

6 Iyar, 5775 (24/04/15) **Preparing to Receive the Spirit of Grace:** J. M. Terrett

Our Spiritual Coach

Tazria/Metzorah She Bears Seed/Infected One Quarantine and Hygiene

Torah: Lev. 12:1-13:59/14:1-15:33

These two portions are not easy to handle because they seem to deal with infections and conditions which are no longer much of a problem with us in our modern world. However, I would like to make several observations to help us learn from the eternal Word, even when it deals with the nitty-gritty practical details of our lives. First of all, before the advent of more sophisticated medicines, we are introduced to two medical concepts which still serve us well today: quarantine and basic hygiene. When a woman gives birth she takes between just over a month to just over two months to recover before she tries to enter the tent of meeting and dedicate the new child before the L-rd.

This would give her time to heal and it would give the child time to thrive before becoming exposed to whatever colds or other infections might be going through the community, which was a good idea; just a point of observation. She waited 33 days for a boy and 66 days for a girl, not because of any perceived gender superiority or inferiority, but in recognition that a girl would eventually encounter her monthlies, the mother is going through a pre-emptive purification for her daughter - nothing more, nothing less.

After giving birth and during her monthlies, a woman's immune system is in recovery and some form of quarantine is a protective measure. What follows is a rather detailed guide for the Levites to distinguish between a contagious form of skin condition and a non-infectious skin condition. When the skin condition was deemed contagious, the person was isolated for seven days to give it time to be healed - to seek the L-rd for His healing touch as well. Once the condition was deemed healed (pure), the person had to wash their clothes, to prevent any possibility of re-infection.

Throughout these two portions, there is no indication that our people thought that disease was caused by vapours or by spirits - we are given the impression that disease is part of what happens when a large group of people live together and outsiders come in with their infections and besides whatever basic medicines were used (oil for the outside and wine for the inside, along with various herbs like hyssop), hygiene and quarantine were practised, without any blame or guilt being placed on the sick person.

Lastly, if the person was struck with leprosy, they had to live in a permanent form of quarantine, but their needs were provided for until they were delivered from their sickness even if it took them their whole lives. The question of healing is not dealt with here directly, except to say that in some situations, people were not healed, but they were still taken care of by the community with two very practical strategies: hygiene and quarantine.

This even applied to a mouldy piece of clothing and to a mouldy house and the two principles (hygiene and quarantine) are referred to in Lev. 15:31 at the end of the second portion: ***You shall separate the Children of Israel from their impurities, for fear that they should die because of their impurities if they should soil My tabernacle which is in the midst of***

them.

Biblical spirituality is practical and the kind of purity we are called to pursue is both spiritual and physical, which is really quite sophisticated for this time so long ago.

Haftarah: 2 Kings 4:42-5:19a/2 Kings 7:7:3-20

The two prophetic portions deal with stories about leprosy with a twist. The first story is preceded by a multiplying of bread by the prophet Elisha, which also occurred with our Messiah during His earthly ministry. Then you have the story of the healing of the war leader of one of Israel's enemies who ends up acknowledging that there is no god but the G-d of Israel. From the outset, G-d has been the G-d of the nations and causes His sunshine to shine on the righteous and upon the wicked, in order to draw all peoples to Himself.

The second story deals with how, about a generation later, the L-rd lifted the siege of Samaria by scaring these same Syrian enemies into a panic so that they fled and left all their supplies behind them. This was discovered by four lepers who decided that they would be chastised if they did not share the good news with the people who were suffering in the city. The prophet Elisha predicted the lifting of the siege by the L-rd and one of the officers of the king who doubted the L-rd paid with his life by being trampled by the joyful, desperate people who came to the abandoned camp to get food.

G-d will always provide a way of escape for His people and no situation or enemy is capable of standing in the way of His purposes, even if it takes those in quarantine to break the good news to us.

Brit Chadashah: Luke 7:18-35/Matt. 23:16-24:2, 30, 31

The first New Testament passage deals with the testimony which John the Baptist received from the Messiah - which included people being healed from leprosy, being delivered from demons and blindness as the Good News was being proclaimed to the poor. Then the ministry of this unique prophet is outlined. He is called by the Messiah the Elijah who was to come and the people neither received John's ministry nor that of the Messiah, because they did not look at the positive results of both outreaches and just found fault because they still wanted to tell G-d how to do things.

