solution and never become part of the problem. The progress of the Gospel and the Torah is happening globally, even in the midst of some of the stiffest opposition believers have ever encountered. Revivals are sweeping regions of the globe and an incredible number of people are coming to faith globally.

At the same time, the enemy is also undermining our faith globally and we are under constant attack from nearly every direction. How should we respond? See numbers one and two and let number three help you to keep going with those who have managed to survive the latest purges of those spiritual cossacks and killing squads that are doing their best to crush us and smash us. They shall never fully succeed because, again, greater is He who is in us than the one who is in the world (I John 4:4). Have faith in the promises in His Word. Make obedience the straight and narrow path you refuse to deviate from as the second great darkness is gaining momentum globally. Through it all, our job is to allow the momentum of the coming Kingdom be the place where we live! We are already citizens of the Kingdom.

May His faithfulness be the light we follow and may His Word be the foundation of the life we build and maintain in our blessed Messiah and in His Spirit. That's all there is to it.

Yitro: Jethro (Abundance). Exodus 18:1-20:26; Isaiah 6:1-7:7; 9:6,7 (9:5, 6) Matt. 5:8-20.

This portion is the beginning of the year the Children of Israel spent camping around the mountain, relearning how to live and how to walk with their Divine Deliverer.

The first part of the Haftarah portion is a Messianic portion which describes the mighty, magnificent glory of G-d which is preparing to break forth upon our darkening world and burn all of its folly to a crisp, before installing the everlasting Kingdom of our blessed Messiah. Isaiah 9:6,7 (5,6) is a five fold declaration of Messiah's divinity. He may have come as a child who was given to us, but He has always been:

Wonderful	(totally worthy of worship)
Counselor	(the One who always knows what's up)
Mighty G-d	(the Creator and Sustainer who has always been unchanging, and omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent)
Everlasting Father	(He has always loved us and has never hated us)
The Prince of Peace	(The victorious One who will one day rise up and establish the eternal Kingdom of G-d over all the nations and generations of mankind).

The New Testament portion (Matt. 5:8-20) says at least two things. Messiah has come to correct all the spiritual abuses which had crept into Judaism AND secondly, to fulfill the Torah without ever changing it (never adding to it, nor taking away from it).

In the Torah portion, Israel has arrived at the mountain where Moses saw the burning bush. (Note: there is a false teaching which says that Mount Sinai is somewhere in Saudi Arabia. In Bible times Mount Sinai was in the Roman province of Arabia, which was centered in the Sinai peninsula and never part of the region which later became known as Arabia).

The Mountain in question is a massif, which is a compact collection of mountains and this particular group had three separate peaks. No one know for sure which peak was covered with clouds and lightening as it shook, but I vote for the highest peak.

The camp was probably roughly divided into the twelve tribal groups and already had a functioning leadership of elders and princes. But there was not a spiritual leadership in place which could integrate the the Word of the L-rd into how they lived their lives. However, in its current state, it likely resembled a motley crew more than it did the hosts of the L-RD who were now ready to hear the Word of the L-RD. They needed some work. How about us?

It was close to where Moses' father-in-law lived. He had two names: Jethro and Reuel and when he heard about Moses' arrival, he journeyed to bring back Moses' family who had been sheltering with him during the year it took to reduce Pharaoh to submission. While he is there, he observes how Moses is trying to teach the people how to integrate G-d's Word into their daily lives as they wait for further instructions from YHVH. Moses is not going about this task in an orderly fashion and there is quite a backlog of people trying to put their concerns before him. He appears to be the only source of instruction.

Jethro first acknowledges the Hand of YHVH and leads all the elders in a celebration ritual meal in the presence of YHVH. We are not told where and how it was held (Duet. 29:29).

Then when Jethro sees the chaos which surrounds how Moses is trying to teach the people, he instructs Moses to set up a structured spiritual leadership where leaders of: 10, 50, 100 and 1,000 could teach the people the ordinances and laws of YHVH. We are not told when and how their training happened, but they were there to help the people integrate the Word of YHVH into their lives. They had not yet been given the 10 principles, but they knew enough about the ways of the L-RD to show the people how to walk with YHVH, far from idolatry and fornication. In the process of being set up, they had to help the people redo their understanding of right and wrong, based on the deliverance of YHVH and not on the Egyptian ways they may have learned in exile. We are in the world, we are never of the world.

Once the new spiritual leadership hierarchy began to function, Moses could concentrate on the bigger issues and let the people learn how to apply the little issues into every area of their lives. It was in the third month out of Egypt, on the first day of the month of Sivan when they set up camp and after Jethro had helped them to organize the spiritual leadership of the camp, they were finally ready to hear the Ten Holy Words.

