

11 Cheshvan 5776 (24/10/15) **Finding Our Place: Belonging and Membership** J. M. Terrett

Lech Lecha

Go Forth Yourself

Walking By Faith

Torah: Gen. 12:1-17:26

- (1) 12:2, 3 (Great nation, all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you)
- (2) 13:6 (as numerous as the dust of the earth)
- (3) 15:6 (believed and it was imputed as righteousness)
- (4) 17:27 (all members of the household were circumcised)

Haftarah: Is. 40:27-41:16

- (5) 40:31 (wings of eagles, run and walk not grow tired or faint)
- (6) 41:14 (do not fear worm of Jacob, feeble remainder of Israel)

Brit Chadashah: Romans 4:1-25

- (7) 4:11, 12 (father of both uncircumcised and of the circumcised)

Abraham was old when he was given the promises and for the first ten years of his time in Canaan, nothing much happened towards these being fulfilled, except the confirmation of the promises, both by vision and by oath. There were also complications he had to deal with as he waited for the promises (famine and time in Egypt and potential loss of Sarah, rescuing Lot, the birth of Ishmael, his time among the Philistines). We have to learn do deal with complications in our lives as we wait for His promises to be fulfilled in our lives.

(Sherri p. 139) **Ps. 110** Jewish Hero: Judah Quarterly Meeting

Sermon: **Finding Our Place: Belonging and Membership**

As we come to another quarterly meeting, where we will be giving updates about the progress of our community, I want to talk to you this morning about a very important aspect of our spiritual identity: belonging and membership.

You have often heard me speak out about our need to have both a healthy grasp of our personal relationship with the L-rd and a healthy grasp of our corporate relationship. This corporate relationship has a triple feature which is an exciting part of our spiritual identity. We are first part of our local community and this aspect of our spiritual identity means becoming involved in all aspects of the life of this community, both in lending our aid and in receiving help as part of an extended family of believers.

Next we are also part of the worldwide community of believers, both Jewish and Gentile as, again, we both lend support and receive support from this global spiritual enterprise which is reaching out to the world all over the globe. This link crosses language and cultural and racial barriers, as well as age and gender barriers. Despite all the attacks on our faith and the challenges we are facing in our modern world, we are seeing people coming to faith in unprecedented numbers, especially among our Jewish people.

The third aspect of our corporate spiritual identity is spoken of eloquently in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrews – we are part of the generational body of our Messiah, along with believers of all ages, beginning with Abel and extending to the last baby who is

conceived before the return of our blessed Messiah. Hebrews calls it a great cloud of witnesses and the Book of Revelation describes it as a mighty crowd of people from all nations and languages which extends into the myriads of myriads. So that no matter what is happening in our local community or to our generation of believers, be it ever so good or ever so bad, we are part of the greatest enterprise this world has ever seen – one which is so beautiful that it is described as an enormous golden city with the heavenly temple in its midst.

So you see, we are special people with a special destiny and our personal link with our Messiah comes with this triple corporate spiritual identity whose benefits have the potential to enrich our lives repeatedly and continuously as we grow personally and corporately in our Saviour and Lord. Our quarterly meetings are designed to help us become aware of all that is going on in our community and one of the privileges of this community involvement is membership.

When we founded the community over a decade ago, we put together a fairly comprehensive constitution to help govern both what we believe and how we operate and one of the provisions of this document is membership and all of the remarks which I have made this morning about our corporate spiritual identity were intended to introduce this amazing feature of what it means to be connected to our local community of believers.

For the last several years of our community, we have not maintained an official list of members and I want to let you know that our leadership is coming up with membership procedures from the constitution in order to have a list of people to draw from as our various ministries and departments grow and mature. This does not mean that we are forming an exclusive club which people have to belong to before they are able to participate in the life of our congregation – nor does it mean we are forming some kind of secret society with special handshakes and elaborate costumes, although I wouldn't mind riding around on fancy motorbikes, but I am not sure about the hats which the Shriners wear.

Membership is designed to give us a stable group of volunteers with various giftings who agree with our beliefs and the kind and level of spirituality which we promote and which we can draw from to participate in and give leadership to the life of our growing, dynamic community. The Messianic Movement is a fairly particular group of believers and not everybody is called to live our particular kind of spirituality, but as we grow and mature, we want to identify our regular supporters and give people as big a share in the ministry of this congregation as they are able and willing to engage in.

