

**Nitzavim**                      **You Are Standing**

**Torah:**                      Deut. 29:10 (9) -30:20

**Haftarah:**                Isaiah 61:10-63:9

**Brit Chadashah:**      John 15:1-11

This is the last Torah portion before Rosh Hashanah, which makes it the last regular portion of 5782. I want to briefly comment on the Torah Portion and I will leave the Prophetic Portion and the New Testament Portion to your own individual study. The main part of this sermon will combine the Torah Portion with an exploration of the Makzor (Fall Feasts' Liturgical Guide). One of the main features of the High Holy Days and Sukkoth is threefold. First, we examine the year that is now passing, to see what has been happening to us spiritually. Next, we do a personal spiritual inventory, so that we will see ourselves for who we are and better understand how we can heal and grow spiritually.

Lastly, we look towards the year which is to come, so that our hearts and lives are fully equipped for any new challenges which may come our way in 5783. This means making sure that the house of our Faith and Obedience stands solidly on the Word of G-d, as we send down roots even deeper into this marvellous document. This also means that we want to do some spiritual pruning so that the garden of our hearts and lives remain filled with the fruit of the Spirit and are not being choked by the works of the flesh.

It is a spiritually intense couple of weeks, but I find the time both refreshing and satisfying, especially because we celebrate the feasts from a Messianic Jewish perspective. It is another way of saying that we observe what the Bible teaches as we reestablish spiritual order in our hearts and lives, while we patiently await for Messiah's Kingdom to come.

Spiritual wholeness and spiritual stability is the place we want to live, both as individuals and as a community. We may be wounded next year, but we want to make sure we are healed from all the wounds we encountered in previous years so that we are not stuck in an ever growing weight of pain. This is a time of the year where we closely examine our spiritual health and make sure that we have a rich, balanced spiritual diet. Renew, repair and refocus because there is no such thing as standing still in the Messiah. In Him, you are either walking ahead or slipping behind. It is a great and joyful task to set straight paths for our wounded feet, as we boldly and joyfully walk the bumpy straight and narrow path to our home in glory.

I could add recycle as one of the functions of this special time, because going over the same ground makes sure that we are not beginning to wander or to lose our grip on the spiritual disciplines we are called to practice as disciples of our King. I have said it in the past, and I will say it now and I will most certainly say it in the future – there are five categories of spiritual disciplines we need to practice, so that no matter what comes our way, we will never crash and burn spiritually.

They are first Bible Study and prayer, which we must practice daily and constantly to remain healthy spiritually. Fellowship and worship are two essential group activities we really cannot do without. Sheep that live as loners are asking for the enemy to devour them. Lastly there is outreach where we respectfully engage in faith dialogues with those who need to come to faith. We need to avoid doing this intrusively or aggressively and that takes patience and wisdom, so that people we share with always want to come back for more.

As Moses draws to the end of his recitation of the Law and the covenant stipulations, he wants to stress that walking with YHVH is both essential and attainable. He has covered a lot of ground and as we approach his amazing concluding remarks, he wants to assure us that we have everything we need to know, to fully walk with YHVH, but there will always be things we don't know which we really do not need to know. The Word is not there to satisfy our curiosity and some thing will always remain a mystery.

One of my favourite verses is given in this portion:

***“The secret things belong to G-d, but the things which He has revealed belong to us and our children forever, so that we may put them into practice.”*** (Deut. 29:29)

I have an inquiring mind that is curious about any number of things. Someone once told me that I am full of extremely interesting things that rarely come in handy. I like watching Jeopardy because you have to have a firm grip of a wide spectrum of trivia to do well. There are some categories where my mind draws a blank, but I usually do as well, if not better, than most of the contestants as I answer over half of the questions.

YHVH is not afraid of what we may learn and there is no category of knowledge which He wants us to avoid. But we will always come to a wall where we can learn no more. You see the word for mystery in Koine Greek refers to ideas and concepts that will forever remain beyond our ability to fathom and if we tried to understand them, our human brain does not have a big enough hard drive. Our brain would explode from the effort.

It is said that the total amount of human knowledge doubles every two years or so, but there is one feature of this explosion of knowledge that is not talked about enough. What we learn brings with it more questions than it does provide answers. I have said and will continue to say that I have to accept by faith the things I will never be able to understand, but my faith must never contradict the things I do know. We live in an orderly universe which is governed by laws which cannot be violated, but the further we go into space, the further we realize we have to go. We should never become discouraged by the things we will never know because G-d is not hiding from us anything which we need to know.

