

20 Elul 5781 (28/08/21) **Refreshing and Preserving Your Spiritual Identity** J. M. Terrett

Ki Tavo	When You Enter In	Consequences of Choices, It Is Up to Us
Torah:	Deuteronomy 26:1-29:9 (8)	
Haftarah:	Isaiah 60:1-22	
Brit Chadashah:	Luke 24:44-53	

This is the second last portion of the annual reading cycle for 5781 and it is both one of the most severe and one of the most positive in the Torah. Next week, I will be introducing the Makzor Prayer and Service Guide as we get set up to welcome in the new year, 5782.

The Haftarah portion in Isaiah is very positive and speaks of the restoration of captive Israel, so that the final state of the people is better than even what it was before. In the New Testament Portion our Messiah reviews all the passages in the Tanach (Old Testament) which speak about Him and His ministry. How well is your understanding of our blessed Messiah based on the Scriptures? Everything about His Life and His ministry is a fulfillment of the Scriptures – even to the conditions which must be present, when it is time for His return.

Moses' time is coming to an end, and he wants to make sure that he has covered everything he needs to cover, before he turns the people over to Joshua so that they can be lead into the Promised Land. Ch. 26:1-11 introduces a First Fruits Harvest Tithe Offering formula. First Fruits in the first of the three harvest times and the offering formula is given to remind the people of the wilderness wandering years and their deliverance from the slavery of Egypt. It is also given to express the people's thankfulness to G-d for such an abundant land.

They were to fill a basket with the first fruits of their first harvest, and take it before the L-RD to be used for rejoicing with the Levite and the stranger. It was a tithe of their tithes, which were also to be brought before the L-RD.

Ch. 26:12-15 is a declaration that every third year, their tithes were to be given to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow. Also, they are warned that none of the riches which YHVH granted to them were to be used for any unclean or idolatrous purpose.

In the final portion of Chapter 26 they are called to make a solemn promise to keep all the commandments and not to adopt a partial spirituality, in order that they may be fully His people and be fully blessed by Him. There are no half measures in our Messiah.

Chapter 27 begins with an admonition by both Moses and the elders of Israel for the people to keep all the commandments. Then once they are in the Land, on Mount Ebal, they were to both erect a stone monument and to build a stone altar. The stone

monument was to be coated with plaster and the commandments were to be inscribed on them. The altar of unhewn stones was to be built and both burnt offerings and thanksgiving offerings were to be made. The people were to rejoice before the L-rd and then engrave the commandments of the L-RD onto these huge stones. Two monuments, one purpose.

Next, the people were to be divided into two groups, one group on Mount Gerizim was to pronounce blessings and the other on Mount Ebal was to pronounce curses. Twelve categories of curses are mentioned first and they are practical consequences of violating the Law which was given to them. Obedience is the deepest expression of our faith.

The first part of chapter 28 is given over to the mighty blessings of obedience which YHVH will bestow upon His covenant people who fully obeyed His commandments. When the people sow obedience, they are told that they will reap blessing. His Word is to be their only guide and they are not to turn aside from it in any way. The same applies today.

The next part of ch. 28 gives an incredibly graphic description of all the terrible troubles the people will encounter whenever they stray from obedience in any part of their lives. The land and the skies will turn against them as they are cursed into oblivion. They will encounter illness, worse than what the Egyptians were struck with and they will be defeated by their enemies and taken into captivity.

The description of their woes goes into quite a lot of detail. They will not only lose everything, including their children, but they will be covered from head to toe with ulcers. Insects will consume their harvests and their vineyards will be eaten by worms. This disciplinary action will pursue them until they are destroyed for not obeying the commandments. All their fortresses will be taken, as their land is completely ravaged until there is nothing left to eat.

They will be in such distress that they will eat their own children and will not share any of this gruesome flesh with any of their neighbours. No one will show pity to anybody else as the people sank into literal self destruction.

It gets worse. During this period of great distress, mothers who have just given birth will eat the afterbirth without sharing with anybody. Starvation based cannibalism has occurred at various moments of distress throughout history, but the scale of this horror will exceed the worst cases that have ever been recorded.

