

Today is Shabbat Hachodesh, which marks the end of the month of Adar and the beginning of the month of Nissan. Purim always occurs at the last full moon of winter and Passover is always celebrated at the first full moon of spring. We will not have a community Seder this year due to Covid, but over the next week, I will be putting together and revising a guide for home observance, based on our usual Haggadah. The Seder has fifteen parts and even as we do home observance, it remains a very exciting time and marks the beginning of a new year in the L-rd. Again, I should have the modified guide ready for next week.

This week's Torah Portion is also doubled and deals with the final details of the construction of the Tabernacle and the putting together of the priestly clothes. Our people camped around the holy mountain for about a year and they made a somewhat bumpy transition from a motley crew of escaped slaves to the hosts of the L-rd, ready to enter Canaan.

This is the last portion of the Book of Exodus and the whole content of Leviticus and many of the chapters of Numbers were teachings that were given while our people camped around the mountain. They had to learn the hard lesson of integrating G-d's Word into every area of their lives. How is this process doing in your life? How is it doing in the life of our congregation?

Lets take a look at some of the main features of the Double Portion.

<b>Vayakhel/Pekudei</b>	<b>And (Moses) assembled/ Accountings of</b>
<b>Torah:</b>	Exodus 35:1-38:20; 38:21-40:38
<b>Haftarah:</b>	I Kings 7:13-26; 7:51- 8:2
<b>Brit Chadashah:</b>	Hebrews 9:1-11; 8:1-12

This portion is rich in content and shows the precision and the details that went into how our people prepared to host the divine presence in their midst. They had to learn how to both view life differently and how to conduct the business of their lives differently. There is no particular order in the instructions about building the tabernacle, as much as there was care taken not to miss anything of importance, as both the tabernacle and the priestly clothes were put together. They made good use of the plundered Egyptian treasures.

They were also able to pour their spiritual energy into this new task and let the shame of the golden calf fade into the background. When we learn from our mistakes, instead of allowing them to be constant reminders, we also need to let them also fade into the background.

The passage begins with the prohibition of lighting fire on the Shabbat. Now, when you look at this in context, cooking fires to prepare food were not forbidden (Ex. 16:23), just the fires they would have used for tasks of many kinds. Cottage industries flourished in Israel, but had to be shut down for the Sabbath. It needs to remain a work free zone.

Next, the people were encouraged to use their talents and gifts in the year long task of building the tabernacle and fashioning the priestly garments. Along with the special cloth that went into the priestly garments, the people also helped put together the furniture which was made for the tabernacle. Most of the pieces were made of wood which was coated with metal, so it was light enough to be transported easily. The exception was the menorah, but it was not very large and could be transported easily.

Women were also invited to help in putting together the tabernacle and the priestly clothes.

The covered part of the tabernacle had three coverings. The first one was made of dyed cloth. The second one was made of dyed goat hides. The top covering was made from a kind of unidentified antelope skin, called takhash. Many modern translations do not know which animal is being referred to as the source for the leather that went into the top covering, so some pretty strange translations occur. Some call it dolphin or porpoise skin, while others say it was badger skin. Which ever animal is being referred to, it had to be a kosher animal.

The tent had an outer rain covering of takhash skin, but the surrounding courtyard remained uncovered.

The L-RD designated two artisans to act a foremen to supervise the work: Betsaleel and Oholiab. They did not do all the work themselves, but they supervised the workers to make sure that all the work conformed to the proportions which Moses outlined.

We are told that the people brought too much treasure and were told that no more was needed. We are not told what was done with the surplus treasure. It was either returned or kept in reserve to help with future repairs of the structure and the garments.

The components of the tabernacle and the surrounding courtyard formed an "echad", which refers to a composite unity or a plural singularity. "Echad" first appears in the Bible as a description of YHVH and next as a description of the mystery of gender. Because G-d is a plural singularity, so the completed tent and courtyard had to reflect this singularity.

Cherubim are represented at least twice and they represented angelic beings who perpetually surrounded YHVH with praise. They were not idols or graven images, just reminders that worship should be a constant unchanging reality in our lives.

The clothing of the priests and each item of tabernacle furniture has a symbolic meaning. What they actually looked like was not as important as their dimensions and in actual fact, there was nothing special about the artifacts which were made, beyond their symbolic meaning. It was the presence of YHVH alone which was holy. The same is true today.

The tabernacle had three distinct parts. First there was the courtyard which was open to all and was the place where copper altar stood, so that the people could make various sacrifices to the L-RD. The tent itself had two parts, the holy place where the priests went and the holy of holies, which was only accessed once a year by the High Priest on Yom Kippur.

The outer part of the tent which the priests accessed, had the altar of incense, the table for the special bread and the golden menorah. On the other side of the veil, the ark stood alone. It was a special box which contained manna, Aaron's rod and the tablets of the Law.