Sometimes, even your beloved rabbi gets stumped and cannot always provide answer to every question that I am asked. When I reach to limit of what is knowable, I have to learn to accept the unknowable by faith. Human knowledge will keep on expanding at a rate that will be faster and faster, but the answers to the meaning of life are found in the Scriptures. We know where everything came from, why everything is here and where everything is headed. In a nut shell, we are here to establish a relationship with YHVH by faith and to learn to walk with Him by faith and obedience. His kingdom is coming and can never be hindered or slowed down and I would like to end our exploration of Deut. 29:29 with an old Jewish proverb. It is not so important to recognize the Messiah when He comes, it is important that He recognizes you.

Do not let your heart and mind become choked with the legends of any form of gnosticism and other forms of mysticism. If we have to know everything in order to walk with our Messiah, we will spend our lives going down endless rabbit holes, instead of walking peacefully and calmly on the bumpy straight and narrow (see Jeremiah 6:16). Now I want to introduce our Messianic Makzor and let you know what is in store for you as you join us for our High Holy Days and Sukkoth services.

I put together our Messianic Makzor over a number of years. I borrowed freely from a number of sources, but always made sure that our Messiah and His coming Kingdom were the focus of all that we intend to do. It contains several features that can be found in a Rabbinic Makzor, but I aimed for strength rather than length and did not want to fall in the trap of reciting long, redundant prayers which cover, in some cases, hundreds of pages.

You see, the High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) are pretty well the only times when the synagogues are full. You have to buy your seat and it can run to as high as \$800 per person, with a family rate that may run up to \$2,000. There are ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They are called the Days of Awe and people are trying to make up for a year of spiritual neglect and they believe that if you attend as much as you can and repent and pray at length and with great enthusiasm, you are guaranteed to have a good year. They believe that this is the only time of the year where shul attendance is required and that they can slack off for the rest of the year.

They make peace with people they have offended and try to be as nice as possible during these ten days. The services can last all day and it is a spiritual marathon that can be quite exhausting. There are nearly endless requirements for this special period of the year, many of which have been picked up from the nations among whom our people dwelt. Before our people went to Babylon, Rosh Hashanah was the Festival of Trumpets and not New Year's. In the Bible there is only one New Year's and it is the first day of the month of Nissan.

The Festival of Trumpets was always intended to be a recognition of both the coming judgment and the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. The way Talmudic, Pharisaic Jews observe the Festival of Trumpets still contains many references to judgment and the Kingship of YHVH, but it is neither the birthday of the world, nor the start of a new year. Rosh Hashanah comes at the middle point of the Festival cycle and there are two periods of seven days, one which begins on the day after Passover and the other where Sukkoth is celebrated for seven days plus one.

The rabbinic calendar does not record the actual number of years since creation. When the Gentiles came up with a calendar which measures time before and after the birth of the Messiah, the Rabbis wanted to go one better. They went to all the genealogies and counted the number of years beginning with the life of Adam forwards. However, no one knows or can know, how long our first parents lived in the Garden of Eden before they were excluded or how long a period of time there was between creation and the arrival of Adam and Eve.

As well, the genealogies are not intended to be a strict measurement of time. They are there to mark special events and to introduce people. So, as part of our celebrations, we will still recognize Rosh Hashanah as Jewish New Year's, but we will concentrate on the judgment which shall come when the last trumpet is sounded.

When I put together the Makzor, I made sure that no important detail was left out of both a traditional rabbinic observance and that which the Bible teaches. The Festivals are still a very important feature of what it means to walk with the Messiah, as we let our lives revolve around both the protection and provision of YHVH, and that according to His Word.

When I put together the Makzor, I also put together the schedule so that you can know what to expect from each service from a Messianic Jewish perspective.

The term the High Holy Day only refers to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur because they are mainly solemn observances where we take a serious look at ourselves and our faith and do some pretty heavy spiritual house keeping. Sukkoth really brings the annual Festival Cycle to a close and during the days of Sukkoth, we are instructed to have nothing but joy. The three festivals form three distinct groups of services, four for Rosh Hashanah, five for Yom Kippur and six for Sukkoth, not counting the intermediate days. There are two fairly long prayers: Avinu Malkeinu (our Father, our King) and Al Hayt (for these sins). In Pharisaic synagogues both of these prayers are read through several times, which I find to be quite redundant and unnecessarily repetitious.