The second New Testament passage deals with the woes which our L-rd pronounced against the generation who had their own compromised spiritual agenda and were more concerned with appearances than they were with spiritual realities. We need to focus on the L-rd's agenda in our lives, especially when that includes such strategies as hygiene and quarantine and believing that He is greater than all our enemies and will always meet our needs.

(Gillian p. 139) **Ps. 106, 120** Jewish Hero: Naaman the Syrian

Sermon: Passage: Acts 1:8; 4:31: ***But you shall receive a power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea, in Samaria even to the ends of the earth. And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they proclaimed the Word of G-d with boldness.***

In order to understand how the Holy Spirit works we need to both look at how He worked in the Old Testament (Tenach) and how He worked in the New Testament. He anointed people and filled people; especially the prophets and we have the most detailed description of how the Spirit worked in the lives of Elijah and Elisha.

When we move to the New Testament, we see the power which was evident in the prophets have its fullest manifestation in the life of our Messiah and there is not a change in how the Spirit works, there is just an added role. You see when our Messiah walked among us, the disciples recognized His voice and rejoiced in both His teachings and in the signs and wonders which he performed.

However, He could only be in one place at once and yet He called His disciples to take His message to the ends of the earth and promises to be with us daily throughout the process. The added role which the Spirit undertakes is to bring the presence of our resurrected and ascended Messiah into our hearts and lives as we go to the ends of the earth and He will continue to do this until the end of the age.

We need to seek to continually be filled and guided by the L-rd through His Spirit and the aspects of this guiding which I want to deal with this morning are threefold. The Spirit warns, convicts and arms believers as He brings the presence of our Messiah into our lives and our main point of access to this presence is in prayer.

Let us deal first with the warning aspect of the Spirit. Throughout his travels Paul was warned by the Spirit about events and troubles which would come his way. This does not mean that we will see every problem coming or that we will always stay one step ahead of events as they come into our lives. What it does mean is that our Messiah will vet all the experiences which are allowed to come into our lives, be they ever so good or ever so traumatic.

So instead of feeling ambushed or panicked, we need to look for His way of escape or His duty which will always be attached to everything which happens to us in our walk with the King.

The major source of warning will always be the Scriptures, but He may also speak directly to our hearts or use circumstances which we will recognize as Him speaking to us and guiding us. There is a learning curve in this process and the challenge will always be to discern whether it is His voice we are hearing or our own (or someone else's).

In their first encounter with the resurrected L-rd, the apostles recognized His voice when their hearts burned within them as they considered the Scriptures which He brought to their attention. There needs to be an element of recognition whenever we receive a warning or a word and this element must be firmly based in the Scriptures and not in personal conjecture which does not line up with the Scriptures.

In my experience, I have encountered many people who exercised a valid prophetic ministry and others who only thought they did and the difference may not be easily discerned at first, but by their fruit you shall know them. Again let me remind you of a principle I have already spoken with you about. G-d will speak to our hearts first and not use people to tell us things which He has not been dealing with us on first.

This means that any prophetic warning we may receive will always have as its objective to focus our attention on the L-rd and the Scriptures and not on the personality or authority of the prophet. False prophets are a problem in our world today because there is a misconception about the role of a prophet.

The prophet will always second and confirm the Word and never replace it and a prophet will never try to supplant our need to receive personal guidance directly from the L-rd. This tendency to supplant our direct personal guidance has been called directional prophecy and it is a subtle or a direct attempt to become the source of a person's inspiration and make them feel that they cannot hear directly from the L-rd without the person claiming to be a prophet.

The Spirit brings the presence of the L-rd to the community of believers and teaches us to recognize His voice and to avoid other, lesser sources, which may seek to become spiritual brokers when none are necessary and this leads us to our second point - the conviction of the Spirit, which either stops us when we are on a path we should not take or encourages us to take a path we should be taking.

Again conviction has to be primarily in response to the moral and spiritual imperatives of the Scriptures in a relationship or growing intimacy with the Messiah because there will always be a number of heart issues the L-rd will be working with us on.

These issues may be major or minor, but the conviction of the L-rd will always focus on what He is saying to us in our hearts, both as individuals and as a community and this conviction will be used by Him to help us grow in strength and freedom as it is described in His Word.

There are always areas in which we can improve, but there are also areas which other people would wish we would improve, not so as to move closer to the L-rd, but mainly to move us under the control of their preferences and this is not authentic conviction.

