

Va'etchanan	And I Pleaded	Shabbat Nachamu
Torah:	Deuteronomy 3:23-7:11	
Haftarah:	Isaiah 40:1-26	
Brit Chadashah:	Matthew 23:31-39	

Today is Shabbat Nachamu, also called the Sabbath of Consolation. Including today, there are seven Sabbaths of consolation, where comforting portions from Isaiah are read, as we climb out of the darkness and sadness of Tisha B'Av and begin our preparations for a New Year in the L-RD. This year, Erev Rosh Hashanah falls on Monday, Sept. 6th. Have you picked up your High Holy Days and Sukkoth schedule? Are you making plans to attend as many of these services as possible? It is our annual all systems check up!

The Fall Feasts are both exciting, as well as being the busiest time of the year. Life passes by so quickly that we need to take advantage of every year we spend walking with the Messiah until He returns. We need to seek Him every day, every week, every month and every year. When we stumble, we have to get back up, dust ourselves off and get back on the straight and narrow, wherever it takes us. This is the whole duty of man.

As Moses continues to review the laws and commandments which the older generation had violated, he reminds the people of the new generation of the dangers of any kind of idolatry. He also warns them not to add anything to the revelation they have received and certainly not to take anything away from it. We need to walk by the divine revelation of His Word.

At the beginning of the portion he remembers how much he pleaded with G-d for permission to lead them into the land and he was refused and even told not to keep asking when he was told no. In our prayers, we need to seek the will of G-d and not to think of Him as the great sugar daddy in the sky who will give us anything we ask for if we pester Him enough. When He says that enough is enough, we need to accept this answer and not let our prayers become whining sessions where we keep trying to get our own way.

Moses is going to be allowed to see the land from summit of mount Pisgah, but that is as far as he is allowed to go. We need to learn to listen as much when G-d says no, as we do when He says yes. Are you listening to what G-d is saying to you?

There are some major differences between the two givings of the Law and having two copies of the teachings is an enrichment we should be grateful for. In both chapter four and chapter five we are told not to alter anything we have received from G-d and all and any traditions we develop need to be firmly based on the Word. The Ten Commandments stand unique in the Bible and are the foundation of everything else it teaches. G-d says what He means and means what He says.

Both the mainline churches and the Talmudic synagogues have developed some very intricate traditions and extra beliefs which the Bible does not teach or support. Our situation may change as we carry the Bible through any number of cultural settings, but any traditions we develop should neither add to or remove from the Bible. We want to develop ways of putting the eternal Word into action so that our obedience is constantly renewed and refreshed. His is the only voice we need to be constantly and stubbornly listening to.

No other nation has ever had such a majestic group theophany, such as the one our people had as they camped around the dancing mountain and His awesome holiness goes far beyond our ability to describe it. This is why we are commanded not to make any resemblance because He is not like anything in the created universe. We are made in His spiritual image, not His physical image. He remains beautiful beyond description!

Israel is told that even if He had to disperse them because of their abandoning the commandments, He will never completely abandon them. He wants them to learn from the negative example of the older generation and not to incur the wrath of G-d, the way they did.

He gives them their own copy of the Ten Commandments, with one change. They are now called to observe the Sabbath, not in memory of the Creation, but as a reminder that they were once slaves in Egypt. Only free people can keep the Sabbath.

Moses goes on to remind the people that walking with Him needs to be a generational reality as they give YHVH and His commandments their complete spiritual devotion in every area of their lives. The Shema makes 14 statements as it outlines our need to have a focused, complete devotion to G-d through His Word.

They are to make righteousness their dwelling place so that the L-rd can both drive out the Canaanites before them and bless them as they take up residence in the land. They are not to have any religious contact with the Canaanites or adopt any of their idolatry. The land needs to be cleansed and they are not to pollute it again in any way whatsoever. All of Canaan's inhabitants are to be devoted to destruction so that Israel does not learn any of their bad habits. We also need to not learn any of the spiritual bad habits of our modern world.

Israel is called to be a holy people which belongs to YHVH from among all the peoples of the earth. Israel is to get set up in the land and be firmly entrenched into the Word and in that state they are to be a blessing to all nations, before whom they shine as salty light. Israel's faith and obedience is to be a model for the nations to follow. The call to go out to all nations will come later, after they have set up a righteous kingdom which will serve as a base for this outreach, once Messiah comes to die and the resurrected Messiah sends us to the nations.

