

30 Kislev, 5776 (12/12/15) **Shabbat Chanukah: Living For the Biggest Issues** J. M. Terrett

Miketz **At The End Of** **When Things Finally Start To Come Together**

Torah: Genesis 41:1-44:17

Haftarah: (I Kings 3:15-4:1; Zech. 2:14-4:7; 1 Sam. 20:18-42 [Is. 66:1-24])

Brit Chadashah: Matt. 27:15-46

(Jack p. 159) **Jewish Hero:** Zipporah **Torah Carrier:** (Destiny)

L-rd's Table **Chanukah Oneg** **Seventh Candle**

Torah Meditation:

Today is both Shabbat Chanukah and the last day of the month of Kislev, so the prophetic readings are altered to reflect these calendar concerns. I have listed all four of the readings, though the one from I Kings is usually dropped and the one from Zechariah is usually read in conjunction with the one which announces the new moon (I Samuel) and the one which is read on the new moon. As we prepare to have various members of the congregation share in presenting Torah meditations, we need to understand the degree of flexibility we can exercise when the readings become a little complicated.

The festival of Chanukah is a celebration of light a very dark time in Jewish history and I will deal with in in my sermon. The new moon is also a time of reflection in Judaism when our people consider redemption and the coming Messianic Kingdom. We will deal more with this when we celebrate the L-rd's Table. This is because as Messianic Jews and Gentiles we celebrate the redemption which our Messiah won for us on the cross and we look forward to His coming Kingdom, when all abominations shall cease and the New Heavens and the New Earth will become the reality where we shall dwell forever.

In the meantime, I want to talk to you about the Torah portion where things suddenly begin to turn around for Joseph and the visions and dreams he had as a young person begin to be fulfilled. Let me first speak about the fulfilment of visions and dreams. Most often dreams are our mind sorting things out in our lives and they are not often messages from G-d which we will see fulfilled in our lives. Joseph was a prophet who did not understand why he was dreaming and having visions and when they came, they had very little to do with his life at that time.

He shared his dreams and visions and in a strange way, the hostility of his brothers contributed to their fulfilment. The House of Israel was becoming a nation and the covenant was now something which was passed on through the entire community and not just through one important individual. It always had two parts which first concerned becoming a great nation in the land of promise and then becoming a source of blessing to all nations. It was time for the Children of Israel to become a great nation and two of Jacobs sons had a hand in this shifting of gears.

First Judah helped to get Joseph out of the reach of his vengeful, jealous brothers.

Next Joseph was being positioned to provide a safe place for his people at a crisis time in their lives. Among the Talmudic shuls there is much discussion of the nature of the Messiah and many feel that there are actually two Messiahs: Ben Joseph (who suffers) and Ben David

who comes in glory. They feel that there are two Messiahs who each come once. They feel that the suffering of the Jewish people makes them sort of a corporate Ben Joseph and then when Messiah comes, their suffering will end and His Kingdom shall reign.

They feel that there are two Messiahs, one to suffer and one to come in glory. From the Scriptures, we understand that there is only one Messiah, who came first to suffer and who will one day return in Glory

When we read the passage, we see that the suffering of Joseph was strategic and nothing like either the suffering of the true Messiah on the cross, or like the incredible veil of tears our people have walked through over the centuries. Joseph is neither a Messiah, nor a patriarch. He was a prophet who was positioned through his betrayal to both save the country of Egypt from extinction and to rescue his own people and give them a safe place to grow into a mighty nation.

He was sold as a slave, falsely accused of sexual misconduct and then forgotten by the court officials he helped when they had dreams they could not understand. However, he continued to wait on the Lord and after a long period of obscurity, when Pharaoh had a dream, he was ready to step in and let the ruler know what it was all about. When we have dreams and visions, we need to be careful to seek the Lord through His Word, so that we can receive a valid interpretation, without seeking to make dreams and visions our principle way of understanding the world.