We pray the Avinu Malkeinu in three separate parts, one part on each of the first three services of Rosh Hashanah. Besides introducing the Ten Days of Repentance, we also perform two special ceremonies. On Erev Rosh Hashanah, we recite Hatarat Nedarim (release from all vows), where we turn over all unfinished spiritual business to YHVH, so we can face the coming year with no debilitating baggage. We also recite a solemn prayer Unetane Tokef (let us acclaim) and read the thirteen attributes which describe how merciful and just YHVH is. We read the first portion of the Daily Standing Prayer (Shemoneh Esrei)

On Rosh Hashanah morning, just after we recite the second Avinu Malkeinu and the second Shemoneh Esrei, we deal with the Akedah (binding of Isaac). Then we read verses which, first describe the sovereignty of G-d (Malchuyot), then verses about our duty to remember what YHVH has done for us (Zichronot). Finally, we recite verses which speak of the coming judgment of YHVH (Shofarot). At the end of the morning service we sound the shofar one hundred times.

On the Rosh Hashanah evening service, we recite both the third Avinu Malkeinu, along with the third (final) portion of the Shemoneh Esrei. We sound the trump again one hundred times. We perform Tashlikh (casting off) at the end of the Rosh Hashanah evening service. We sign over our sins to YHVH and then we cast them off. Actually I bring a shredder and we shred the certificate and if anybody wants to take their sins back, they have to find the shreds of their certificate and glue them back together.

We also bring sliced apples and honey (and cheese) to the Rosh Hashanah service as a sign that we will have a sweet new year. We also greet one another in Hebrew, with a slight difference. Instead of saying: "Happy New Year, may you be inscribed for a good year". We say Happy New Year because we are inscribed [in the Lambs Book of Life] – Shana Tovah ki nitchtavenu.

The last service for Rosh Hashanah is a feast which is held after our Shabbat Shuvah (Sabbath of return or repentance) service. We are celebrating both the New Year and the fact that we have been forgiven and cleansed for one more year.

Ten days after Rosh Hashanah, comes our five services for Yom Kippur. On the eve of Yom Kippur, Kol Nidre (for these vows) is chanted in memory of the Jews who were forced to become Catholic, but secretly remained Jewish. We also recite the Al Hayt (for these sins) twice, preceded by passages adapted from the Art Scroll Prayer Book. We also recite the Shema and say the Lord's Prayer in English and in Hebrew. The Al Hayt prayer is recited in seven sections both on Erev Yom Kippur and during our Yom Kippur morning service.

We will also deal with the Avodah, which speaks of the High Priest's annual entrance into the Holy of Holies both to sanctify the people and the sacred furniture. This was the only time anybody went behind the veil and it was believed that as long as he came out alive, the sins of the people were still going to be forgiven. This is a legend which is not taught in the Bible.

Next, on Yom Kippur afternoon, we examine various calls to repentance. We also recite the Shema and read Tefillat Hatalmidim. The main part of the service is an examination of the Book of Jonah, which is one of the best examples of radical repentance in the Bible.

During the Yom Kippur evening service we hold the only Yizkor (memorial) service in the evening and recite the full Kaddish (Mourner's Prayer). We recite the Shema and the Disciple's Prayer. We also look at a special Torah portion where repentance and holiness are discussed (Leviticus 19:1-18). We also read and discuss verses from the Beatitudes (Matthew 5, 6, 7). We will also discuss the incident of the woman caught in adultery whom the Pharisees wanted Yeshua to order that she be stoned. A final shofar blast is sounded and the fast is declared over.

On Yom Kippur, some of us will fast from sunset to sunset and only drink water. Other's will have a partial fast for health reasons. People who are sick, pregnant or breast feeding ladies are not required to fast. Young children are also excluded from the need to fast. Again, we are not bound by the regulations from the Talmud and from the Pharisaic rabbis. We want to have a flexible, biblical approach to Yom Kippur and to all the other services which are held during the Fall Festivals.

