

Matot/Masei

Tribes/Journeys of The Silent Years

Torah: Numbers 30:1(2)-32:42/Numbers 33:-36:13

CHAZAK, CHAZAK, V'NITHAZEK (Be strong, be strong and may you be strengthened)

Haftarah: Jeremiah 1:1-2:3/Jeremiah 2:4-28 (3:4; 4:1,2)

Brit Chadashah: Acts 9:1-22/James 4:1-10

Today's Torah portion is doubled, so we have two of the portions of Affliction combined, instead of each being on a separate Sabbath. Usually there are three Shabbats of affliction between the 17th Tammuz, when the walls of Jerusalem were finally breached and the 9th of Av, when the Holy Temple was burned and demolished. The presence of G-d had already departed, but the holy things which the people forged around the holy mountain was part of the loot the Babylonians took from the fallen city and they were never heard of again.

With both the first and the second destruction of the holy temple, the people violated a solemn oath which they had made, first to the Babylonians and then to the Romans. In both cases, they promised not to rise up in rebellion against their overlords. These two oaths were made before G-d and when they were violated, His protection was removed from the oath breaking rebels. And though they fought valiantly to defend the holy city, without divine protection the effort was futile and was doomed to fail (Ps. 127:1,2).

Most years, there are ten Sabbaths between the 17th of Tammuz and Rosh Hashanah, and even with the doubling of the Torah portions, this is also the case this year. As of today, there are only 8 weeks to go before Rosh Hashanah and the year 5782!

In the Messiah, we are to remember the good times and the sad times, because the glorious end of our journey makes all the pain and darkness evaporate as if it was never real! We still have to pass through valleys and scale mountains, but all along the way His provision and His protection will sustain us. Sometimes when the horror of human history pounces on us with little of no warning, we need to look for the ways of escape He will always provide for us. This is because we realize that, in the end, we are citizens of the coming Kingdom and through it all, we are kingdom bound pilgrims and strangers and our calling remains to walk as salty light, functioning as homing beacons for our lost and darkening world.

The first part of the first portion deals with how a lady's rash oaths would could cancelled. The next chapter deals with Moshe's final campaign against the Midianites, before the power is transferred to Joshua, just before Moses dies. Israel assembles an elite attack force of 12,000 soldiers and prepares to move against the Midianites who had all taken refuge in various fortified towns and cities. Phineas is to go with them and take the sacred instruments (likely the urrim and the thummim, the yes and no stones) and the loud sounding silver trumpets to signal the attacks that were about to occur.

In a swift punitive action, they ravaged the entire country and killed five of the Midianite kings who were allies of Balak. I wonder why Balak's death is not mentioned? They came to punish their enemies and had no intention of settling in this land, as it was not part of the Holy Land. Balaam was hiding in one of the fortified cities and he was executed for recommending to the Midianites that they send the sexual priestesses into Israel's camp. Why did Balaam not flee? He may have been held hostage as a good luck human talisman which did not work.

We are not told how long the punitive action took, but the entire country was laid waste and all of the men were killed. Some may have fled into the hills, because the nation did not disappear, but it was several hundred years before it could recover enough to be a threat to Israel. Initially, they took all the ladies captive along with all of the children, but when they came before Moses, they were instructed to kill all the women who had slept with men because these were the same priestesses who tried to overthrow the camp. They also killed all the male children so that no Midianite legacy survived intact to trouble the camp again.

They pillaged all their livestock, their flocks and all their riches. All their walled cities and sheepfolds were burnt and any of the country folk who took refuge in the larger cities, suffered the same fate as the city dwellers. They brought their considerable booty to Moses, and the leaders, who came out of the camp to greet them. Those warriors who had killed anyone or who touched any dead person, had to remain outside the camp for seven days and be cleansed by the ashes of the Red Heifer on the third and the seventh day.

All of the precious metals had to be melted down, so no idols would survive and they washed any clothing they looted, as well as their own clothing. They wanted none of the pollution of the Midianites to ever defile the camp again. We learn that they did not suffer a single military casualty as they slaughtered the idolaters who had tried to destroy them.