Moses went up and down the mountain at least three times. He went up the first time to report on the people's willingness to totally submit to whatever YHVH commanded them. As part of the process, they set boundaries around the mountain so that neither the people nor their flocks would be in any danger from the presence of the L-rd, which was lethal to those who entered it without the proper precautions. Playing games with YHVH is very dangerous.

As this was going on, the cloud which had hovered over the camp, covered the mountain and it was into this cloud that Moses went to receive the ten basic principles of biblical theology and spirituality. There was also fire and smoke and tremors emanating from the mountain and the people kept back, full of fear and awe. There was none of the pagan trickery or the deceptive rituals which the pagans used to pretend that the divine presence was there. There was no squeaking, muttering or fake seizures that still are used by those who put on seances to fool the unsuspecting crowds. This was the real thing and it was pretty scary.

An entire mountain shook with tremors and gave off lots of smoke and lightening and the people were afraid and full of awe. Any Canaanite spies would have either fled in terror or stood back amazed.

When Moses went up the mountain, Aaron came part way up and likely took up a position where he was still visible to the people. It was from this position that he was later pulled into the criminal folly of the golden calf. Joshua probably climbed to the very edge of the cloud and sat and waited as Moses entered alone into the presence of G-d.

Now the people were ready to receive the ten sacred principles of biblical spirituality and which occupy an elevated position above all other instructions or commands of the Scriptures. They still apply today and were upheld by our Messiah on more than one occasion. They form an inseparable, indivisible declaration of all that G-d has ever had to say to His people. Everything else in the Torah, the prophets, the writings and the New Testament are but applications of this central statement in ten parts.

Please rise as we hear the Ten Commandments. After each one is read, you can respond with an amen to indicate your acceptance of each one and your agreement to put them into practice in every area of your lives. (they are read and responded to)

Let us briefly touch on each one.

1. **You shall have no other gods before Me.** It took several generations for Israel to become truly monotheistic, for truly there is no other god. Polytheism (a believe in many gods) and pantheism (a belief that everything is part of G-d) are wrong and stand as perversion of the truth of the Torah. The trinity does not fall into this category because in Messiah, we proclaim the plural singularity of the one G-d who has always existed in three persons. He is echad, the composite unity which is indivisible and has always existed as the only One true G-d. There are no other gods.
2. **You cannot worship the works of your hands.** You cannot worship any aspect of creation. Only the Creator is worthy of worship. This is really a big deal and the explanation of this commandment represents the largest section in the giving of the Ten. His wrath against offenders is limited to every member of the living generations of the offenders, while His unlimited mercy is ready to be shown to all the generations of those who rightly discern who He is. In Acts 17:30, 31 This mercy also extends to those who unknowingly wallow in pagan error. Loving Him and keeping His Commandments is the key to unlocking His mercy blessing to a thousand generations. This number is an enduring symbol of G-d's mercy and is never intended to be taken literally. If I've told you this once, I've told you a thousand times?
3. **You shall not take the name of YHVH in vain.** G-d is not someone you can use as a guarantor of your word (unless you formally perform an oath ceremony before the priests). He is not a weapon or a force you can aim at your enemies. He cannot be manipulated and He is never under anyone's control. We need to be under his control.
4. **Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.** The observance of this special day predates the earliest days of Judaism and those who wrote the first eleven chapters of Genesis were Sabbath observers, including Noah and the other nine patriarchs before the flood. Sunday worshipers wrongly teach that it is not a big deal. While it is not a salvation issue, it is definitely an obedience issue and violators will suffer loss when they stand before the L-rd of the Sabbath. The Sabbath is the only day which YHVH blessed and it is the only day of rest which the Scriptures recognize and which they sanction. Romans 14:5 says that some people consider some days special, while others consider them all equal. Paul is talking about pagan holy days which some believers observed and which they wanted others to observe. People were already observing the Sabbath and Paul did not want the people to adopt other days in competition with the established day of the L-RD. Later, he talked about people who forbade meat in favour of a strict vegetarian diet. It was not an assault on Kosher. Sabbath keeping is foundational to authentic biblical spirituality. To abandon it is to place believers on a slippery slope where other core teachings of the Bible may also be called into question.
5. **Honour your father and your mother.** Together their union caused Adam's blood to flow into our veins and we pass this same blood onto our children, generation by generation. Honour means to recognize this unbroken link as we also prepare to pass the baton onto our children's children until the Kingdom comes. The word "and" links ideas of equal worth. Both parents deserve equal honour, never one above the other or one instead of the other. We honour them whether they are good or bad.