After having been as numerous as the stars, the people shall be reduced to a small, pitiful number and just as YHVH took pleasure in blessing His people, He will now take pleasure in causing them to perish in horrible ways.

They will not even find peace in their captivity. Their hearts would be agitated and their eyes will grow weak. Their lives will hang in doubt before them, with no relief from

this distress, night and day. Every morning, they shall ask for the night, and every night they shall ask for the morning, never knowing if they will survive another day.

They will be taken far away in ships and even when they offered themselves for sale, there would be no buyers. As thoroughly as they had been blessed in every area of their lives, there would be nowhere in their lives where they could escape the punishment for their disobedience. This chapter is one of the most fearful descriptions of punishment in the Bible and even though there evidently would be survivors, their lives would be so miserable that they would welcome death as an end to the relentless suffering they were being subjected to.

Some of the details in this second giving of the Law, filled in details not given at Mount Sinai. Moving away from the gruesome description of divine wrath upon backsliders, the passage ends with a reminder of all the great things YHVH had done for them, both as they left Egypt and during the forty years they wandered in the wilderness. Their clothing and their shoes did not wear out. They ate manna, not bread and consumed no strong liqueur. They also saw what YHVH did to Sihon and Og. They have never been successfully opposed by any circumstance or by any enemy. When they were obedient, they were blessed in all they did.

The contrast between the horrors of divine punishment and the mighty blessings of obedience is on purpose. While they could not claim credit for any of their blessings, they would take full credit for their punishment. As G-d's covenant people, their status would be elevated above all other people on earth. When they violated this covenant, they would be brought lower than any other people on the planet.

Their only source of blessing and security would come from faithful obedience. Their incredible source of punishment would come from their disobedience, as they forsook the Commandments of the L-RD. As believers, we will be in a constant state of spiritual warfare, but as long as we walk the straight and narrow, there is nothing that we cannot overcome. And in all the troubles we may be subjected to because of our faith, nothing and no one will ever be able to completely destroy us. Walking with the L-RD according to His Word is well worth it, no matter what trials may come our way on our journey through this life to our Father's Home in Glory.

Sermon. Getting ready for the Fall Feasts

Well, after our journey into the grotesque consequences of disobedience, I now want to look at how we can live lives which refresh and preserve our spiritual identity.

This will happen when a sinner saved by grace, transforms into a disciple full of faith and obedience. Also when a member of the motley crew of this world becomes a part of the mighty Hosts of the Almighty. And when the works of the flesh are completely weeded out and when the fruit and gifts of the Spirit take root. What is taking root in your life?

Part of this means learning how to defeat the sin which is crouching at our doors. In the process, we are transformed from being part of the mob which wanted the Messiah killed, into a member of the great crowd of witnesses who rejoiced at His resurrection. We are taking up the mighty spiritual weapons of our Messiah, as we lay down the deceitful tricks of the world.

We will also cease being a lost, blind sheep, and become a stranger and a pilgrim joyfully striding through this lost and dying world. We will go from being a slave to sin, consumed by lust and doubt, to a disciple, building a fire proof house on the Rock of His Word. We will go from doing our own thing to adopting G-d's daily agenda and His plan for the ages.

We will stop living in terror and being pursued by demons and become a joyful believer guided and upheld by angels. We will go from wallowing in the dog vomit and pig muck of this world to plunging into His Word and walking in His light. We will go from being a friend and servant of the enemy and become a servant and a friend of G-d, even though this also means we become an enemy of the enemy. Whose enemy are you?

We go from constantly worrying about the morbid eventuality and seeing our lives ripped apart by the ravages of sin, to joyfully embracing the Kingdom purposes of G-d. Instead of doing whatever it takes to get our own way, we will do all that we can to see our Messiah's purposes fulfilled. Even better, we go from taking pleasure in the pain and suffering of our enemies, to rejoicing in the healing and joy which our Messiah brings.

This will happen because we live in two different worlds, simultaneously. Our true life is hidden with G-d and we are just pilgrims in this life, focusing on the coming Kingdom.