Being picky and hard to please, even when we do it with a smile and claim we are doing it for other people's good, is not a source of authentic spiritual conviction, because it has nothing to do with biblical holiness.

There are those in our midst who may be doing things they should not be doing and others who may not be doing things which they ought to be doing, but the conviction to change should come from the L-rd and not from people who want everyone to walk to the sound of their personal drum.

Generally it can be discerned by distinguishing between the biblical principle in question and the specific activity that is being criticized. People often mistake the role of a prophet by looking at those who railed against the great sin of the people of G-d who were engaging in gross idolatry and gross immorality and they ignore the tender words of love and concern. It is the same with the conviction of the Spirit. He does not want to bully us into submission so that we are unable to move or think without feeling bad or condemned.

He wants us to grow in our conviction that walking with the L-rd is the good path, full of joy and abundance and freedom and healing. As we learn to discern the voice of our Messiah, we understand that the voice of the Spirit is this same voice and He wants to coach us to

victory, confidence and strength as we increase our grasp of His Word and learn to recognize His voice.

This leads me to the last point of His coaching - the Spirit wants to arm us and His principal weapon is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of G-d. He wants us to learn to conduct our lives in response to the principles of the Word and to use this Word to slice through the lies of the flesh, the world and the enemy and also to learn the art of spiritual warfare.

When we rightly handle or dispense the Word of truth, our lives will be filled with truth and our hearts will burn within us as the coach moves us to new challenges and victories and helps us to recover from those which we have not yet been able to conquer.

It is a growing dialogue with our Lord through His Spirit, where He, the Messiah comes to us as personally and as mightily as He came to His apostles when He walked among us. In the process, we learn to have confidence in His voice when He warns us and when He chooses not to warn us because we understand our lives to be vehicles for us to express our faith and obedience in Him through His Word.

As we approach Shavuot and our annual celebration of the giving of the Spirit and the Word, we want to learn to discern how the Spirit works, when He warns, when He convicts and when He arms us. He wants us to learn to draw close to Him and His Word and to avoid all the pitfalls and snares which will claim to be from Him, but which do not sound right and which do not confirm what He is already saying to us and what He is already working on us with, because He wants to be our primary source of spiritual authority, strength and provision, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

How is the voice of our blessed Messiah doing in your life? In our life as a community? As we cycle through the festivals every year, what is He saying to us and how does He want us to relate to the changes and stages we need to go through as we walk with Him on our way to our Father's Home in Glory?

The summer is nearly upon us and the fall is not far behind. We are seeing new people come into our midst and we are seeing new opportunities for ministry open up before us. This will not be without challenges and even setbacks and even attacks and snares, but if we are learning to listen to His voice through His Spirit and through His Word, we will not fall prey to those who would prey on us and diminish or confuse our spirituality.

We are a Messianic community of Jews and Gentiles exploring a spiritual lifestyle from a Messianic perspective with lots of challenges and with a fair bit of spiritual resistance. Our goal, as we prepare for another Shavuot is to become more adept at letting our Coach be the voice we listen to and the voice we recognize amidst all the influences and voices which will crowd in and try and pull us into so many directions which are not the ones our King is working on in our lives.

Our Divine Coach wants us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Discerning the authentic voice of His Spirit through His Word in our lives is one spiritual discipline He will work on with us again and again until it becomes and remains second nature.

The L-rd wants us to first come to Him and find the salvation He so freely offers. Then He

wants to wean us away from the false influences of the world, the flesh and the enemy as He teaches us to see the world through the eyes of His Word. Related to this, He wants us to learn to discern the voices of the various forms of competing, infected spirituality which we will encounter in some of the strangest places as we develop and maintain a healthy spiritual immune system and make decisions based on what He is saying to us in our hearts through His Word so that we do not begin to lose our way in a world which is neither friendly to His voice or to His Word and which is bent on our spiritual destruction as we move closer to the end of the World and the coming of His glorious kingdom.

How are you doing with His coaching style in your life? What kind of relationship do you have with His Word? Are you listening to His warnings and are you responding to His convicting in your life? Are you letting Him arm you so that you win and overcome?

Are you really aware of what He wants to do in your life or are you too busy listening to all the other voices who want your attention so that you are not sure where you stand in His kingdom?

His Spirit of grace is on our side and brings His presence into our hearts and lives, no matter where we are or what is happening or not happening in our lives, because as long as He is happening in our lives through His Spirit and by His Word, we are in great shape.

What shape are you in?

Let's pray.