

Ki Tisa	When You elevate	The Agony and The Ecstasy
Torah:	Exodus 30:11-34:35	
Haftarah:	I Kings 18:1-39	
Brit Chadashah:	2 Corinthians 3:1-18	

While he is on the mountain, Moses is receiving instructions which would allow the covenant presence of YHVH to dwell in the midst of His people. The Lord called qualified artisans to help to put everything together. None of them were professionals and it is the dimensions of what they built which was holy. In most ancient religions, access to the gods was limited to a small elite who preformed elaborate secret rituals to gain access to the divine presence. These were accompanied by lots of noises, smoke and fire, which were geared to terrify the worshipers. None of this found its way in to how YHVH was to be worshiped.

Access was granted to those who performed the necessary rituals. At this point the Levites had not yet been designated to act as the priests because all the people were invited to have access to the divine presence. A big part of worship was Sabbath observance, where the people were told to stop and remember that they served the singular Creator and not a motley host of various gods who each controlled part of the cosmos.

As a sign that access was to be granted, the L-rd gave the two tablets to Moses as a kind of written and sealed contract, after the people expressed their willingness to abide by the covenant stipulations. G-d was also promising to be present in their midst and grant them both mighty provision and complete protection. There was not a sweeter deal to be had anywhere else on earth and this sweet deal is still available to us today!

Meanwhile, back in the camp, there is a coup being planned by the unrighteous core of idolaters who wanted to give YHVH a makeover that would put Him under their control. They surrounded Aaron and the elders and required that Aaron make them an idol who would lead them. It was a long time since they had heard from Moses and they must have assumed that G-d had done him in. They wanted a god whom they could control and the rituals they wanted were not to place the people under the control of YHVH, but wanted to place YHVH under the control of the people. Too many believers still fall into the same trap today.

I am not happy with how easily Aaron caved and he either shared their uncertainty about the fate of Moses, or he was only stalling for time until Moses could return and release him from the hostage abduction he had fallen prey to.

YHVH was furious because the people had abandoned His Word when they were not being threatened and all their physical needs were provided for. If they slipped back when things were going well, what would they do under duress? He commands Moses to step aside so He can incinerate the rebellious people and make another great nation from Moses. Aaron and the elders would have been among those who were consumed, with only Joshua being exempt. It was not an idle threat. The living G-d is not to be toyed with.

It was also a test for Moses to see if he would stick by the people, both when they walked with YHVH and when they wandered from His Word. Moses did not want the bad press such a slaughter would cause. He stood for the people and G-d listened to him.

In a great fury, Moses descends the mountain with the glorious tablets, which were written by G-d on both sides. He hears the noise from the camp and in front of the people, Moses destroys the tablets of the covenant and grinds up the golden calf, which he makes the people mix with water and drink. They saw that their pretend god was just a vain idol and could do nothing to defend himself or provide for them. We need to avoid pretend gods!

Aaron is questioned and he makes a lame excuse. He said he threw gold into the fire and out popped the golden calf. Talmudic rabbis believe that the calf was fabricated by magic which was performed by the mixed multitude. The Scriptures do not say this. Be careful about adding detail to the text which tries to make it say something which is not intended.

Moses spoke to the people whom Aaron had lost control of and called for people to make an armed stand for the L-rd. The house of Levi stood with Moses and embarked on a hunt for the leaders of the attempted coup, which netted three thousand rebel leaders.

He calls upon G-d to forgive the survivors and says if YHVH was going to erase their names, let Him erase his as well. The L-rd did not smite Moses or the people who had failed to rise up against the idolaters, but YHVH did strike down those who had helped in making the idol and who became worshipers of this abomination. We learn later that the Levites acted as an armed body guard for Aaron and the elders. Now the broken covenant had to be put back together. What steps are you taking to make sure paganism does not take control of your life?

