

<b>Eikev</b>	<b>As a Result</b>	<b>Taking G-d and His Word Very Seriously</b>
<b>Torah:</b>	Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25	
<b>Haftarah:</b>	Isaiah 49:14-51:3	
<b>Brit Chadashah:</b>	Hebrews 11:8-13	

This is the second Sabbath of Consolation, where we learn to digest our troubles and the trials which come our way, so that we can offer them as praise offerings to the King who has brought us through them. Year by year, we can never be certain what troubles and challenges will intrude into our lives, but year by year and day by day, we can be certain that the faithful provision and protection of YHVH will never abandon us. He always has our back.

On the plains of Moab, right across the Jordan river from the mighty fortress of Jericho, Moses continues to tell the new generation the story of all which Israel has experienced since our people were delivered from Egyptian slavery. In the next portions, he is going to go over again some of the main teaching he did while our people were camped around the dancing mountain. But in this portion, Moses wants to bring them up to speed about where they should be spiritually, as they prepare to enter Canaan and conquer it in the name of YHVH.

It is a more pensive account than the first giving of the Law, because Moses wants to leave behind him a legacy of a people who not only fully trust in G-d, but who walk faithfully according to His Word. He says that YHVH will remove from His people, all the sicknesses with which He struck the Egyptians and also promises to smite those who hate Israel with these same plagues.

They are going to take possession of the land in a series of major military encounters, but the actual resident population which survives will be destroyed before them only little by little, so that the beasts of the field do not multiply before the people are actually in possession of the entire land. The idols of the land and its people are to be devoted to destruction so that none of their criminal idolatry survives to trouble the Children of Israel. If this new generation succumbs to any of this criminal idolatry, they will also be devoted to destruction and not survive.

YHVH says that He has been testing the new generation during the 40 years of wandering, so that they would really know who He is and what He requires from His people. They are to live by everything which comes out of YHVH's mouth so that they could be just as blessed and protected, going into the land as they were while they were wandering in the wilderness. The land is well watered, with abundant crop yields and mineral reserves.

In this passage, 40 is mentioned three times. First, Moses initially spent 40 days and nights on the mountain, while he was receiving the first tablets of the L-RD. Next, He spent another forty days interceding for the people and receiving two new tablets of the Law, also written by the finger of G-d. Finally, YHVH spent forty years evaluating the new generation so that they would be fully prepared to enter the Promised Land.

To date, the people have had things fairly easy and are warned not to take credit for the mighty blessings which they continue to receive from YHVH. As part of the care which G-d is going to exercise over His people, He will use be two levels or kinds of chastisement. When they stumble, He will chastise them like a father chastises his children so that they can return to the straight and narrow, whenever they lose their footing. And while He promises to

never totally abandon His people, if they wander into criminal idolatry, they will perish and be driven out of the land, just as surely as the pagan nations whose land they are about to acquire.

They will face incredible, gigantic foes, and YHVH will drive these before His people like a devouring fire. This will not be because of this generation's current righteousness, but it will be a confirmation of the promises which were made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He reminds them how persistently even this generation was rebellious, likely because of the evil example of the preceding generation. When he came down the mountain and witnessed the people practising sexual acts of criminal idolatry, in great anger, Moses smashed the first copy of the Ten Sacred Words.

His second forty days on the mountain were to intercede for the people and get a second set of tablets, which were also inscribed by the finger of G-d. G-d was also angry enough with Aaron to kill him because he caved in so easily to the people's return to paganism. When Moses received the new tablets of the Law, he also fashioned a temporary wooden ark to house the tablets of the Law until the permanent ark was fashioned.

The Talmud takes several flights of fancy about what became of this ark. Some say it eventually housed the broken tablets of the Law and was carried into battle whenever the people went to war. We are not told what happened to this temporary ark, but it contained the new tablets of the Law and not the shattered pieces of the previous tablets.

After mentioning that the Ten sacred words were written on the new tablets, Moses jumps ahead to the death of Aaron, who is then succeeded by Eleazar. He just wanted to finish Aaron's story and remind the people that there is no favouritism before YHVH. He responds to our responses so that His redemptive purposes can be fulfilled. He mentions that after they had received the first set of instructions, which he is reviewing for them, they were told to begin their journey to the Promised Land. The wilderness wandering is mentioned sparsely because the people have hopefully learned their lesson.