Later, we learn about both the camping order of the people and their marching order, which was designed to keep YHVH and His presence as the centre of the camp and as the centre of their lives. Is He the centre of your life and does He walk with you as you wander through this darkening world on your way to our Father's House in Glory? It was the presence and the provision of YHVH which made both the people and the camp special. What makes you special?

The experience of the holy mountain was rendered into repeatable symbolic behaviour so that it could be remembered. YHVH and His deliverance were going to be with the people daily and perpetually as a forward looking spiritual remembrance. Together, the combined symbolism speaks of the coming kingdom. This same spiritual reality and symbolism needs to be with us daily and perpetually.

Once everything was put together and the tabernacle began to function, the people were ready to begin their journey to the Promised Land. Is everything together spiritually in your life? Are you ready to undertake a daily pilgrimage towards the coming kingdom? They had a light at night and a cloud by day, which were spiritual realities of the presence of YHVH. How real is the presence of YHVH in every area of your life?

**Chazak, Chazak, v'nitchazek** Buckle up, Leviticus is next!

### **Sermon: Looking Ahead and Trusting the Messiah**

**Passage:" For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of G-d, you may receive what was promised. For yet "in a little while, the One who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back". But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, we are among those who have faith and so are saved."** (Hebrews 10:36-39).

I want to always be looking ahead at the good things which our Messiah will always bring our way. But sometimes we have to look behind and around so that we do not lose sight of how His hand is active, even in the confusion of our darkening world.

As it stands, our congregation is part of the second Messianic movement, which started slowly, but is gaining momentum. Sadly, many Jews who come to faith in the Messiah, sever all contact with Judaism, because all they have known is traditional Judaism out of which they were saved. Too many are unaware of us as a second option – remaining as a form of biblical Judaism which centres on the Messiah and His coming kingdom.

This modern Messianic Movement has come to us in three stages. In the 1800's Jewish outreach consisted of Jewish converts who were integrated into mainstream Christianity because they severed all links to their Judaism, as they tried to pull others out of it.

Next, in the early 1900's, Jewish fellowship groups sprung up within churches to give Jews fellowship during their integration out of Judaism. While they still identified as Jews, they did not practice anything related to either historical or biblical Judaism.

Finally, shortly after WWII and especially after the Six Day War of 1967, many Jews were no longer content just to integrate into mainstream Christianity and began to want to explore Judaism from a biblical perspective. They even wanted to maintain a cultural and historical link with Judaism. Some of these early groups fell prey to the influence of Talmudic Judaism and reverted to the ranks of traditional Judaism.

Others began to express their faith in an expression of Judaism which was derived from the Bible and which was not based on the traditions which developed over the centuries.

Jewish tradition and the Talmud still haunt the Messianic Movement and protecting ourselves from the non biblical features of traditional Judaism, remains one of our chief challenges. Some who come to us, find us too Jewish, while others who consider Talmudic Judaism as the only authentic form of Judaism, do not find us Jewish enough.

So while we are firmly rooted in our biblical faith and have much in common theologically with various elements of biblical Christianity, we are also completely and uniquely Jewish, both in what we believe and in how we practice of Jewish faith.

While we do not want to oblige Gentile Christianity to join our ranks and become Jews, we remain at odds with them over their abandoning of Sabbath Observance. We also object to those Gentile believers who label all and any practices of Judaism as forms of legalism. Biblical Judaism stands firmly on the grace of our blessed Messiah and on the immovable foundation of His Word. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

In the first century, the council of Jerusalem only stipulated that Gentile converts fully abstain from all and any forms of paganism and referred specifically to idolatry and fornication. Gentiles were instructed to place their faith and their obedience on the clear teachings of the Scriptures and upon the early apostolic tradition which also did just that.

Circumcision, kosher and the festival cycle had gentile equivalents and only became problematic when they were elevated to salvation issues. There are some modern Messianic believers who have fallen into the same error. Gentile spirituality and Jewish spirituality derive from the same biblical base and are the only two acceptable contexts where our faith can be expressed, as both Jews and Gentiles.

On the other hand, Sabbath observance is mandated by the Bible and switching to Sunday worship is the worst departure from biblical truth that the Gentile church has ever made. As messianic Jews and Gentiles, the practice of biblical Judaism is our calling and it is also our duty, from which we should never waver.

Well, what is biblical Judaism and how does it compare to either Talmudic Judaism or Gentile Christianity? Once we outline the covenant groupings which are the basis of our faith and practice, the differences will become evident, because we follow what the apostles taught, nothing more and certainly nothing less.