If this mighty and glorious Kingdom does not burst forth in our lifetime, we will gleefully take our place in Heaven, sleeping under the altar. We are leaning on the arms of the Almighty as we look on with dismay at all the injustice and greed that prowls through our world.

There are two core groups in our world who are recruiting members, the righteous core and the wicked core. We do not want anything of the wicked core to be even a tiny part of our hearts and lives. However, even though being a nice person who loves his neighbour and who does his best to be a good person, will never solve all the problems of the world, or usher in the Everlasting Kingdom, it is definitely a step in the right direction.

Self righteous pseudo believers who wallow in malicious gossip, tale bearing, deceit and who embrace war mongering conspiracy theories will be known by their fruit. What kind of fruit is budding and ripening in your heart and life? And contrary to what is said in the world, nice guys do not finish last, because we are running in a different race, which follows different rules and offers different rewards. To run in this race, you must learn to be a kind, gentle, nice person whose salty light shines through what they say and the way they do what they do. Meanness and trouble making are not fruit of the Spirit, they are weeds from the world. Don't let them choke your spirituality, especially when you are dealing with difficult people.

Some carnal believers love contention, and love to dispute and argue as their main communication strategy. Believers must not give into arguing and fighting, even when they deal with those who are always trying to pick a fight, with a chip on both shoulders!

As we come to Fall Feasts, we want to examine our hearts and lives, so that none of the carnal darkness of this fading age is allowed to lurk in any corner of our hearts and lives. It is time for our annual spiritual Fall cleaning, where we give our hearts and lives a good dusting and fix anything that has become wounded or is broken. And even with those things which we are not able to be fully set free from, we will be able to see that His grace is sufficient for us and that His strength can be made perfect through our weaknesses.

Part of this renewal and refreshing we want to see happen in our lives when we come to the annual Fall Feasts, is a strengthened determination to stand up for our people and to speak up on their behalf. Over the centuries, some horrible lies have been thrown against our Jewish people and even today, many subtle and polite forms of antisemitism still persist.

Wherever our people have wandered they have always promoted light and justice and fairness as good citizens of every country where they have dwelt. We have always wanted to build and maintain safe communities both for ourselves and for our neighbours. Despite all of this, we are still unjustly hated and some even argue that holocaust denial is not a vile form of antisemitism. It is. Denying that it happened does not mean that it never happened.

One of the worst forms of antisemitism is anti-Zionism, where some have been deluded into thinking that their attacks against Israel are really efforts to stand up for

the downtrodden and the oppressed. This is not so. They are really supporting hate groups who are really treading down and oppressing their own people. A lot of politically correct jargon is actually a cover for all kinds of darkness. Racism is always wrong and so is abortion. Hatred is wrong, but so is the LGBT agenda. Violence is wrong, and so are all and any regimes who support its use against their own people. Lying and character assassination are also wrong, so be careful what you say about those who disagree with you – and be careful how you say it!

In all of our dealings, we need to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. May the Messiah continue to teach us how to be peacemakers who promote a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. May we never slide into using slander and falsehoods as a way of dealing with those we disagree with. Only truth speakers can shine and be salty in our darkening world. Slander and gossip are just a pernicious form of lying and are expressions of hatred.

Our world is filling up with folly as misinformation spirals out of control and even good people are sucked into believing things which are definitely not true. Jews have never been part of an international conspiracy to take over the world and there is no secret Jewish society which is really in control of the finances of the world. Lies like this, give people an excuse to hate Jews and to call for our destruction. Believing lies about good people is a grave deception.

There are so many wolves in sheep's clothing on the prowl in our midst, seeking for more victims. Among them, there are also sheep in wolves' clothing, just looking for a way to be delivered from their pain and confusion. What kind of clothing are you wearing?

People can get so confused that they are no longer able to discern what is true and what is just a malicious fabrication. It is an art which is on the decline. When I hear something, I always ask myself two key questions which are really detectives on the trail of the truth: What are you really saying (clarification)? and how do you know this (verification)? When we do not know, we need to admit it. There is so much being said by so many people, that sometimes good people end up on the wrong side, but we should end up on the side of wrong.