Moses declares the YHVH owns both the visible Heavens and those invisible ones above the visible ones. He is the L-rd of lords and the G-d of gods and He is our glory. They were called to avoid rebellion so that they would have the strength to possess the land. Obedience gives us strength and causes His abundant blessings to be showered on us.

The people are reminded of their need to surround themselves with the symbols or prompts of G-d's Word so that there is no part of their lives where total obedience does not exist. Our lives need to be saturated with His Word. In a state of blessing, born of obedience, the passage ends with some pretty powerful expressions of YHVH's mighty provision. Their days in the land will be like the days of the Heavens above, which are endless.

They will be granted every place where they set foot and no enemy will be able to stand before them as YHVH fills the land with fear wherever His people appear. As we learn to walk according to His Word, there is nothing nor anyone who can stand in our way or thwart any of His purposes in our lives.

Sermon: **When You listen, what do you hear?**

This morning, I want to share insights with you from the first phrase of the Shema:

***Shema Yisrael YHVH Elohaynu, YHVH echad  
(Hear Oh Israel, Yahweh is our G-d, Yahweh alone)***

Among some of the tribes of South Africa, when the people understand what you are saying, they say that they can hear you. When they cannot hear you, they are not asking you to repeat your words or to speak louder, they are merely stating that they do not understand you. In discussing a new preacher, the people told their old preacher that they cannot hear this new man. G-d is not asking His people to listen, He is requiring them to understand the most radical religious affirmation that had even been made since the confusion at Babel.

In the midst of all the confusion and pagan idolatry, G-d is not saying that He is some god who has come to compete with other, older gods. He is not even saying that He is the best god among an established group of gods. He is saying that He is the only G-d who has ever existed and that besides Him, there are no other gods. It is a shocking statement to make to a people used to hearing about any number of gods, worshipped by any number of peoples.

In fact, when ancient peoples went to war, they captured the gods of the people they defeated and kept them as captives to their god or gods. The idea that there was only one G-d and that there has always only been one G-d was mind blowing to say the least. So YHVH is requiring His people to make a major paradigm shift away from both the polytheism (many gods) of some of their neighbours and the pantheism (everything is god) of other neighbours.

Each set of pagan gods came with some kind of a creation story which peopled the earth and the heavens with so many major and minor deities that they were almost impossible to count. Among the ancient Greeks, there were three supreme beings who ruled the universe. The earliest Greeks worship Uranus, but when they were conquered by the Mycenaean Greeks, their supreme god, Kronos (Saturn) is said to have defeated Uranus and banished him to the outer darkness. When the Last set of Greeks invaded, their supreme god, Zeus (Jupiter) is said to have defeated Kronos and cast him into the bottomless pit of Tartarus along with all the other Mycenaean gods, who were called the Titans.

It gets worse. You see, many ancient peoples believed that before the first gods came into being, there was this cosmic slime, called chaos, out of which all the gods and all of creation was made. The Romans adopted the Greek religion, but changed most of the names of the gods. Each god controlled an area of creation and the three most important gods ruled the heavens (Zeus or Jupiter), the sea (Poseidon or Neptune) and the underground land of the dead (Hades or Pluto). The Greeks forced the worship of their gods on the people they conquered, but they did not have a concept that there was really only one G-d.

The Hindus and the Germans came close to the idea of one supreme god, but even they felt that various lesser gods were either manifestations of the Supreme being or in some way his servants. He was called Om among the Hindus and Allfather among the Nordic peoples. YHVH was clearly stating a very radical concept which the ancient peoples would struggle to grasp. He wanted His people to acknowledge that there was really only one G-d, who was creator of all things and did not crawl out of some primeval slime. No other gods exist.

It took the people a while to become truly convinced monotheists and for many generations our people did not get it that there has always only been one G-d and that pledging allegiance to any other god was a criminal act and a gross betrayal of who G-d said that He was. There

have been some attempts at monotheism over the centuries, but at best they mostly claimed there was one god above all other gods and not that all of the other gods were not real. The Apostle Paul called them demons because they had deceived the people into worshipping them, while none of them possessed the power and eternity of G-d. They were lies.