At this point, Moses pitches his tent outside the camp because the presence of YHVH would be lethal for the people who so easily rebelled. They wept and surrendered all their gold, probably to replace the gold which had been pillaged to make the golden calf. Moses' tent was the first tent of meeting and the cloud hovered above it. The people worshiped when they saw Moses going into the tent, but they were not granted any access to the presence until full atonement could be made for their sin and until a fully functioning tabernacle tent had been set up. They were now on probation and had to show that they could be trusted.

Moses was reminded that he was to lead this fractious group to Egypt and he needed a boost in order to be able to fulfill his task. G-d shows Moses a portion of His glory and then declares his name in one of the greatest expressions of grace in the Scriptures. The sacred name is a shorter version of the full name and even the full expression of the thirteen attributes of YHVH falls short of the glory which was revealed in our Messiah and which shall one day be revealed to all the nations and generations of mankind.

The call to abstain from idolatry is repeated and the people are required to destroy all the idols of the Canaanites and not participate in any religious devotion to them. They were forbidden to make any molded gods, like the one they made with the golden calf.

The three pilgrimage festivals are introduced, as well two of the most heinous Canaanite religious practices: smearing their grain offerings with blood and boiling a baby goat in its mother's milk as an act of worship. These were rituals where the worshiper supposedly gained a measure of control over the deity and could point Him in any direction they wanted to. Worship gives YHVH control over us and we are to be holy and separate as His servants. We serve Him, He never serves us. His control over us is our only refuge.

The portion ends with Moses preparing to receive final instructions from YHVH.

There is no indication that Moses went back up the mountain after this point. Instead, he would go into his tent to speak with YHVH and come out to give the people the instructions which he had received. So that the people would know that the presence of G-d dwelt in Moses' tent, his face glowed whenever he came out. He had to cover his face because the people were not yet ready to receive the full presence of G-d. This would only become available in our glorious Messiah. The agony of the golden calf was followed by the ecstasy of seeing glory of G-d and having Him recite the meaning of His name. None of our foolishness can ever get in the way of either G-d's purposes or His glory. We either learn to walk with Him or we are get behind. Are you walking with Him or are you in danger of being left behind? Is your heart a sanctuary for His glory?

Sermon: Understanding Life: Heaven is the Happy ending

During the current pandemic many people are stressed and even depressed and can hardly wait for all the restrictions to be over. Reactions to the pandemic vary. There are those who understand that restrictions will help to bring the outbreak under control. At the other end of the spectrum, there are those who think that the whole thing is a hoax and is being used to advance government control and rob us of our basic liberties.

As a student of history, I am aware of many of the destructive pandemics which have ravaged our planet in the past and one of the disadvantages of becoming a global village is that diseases from one region now become global almost instantly. Some plagues wiped out hundreds of millions of people and most of these diseases are still lurking in the crowded, unsanitary communities of our world, ready to break out if they were given the opportunity.

How should believers relate to both the current threat and to others which will certainly come our way as we patiently wait for the coming of our beloved Messiah's kingdom? No matter what is going on in our lives, we need to have faith and learn obedience and not lose sight of the coming kingdom as its approach draws near. Heaven is the happy ending we are all moving towards in Yeshua. Nothing less is really worthy of our attention.

As we encounter trials, various forms of spiritual warfare take advantage of our distress and want us to turn away from the Word of G-d and the promise of His coming Kingdom. And while we will have great victory during our pilgrimage through this life, dwelling under the protection and provision of G-d, we need to understand that we are in a perpetual spiritual conflict that will never really let up. We have to learn to stay on the alert and not become lazy.

Our secular society continues to take aim at our beliefs and wants to overthrow our biblical morality. I recently heard that some of Dr. Seuss's books for children are being taken out of circulation, because they are supposedly racist. I am waiting for Charlie Brown and Piglet to be the next targets. Instead of dealing with things that are truly offensive, our society is just increasing the number of things that might offend people who follow a politically correct agenda. Does anybody even know what gender neutral really means?

I am offended by all and any forms of racism and we need to take a stance against violence and abuse whenever it occurs. However, problems are not solved by changing definitions and looking for new problems where there are really none. Injustice and criminal violence have always been a problem and we need to support all and any efforts to bring these social problems under control. But going on a witch hunt is never helpful.

