

Passage: Ephesian 4:1-16

Our people realized that when Messiah comes, there will be big changes in Judaism, even as Messiah's message of love and forgiveness was to be carried to the ends of the earth. Messiah abolished nothing, but He fulfilled so much of what was presented symbolically in the Torah, the Prophets and the writings. The Torah should remain the immovable foundation of our faith, because everything which is written in the New Testament is firmly rooted in the Torah. In Messiah, there is no room for spiritual confusion of any kind.

Paul and the other writers of the New Testament frequently quote from the Old Testament and as I have said before, I will say gain. The New Testament was written to explain the wonder of the Messiah to Jewish believers and also to introduce the wonder of the Torah to Gentile believers. There is a harmony between all 66 books of this wonderful document we call our Bible and it is both our duty and our privilege to become familiar with its contents.

Our portion for today contains so much rich teaching and I recommend it to you for your study. Among its themes, two stand out: spiritual fullness and spiritual stability. There is really no spiritual shallow end in the Gospel and while many of us may have different callings, we are all called to both the fullness and the stability which Paul outlines in this portion.

It is a sad reality that too many believers do not walk in a manner which is worthy of our calling. Some communities are filled to the brim with infighting and Gossip. And too many believers seem to only pray when they are blessing their food, or when they are in dire need. Unless YHVH (Father Son and Holy Spirit) is both the solid foundation of our lives and the central focus of all that we do, we have become spiritually distracted and face two very real dangers.

On the one hand, the house of our faith can be slipping off the solid rock and may begin to sink into the sand of this fading world. On the other hand the garden of our life risks becoming choked, scorched and ravaged by the birds of doubt – instead of being filled with the marvellous life giving fruit of the Spirit. The works of the flesh cause too many unstable, immature believers to self destruct. This is not what we are called to.

We also have to be on our guard against any number of false teachings that want to roar through our lives and poison our faith. Given that believers and believing communities face so much resistance, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile, how do we avoid becoming pessimistic and negative? Sadly, I have known more believers who have faltered and stumbled, than I do those who have successfully faced trials and come through with flying colours. What kind of colours are you flying?

Paul had the same experience and along with warning believers about all the opposition they face, he also encouraged them by speaking of our spiritual potential in the protection and provision of G-d. My physical health has not be good or steady for several decades, but as long as my spiritual health holds, I remain a happy, contented camper. I intend to get my health back and start power walking and distance cycling again, but by the grace of G-d and some positive spiritual stubbornness (also known as perseverance), I have not lost my way spiritually as I continue to benefit from all that Messiah continues to do for me.

Spiritual harmony is really important to the Messiah, as is maintaining high moral standards, based on the Bible. Five helpers in this objective are listed as humility, gentleness, patience love and peace. How are these spiritual staples doing in your heart and life? They remain congregational staples for B'nai Chayim. How strong is our bond of peace as we relate to each other? We may have some very unfortunate grumpy troublemakers who wander through our shul, but through it all, the righteous core of our community will remain strongly linked together in the bond of peace. How is your bond of peace holding up?

Next, Paul launches into a sevenfold description of things that are “only”. He says that there is only one body – which we realize is made up of every generation of believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. As well, even in this dark and spiritually polluted world, truly, there is only one Spirit. For some reason, Paul does not talk here about the angels that G-d sends to look over us, but there is only one Holy Spirit. Are you letting G-d's Spirit fill you and enrich your life?

He moves on to point out that there is only one hope – everlasting life in Messiah's eternal kingdom. He says that this is our vocation and our calling. We are Heaven bound, spirit filled pilgrims, blazing a shining path as we joyfully walk the bumpy straight and narrow, over tall mountains and through deep valleys. Because I am heaven bound, it doesn't matter what the three creeps throw at me – you know the enemy, the world and the flesh. In Messiah our lives should always be full of peace, even in the midst of pain and chaos (and the pandemic).

There is also only one L-rd, our G-d, who was born of a virgin, died on the cross, and was buried, only to rise after three days and ascend back to the Father. It is He who dwells in our hearts by faith and who walks with us every step of the way, from the moment we invite Him into our hearts until that glorious day, where we either graduate out of these feeble bodies or are snatched out of them when He returns to set up His Kingdom in a new Heaven on a new earth.

He alone possesses divinity and there are no other gods beside Him or above Him. There is only one genuine faith, based on the Gospel story which is found throughout the pages of the Holy Bible. There are not numerous paths to G-d – there is only one, because Yeshua is the Way, the Truth and Life. There is no access to the Father except through Him.

Further, there is only one immersion (baptism), which is our ritual death to this world and our ritual resurrection as we wait for the world which is to come. Splashing or dunking babies is not the biblical model and if you have only had this kind of nonsense happen to you, speak to me and we will arrange to dunk you!

He finishes with a double statement about YHVH. There is only one G-d and the trinity does not teach three gods, but describes a unique plural singularity and the composite oneness (echad) of our G-d. The gods of the nations are false, as are the pernicious teachings of evolution which denies the reality of G-d. He does not need either our permission or our agreement to exist and not believing in Him leaves you both without any means of invisible support or any true meaning and purpose as you wander through this life.

G-d is infinitely more certain than death and taxes. The tumultuous seething and howling of the nations is less than a minuscule (microscopic) drop in G-d's unlimited bucket! He is the real reality and His is the true truth which nothing can shake or sully.