Lynch mobs and hate crimes brought the Nazis into power and this same mentality was behind the mob that stormed the US capital. Hatred is never an option for believers.

Along with the Fall Feasts, we are also heading into two elections, one municipal and one federal. Be careful. Our political opponents are not necessarily bad people who are trying to take away our freedoms, as they plot to destroy our communities and our country. There is always a need for accountability and reform and if we promote them, it will slow down our world's sinking into darkness without a fight. Take heed where you get your information from and be careful how you speak of our leaders and others

aspiring to be elected to political office. Slander and character assassination should never be a part of any campaign strategy.

It is time for us to listen, and to ask good questions as we stand on principle. Vote. We need to do our best not to let sin abound, even if it is a losing battle. I never want to give up without a fight. Carefully select the issues you want to take a stand on and let your voice be heard, while it is still possible to promote good government in our darkening world.

The corrupting forces of evil are our real enemies and their relentless attacks on our faith and on our spiritual morality are the real dangers we are facing. We need to learn what it means to be a wise, enthusiastic spiritual activist, no matter which party and which candidate you end up supporting. Vote according to your conscience and the issues you support.

In the early 1800's, Europe began to sink into chaos and violence. Two things happened. Immigrants poured out of Europe to avoid the revolutions and distress which was sweeping the continent. But there was one country where no bloody insurrections were occurring – Great Britain. This was because evangelical politicians promoted electoral reform and social justice and people saw that they could promote change without resorting to violence.

Our government does not permit religious bodies to promote any political positions or political parties. So, I really do not care who gets elected, as long as they promote goodness, reconciliation and social justice AND are friendly to our constitutional right to freedom of religion. I oppose evolution on religious grounds. I oppose abortion on religious grounds. I also oppose the LGBT agenda on religious grounds and I have a very solid biblical basis for opposing these volatile issues. What do you oppose on religious grounds?

The years roll by and governments come and go. Rather than getting confused or bent out of shape by candidates who make promises we know that they have no intention of fulfilling, we need to renew and refresh our biblical spirituality. The pace of change in our world is still accelerating, but if we stand firm on what the Bible teaches, we will not be overwhelmed by the sinfulness which is gaining ground and building momentum.

Our biblical worldview is getting less and less popular, but nothing has really changed. Our world is really a spiritual combat zone where the enemy of our souls is trying to derail the purposes of G-d. We need to remain ambassadors for the world which is to come.

We also need to keep on seeing things differently and doing things differently and we need to learn never to fight fire with fire. With firm meekness and enduring respect, we need to dialogue with those ensnared by the enemy's darkness.

Our world is growing more and more hostile to our faith, but in our dealings with the world, we must never resort to hostility. We must never hate our enemies. There have been too many times in the history of our world where politics and religion went hand in hand and where believers from different faith positions hated each other and killed each other on supposed religious grounds. A truly biblical position always forbids the use of violence in the name of our faith. We support the rule of law and promote reform through peaceful means.

I will always stand firmly for religious freedom and I will never call for violence against those who oppose this right or who disagree with me on any issue. During the High Holy Days and Sukkoth we are going to take time to assess and refresh our spiritual identity. We live in times where it is becoming more and more difficult to promote either what the Bible teaches of the spiritual values which it promotes. This should never stop us from sharing our faith.

As we do our annual spiritual house cleaning and as we come to two elections, may the power of the Coming Kingdom uphold us and guide us, both in how we live and who we support for election or re-election. We can passionately support a political party or a candidate. We can also passionately oppose a political party or a candidate.

Our biblical faith does not require that we vote for any particular party or for any particular candidate. It does require that we maintain a strong, biblical worldview and that we never let ourselves to be pulled away from what we believe or the spiritual values which our faith calls us to embrace. Use biblical wisdom as you decide who to vote for and who to vote against.

The Fall Feasts will help us to maintain a firm grasp on our biblical spirituality. It promises to be an amazing time of spiritual renewal. Election time is also a time when tempers can flare and people make all kinds of accusations in order to paint their opponents in the worst possible light. Let us do our best not to follow suit and remain focused on the issues which matter to both our faith and to our biblical spirituality. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.