G-d delivered our people from a house of servitude in order that we should become His servants, who are called to practice faith in His promises and obedience to His commandments. This is a generational covenant that will never wear out or grow old as long as the people are faithful to it. His blessing is said to last to the thousandth generation, but if they violate the covenant, He will take immediate punitive action against them and against all those who despise or hate Israel. He may punish His people, but He will continue to show His great love and mercy to Israel as the people repent and exercise faith and obedience.

The younger ones in this new generation, who were born during the wandering years have never known paganism and have grown up with the full protection and provision of G-d. The older ones may have remembered their slavery in Egypt and are told that it is something which they will never have to experience again, as long as they walk with the L-RD according to His Word. Even today, our calling as Messianic Jews and Gentiles is to have faith in G-d and obey the Word as we wait for the final chapter of human history to unfold, when Messiah returns to set up His everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Sermon: **The Timing of G-d: A Biblical Study in Final Things**

In the short history of our planet, three significant punitive spiritual interventions occurred to ensure the survival of our race. The first was our exclusion from the Garden so that our first ancestors did not eat of the tree of life and live forever in a fallen, sinful state. During the next ten generations, the righteous core of the children of Adam and Eve shrank until at the end of the 120 years it took Noah to build the ark, there were only 8 people who had not succumbed to the global darkness that came close to engulfing our entire race.

G-d cleansed the earth through the flood and what was once an immense single continent, began to drift into the continents we have today. This drifting initially began while the ark and its inhabitants floated safely above the mighty geological changes which were happening on the surface of our planet. Continental drift is still happening on a smaller scale, but once the waters subsided and filled the basins of what we know as the various oceans of the world, Noah and his family came down from the mountains of Ararat and set up a community on the plains of Shinar, which is Northern Iraq.

They were told to disperse and repopulate the cleansed planet, but almost immediately the influence of evil began to be felt when Canaan had sexual relations with his grandmother. The people were afraid to disperse and built an astrological ziggurat to try and predict the future and they may have begun to worship various heavenly bodies. In a few generations, sin was gaining a hold over the people almost as firmly it had in the days when Noah was building the ark.

G-d came down and scattered the people into peoples, nations and families who each spoke a different language. These intact linguistic family groups scattered until the globe was repopulated, but this time by people who could not understand each other. The progress of sin was slowed down and YHVH selected one family group to begin His redemptive purposes of reuniting the scattered nations and peoples and families of the earth.

In Abraham, His gave a double pronged promise which is the basis of everything which has been done since then. Abraham was first to become a great nation and occupy the site of the former Garden of Eden. Then he was to become a blessing to all nations, once the Messiah was to come. Jewish people have always been a salty light and remain the special people of G-d. The promised Messiah came, died, rose and ascended and once all of the purposes of G-d are fulfilled, He will return to set up the everlasting Kingdom of G-d over all the nations and generations of mankind.

The timing of His return has been a great subject of speculation in nearly every generation of believers. Talmudic Jews are still waiting for His arrival, but there is as much, if not more speculation of when and how this amazing event is to occur. In my brochure, entitled: Notes on Prophecy, I outline the seven signs of our Messiah's return which have to be fulfilled before this glorious event bursts forth to bring human history to a close.

Today, I want to discuss four related concepts which we have to have a biblical understanding of, if we are not to be deceived and lead astray. Discussions of the End Times can end up in heated arguments, but as long as your position is biblical, you will not go far wrong. In this, as with other teachings of the Bible, we will eventually end up having to invoke Deut. 29:29, because G-d is not going to explain everything and the secret things truly belong to Him.

There are three passages in the Bible which I like to reference when it comes to a discussion of the End Times. They are 2 Peter 3:2,3 and 9, 10 which talks about the timing; Hebrews 10:35-39 which talks about our need for patience and, finally 2 Thess. 2:5-12 which talks about the coming of the final great deception and the rise of the final Antichrist.