While there are hundreds of strands of modern Judaism, there are only five covenant groupings which are outlined in the Bible. The first is circumcision, which is a personal, private, permanent dedication of ourselves and our offsprings to G-d. Immersion is the Gentile equivalent of circumcision. We also practice immersion as a means of proclaiming our faith in the death and resurrection of our risen Messiah.

Next comes kosher, which traditional Judaism has made unnecessarily cumbersome. It uniquely outlines which meat is safe to eat and the Gentile equivalent is practically holiness, where we separate ourselves from the defilement of the world and do not allow any of it to gain a foothold in our lives. Next comes a covenant grouping which Gentiles were never called to abandon, which is the Sabbath.

The festival cycle is an extension of the Sabbath and is annual harvest tithing cycle, which Gentiles are not required to follow, except for the celebration of Passover, which they have turned into Easter. Many of them have the right idea, but the wrong date.

With Easter, they have turned communion into a magic ceremony, instead of a simple memorial ceremony. We feed on His Word and not on the L-RD Himself.

Next comes the Torah, which is a commitment to the Word of G-d, and of which the New Testament is an inspired commentary. Both Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians are called to base their lives on the faith and obedience which this unique document outlines. Any additions to or departures from the Bible, should be avoided so that our spirituality does not become debased with traditionalism or paganism.

The fifth covenant group of biblical Judaism concerns the Messiah, Israel and the coming Kingdom. All Jews believe in the coming of the Messiah to establish His everlasting Kingdom and most Jews support the reestablishment of Israel as the physical and spiritual homeland of our people. Yeshua is the divine King of Israel and of the nations, and all believers, Jew and Gentile, are fellow citizens together of His coming Kingdom.

As we went through these covenant groups, you probably became aware of how Messianic Judaism differs from both Gentile Christianity and traditional Judaism. We have a unique calling and as our congregation grows and develops, the priorities I have outlined will never change because they are firmly and clearly based on the Bible.

We have need of perseverance and patience because evil people will rise up and try to destroy us. Our secular society will keep on doing its best to subvert us and move us away from both our beliefs and our spiritual morality. Somebody advertised a book on Facebook which outlines various churches' positions on homosexuality. Along with abortion, homosexuality represents the greatest departures from biblical morality that the world has ever seen. Evolution is the greatest departure from biblical truth and we are living in an age where our faith and spirituality are encountering a growing hostility and it is becoming less and less easy to stand on our faith, but stand we must. How well are you standing?

But, how easy is it to clearly define the fundamentals of our biblical faith with so many groups, Jewish and Gentile, adopting various positions in opposition to the Bible? At the end of the 1800's Gentile believers realized that evolution and secularism were undermining our faith and trying to get the world to turn its back on what we proclaim. To combat this, they put together a list of the five basic fundamentals of our faith.

I know I have shared these with you in the past, but let me encourage you to really get to know them and let them become the basis of all that you believe, nothing more and certainly nothing less. They need to be the solid foundation of everything you believe.

The first deals with our singular source of faith and practice, the Bible. It has come down to us virtually unchanged and can be entirely relied upon when we use a reliable translation. Translations usually have about a 50 year lifespan, before our language changes and a new translation needs to be made. As long as any new translation is based on both the original Greek and the Hebrew texts, nothing new can creep in and nothing essential will ever be lost.

The Koran is not the Word of G-d. The Book of Mormon is not the Word of G-d. None of the sacred texts of Hinduism or Buddhism are the Word of G-d. Nothing essential has been lost and what we read today has not changed over the centuries. In a reliable translation it is as if we were reading the text as it was originally delivered.

If you have any questions about any translation, let me know. There are simple tests that can be performed to evaluate the reliability of any translation. There are over 400 translations in English and most of them are reliable, but some are getting so old that they are hard to read. Find a reliable one that is easy to read.

Next comes our firm and unchanging declaration that Yeshua, Jesus, is the Son of G-d and as such, is G-d the Son. He is not an archangel. He is also not a lesser or inferior G-d. He is true G-d of true G-d and has always been so and will never change. Jews also believe in the divinity of the Messiah and when they come to faith in Messiah Yeshua, a veil drops from their eyes and they embrace what the Bible has always taught from the beginning.

Don't be fooled, Judaism has always taught the divinity of the Messiah and the triune nature of G-d is the consistent testimony of the Scriptures. We do not teach three gods. We do not teach that Yeshua became G-d. We do not teach that He is inferior to G-d. This is who the G-d of the Bible is – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

The third fundamental of biblical faith is that Messiah was born of a virgin, without the help of a man. This was the promise which YHVH made to Eve and which the prophet Isaiah states so clearly. Yeshua is both fully human and fully divine. This is a mystery which cannot be adequately explained to the satisfaction of some, but it is what the Bible consistently teaches. Mary was His mother, but Joseph was not His father. She gave Him a tabernacle of flesh so that He could perform His earthly mission, which is the subject of the fourth fundamental.

