

24 Tammuz, 5776 (30/7/16) **The Seasons of the Spirit (Annual Picnic)** J. M. Terrett

Pinchas **Phineas, Dark Skinned** **Jewish Time is Festival Driven**

Torah: **Numbers 25:10-29:40**

Today is the first Sabbath of Affliction on the annual calendar and marks ten weeks until the High Holy Days. I have always found it funny that when one of the fasts concerning the loss of the two temples falls on a Sabbath, it is moved to Sunday because we are not to diminish the joy of the Sabbath as we rejoice in the goodness of G-d in the anticipation of His coming Kingdom. And yet the three Sabbaths between the fast of the 17th of Tammuz and the fast of the 9th of Av are called the Sabbaths of Affliction and during this time, no weddings or joyful celebrations are supposed to be held.

According to the Bible, the Sabbath trumps both any sorrow, no matter how minor or how great and any joy, no matter how minor or great. We are only strangers and pilgrims passing through this life on our way home to our Father's House in Glory and so the things of this life always need to take a minor role and should never be allowed to diminish or distract us from the things of G-d's Kingdom and His righteousness in our blessed Messiah.

With this in mind, I am going to ignore the Haftarah portion and give you a brief meditation on the Torah portion. There are lots of good things in this portion and I will just concentrate on two, the census and the best outline of Jewish time in the Bible. Most censuses in the Bible were to be taken to see how many first born there were in the twelve tribes in order to pay a ransom for how much this number exceeded the number of Levites. The Levites replaced the first born sons as priests after the incident of the golden calf.

This is the second census which was taken to number the warriors who were going to participate in the conquest of the Promised Land and even though the Levites were also counted, there is no mention of a reconciliation between their numbers and the first born of each tribe.

Two smaller issues deal with the law of inheritance when there is no son to be the heir and also with the anointing of Joshua as Moses' successor.

The portion dedicates two chapters to the best outline of Jewish time in the Bible. It begins with which sacrifices were to be offered every day and then deals with both the weekly and the monthly sacrifices.

The Sabbath is always the biggest and most important festival in the Bible and is the first one mentioned in the Bible.

Moses goes on to mention the seven festivals of the L-rd, beginning with Passover and ending with an outline of the daily sacrifices for the eight days of Sukkoth.

Seventy bulls are to be offered over these eight days and since this is the same number as the tribes and nations mentioned after the flood, Jewish people have always understood that they were making atonement sacrifices for the nations until the time when they should come to acknowledge the only true G-d, the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Father of our beloved

Messiah.

We will always be a Sabbath powered, festival driven shul because when we live our lives according to the festival timing of G-d, no matter where we roam and no matter what happens to us, we are never wasting our time or losing out on anything which is really important. Jewish time is festival driven – what drives your time?

Sermon: The Seasons of the Spirit

Passage: I will base my brief meditation on the Parable of the Sower in Luke 8. There are four kinds of soil: (1) by the wayside, where the good seed of the Word gets eaten by the birds of doubt, (2) on the rocks, where the good seed of the Word is withered by temptation and does not grow, (3) among the weeds, where the good seed of the Word is choked by the cares, the pleasures and the riches of life and does not reach maturity and bears no fruit, (4) on good soil, where the good seed of the Word is received by an honest, good heart and bears much fruit with perseverance (because it has overcome, doubt, temptation and the distractions of the flesh in this life).

Just as there are annual seasons where only certain kinds of activity are possible, so the working of G-d in our lives comes in seasons. There is a time for planting, for weeding and watering, harvesting and also patiently waiting out the long, cold spiritual winters we sometimes have to live through. Do you know what season of the Spirit it is in your life?

I am saddened when people do not respond with faith to the Gospel of the Torah. I am also saddened when they do not send down roots into the Word and wither in times of temptation and trial. I am further saddened when people's faith becomes choked and fruitless under the onslaught of the cares, the riches and the pleasures of life.

In our Messiah, His Son, G-d calls us to respond to the seasons of the Spirit as He calls us to sow change, to deepen our roots and to remove spiritual weeds from our hearts and lives. Those who do not become spiritual casualties, not because there is anything wrong with the message, but because they have a deficient response and ignore the seasons of the Spirit.

At our annual picnic, I am always glad to see new faces in our midst and am sad not to see some old faces who are no longer with us. Some because G-d has moved them on and others because they have refused the move of G-d in the spiritual seasons of their lives.

G-d's call for faith and obedience has a limited shelf life in our lives and when we stall, get sidetracked or become spiritually distracted, the seasons of the Spirit move on and we become unable to handle the spiritual seasons which G-d wants us to grow through and be changed by. What do you do if you realize that you have not been responding to the seasons of the Spirit the way G-d wants you to?

Wheat found in Egyptian tombs was planted and sprouted after being dormant for 5,000 years—when G-d's seed is planted, it will always sprout, even when we have left it dormant in our lives for too long. His seed is always good and we need to seek Him and plant the seed and send down roots into His Word and weed out distractions from our lives or hunker down and wait until the snow is gone.

During our summer rest, we need to be recharging for the fall. How many High Holy days and Sukkoth services are you planning to attend? We always need to be sending down roots and weeding and feeding our faith and if we have blown it and the seasons of the Spirit have moved on, the seasons will turn and spiritual opportunities will return.

We remain a Sabbath powered, festival driven shul where the seasons of the Spirit are always our focus. Look around you: it is high summer. All too soon, fall and winter will be upon us.

One final question with respect to the seasons of the Spirit: Will you still be here among us over the fall and winter and will we see you at the next annual picnic?

Shabbat shalom.