

Behaalotecha

In Your Making Go Up

The Unstoppable Purposes of G-d

Torah:

Numbers 8:1-12:16

Haftarah:

Zech 2:10(14)-4:7

Brit Chadashah:

Rev. 11:1-19

(Tom p. 155) **Ps. 68**

Jewish hero: Manasseh-The repentant king

Torah carrier: Aaron

This passage brings us to the completion of the yearlong preparations which were being made before the people were ready to move away from the mountain and towards the Holy Land. The Levites were consecrated and the people shared their first Passover in the wilderness and provision was made for a Pesach Sheni (second Passover) for those who were unable to participate at the regular Seder. Chapter nine jumps back to the day when the Tabernacle was first put up (The first day of the first month of the second year after Egypt) and the presence of G-d settled over the tabernacle with a cloud during the day and a fire at night and the people knew it was time to move when the cloud lifted, whether it was after two days, a month or a year.

Two silver trumpets were made to mark when the people were to march and mention is also made of regular shofars, which are to be sounded at festival times. The 21st of Iyar (second month) of the second year, the cloud lifted after hovering for one month 21 days, and the people made their first departure from the mountain. It must have been a glorious sight with all the banners forming up behind the Ark and the blessing was given which we still use as part of our Torah service: "Arise O L-rd and let your enemies be scattered. May those who hate You, flee from before You". We have added: "For from Zion shall go forth the Torah and the Word of the L-rd out of Jerusalem."

Even though it was only a three day march, the people murmured against the L-rd and fire devoured the extremities of the camp and they called the place Tabeera (burning in Hebrew). It was either at this same place or at their next camping place when the people demanded meat (along with manna) and Moses has a mini-melt down. He feels that he cannot carry the burden of leadership alone and on or around the first celebration of Shavuot (Pentecost) after they moved away from the mountain, the L-rd took of the Spirit which was upon Moses and distributed it among the 70 elders.

We are not told when the L-rd first placed the Spirit on Moses, but it was at Pentecost that the Spirit also fell on the 70 elders and many years later, it also fell on the 120 who were gathered in the Upper Room! In response to the people's call for meat, the camp is covered with quail two metres high for a day's journey on either side of the camp. The people gathered an excessive amount of quail and they were struck with a plague and those who had coveted the meat were buried at the camp site, which they named Kibroth-Hattaava (the sepulchre of coveting in Hebrew).

A third problem arose when Miriam criticized Moses before the people for choosing an Ethiopian woman to be his wife (or one of his wives). The problem was not so much criticizing his choice, as it was challenging his G-d appointed leadership. She is struck with leprosy. They moved from Hatseroth, where this occurred and camped in the wilderness of Paran, which was to be

their launching site for the conquest of the Holy Land.

The Haftarah portion in Zachariah deals with the promise of G-d's perpetual dwelling among His people and mentions two aspects of Messiah's coming ministry – As the Branch or Sprout, He will cleanse the land from its sin and He will be the chief cornerstone which has seven eyes. A mighty golden menorah mounted on a base is also mentioned and it receives golden oil from a pipe (conduit) and has two olive trees on each side of the base.

The New Testament portion deals with this same vision in Chapter 11 of the Revelation and much discussion has been given as to the identity of these two trees or two witnesses and the most likely identification of them is that they are the two intended witnesses of G-d on earth, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. We are told that it is not by our own power or strength that the purposes of G-d will be fulfilled in our blessed messiah, but by His Spirit.

Just as the camp was organized around the fire above the tabernacle, so the mighty purposes of G-d are organized around His true light, who is the Messiah. No matter what obstacles present themselves and even if they kill us, His purposes shall be fulfilled and His kingdom shall be established.