When you listen to who G-d says He is, what do you hear? I have studied mythology since I was very young and I have always seen a connection between the saints and angels which the Catholic and Orthodox churches revere and the pagan belief in many gods. The Catholic church has many patron saints who control various aspects of nature and each European country has their own special saint which protects and provides for them. For France and Quebec it is the Virgin Mary. For England, it is Saint George and for Scotland it is Saint Andrew. Wales reveres Saint David and Ireland is under the protection of Saint Patrick.

Most Catholic and Orthodox churches are full of statues of various Saints, but they say they do not worship them, they say that they venerate them and pray through them to get a better access to G-d. When we first went to Quebec, my son was very young and when we were visiting the main church in Baie Comeau, he said:” Dad, lets get out of here, it is full of idols.”

Talmudic Jews and Muslims also have a large group of saints or holy people that are believed to be helpful when people call upon them and ask for their help. It is really a functional form of polytheism and idolatry because all the saints and the true holy people are asleep and can only influence the lives of living believers through their example. Nothing more.

Some believers ascribe semi divine powers to Satan and treat him like some kind of fallen god who still has some cosmic powers. This is not true. Lucifer is a Latin term which rightly refers to our Messiah and which means either the morning star or the light bearer. It is wrongly applied to the enemy. He was never G-d’s right hand man who rebelled and had to be violently expelled from Heaven. He was never Yeshua’s brother.

He is fallen angel or messenger but has never had any characteristics of divinity. There has only even been one G-d and it is wrong to populate the universe with powerful beings who are semi divine and who can help us with specific problems. Among the Catholic saints, though, my favourite patron Saint is Saint Jude. He is the patron Saint of lost causes.

YHVH alone possesses divinity and He alone is worthy of praise and worship. All other gods who have been worshipped throughout history were never truly gods and were either made up beings or devils trying to steal worship away from the only Being worthy of worship, YHVH. This is not an easy concept for former polytheists (many gods) or pantheists (everything is god) to understand and many bad spiritual habits are hard to break.

In prayer we speak to G-d and to G-d alone. I have heard enthusiastic believers address Satan in prayer, as part of either an exorcism or of a deliverance from demonic oppression. We should only ever address our prayers to G-d and get weaned away from a belief in many gods. Once we realize that there has only ever been one G-d, we are set free to offer Him our complete, undivided devotion. Satan is only to be rebuked and resisted.

Philosophers and many who challenge our belief in only one G-d, wonder how we can be so certain that ours is the true G-d and that all other religious systems are false. This is something believers have struggled with over the centuries, but our understanding that there is and always

has only been one G-d, does not run counter to anything we can observe in the universe and there is no contradiction between the G-d we believe in and the universe which He created. We are not saying that other religious people are evil, just deceived.

Israel had to come to the understanding that there has only ever been one G-d who is nothing like the strange and gruesome gods which the pagan nations worship. There is one further realization that our people needed to make as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. Not only is there only one G-d, but this same Creator G-d is our G-d. He chose the Jewish people as His special people and He wants us to choose Him and serve Him with gratitude and awe.

He chose the Jewish people so that people would understand that they need to choose Him and not make up extravagant rituals which have to be performed in order to relate to our G-d and somehow hypnotize Him to get Him to do their bidding. Tabernacle worship is both majestic and quite straight forward. It has none of the incredibly complicated rituals that many pagans use in order to serve their gods and to gain their favour.

He is not just the G-d of the Jews. He is the G-d of all the nations and generations of mankind, even though after the scattering of Babel, a great deal of confusion crept into the various pagan religions of the world. Each people group had at least a partial understanding of G-d which they modified and added to, until the simple truths they had at Babel were transformed into the confusion and contradictions of the various religions which have unconsciously or consciously twisted the simple truths of G-d into the elaborate nonsense which darkens our world. There is nothing grotesque or disgusting about YHVH.