Under the leaders, the captured treasure was divided into two parts. Before it was divided they had 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys as well as 32,000 prisoners. From this undivided treasure, they were to pay 1/500th as an offering to the L-RD. It was then divided in half and from their portion, the non combatants had to pay an offering to the L-rd of 1/50th from their portion. The total gold they took, was equal to 270.6 kilos (nearly 600 lbs).

Chapter 32 deals with the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with half of the tribe of Manasseh to remain in the territory of the former kingdoms of Sihon and Og, because it was good for raising livestock. They agreed to help the other tribes conquer Canaan and built a series of fortified towns for their families and their flocks, to keep them safe until the soldiers came home.

Chapter 33 deals with all the campsites Israel had, from the time they left Egypt, until they came to the plains of Moab. We learn that from the departure after the Passover, where the first born of the Egyptians died, they camped eleven times before they reached Mount Sinai. When they left the mountain, they camped three times before they came to the place where they were supposed to launch the conquest of Canaan.

Then they turned back into the wilderness and over a 38 year period of time they camped 17 more times. They camped at Mount Hor in the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt and this was the place Aaron died and was buried. It took them eight more camps to complete their journey around Edom. It was during their time camping on the plains of Moab that the punitive action was launched against the Midianites. While they are waiting to hear the second giving of the Law, the rest of chapter 33 is a warning to destroy and displace all the Canaanites, so they do not become a problem like the Midianites were.

In fact, their action against Midian was a practice run for the conquest they will undertake, once they cross the Jordan. They are warned that if they succumb to criminal paganism, that the YHVH will treat them the same way He is going to treat the Canaanites.

Some of the men who were under 20 at the time of the first failed entrance into Canaan, had now been wandering for forty years. The 38 years of wandering in the wilderness, was a hard lesson, as the people watched the fighting men who had come out of Egypt, die one by one.

We must not think that their time in the wilderness was one of great suffering. They had a cloud by day and a fire by night. They had manna six days a week. Their clothing did not wear out and their feet did not swell. They were not troubled by any enemies and their lives revolved around the Sabbath and the Festival Cycle. Their greatest burden was the weight of guilt they carried, knowing that they would never enter the land which they had been delivered out of Egypt to possess.

The Talmud says that those of them who were still alive in the fortieth year, just dropped dead and were buried at the same time they buried Aaron. The Bible does not teach this, but we know that none of them lived long lives, unless some of them were similar in age to Moses and Aaron. For us, we need to realize that it is really not important where you are in your life. What matters is where you are in the Messiah. Where are you in the Messiah?

When we do not follow where the L-rd wants to lead us, we will do our own fair share of wilderness wandering, but instead of being consumed by guilt and regret, we need to learn to hear the voice of G-d and to go where He leads us. He will first lead us to faith and then use His Word to completely purge us from all paganism. He will also teach us to nurture the fruit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, while we learn to weed out the sinful works of the flesh.

We need to learn to keep sin crouching at our door and not invite it into our hearts and lives. We need to learn not to quench or grieve the Holy Spirit as we learn not to let the sun go down on our wrath. We grieve the Holy Spirit when we do what His Word tells us not to and we quench the Holy Spirit when we do not do what His Word tells us to.

Our calling will not always give us an easy time in this life, but wherever He takes us and whatever happens to us along the way, it will all be worth it when we reach our final destination. We should be able to say with the Apostle Paul that our light sufferings of this present age are not worthy to be compared to the unlimited weight of Glory which is waiting for us in eternity. Are you focused on what is waiting for you in Glory?

In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10 and in 2 Corinthians 11:22-29, Paul gives two summaries of the ministry he accomplished and the personal challenges he faced, once he came to faith. I do not wish you trials and tribulations, but we need to know that if we want to really walk with our Messiah, these will come whether we want them to or not. In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul goes on to say that all of those who wish to serve our Messiah, will suffer persecution.

We may not be thrown to the lions or burned at the stake, but we will be betrayed and lied to, both by those who claim to be brethren and by those in the world. All levels of our government are becoming increasingly hostile to our faith and one day, we may have to go underground like believers who dwell in Communist China. We will see evolution forced on our children as they are taught to abandon biblical morality and family values. In the early days of the faith under the Romans, at various times, it was illegal to practice our faith. When the church became official, anyone who did not agree with their non-biblical doctrines and traditions was jailed and sometimes killed. Real believers never persecute other believers.