Sermon: Our Amazing Handbook for Spiritual Happiness

Passage: *Do not let this Book of the Law be far from your mouth, but meditate on it day and night in order to act faithfully according to all that is written in it, for then your endeavours shall prosper and then you shall succeed.* (Joshua 1:8)

Just a little note before we get into the meat of this passage and discuss our amazing handbook for spiritual happiness: When it says not to let the book get far from your mouth, it is referring to an oral repetition of something you have memorized and that you constantly review. But just so that your memory does not fail you, you have to act according to all that is written there in. You must read (or hear), memorize, repeat and verify – a very active, even proactive approach to the Scriptures and one that still works today.

As Messianic Jewish and Gentile believers in Messiah Yeshua, we are truly walking with the L-rd as people of the Book and we want our lives to reflect a consistent (persistent) adherence to its contents, from Genesis to the Revelation, for it is indeed a handbook for spiritual happiness. So, what I would like to do today, as we spend the summer exploring the joys of spiritual nurturing, is to examine how to get the best out of this amazing volume.

In order to do this, I want to help you understand what it means when we say we believe that this collection of sacred writings is inspired by G-d and how the various portions of this ancient text were put together in the form that we now have in our possession.

I would then like to explore with you how it was passed on through the centuries without having its meaning obscured by an increasing number of errors, additions or omissions and finally, how this book written in five dialects of Hebrew and in an obscure, now archaic dialect of Greek, came into our possession in any number of English translations.

I want to instill you with both a confidence in the authenticity of its contents and encourage you to heartily apply these contents to your life because you are convinced that the word you read

is the same one which was given by G-d over the centuries to the various authors of this amazing handbook of spiritual happiness and spiritual success.

The apostle Peter said that no portion of this book could be the object of personal interpretation because the authors of its contents were inspired by the Spirit to write what they did the way in which they wrote it (2 Peter 1:20,21). He also said that some of its content was hard to understand and would be twisted by ignorant, unstable people (2 Peter 3:16).

So let's look at the first stage of our journey. The Bible is really a collection of 66 different books written by some forty different authors over a period of just under 2,000 years. It contains the oldest record of the origin of the human race and traces the destiny of one particular family of mankind until the arrival of the Messiah of promise. It outlines the basics of who G-d is and what He is like and what He expects from mankind, but it neither gives us all the answers to all of the questions we might have about the origin and meaning of life, nor does it contain all the writings which holy men and women have received from G-d throughout the ages. John said the world could not contain all the volumes which would be written.

You all know my favourite verse in this amazing collection: ***The secret things belong to G-d, but the things which he has revealed belong to us and to our children that we may put them into practice*** (Deut. 29:29). This means that at various times, G-d has given partial revelations of His truth to mankind so that we should be able to both know Him and walk according to His laws. The oldest portion of the Bible is Genesis 1-11, which is a series of songs (odes) which speak of the first series of events which impacted our first ancestors, from the creation, through the fall, the flood, the tower of Babel and the dispersion of the children of Noah into the families and nations and languages which have been wandering and floundering across our globe ever since.

Not much detail was given, but the Bible remains a record of what G-d said and did and holy men and women wrote down what they received and passed it along to their children's children. This was so that authentic knowledge of the true G-d would not be lost or obscured by other writings or tales which falsely claim to come from Him.

It is a record of dreams and visions and dialogues and narratives which ignore much of the checkered history of our dubious species and give an outline of the purposes of G-d for all mankind, no matter where they have wandered and no matter how long it takes them to come to a knowledge of these writings and of the Divine Author who moved upon people He selected to record His message to the scattered nations and generations of mankind.

While it makes no claim to be exhaustive, it is both complete and authoritative. In fact, there are some 400 confirming sources mentioned through the Old and New Testaments which have been lost to history and there are three things we can derive from this loss. First of all, they are mentioned in that which was not lost, so we can be sure that they would never contradict this surviving source. Second of all, they were lost without a trace, but should they be found, we would immediately recognize them both by the original dialects they were written in and by the biblical content which they would confirm.

Lastly, they were obviously only important for the time when they were available and their loss has not diminished the essentials of divine truth which are still available to us. Many spurious books have been unearthed which claim to be some of those which were lost, but either their

content or their linguistics prove that they are counterfeits and not some of the books which were lost.