When they come, we need to welcome them and understand that they will have as their objective to guide us towards the purposes of God through His Word. This is what Joseph did and when things began to turn around for him, he saw that his dreams and visions were not false or presumptuous. They were fulfilled under the hand of God and now he was going to both bless the land of Egypt (and other lands whose people came to purchase grain) and also bless his own community as it grew into a mighty nation of twelve (thirteen) tribes.

He manoeuvres his brothers into a position where they would have to come clean with their father about what they had done, but he also came to see it as the hand of God, so he bore them no ill will as they prepared to dine on humble pie. There was also Jacob to consider. He was an old man, settled in Canaan who wanted to spend his remaining days watching his grandkids grow up. He had to have a strong motivation to be willing to pull up stakes and allow his family to settle in a foreign land.

We can learn from the example of this portion, because there will be periods of great waiting in our own lives and also times when things will begin to turn around. As long as they turn around His Word and His purposes, we will be safe and secure, no matter what betrayals or setbacks we encounter along the way. He is with us and that is always more than enough in whatever circumstances we find ourselves dealing with.

Sermon: Living For the Biggest Issues

Passage: Matt. 5:13-16. ***You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its flavour, what is it good for? It only serves to be thrown outside and trodden underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city situated on a mountain cannot be hidden and a***

light is not lit and hidden under a bushel but it is put in a candelabra and gives light to all those who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in the heavens.

After the arrival of Alexander the Great, the Middle East went through a period of extensive Hellenization, where older cultures and older faiths were being absorbed into the Greek culture and religion. The Greek rulers of the region wanted to create a Greek world in place of the other cultures who would not recognize their authority. Many who resisted this forced assimilation were killed and when one particularly vicious ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes, saw the Jewish nation as a threat to his rule, he set about to turn them into good little pagan Greeks.

He entered into Jerusalem on the Sabbath and slaughtered the inhabitants who refused to fight on the Sabbath. He set up a pagan altar in the Holy Temple and pilfered its treasures. The High Priest succumbed to this assimilation and pagan altars were set up in every Jewish town and village and every adult Jew had to sacrifice a pig in honour of the Greek gods. The study of the Torah was forbidden on pain of death and they destroyed as many copies of the Torah as they could find.

It looked like Judaism was about to be extinguished until an old priest in a small town took up his sword and struck down those performing this pagan sacrilege in his village. He escaped to the hills and his five sons began a long military campaign which eventually freed the Holy Land and restored temple worship and the study of the Torah. It is never easy to have to take up arms to defend a cause and during the season of Chanukah we celebrate the stand that was taken for the light, more than we celebrate the blood which was shed in the process.

In our modern world we have so many competing agendas which want us to go in so many different directions in pursuit of happiness and fulfilment, both when we are young and just starting out and when we have been around the block a few times. Our society has turned its back on both the beliefs which we hold as true and on the spirituality and morality which it is our calling to practice. I am not recommending that we take up our swords and slaughter those who have turned their backs on a biblical worldview, because truly this is not the main thrust of the festival of lights.

We need to have the courage of our convictions and make a stand in our own hearts and lives for the light, and steadfastly refuse to be assimilated into the poisonous secular society which is doing its best to change both how people view the world and what is considered acceptable behaviour in its pursuit of human rights and justice. What was once seen as good and acceptable is now marginalized and we need to remain both salty and full of light, even when we are portrayed as religious fundamentalists who cling to an outmoded way of life.

Judah and his family took a stand for the biggest issues in their lives and decided that their allegiance to the Torah superseded any allegiance to a society which was going into overdrive to assimilate them and pull them away from their biblical spirituality. You see, biblical spirituality asks the biggest questions about the meaning and purpose of life and wants to build a life based on the eternal truth which our society wants nothing to do with.

We live in a world where communication and education are making us aware of the problems and challenges which face the global village and it is hard not to get caught up by the hype

and the information overkill. The message of the Torah and the rest of the Bible is the source of our salt and our light. We believe in the Creator and we affirm that we are citizens of the coming kingdom even if this is not a popular notion in our politically correct world. The Maccabees resisted the forced assimilation away from the truth which the Jewish people were called to hold on to and to proclaim. Assimilation is still a major concern for us as well.