I have frequently taught you that we will suffer a relentless three pronged attack as we stumble through this life on our way to Glory. First, the enemy of our souls will line our path with all kinds of snares as he does his best to generate hatred for all and any of us who believe in the G-d of the Bible and want to walk in its ways. Next, our world will want to undermine our faith and our biblical morality as it decriminalizes all kinds of sin and promotes behaviour which the Bible forbids. Hear me on this – Evolution is nothing more than a criminal form of idolatry and our sexually liberated society is sliding more and more into criminal fornication. Society wants to raise our children and to teach them whatever forms of sinful nonsense is currently popular.

This is not all happening at once, but the enemy of our souls is increasingly using features of our modern internet driven world, to set the stage for the arrival of the beast and the Antichrist. Our faith is more and more being considered a pernicious kind of an ancient lie that they want to stamp out and deliver us from. Many of the larger, traditional churches have abandoned the teachings of the Bible and believe it is just a collection of made up stories designed to teach us to be good in a way that no longer makes sense.

Our society has not yet begun to openly pass laws against our faith, but their politically correct agenda is turning against us and our faith in much the same way as the Nazis and Communists did, when they came to power.

As we come to grips with this increasing hostility, we need to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves. Our faith has survived when many societies tried to eradicate it, but we need to be ready for difficult times which may soon be upon us. We need to listen to the Spirit and walk according to the Word. We also need to be model citizens who live as salty light and not slip into behaviour which the Bible calls sin. We will never fight fire with fire.

Many are running around declaring that the sky is falling and are teaching such strange things as the flat earth theory. Some, like certain groups of Mormons, are even building underground shelters and stocking them with food. Others believe that the UN is stationing troops all around the world as it prepares to set up one world government by force. We have to be careful not to join with those who are crying wolf and are not putting their main energy into digging into their Bibles and sharing their faith while it is still legal to do so.

Too many are not very familiar with what the Bible actually teaches are the signs of the end of the world, but there will be no room for doubt and speculation when the final darkness seizes control of our world, one last time. Remember me teaching you that the real conflict of the ages is between the righteous core of truth seekers and the wicked core of sin seekers? Our world's righteous core has not yet dissolved, but it beginning to do some serious melting.

Israel was nearly overthrown by the wicked, seductive priestesses of Moab, but things are starting to heat up for us, both morally and spiritually. The real mark of the Beast is when the consciences of this world are seared (II Tim. 4:2) to the point that the copy of G-d's laws which all carry in our souls is no longer intact.

You know that I am not an alarmist or a conspiracy theorist. I just keeping looking around and I see that the final darkness is growing and building momentum. What should we do to prepare ourselves for this final onslaught? We need to continue to have faith in the promises of G-d's Word and to walk in obedience to its teachings.

We need to share our faith and engage with people who have swallowed the lies of evolution and who want to change the light into darkness and the darkness into light. We need to walk in the light, as He is in the light. Even if we have to go underground, we will walk through that valley when it comes, under the full protection and provision of our Good Shepherd.

I did not intend to begin sharing my sermon in the middle of my Torah portion, but everything that has ever happened to our people Israel has an application for us in today's world. More and more people are teaching crazier things, both Jews and Gentiles and, more and more, we are being encouraged to get all we can, can all we get and sit on the lid, as our world teaches that materialism is our sacred duty.

There are still solid believers in high placers of leadership and not everything in the current human rights agenda goes against what the Bible teaches. We still need to care for the hungry, the sick, as we do our best to fight poverty and oppression around the world. But just try speaking out against the gay agenda and see what happens. If they come after me, I will boldly proclaim that sexual orientation is a religious conviction which is protected under the charter of our freedoms and rights. I just happen to believe that monogamous heterosexuality is what the Bible teaches and they have no right to attack me for believing in it.

We need to be putting up more of a fight and support good outreach ministries before what they are doing becomes illegal. This does not mean banging on doors and practising intrusive proselytization and try to argue and yell people into the kingdom. There are enough cults doing that as we speak. We need to be meek and respectful and win a hearing when we are presented with the opportunity (which I call a divine appointment). At the age of 19, I was led to the L-rd because of a series of these special moments and true spiritual discernment is able to recognize them when they are brought our way.