The Yom Kippur evening service brings the High Holy Days to a close. They are also called the Days of Awe. I only included traditional elements which reflected biblical content and I integrated frequent references to our blessed Messiah. During these special days, we are not trying to make up for a year of spiritual neglect or as a means to ensure that we will have a good year, when the High Holy Days are over. This is a rabbinic superstition where people try and bargain with G-d, instead of renewing their commitment to walk with Him according to His Word every day during the coming new year.

Spirituality should never be seen as a way to control G-d or to oblige Him to do what we want Him to. He is a person, not a force that we can learn to control for our own uses. We want to learn to live daily under His control, so that His protection and provision affects our whole lives. There is no room in the Torah or in the Gospel for part-time or seasonal believers, who live one way during the Fall Feasts and another way for the rest of the year.

In main line Gentile churches, the usually empty churches are crowded at least twice a year. First on Christmas Eve, then on Easter Sunday. G-d does not want us to make Him just a part of our lives. He wants us to give Him our lives and to learn to walk according to the stipulations of His Word in every part of our lives. We need to live in the world every day how we live in shul and during any festival times. Our faith is not something we can shut off and turn on at our discretion.

We need to live lives which both reflect the wonder of the G-d we believe in and also which speak of how He wants us to live as we wander through this darkening world on our way home to our Father's House in Glory. Before he drank too much beer and married a nun, Luther had some good things to say. He said believers should live every day as if Messiah were crucified yesterday, risen today and coming back tomorrow. This will always be our objective.

Sukkoth is one of the three pilgrimage festivals where the people brought the tithes of their agricultural increase and turned them over to the High Priest at the Tabernacle. The other two are First Fruits and Pentecost. However, every third year these tithes were turned over in their entirety to the Levites, the widows, the orphans and the strangers who dwelt among them. Tithing was never abolished and we are still required to bring a tenth of our increase and give it to the shul for the upkeep of the shul and our community. It is because of the goodness of G-d that we have any increase and when we hold it back and do not tithe, we are actually robbing G-d. Those who preach the Gospel are told to live off the Gospel. I am not in it for the money, but I do have bills to pay and I always tithe. In the eyes of our Messiah, ten percent of a little is the same as ten percent of a lot. We do not all give the same amount, but we should all be giving the same portion.

I will not be doing what most synagogues do. When you seek out membership in traditional, Rabbinic shuls, you are required to submit your income tax return from the previous year, so you can be told how much money to give. This has been one of the leanest summers on record for the finances of our shul and we are behind several pay checks for our beloved rabbi. I have always said that paying the rent and our insurance must always be done before I am paid. Patti and I are not in a good financial position right now and if it were not for our pensions, we would not be able to make it and continue our ministry in the shul.

We are trusting the Messiah and in His Word, it says that unless YHVH is building a house, those who build, build in vain. The same goes for those who are standing guard (P. 127:1). I am not kept awake at night by this situation because we trust the L-rd and we know that somehow He will come through. We love all of you and each of you and trust that you feel the same and have the same level of trust in YHVH.

In a Jewish community, no one goes hungry unless everyone goes hungry and people take care of each other, even in a hostile world that hates us. We will never hate back. We will trust the Messiah and wait on Him for our deliverance. I did not intend to go here, but it is part of the meaning for the pilgrimage festivals and that includes Sukkoth. Some time after Yom Kippur, we will put up the same big tent in our back yard as we had last year.

Our first three Sukkoth services will be held in the Sukkah tent. We should try and bring lemons and snacks. I will provide branches for waving. On Shabbat Sukkoth, October 15<sup>th</sup> we will have an Oneg (feast) after our service, which will be in the building.

Twice a day, every day during the week of Sukkoth, I invite you to come into the Sukkah and celebrate with great joy (from 3-5 pm and from 7-9 pm. I have not yet been able to find a stove and if we do not have enough heaters, please bring blankets and dress warmly. If it gets to cold, we will just poke our heads into the Sukkah and have our service inside our home.

The last two day of Sukkoth, Hoshana Raba (Great salvation) and Shemeni Atzeret (the Eighth Day) will also be held in the Sukkah and again, if it gets too cold, we will just poke our heads into the Sukkah and go inside for our service.

The festivals end with Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in the Torah), on October 22 which will be held in the sanctuary. We will roll back our scroll and dance it round the sanctuary seven times. We will also read special verses in as many languages as we can. It will be an amazing busy time. Join us for as many services as you are able. Don't miss out!