- 6. You shall not commit murder.** A committee of two brought life into this world and only a committee should end it. The sword of wrath has ended countless innocent lives and is wielded by the servants of the enemy. As servants of life, we do not seek death as a primary solution without due process. Life is a precious gift.
- 7. You should not commit adultery.** The Hebrew, the word adultery is used interchangeably with fornication to indicate all and any departures from acceptable sexual expression. Sex should only occur within the bonds of a marriage between a man and a woman. Polygamy is a separate issue. Fornication indicates any forbidden sexual activity before or after marriage. Adultery indicates sexual activity by a married person with someone they are not married to. Homosexuality indicates sex between two members of the same gender. All three are forbidden sexual practices condemned by the Bible and which believers should never consider acceptable, whatever the society at large approves of. We do not hate sexual offenders, we just refuse to deem their offenses as acceptable behaviour. Sinful behaviour is never acceptable.
- 8. You Shall Not Steal.** Ownership should be exchanged by negotiation and by agreement and never by force. All those who have stolen the lands of people they have slaughtered will stand guilty of both murder and theft when they stand before the Messiah on the day of judgment. Genocide is the worst kind of theft.
- 9. You shall not bear false witness.** Gossip is a heinous crime and is always wrong. It is also the most besetting sin which believers fail to fight against and so easily fall prey to. There are things which it is our business to share and others which we should not share. Making up lies about people we do not like or twisting the truth to defame people are serious crimes before G-d. Speak the truth, but keep confidences. Refuse to spread defamation and do not become a willing conduit for half truths and slander. Do not use your words or your mouth as a weapon. (story: the first mate was sober today).
- 10. You shall not covet anything or anyone which belongs to your neighbour.** There is a big difference between coveting and the desire for self improvement and the acquisition of wealth. Enriching yourself by desiring or acquiring that which belongs to someone else is wrong and is a sin. Godliness and contentment are a great source of gain. Wanting more and more, endlessly is to fall into the snares of the enemy. It is not wrong to be rich and there is no shame in being poor. Walking with G-d in whatever station you find yourself is probably the greatest treasure you can acquire in this life. I have met rich people and I have known poor people. My own brother is worth millions and I do not envy him. He is a very talented person who earned every penny he has. Currently, our world has more personal wealth than at any other time in human history and yet are we more contented and happy than at any other time in human history? I think not. There are some very specialized industries which cater to the wealthy and to those who want to be rich. It is sad that so many have so much and have so little happiness and satisfaction. My life is not dedicated to procuring great wealth. Why should I struggle for something which is both elusive and only temporary? Let the rich be rich in good deeds and let the poor be free of covetousness and envy. Doing what G-d has called you to and being all that G-d wants you to be, should be your life goal, nothing more and nothing less. More gold, more trouble, more Torah, more peace!

Once the people had heard the ten principles from G-d, they were terrified by two things. First by what was said and then by how it was said. They were overwhelmed by the display and were afraid that if it continued, they would be consumed the presence of G-d.

They knew that G-d had more to say to them in showing them how to apply His Word to their lives, but they wanted to hear it through Moses and not directly from the voice of G-d. They did not want to lose the presence, they just did not want a spectacle which terrified them and which they felt might destroy them. Being afraid of G-d is a good thing if it translates into faith and obedience. They were ready to hear more, but without the mighty display of tremors, lightening and smoke. They were also stunned by the words they had heard. They saw that big changes needed to be made. Are you making these changes in your life?

The passage ends with their request to no longer hear directly from the presence and then three more warnings are given about paganism which might try to encroach in their midst.

They were warned again about making idols or anything which they associated with G-d. Not even the smoking, lightening covered, tremor filled mountain, was a powerful enough image of all who YHVH is. He is incomparable and not even the mighty expanse of the heavens is a reasonable facsimile of His divine majesty. Any attempt to represent Him, diminishes Him and should never be attempted. He is over and above all we can think or imagine.

Next, once they are in the land, they can erect two kinds of altars for their sacrifices. One could be made of earth and the other could be made of unhewn stones. They had to avoid functional idolatry in how they built their altars and in how they made their offerings.

Finally, a big part of Canaanite worship involved ritualized sexuality, both male and female. Jewish priest were not to wear garments which would show off their genitalia. Private parts should not be shown in public and no part of their religious devotion should be sexualized. Sexual perversion had a strong stranglehold on the Canaanites and the L-RD did not want any of this filth to infect how His people worshiped Him. Suggestive behaviour and sexualized clothing was forbidden. The same should apply in our twisted world as well.

We have looked at the ten foundations of biblical spirituality. They should still be the foundation of our spirituality and any departure from them is a serious departure from walking with G-d. We need to organize our lives around His Word and spend our years worshiping and studying as we remove paganism and carnality from our midst and let His presence be the core around which we build our lives.

Shabbat Shalom and shavua Tov