The sad reality which we have to face is that as long as the flesh, the world and the enemy have not been removed from the world we are traveling through, we have to fight the same battles over and over again, in each generation, until the light of His Kingdom finally dawns.

I have said that Heaven is the happy ending because we are in a generational pilgrimage through a sin infected world where the righteous core and the sinful core remain locked in an endless struggle for the souls of mankind. This is what life is all about, nothing more, nothing less. We need to be focused on the Happy Ending and walk with assurance through this fading world. We will find peace in the Messiah, never in the world.

A great darkness overtook the world in the days of Noah and he watched in horror as evil gained ground, especially during 120 years it took him to build the ark. Only he and his family escaped the destruction which the sinfulness of mankind brought down on their heads.

This same battle between the righteous core and the sinful core is still the real battle of the ages in our modern, sophisticated world and we also need to watch in horror as we see the spiritual forces of darkness trying to regain control of the world and extinguish the light of the Gospel. Our job throughout this struggle is to remain in the light and not to become discouraged when the darkness gains more and more ground in our modern secular society.

We see the story of the ages unfold as the purposes of G-d line up against the evil agenda of the enemy, and even though it may appear that we are losing ground, Heaven is still the happy ending. I have prepared a brochure about prophecy where I outline the seven signs of the end of the world and the arrival of G-d's Kingdom, once His final purposes are all fulfilled. I encourage you to study it so that you are familiar with the signs of the end of the age. The enemy may be picking up speed, but nothing can stop Messiah's coming kingdom.

In our day, the world is increasingly coming under the growing influence of internet technology and there is a host of mighty voices, where each one is trying to lead people into a variety of different directions and it can be quite confusing. Some of these people sound so good and look so friendly, that we get won over by the strength of their personality and not by the truth of their presentation. Please understand me when I say that not everyone you encounter on line will lead you astray, you just have to be wise and discerning as you remain wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove. Be careful about the influences which you let into your life.

There are several big time evangelists who preach a good message and who are not trying to empty your pockets to support their lavish lifestyle. But there are others who want to talk you out of your money and make promises where all your problems will disappear as you laugh and grin your way into the coming kingdom. There are things we need to consider as we discuss how Heaven is the Happy Ending, even if our life becomes a bumpy road.

Where do we start? Before you send in your support for any ministry, let me emphasize boldly and without shame that your tithe (10% of your increase) belongs to your local fellowship (that's us). Big name evangelists may give you great preaching and exciting teaching, but your support for them should be over and above your support of your local spiritual community. Some evangelists emphasize this spiritual principle, while others just want your money, claiming that they are your primary spiritual support. They are not because they are not really involved in the day to day challenges of your life.

Meeting for worship and studying the Word needs to occur at the local level and this is what we accomplish each Sabbath. We eventually want to set up online Bible Study so that we can discuss issues that affect us personally as we learn to continue to see life from a biblical focus. The answer to our questions needs to be fully and totally derived from the Word and from the Word alone.

Understanding the events of our lives from a biblical perspective is an essential challenge, even more so than the events themselves. Being a part of a local community is an indispensable part of what it means to be spiritually healthy, as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Messiah. Who we are spiritually where we live, is the most important thing about us. I am excited about what is going on around the world, but my primary focus needs to be what is going on in my own life and in the life of our particular community.

Next, we need to learn how to handle our struggles from a biblical perspective and not adopt solutions which may diminish the Word in our lives and cause us to be influenced by the world and not by the Messiah. I do not wish troubles on anyone, but when they come, it is my wish that they will be surrendered to the Messiah through His Word. Walking according to His Word is the best victory we can win, no matter how things turn out in this life.

When I encounter a preacher or a teacher, I rejoice that the enemy has not silenced the voice of the Gospel as our society darkens and turns its back on G-d and His Word. But people who promise prosperity and who say that walking with the L-rd will exclude you from the trials which strike all believers in every generation, are not voices for the Torah or the Gospel. We need to be encouraged to trust in the L-rd in every situation and never allow His voice to grow silent in our lives.