Now, I will always share my faith, even when people want to argue with me, but I will not argue back. I am not afraid of an argument, but it is not the one who shouts the loudest and the longest who is speaking the truth. If they do not want to establish common ground and have a discussion, I throw them back (and walk away) and wait until they are ready to hear the truth, even if it takes a lifetime. I live for divine appointments.

In the Book of Numbers we see that the purposes of G-d can neither be rushed or prevented from happening. When the people were not ready, even though they had been delivered for this very thing, YHVH let them die in the wilderness. Sadly, throughout history, too many believers have headed down too many rabbit holes and have spent years and even centuries wandering around wildernesses of their own making.

I am not very impressed with most of that which passes for good preaching or good teaching online or on the TV or the radio, because there are so many who make minor and major departures from the truths of G-d's Word. They love to argue about words to no profit, and believe that arguing is the way to stand up and defend the truth. It is not. Being contentious is actually a work of the flesh and no works of the flesh can actually accomplish the Kingdom purposes of G-d. Being constantly disagreeable pulls us away from the fruit of the Spirit.

It is not always wrong to hold radical views, as long as they can be defended from the Scriptures and do not twist what our Bibles actually teach, but how we share what we believe, usually says more about what we believe than what we are actually saying.

Israel spent a generation wandering and our double portion ends with four final concerns. First, the limits of the Holy Land are given and now include the territory of the two and a half tribes. Israel has never sought any kind of world domination and has never had the desire to build an empire in the Middle East. We want the land which YHVH gave to us and we will learn to live at peace with our neighbours, no matter how fractious and difficult they are.

Ten men are given the task of dividing up the land and the amount of land given to each tribe and family was to be according to their numbers. No tribal portion could ever be passed on to another tribe. We know from history that the full conquest was not completed, until the time of King David, but people still get mixed up about who the land really belongs to. It is G-d's land which approximates the boundaries of the original Garden of Eden and Israel was called to stand as a beacon of light, calling all the scattered children of Adam and Eve back to their Creator – and to quit following the lies and the detours which they have fallen into.

Once they took possession of the land, they were to establish 48 levitical cities, scattered throughout the land, so that these guardians could make sure that future generations of Israel did not wander from the truth of G-d's Word. They were also to establish six cities of refuge so that someone accused of murder would get a fair trial. If someone was obviously guilty, they could not hide in a city of refuge.

Numbers 35:33 says that no atonement for shed blood in the land could be made, except by the shedding of the one who shed blood. This meant by association, that no innocent blood should be shed when the death was accidental and not on purpose. Capital punishment is a biblical principle, not in any way to seek vengeance for the blood which was shed. It is meant to uphold the sanctity of life and deliver those who violate this principle over to execution. It has been wrongly applied by many people and societies over the centuries, but the violation of a principle should never be used to cancel a principle.

The last chapter of Numbers deals again with laws of inheritance and reaffirms that the land should return to the descendants of those to whom it was first given. The daughters of a man who died with no sons are told that they have to marry within their tribal group, so that their inherited land would not pass into the permanent ownership of another tribe.

Genesis deals with the beginning of the universe and of life on earth. After the first 11 chapters, it deals with the promises of G-d which were given to three men: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Exodus, Leviticus and parts of Numbers deal with our people's deliverance from Egypt and them learning the basic principles of biblical righteousness which they were to practice once they entered the land. Numbers mentions their years of wandering and takes the story to the plains of Moab, where the second giving of the Law was to occur.

While not every detail we would like to know is given in these accounts, they tell us the principles we need to follow if we want to walk with the G-d of the Bible. And all that was written after the Torah, including the New Testament, is designed to firmly entrench faith in our G-d and obedience to His Word, into the hearts and lives of all believers.

The enemy remains treacherous. The World remains untrustworthy and our flesh wants to pull us into the darkness of its works. As we read the Bible and study it as a lifetime discipline, we will never lose our way or spend any time wandering through the wilderness. The straight and the narrow is our calling, nothing more and certainly nothing less.