Where does that leave us with the holy writings of other faiths? G-d placed enough indications among all the scattered families of the human race so that they would be able to recognize and respond to the truth of G-d, once they encountered it. Over thousands of years, the original truth was lost or altered, either by sincere people who were trying to understand the meaning of life or by tricksters and false prophets who had their own agenda.

Nonetheless, this will all be all sorted out by our Messiah who will judge the thoughts and intents of the hearts of every generation of all mankind. Our Bible gives a complete picture of reality and is the only authoritative guide to faith and practice among all the other voices clamouring for our attention and our allegiance (including our greatest detractor, the myth of evolutionism).

Any other source which tries to claim any spiritual authority must reflect its contents and never teach anything which adds to or detracts from the contents of the Bible (Rev. 22:18, 19). Is this an arrogant claim – never – it very humbling and a little scary to be entrusted with such an amazing treasure and be given the task of presenting it and explaining it to all the scattered children of Adam and Eve, wherever we encounter them, whether or not they receive what we have to say.

But when we say that our Bible is the word of G-d, how was it put together? Did it come down out of Heaven in the form we have today or was it compiled by specially designated people? We have already said that many of the books mentioned in the Bible have disappeared, so how did those we now have get collected and put together?

We are not given much information about how the Bible was collected before the time of Moses, except that we now possess a record of the ancestors of the Jewish people from the time when they were selected from among the scattering of peoples at Babel until the children of Jacob settled for a time in the land of Egypt. We do not know who recorded the early events of the life of Moses or who recorded the events as he challenged and defeated the gods of Egypt, but we do know that he received instructions from G-d which he recorded in what became most of the content of the last four books of the Torah.

Ancient Jewish scholars assert that Samuel collected the writings of Moses and also recorded the details of the early lives of Saul and David. Many other authors added to this growing collection of sacred writings until the unfortunate disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem, when our people were carried away into captivity. During this difficult period of our history, a man called Simon the Righteous (Shimon haTzadik) supervised the collection and organization of the holy writings which survived the conquest by the Babylonians.

It was Ezra who finished collecting the remaining books of the Old Testament (Tenach), including those which dealt with events during the captivity. When our people came home from their first dispersion, they began to study and to copy this collection and portions of this collection were buried in caves by the shores of the Dead Sea.

When they were found and examined, only the book of Isaiah survived intact and when it was compared with the Book of Isaiah in the King James Bible, something amazing was discovered. There was only a difference of seven words between the two documents, even though there

was nearly 2,000 years between them! Our Bible is purer than Ivory soap!

Once the apostles and their disciples began to tell the story of the Messiah and explain how His life and ministry fulfilled the promises of the Torah, a new document gradually came into existence – the New Testament. There were several early collections (called canons) of the writings of the New Testament, but when the church finally became recognized under that dubious character called Constantine, he wanted one authoritative version which recorded all the authentic teachings of the apostles of our Messiah.

He assembled 2,000 church authorities and about 1,000 church laymen who examined thousands of documents which claimed to be apostolic and after determining authorship, circulation and content, a final copy or canon of the New Testament was put together. Today we have a Bible made up of the 39 Books of the Old Testament (Tenach) and the 27 Books of the New Testament. It is a complete, but not an exhaustive collection and stands as our only guide to faith and action, and it is our amazing Handbook for spiritual Happiness.

Well, how was it passed on over the centuries and how do we know that it has not been tampered with, to add or to delete its content? Many people over the years have claimed to have received additional revelation or to have restored some of the revelation which they claim was lost and how do we answer these challenges?

When I studied the Bible formally, I was introduced to a branch of theology called textual criticism, which traces the history of how various texts or portions of the Bible were copied and passed down to us. Thousands of copies of the original Greek manuscripts and various translations into a number of languages have been studied to determine whether what we have in our hands has been altered or doctored in anyway and here is what has been found.

There are some 400,000 textual variants among the manuscripts of the New Testament, but only some 500 affect the meaning of the text and only some 40 change the meaning, but every time this occurs there are cross references to establish the original meaning.