G-d's choice of Israel was redemptive and He wants to weave back the scattered and lost children of Adam and Eve back into the truth which our first ancestors possessed. Both generations of Israel had seen the mighty hand of YHVH perform mighty deeds as mighty Egypt was brought to her knees, watching their gods be defeated by the G-d of the Hebrews. The signs and wonders He showed His people was not so much an attempt to get them to believe, as it was a demonstration of His love and faithfulness. He is never a circus performer.

When Israel realizes that the only true G-d is the G-d that they are serving, it makes their devotion both humble and even a little joyful. YHVH is the only G-d and even though we have got no special status which would make us worthy of this love, He loves us and wants to lead us out of all and any forms of spiritual darkness. He wants us to shine like a salty beacon to the nations and even if it is not part of our mission to turn all the nations into Jews and absorb all the nations and generations of this world into Israel, we want to keep on proclaiming the truth that there is only one G-d and that He is our G-d.

The heathen may rage against us and mock us and try to pull us away from our G-d, but once we understand that there is only one G-d, getting pulled away from this G-d is the highest spiritual folly. Slightly over half of our world believes in the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but they do not all agree that He is the G-d of Israel, before He is the G-d of the nations. Jewish people have always engaged with pagans and have never been shy about our belief that there is only one G-d and that He is our G-d. This is not out of arrogance or out of some kind of spiritual racism, but it is part of the redemptive purposes of G-d for us to be a beacon and have all the world blessed in us and our truth about G-d.

When it comes to the divine nature of G-d, the Shema uses an interesting word: "Echad". Echad does not teach that there is more than one G-d, but it does say that our singular G-d is also a plural singularity and a composite unity. The triune nature of G-d is not something which

Hellenistic mysticism introduced into the early church. It is not something which the Babylonians taught. It has always been a part of who our G-d is and though the exact nature of this great mystery will not always be easy to understand, we need to understand that this is who G-d has always been and will never stop being. He has been Echad from the very beginning and this reality about G-d needs to remain how we understand who He is.

A belief in the trinity does not teach that there are really three gods somehow united in a single purpose, each somehow also unique from the other two. The Bible has never taught that G-d is "Yichad" (one and only one). It has always taught that G-d is "Echad" (composite unity or plural singularity). Talmudic Jewish people react negatively to the concept that G-d is a trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but this is what the Bible teaches consistently and persistently about the true nature of G-d.

Echad does not endorse the teaching that there are three gods, with one being more powerful than the lesser ones. It does not endorse the nonsensical mysticism which says that there have been multiple unique manifestations of G-d or that He continues to be manifest in strange and wonderful forms. He is not some universal force we can access and manipulate like the force of Star Wars, or the seven emanations (manifestations) of Jewish mysticism.

He is a person who has always existed as an "Echad" and this was a tough concept for Israel to learn. It is a tough concept for us to learn. But we must always distinguish between what the Bible teaches about G-d and how well we are able to understand the mysteries of G-d. References to the trinity of G-d are found throughout the Bible and this concept is not a pagan infestation of strange teachings which the early church allowed into its doctrines when they were finally articulated as the Apostles Creed. It has always been the consistent testimony of the Scriptures.

There have been many wild and woolly traditions and pagan beliefs which have too often infected the generational community of believers. Israel has also had its fair share of these theological intrusions, but a belief that our G-d is "Echad" and not "Yichad", does not fall into this category. G-d is who He says He is and He is who the Bible says He is. There are many features of G-d that are beyond our feeble ability to understand, and saying this is not a cop out.

I will defend what the Bible teaches, without trying to add or delete from the truth which this unique book teaches. There is only one G-d. There has always only been one G-d. This G-d has always been Echad and to believe in the plural singularity of G-d is not to slip into some kind of paganism.

On the plains of Moab, Moses introduces probably the most important declaration of Judaism and our entire, exclusive worship of Him needs to be a declaration of what His Word teaches. Hear o Israel (***shema Israel***), the L-RD is our G-d (***YHVH elohaynu***), the L-RD alone (***YHVH Echad***). And the rabbis have added: blessed be His glorious name whose Kingdom will last forever. We serve the only G-d. The gods of the nations are false. Israel is the people of G-d and all believers can become fellow citizens of the commonwealth of the prophets and the apostles, because the Gospel will always be to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.