Over the years we have seen many people come and many people go and it is with great joy that we watch our children grow to adulthood and learn to follow in our footsteps of faith. You see many of our visitors come to see what we are all about and we want to challenge them to see if this is the particular spiritual context which they are called to in our fast paced, quickly changing world. Finding where we belong spiritually is one key to living a life which matters.

Our community has a lot to offer, both in terms of training and ministry and coming up with a list of members will help us gauge how many people we have to fill the ranks of our expanding ministries, from those who help us set up and welcome visitors, to those who help us with our children and young people, to those who join the worship team, the leadership team and who will even help with the teaching ministry of the shul. We do not want to overload anyone, we want to provide a context where people can find their place of ministry in

ways which are suited to their gifting and their temperament.

Probably the biggest area we want to work on involves sharing the liturgy and the teaching which are so vital to our spiritual nourishment and growth. We already have a group of people leading in the Siddur readings and we would like to see people leading in the Siddur chants, both during the Siddur service and also during the Torah service. We would like to see various people provide Torah meditations and carry the Torah around the congregation. I would even like to have a group of people I could call upon to preach when I have to be out of town for a variety of reasons. I have always said that ministry is a position and not a possession and coming up with a list of members is a step in this direction.

Who can become a member and what are its privileges and the responsibilities?

Anyone who agrees with our statement of faith and who has been regularly attending the shul for three months is eligible for membership. There is a meeting or two with the congregational leadership to go over the constitution and discuss how the various ministries of our community function. This is coupled with a willingness to serve in the life of our community according to individual interests and abilities. We also want our members to understand the festival cycle and the Torah reading cycle and to grow in their ability to participate in the Siddur portions of our services.

We reach a community of some 70 or 80 people, of whom about half are regular attenders and while we understand that life events may prevent even members from always attending regularly, we want to build and strengthen a core group who will help drive our ministry and help it to thrive. Community members who do not feel ready for membership will still be welcome to attend and to participate in the life of our congregation because we want membership to be seen as another way to be connected and not as a way of excluding some while including others. We want to be as inclusive as possible in our biblical context.

We want to strengthen and deepen our connection to Messianic Judaism, both as Jews and Gentiles and give willing and able people more opportunities for involvement. And probably the only stipulation which membership limits this involvement is in the area of voting at congregational meetings, which are part of the decision making process of our community.

Do we really need membership to function as a dynamic, growing community? To answer this, turn with me to two short passages in the Epistle of First Corinthians, chapter 14, verses 33 and 40: for G-d is not a god of disorder but of peace. But all things should be done decently and in order.

Paul had to deal with a very unruly community of believers who did not deal well with either the moral or spiritual issues in their midst and who were beginning to resemble the pagan culture out which they had been saved. Every community has to decide how things will be done in all aspects of the life of this special group of people and especially in the areas of discipline and orderliness in worship. Every community needs a defined leadership and both in accordance with the stipulations of the country and the province in which we live and in order to maintain a level playing field for everyone in our community, we came up with a constitution.

Along with our vision statement, this document is a means for us to let people know who we

are and how we operate so that all things are done decently and in order, peacefully and without disorder. One of the constitutional means of allowing this to function well is membership. It is also a means to increase our connectedness, both to each other and also to the global body of believers – along with the great cloud of witnesses who have also done their time as pilgrims and wanderers and which task we want to do our best to succeed at fulfilling.

Now that your rabbi is feeling better and now that our leadership is wanting to make solid, stable progress as a growing community, we want to introduce membership as a way of recognizing the core of those whose efforts help our shul to function and whose efforts are also helping it to grow and remain a safe, dynamic place where a group of diverse, gifted people fit together in the bonds of fellowship and love and mutual respect and admiration. We also want to have the means to be able to plan ahead and know who we can count on as we introduce new endeavours and strengthen those we are already engaged in.

Are you in a dynamic personal relationship with our Saviour and Messiah?

Are you in a dynamic corporate relationship with the body of our Messiah – locally, globally and generationally?

Will you prayerfully consider membership as a means of helping our community grow and stabilize and will you pray for our leadership and our ministries, that we may all do our best to successfully fulfil our special calling in our local setting? We want to do this as our part of the global and generational progress of the Gospel before that awesome event we are all so anxious to see – the Return of our King to establish His eternal Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Join us after the service for our nosh and our belated quarterly meeting. It is indeed an exciting time to be serving the L-rd and B'nai Chayim is an exciting place to serve the L-rd as we find our place and grow in our connectedness and our belonging.

Let's pray.