He died on the cross for the sins of the world. His death was not a tragedy and the guilt for His death falls on all the sinners He died for, both Jew and Gentile. When Peter wanted to stop Yeshua from being arrested, he was firmly told that it was for this very reason Messiah came into the world. It was decided before the foundation of the world and all the purposes of G-d are based on it. But it did not end there.

He was buried and He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. All the Sanhedrin had to do was to produce His body to disprove this miracle. Many were secret believers in Yeshua and no body was ever produced. Why did He ascend into heaven? While He dwelt among us on earth, He could only be in one place at once and as more and more people came to believe in Him, He needed a more efficient means of meeting with them.

He ascended into Heaven and is praying for each of us as we speak. He returned when the Holy Spirit was given and now, by that same Spirit, can dwell in the hearts of all believers at the same time. We become the only temple which G-d will recognize and all of us can have an individual, personal relationship with Him at the same time.

He is active, bringing about the conditions necessary for His Kingdom to come and when He steps out of the true Holy of Holies, salvation is over and the entire universe will explode with much fire and great noise. Many believers have strange and wonderful beliefs about the details of His return, but the Scriptures teach that His return and the destruction of the universe will happen at the same time. Then comes the resurrection of all the dead, the final judgment and then the new creation, where all believers will dwell forever in the peaceful, marvelous presence of G-d.

These are the five fundamental beliefs which the Bible teaches and along with the five covenant categories of biblical Judaism, constitute all that we believe and are the basis of all that we practice. Traditions come and go, but the eternal Word of G-d will not wither and cannot be overthrown. As we look forward, we have to look backwards and understand that our faith is timeless, so that we do not come to accept something which the Bible does not teach. Messianic Judaism is relevant in today's world and is a valid expression of all which the apostles taught as they outlined the faith of the early church. It has never changed.

Messianic Judaism is the only Jewish context which the Gospel mandates and it is the context which we need to call our Jewish people back to. They need to be set free from the deceptive traditions of men and place their faith in the unchanging truths of G-d's Word.

As we look ahead, we see that our community has seen a lot and has a bright future, as long as we hold firm to the faith which the Scriptures teach. I believe that our lives are filled with any number of divine appointments which the Messiah will use to draw people to Himself through us. He will also cause them to work through their personal baggage and settle into our midst as solid members of our community. Some will wander on, but it is those who stay that we want to work with. It is hard to grow when you are always moving around.

Our rate of turn over is high, but that is fine as long as more people come through the front door than who sneak out the back door. Our shul is not for everybody, not because we have strange practices or because we believe strange things. We will always remain a dynamic community of Jews and Gentiles, who embrace biblical Judaism and who want to reach out to our world with the light of the Torah and the Gospel, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Yeshua is active in the lives of all mankind and he will both grow and sustain the generational community of His body, Jew and Gentile. And because we believe this, we will never grow discouraged if we see lots of people wander through our community and if our growth remains slow and steady. Before the split with Beit Mashiach, the shul I led was flirting with 100 adherents and those days will come again as we grow even beyond these numbers. I believe it and I am trusting the L-RD for it, as I prepare to find my replacement and eventually retire.

As we see these marvelous things happen in our midst, we are open to all and any changes which will enhance our expression of biblical Judaism. We will never dwindle into a church which is struggling to remember its Hebrew roots. Our roots are Hebrew, but so is everything else about us and we welcome both Jews and Gentiles who want to walk with us through this wonderful mandate. Biblical Judaism is our calling and we will fulfill it.

Therefore, we remain a synagogue where biblical Judaism is practiced. This is both our heritage and our future and this is what the Messiah is building in our midst, even as we encounter setbacks which are a normal part of spiritual warfare. I remember everybody who has come through our shul and I do not regret our ministry in their lives -even with the ones who wanted to hijack our ministry and move it in a different direction. I even miss the grumpy, unbalanced ones because the Messiah can make a difference in anyone's life (even mine).

G-d continues to move in our midst through both His Spirit and His Word and may that never change. I want to develop a dynamic Shabbat school for our children. I want to escort young people through the wonders of Bat and Bar Mitzvah. I want to see new believers immersed and taught how to integrate the Bible into every area of their lives.

I also want to see us have a youth group again. Before the split, it numbered over thirty and those days are going to come back and as our youth grows beyond that number.

I want us to have an amazing prayer meeting where we see amazing answers to prayer. I want us to have incredible Yeshiva Bible Studies where the truths of the Word are feasted on by excited believers. I want to train my replacement and encourage leadership development among our amazing leadership.

Our future is bright and will be choppy, but Messiah has promised to walk with us every step of the way and I would not have it any other way. What was promised, both in this life and in the life to come, will be forthcoming as we walk with our Messiah.

Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.