Lets talk about the Antichrist first. The actual term only appears in I John 2:18, 19 and in I John 4:3. This individual is called other things in other places, but he will rise up as a world leader and claim to be an incarnation of G-d, as he takes over political control of the entire globe. There will be no doubt to his identity once he is revealed, but John says that there have already been so many Antichrists and there may be more to come before the final one appears.

From a biblical understanding, any ruler who claims the right to conquer and to rule over a nation or nations other than his own, is the spirit of Antichrist. This would mean that every empire that has ever risen up in the world has been a manifestation of the spirit of Antichrist, because there is only one King who has the right to rule over all the nations and His name is Yeshua Hamashiach (Jesus the Messiah). Four of the worst beasts that have appeared, besides the colonizing European powers, were, Genghis Khan, Hitler, Stalin and Mao. I include the last two because they promoted worldwide revolution and the overthrow of all governments until the planet was ruled by an international communist dictatorship.

The beast is an imitation of the Lamb and he will only be wounded and recover from that wound and not actually die. The false prophet will promote the worship of the beast and institute punishments against those who refuse. These concepts have become common knowledge since the 1800's and how they will actually come into being is part of the mystery of iniquity which is at work in the world today (2 Thess. 2:7).

Many of the conditions necessary for our Messiah's return are becoming a reality in our world today, but there is some considerable misinformation which is also circulating among believers and it damages our credibility when we share our faith with people who are sinking into the final great darkness. Too many have set dates prematurely and which were just theological guesses. To many in the world, the concept of our Messiah's return has become both a gong show and a laughing stock. How many times can you be wrong before people will stop taking you seriously? Serial guessing destroys our spiritual credibility.

I believe more in the glorious return of our blessed Messiah than I do in the daily rising and setting of the sun, but things are not ready enough to be thinking of a date. Deception must be in control before any date could be considered. Why the rush? In the early 1800's a lady prophet began teaching a prewrath ascension of believers, past and present, before the Beast is manifest and the Antichrist assumes control of the earth.

Rapture really means taking living believers out of their bodies, when the Messiah returns and does not refer to some kind of first resurrection before or during the tribulation which will precede the millennial reign of the Messiah. Those believers who hold to a prewrath exit or rapture of believers before the troubles really heat up, fall into three groups: pretribulation, midtribulation and posttribulation. Acts 14:22 says that we must endure much tribulation as we walk through this life on our way to our Father's Home in Glory. Also, I Corinthians 15 says that the dead will rise after the last trumpet is sounded (I Corin. 15:52). I am not looking for trouble, but in our blessed Messiah trouble will always come looking for us.

There is nowhere in the Scriptures where a literal seven year tribulation is mentioned and all the special events which are supposed to happen during this imaginary time, are references which are taken out of context. They are part of a theological system called dispensationalism. It takes a verse, 2 Peter 3:8, where it is said that before the L-rd a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. They take the seven days of creation and give them each a literal one thousand years and since the L-rd rested on the seventh day, there will be a peaceful 1000 reign after the tribulation and before the final return of the L-rd. So with this way of thinking, the L-rd actually returns three times: once to scoop up believers, twice to set up a thousand year worldwide reign from Jerusalem and finally, a final third return, after the final defeat of the adversary. The Scriptures teach that He will return once and only once (Heb. 9:28).

Believers have often experienced great tribulation, as have Jewish people during the crusades and the holocaust. Paul twice outlines twenty eight categories of troubles he has seen (2 Cor. 6:3-10 and Hebrews 11:21:29). Suffering is the spiritual static we encounter in this life as we build up an eternal weight of durable glory, as we pass through the feeble sufferings of this age. I am looking to make a difference, not a quick escape when things get rough. We are spared through tribulation, not from tribulation.

Lets move on to the millennium. Most round numbers in the Scriptures are symbolic. In fact all the numbers in the Revelation are either symbolic or literal. They are all symbolic and not literal. The first mention of a thousand years appears in the first giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. We are told that G-d's mercies will extend to a thousand generations of those who avoid idolatry and who keep His commandments. The same promise is repeated in Deut. 7:9. In Deut. 1:11 Moses wishes that though the House of Israel is as numerous as the stars of heaven, that YHVH would increase them a thousandfold more.