All the textual variants tell us who did the copying, when they did it and where the copying occurred. They are the human finger prints of the Divine Word and verify for us that the Bibles we have contain the same content as when they were first inspired by G-d. All the attempts to falsify or subtract or add to this document have been shown not to affect the content or the message of this amazing handbook of spiritual happiness.

But there is one ticklish question left as we explore this astounding source of spiritual nurture and continue to feed on its contents and let it teach us how to know G-d and walk with Him according to the instructions He first gave from the time of our first ancestors until the present time.

I am talking about the number of translations of the Bible, which in our time, number in the thousands and include most of the languages and dialects which have ever been spoken by the citizens of our planet.

Translation is a science which attempts to take what was said in one language and say the same thing in another language without adding to it or taking away from it. It is not easy, but because we have access to so many Greek manuscripts, each translation can be evaluated to

make sure it faithfully reflects the content of the original Greek (and Hebrew) of the originals.

Generally speaking, a translation has about a 50 year lifespan before changes in the language require that a new translation be made, because words change their meaning over the years. In fact new words are constantly added to languages and some words are no longer used by new generations of those who speak the language.

This linguistic reality requires that new translations are constantly made to ensure that the unchanging message of the Bible is made available to all of mankind in whatever new version of whatever language they speak.

When you encounter a new English translation you need to examine the qualifications of those who have done the work and even compare it to previous translations so that you are sure that nothing has been lost in the newer translation. My French translation was originally made in 1905 and has been reworked twice since then and should be good for a few more decades, but for now it is still an easily understood translation of our amazing handbook for spiritual happiness.

You can be sure that your Bibles are the word of G-d which has come down to us unaltered over the centuries. You can be sure that we have lost nothing and also that nothing needs to be added to its amazing content.

What we have in our hands in the various good translations we possess is the same content which can be found in the originals and as we study this amazing document and listen to those who teach from it, we are nurturing our souls with the bread of heaven and listening to voice of our Creator.

Let me conclude with a triple challenge. Are you making sure the content of this book is never far from your mouth? Are you studying it to make sure to act according to all that is written in its pages? When you hear someone who claims to speak from this amazing handbook of spiritual happiness, are you digging into this guide to make sure that what is said to you is actually written in the book?

We live in a confusing world where any numbers of people claim to be speaking the truth and they contradict each other. We live in a society which rejects the claims of our Bible and wants us to both reject what it teaches and not live according to the morality and spirituality which it teaches.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare, but the principle weapon which will guide us to victory and success in this struggle is our amazing handbook of spiritual happiness, but it comes at a price. This book will not read itself and it is up to us to absorb and maintain its content in our lives.

It is also our responsibility to evaluate any teaching which claims to speak from this source to make sure that it does not add or subtract from this inspired content. It is also our responsibility not to be drawn away from its contents by those who have claimed to have discovered new or hidden truths which were lost as this Bible was passed down to us.

This claim to have discovered new or restored revelation is simply not true. Nothing has been lost, nothing has been added, nothing has been deleted and there is nothing else we need to

know, either about G-d or about how to walk with G-d in our darkening world.

Yes, there are secret things which we cannot know, and which we should not seek to know because all that we need to know about G-d and how to walk with G-d is to be found in the pages of this amazing handbook for spiritual happiness.

May we spend the summer nurturing our souls and enriching our lives so that which is hurting can be healed and that which is lacking from our lives can be included. This collection of holy writings is the Word of G-d which is sweeter also than honey and which is also a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. It is also both milk for the young and solid meat for the mature and as we listen to it and read it, it becomes the house on the rock which cannot be shaken, no matter what is thrown at us.

We remain unashamedly a community of people of the Book and we want our lives to be all about the study and the application of this Book because it is the only authentic, amazing handbook for spiritual happiness. How well are you letting it do its work in your life?

Next week we will examine how prayer can nurture our lives as we learn to listen to G-d and pour out our hearts before Him.

Shabbat shalom.