How does all of this apply to believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile? Upon the foundation of such an incredibly solid and immovable spirituality, each of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Messiah. This does not mean that some of us are more important than others, for all of us are of great worth to our Heavenly Father. Are you aware of how precious you are to G-d? How is the gift of Messiah's grace working in your heart and life? We all have such incredible spiritual potential in our Messiah and we need to put it to full use to get the full benefit out of it. Let's fill our lives with fullness!

To finish his description of our G-d and Father, Paul says that He is above all, He is among all and He is in all. There are four fancy theological terms which are used to describe all the wonder of who G-d is: omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful), omnipresent (everywhere) and He is immutable (forever unchanging). You know there are some pretty amazing techno-gadgets filling our world in this generation and now the sum total of human knowledge is doubling every few years, but it doesn't make no nevermind compared to the wonder and the fullness of the fathomless G-d we serve!

Paul goes on to describe the fivefold ministry which G-d has planted in our midst. There are first apostles (spiritual foremen with a clear picture of how to get things done in our ever changing world), then prophets (those who keep our eyes focused on the promises of G-d and who sometimes see far into the future. Encouragers who never give up), evangelists (those who answer questions and explain the truth of the Gospel and the Torah as they lead people to faith and keep them away from the lies of the world), pastors (shepherds who guide and protect the grumpy, stinky sheep and who would give their lives for them), and finally teachers (those who want to share their deep knowledge of the Word with us).

Now, some who say there is only a fourfold ministry – apostles, prophets, evangelists and teacher pastors, but G-d has placed excellent equippers in our midst so that we can joyfully and steadily grow and thrive on our journey through this life to our Father's Home in Glory.

In a very real sense we are all ministers to help one another reach the wonderful spiritual fullness we are called to reach in our wonderful Saviour and Messiah. Now there are some groups that preach spiritual perfection, which is a plateau where we cease to sin and can do no wrong. In the last days of the Roman Empire there was a cult where the people were divided into two groups: the initiated (initiate) and the illuminate (sinless enlightened ones).

The term illuminate is used in our world to falsely describe Jews and others who are trying to take over the world and who can prolong their lives by black magic. They do not exist and it was only a lie directed at the Jewish people in order to justify our destruction. Hitler and the Nazis believed it. If Jews really did run the world, it would be a better place, full of love and light! There is one Jew who is working to take over the world and we call Him the Messiah from Nazareth, but He will take things one step further. He will completely dissolve the entire cosmos as we know it and recreate it free of sin and death. And I say, the sooner the better!

While we wait, we are called to edify one another, so we can grow in faith and come to the full knowledge of Messiah. Paul even uses an amazing spiritual hyperbole (exaggeration) and says that all that G-d is doing in us and in our midst will one day bring us to the perfect stature of Messiah. Some cults teach that believers eventually come to share in the deity of G-d and are really just born again gods. This is a spiritual hyperbole which is describing a level of stability and maturity. Nothing more and certainly nothing less.

He brings this section to a close with a warning, so that we do not get the false impression that we will all be floating up to Glory on a rose coloured cloud of ease. Paul wants us to no longer be spiritual children who are lacking in strength and in insight. Some live their entire lives, floating and carried away like an aimless boat, caught in the carnal storms of this life with no peace, no roots and certainly no stability.

Now, these days, on line, on the TV and on the radio, there are professional deceivers and charlatans who want to empty your pockets and turn us all into mindless slaves of their incredible folly. They teach things that only they can understand and only they have dug up in the Scriptures. Joseph Smith (founder of the Mormons) and Charles Taze Russell (founder of the Jehovah's Witness) were some of the more modern spiritual phonies and they have led many astray. You are not allowed to question them or challenge them and even though they present great departures from Scriptural truth, they are still roaring around to make more converts among unsuspecting, unsteady and immature believers.

The imagery of the sea calls to mind that the life we are wandering through is only a safe place for those who are solidly founded in the truth of Messiah. We are then encouraged to keep on professing the truth of Messiah in love and not become distracted by the unwholesome rabbit trails which want to overthrow our faith and lead us away from the straight and narrow. We need to be filled with the fullness of the Messiah and remain fully equipped, walking in wisdom and love, focused on the Messiah and on His coming kingdom. Nothing less is worthy of our spiritual attention.

It should be our full time job to delve into the Word and grow in the grace and love of our Messiah. We cannot fail when our lives are focused on the wonder of the Gospel and the beauty of the Torah. There is so much depth in the Bible and so much marvellous content, that we should have no time for spiritual distractions of any kind.

There are two levels of maturity and fulfillment which Paul describes so eloquently: individual and corporate. You cannot have the one without the other if you are to be strong, balanced and effective in the Messiah. We cannot keep to ourselves and get our spiritual food second hand. Now, just a word to our live streamers (who should like and subscribe!).

Many of you live in places where there is no Messianic congregation within reach. We are glad to fill this gap for you, but we would encourage you to seek fellowship with Gentile believers who are sympathetic to our movement. I know why I belong to the Messianic movement. There are many in our midst who are Messianic Gentiles and both groups (Jews and Gentiles) are considered spiritual equals, walking together to fulfill our calling to be Torah observant, Gospel powered, festival driven believers.

I have friends who are not Messianic and I have even taught in a Gentile Bible College. I do not get scrappy with them and I have no chip on my shoulder. I want to shine and be salty, so that I can be one of the influences which will help them escape the doctrinal snare they live in.

I want to digest everything in my life by the power of the Gospel and the wonder of the Torah. I do not want to become spiritually distracted and I would never want this to happen to our community. Things have not been easy during the pandemic and I look forward to seeing many more of you in shul, when things settle down. We are called to fullness and to spiritual stability because there is no shallow end in the Messiah. Shabbat Shalom, campers.