The millennium is a symbol of G-d's mercy which will extend from the first baby who was conceived until the last one, at the end of the ages. In Revelation 20, the word millennium appears six times and refers to the believer's ability to bind the enemy between the time our L-rd ascended and when the world is brought to an end. Revelation 12 discusses the enemy's defeat, where he falls to earth with his angels and is bound to the earth, with no further heavenly access. He is a defeated foe that makes war on us until the end of the world – until the end of the symbolic thousand year period of grace.

Some people may think I am a heretic because I do not tow the line with so many who believe in a literal tribulation and a literal millennium, but unless you clearly distinguish between symbolic language and literary language in the Bible, you will never quite understand it and will be pulled into some pretty odd beliefs. Israel is a land which flows with milk and honey and the trees clap their hands and the mountains skip like goats and the seas roar. I believe all of this, but these are symbolic, not literal references. Trees have no hands and even when I took drugs as a confused young hippy, I never saw them clap.

I believe everything which the Bible teaches, whether it is being taught symbolically or literally. I believe everything it teaches literally and everything which it refers to symbolically. I serve the mighty Lion of Judah who is also the rose of Sharon and who is also the root of Jesse. In the Prophet Zechariah, Messiah has seven eyes. In the Revelation, He also has seven horns. I firmly believe what all of this means.

He was literally born of a virgin and literally died on the cross and literally both resurrected and ascended back into Heaven. But how many crowns will He have on His head when He returns and will He be riding a literal white horse? Horses do not fly.

Again, rapture is to the living what resurrection is to the dead. In both cases we get our glorified bodies, first the dead and then the living. This will happen at the last trumpet when the earth melts with great heat and great noise and when the Lord comes as a thief in the night. The Revelation is an incredibly intricate book of symbols which uses extensive Old Testament imagery to give persecuted believers faith in Messiah's Kingdom, without making the Romans think the Book was calling for rebellion against the emperor. Rome is the great harlot who sits on seven hills. The Vatican only sits on one hill outside of the seven hills of imperial Rome.

The mark of the Beast refers to the need to procure a certificate of emperor worship if you wanted to buy and sell. If the truth be known, the world ends some four times in the Revelation and the final victory of our blessed Messiah is so amazingly complete that all the glory of Rome disappears like the morning mist – along with the horror and glory of the Nazis, the Crusaders and those Europeans who practised genocide among our native brethren.

I take the coming end of the world very seriously – too seriously to engage in the endless, foolish guessing games which wrongly predict that He can return at any second, even if all of His kingdom purposes are not yet complete. He will return when He is fully ready.

I firmly believe in the inerrant authority of the Scriptures. I am a rabid, convinced creationist who acknowledges the universal flood in the days of Noah. I recognize the amazing job our G-d did when He scattered us into different linguistic groups. I would love to have watched as our people crossed the Sea of Reeds which has now dried up. The Red Sea drops to a depth of 1,700 feet. G-d could have parted this sea and taken His people across it, but the journey would have taken several days and the Egyptians would never have followed. The parting of the sea of Reeds was a miracle, not a tsunami.

I would love to have watched the mountain shake like jelly and give off lightning and fire. I would love to have tasted manna and have experienced all the other provision our people experienced in the wilderness. I would love to have walked on the water with our Messiah and have seen the empty tomb. I would love to have seen all those people healed and freed from demonic control. I would love to have talked with the old time saints once our Saviour rose from the dead. But the greatest miracle is still to come.

I am talking about the end of the world which is the only cosmic big bang this universe will ever know. The whole thing is going to loudly dissolve as the dead are resurrected and given new bodies. I am looking forward to the final judgment, where all the hidden, secret tragedies of this sorry old world, will be brought to light and judged. Many who think that they have gotten away with so much, will finally see that nobody gets away with anything forever.

One day, we will also see the new Heavens and the New Earth and speak the new cosmic language, as we drink from the water of life and eat the leaves of the tree of life. Many who are unknown, will become well known and many who are now renowned, will disappear and be forgotten. Many who have suffered great loss will receive an even greater reward.

This is the end of the story I am living for, once all the purposes of G-d are fulfilled. In the meantime, I want to feast on His Word, be filled with His Spirit and walk in faithful obedience. Nothing more and certainly nothing less. Shabbat Shalom.