Those who walk with the Messiah will encounter trials which they will overcome, but we will never be excluded from trials, as if our faith put us into a special category where everything runs smoothly and where tribulation is a thing of the past. When we turn to Him in the midst of whatever comes our way, He blesses us through the storm, but does not deliver us from the storms which will rise up against our faith and try to shipwreck our spirituality.

This week, I listened to a big name American evangelist who has a following in the thousands and I did not find anything objectionable about his message. It was uplifting and challenging, but it was happening way down south and not locally. It could be used as an example of the kinds of struggles local believers face and encourage us to walk in the light and not let the darkness of the world invade our lives. We cannot live second hand through the internet as if the real world where we live did not matter. What really matters in your life? How are you walking through the challenges you are personally facing?

I am not sure if you are aware of how much of a big business international ministries have become. It is a multi-million dollar industry geared to meeting the needs of various sectors of believers, as they send in their support dollars and allow the ministry to become their primary source of spiritual growth and stability. Believers are encouraged to become part of what is sometimes called an internet family and lose touch with what is going on spiritually in their local community. What should be used to enrich what G-d is doing locally can easily become the primary source for believers who should be hooked up to a local spiritual community. Where is your primary source of spiritual encouragement in your local situation?

Untold numbers of believers are stay at home disciples, not because of the Covid crisis, but because they want all of their needs to be met on line. It is exciting to hear about what is happening in other communities and indeed around the world, but what is happening to us in our local lives needs to be the most important part of our spirituality.

As we struggle for balance and grow in discernment, what we believe will constantly come under attack as the lies of evolution rise up against the truths of G-d's Word. What we believe to be right and wrong is also challenged by those who would want us to accept the unacceptable and not work to liberate those who are trapped in various forms of gross immorality. It is the enemy who continues to say: has G-d really said? and what is really wrong with it anyway? Our world is sinking back into pagan darkness on a global scale and the struggles we encounter can be quite confusing and incredibly painful. We do not need to add various internet ministries into the mix. The voice of G-d's Word should be the one we are listening to where we are right now in our local, daily lives.

We should not be surprised by the trials we encounter and we have to be careful not to lose sight of the Happy Ending we are all moving towards. Again, we need to be sure that we support our local spiritual community with our tithes and our attendance. We also need to be discerning so that the voices we listen to on the internet, will enrich us and not just empty our pockets. Are we growing stronger and deepening our understanding of His Word?

Lastly, we need to be focused on what G-d is doing in our individual lives, so that we do not become distracted and not let Him have the first place in our lives. In the last little while, I have had a fairly large dose of health concerns, but that is not what G-d is doing in my life. He is showing me that the truth of His Word is really able to demolish all and any fortresses which rise up against it, whether I am gasping for breath or am resting at home and getting stronger. I want to keep focusing on the Heavenly happy ending

His Word alone has the answers which the human soul needs to embrace and we all need to maintain a strong grasp of this Word and learn to see the world through the teachings which it promotes. It needs to be the primary voice I am listening to as I learn to deepen and enrich my spiritually. This needs to happen where I am located and not second hand through some internet ministry which may sound so much more interesting than the life I am living.

We may encounter spiritual input from a variety of sources, but it is how well we are integrating His Word into our daily lives which really matters. Our lives are a pilgrimage and all of us will have a happy ending, once the Kingdom of Heaven is set up in our midst.

We may go through any number of trials and encounter difficulties which seem massive, but what we are going through is not where we will end up. Every believer's life that is based on faith and obedience to the Word has a happy ending because we are all bound for Heaven. What direction is your life heading in? Attacks on our faith and strange ideas may try and block our path or even send us down sidetracks which G-d's Word tries to warn us against.

We need to be wary of the influences which we encounter on our journey and not get sidetracked with things which have no real heavenly value. It is good to be back. Thank you for your prayers and your support. I want to live for the only Happy Ending which really matters. How about you? Shabbat Shalom and Shavua tov.