Being a great nation and a blessing to all nations is still the calling of the House of Jacob which will never change, no matter what unfriendly contexts we are called to wander through on our way home. We are living in a constant deluge of propaganda which is trying to change what is considered to be real and true, but we can find comfort as we look back over all the centuries that have tried to quench the light we have been made stewards of.

The universe has not changed. It still functions the same way it always has as a testimony to the Creator. There is a massive shift occurring in the way people look at life and really this is the only thing which has changed. When we are pressured into changing our biblical worldview for the confusing collection of supposedly more enlightened ways at looking at the meaning of life, we need to remain steadfast and not be bullied out of our faith because people mock it and claim it is something we need to grow out of and be liberated from.

I am deeply troubled by the war in Syria and the mess which is Africa. I am alarmed at the rising levels of pollution and the blind materialism which falsely defines happiness by the amount of things which people own. I am disturbed by the breakdown of families and the rise of substance abuse worldwide. I find our modern sexual revolution revolting and do not see human progress evolving towards a brave new world.

People are faced with the same spiritual challenges they have always struggled with: where do I come from, where am I going and where do I belong. At Chanukah, we need to rejoice in the courage of one family which turned things around for our people and made sure that the light of G-d's Word did not go out. I am not afraid to dialogue with people about what I believe and why I believe it, because our calling is to be salt – that which preserves (the truth) and gives an invisible flavour (to life). We are also called to be light, producing good works, mercy and love as we proclaim the timeless truth of the one creator G-d whose love for the world sent the Saviour to break the power of darkness and allow us to find His light.

It is becoming increasingly unpopular to be a believer in the light and the attacks on what we believe and on the spiritual morality we practice will continue to multiply, though our fight against this growing tide of pagan darkness will not be military like it was for the Maccabees. However, it will be just as intense because spiritual darkness in any form will always try to smother the light and it will always have a two pronged attack. It will try and overturn what we believe – without being able to overturn the reality which testifies to the truth of our beliefs. It will also try and overturn the kind of morality we practice and decriminalize behaviours we find abominable and portray us as cruel and narrow minded, as if we were attacking innocent people because of what we believe is right and wrong. Reality has not been altered by the altered perceptions which want us to lose our salty light and lose our grip of the Scriptures.

As we weave our way through the holidays, may our celebration of the festival of lights motivate us to keep our eyes on the biggest issues and not be bullied away from the same faith which sustained the Maccabees in a time when they faced a different version of the same kind of darkness which is trying to engulf our global village. We will face increasingly

negative portrayals of our faith and lifestyle and we will be called to abandon our archaic, small tent, worldview and get with the program where totally unacceptable paganism is the promoted agenda. Technologically advanced paganism is still paganism.

Instead of being forced to set up altars and perform pagan sacrifices, our darkening world would have us worship the myth of human evolutionary progress and abandon any faith in the G-d of the Bible or the miraculous deeds which He performed for us in the past and which He will still perform for us as long as our light and our salt remain intact. Faith in what the Bible says about G-d and the origin and purpose of life and obedience to the moral and spiritual stipulations which the Bible teaches is still our whole duty, whether or not we find acceptance from the society before whom we are to shine and be salty.

We are going to observe communion because this is the Sabbath which is closest to the new moon and tomorrow begins the Hebrew month of Tevet. Our redemption is drawing near and we need to continue to stand for the biggest issues in our lives. If in anything we have allowed the noise and the darkness of the world to invade our hearts and lives, we can surrender ourselves once again to the Messiah to be cleansed and healed once more.

Our battle with darkness will never be over in this life, but there will always be moments when we can stop, reflect, renew and recharge as we celebrate the goodness of G-d and the reality of His love for us in the blessed Messiah of promise. As Judah the Maccabee cleansed the temple and restored the light, may the L-rd of light cleanse our hearts and lives and restore His light in us, again and again, until the kingdom comes.

Chag Chanukah Samaech. Let us observe the L-rd's Table and rejoice as we share our Chanukah Oneg together.