

Matot/Masei (Tribes/ Journeys of) **Finishing Touches Before the Conquest**

Torah: 30:1-32:42-33:1-36:13

Haftarah: Jer. 2:4-28-3:4; 4:1

Brit Chadashah: Acts 9:1-22; James 4:1-12

The annual Torah readings are divided into 54 portions and since up to twelve times a year, the portions are suspended for special festival readings, the readings are sometimes doubled up for fit all of them into the annual reading cycle. This year this only occurs once and it is this week. The Book of Numbers takes us from the setting up the tabernacle and moving into position to enter the land, to heading back into the wilderness and ends with the camp set up on the plains of Moab, ready to hear the Book of Deuteronomy.

Very little detail is given about the wilderness wanderings, but this generation of the people is being prepared to finish what the generation of the Exodus was unable to complete. In the last week's portion, they were nearly destroyed by the women of Moab and they also do their fair share of complaining, but they are able to complete the conquest of the two strongest points in the land – the kingdoms of Sihon and Og. This was the last place the Canaanites would have suspected them to use as a launching point and it must have terrified them because it showed them that the House of Jacob would have no trouble conquering the land.

This double portion deals with six major topics and I will briefly touch on each of them as we deal with putting on the finishing touches before the conquest. First of all, there is a provision to protect ladies who are manoeuvred into making oaths and it allows them to be released from them by their fathers or husbands. Men are not given this provision, possibly because their wives would make sure they did not make promises without consulting them. Jephthah is an example of a man making an oath without consultation and it had disastrous consequences for his only daughter.

The dialogue moves to the punitive action against Moab who sent their prostitute priestesses – their sex slaves to do the fighting which the men were too afraid to do. Upon the advice of Balaam, they cause great damage in the camp and proved a mightier adversary than either Sihon or Og. This expedition is punitive and involves a small number of men, a thousand from each tribe. They are showing the Moabites that they have no hope of defeating Israel and the men move through the land, burning and pillaging those who had no business attacking Israel. They kill Balaam who masterminded the whole thing and take captives of the women and female children who have not yet been dedicated to the gods of Moab.

It was an object lesson for both the Canaanites and for Israel about standing in the way of the purposes of G-d. The soldiers divide up the spoils and share them both with the people and with the priests and the army returns to the camp without the loss of a single life. It left Moab in ruins and unable to cause any more problems for Israel, either militarily or spiritually.

Their perverted gods had been humbled before the God of Israel and their female sex warriors had been unable to stop the hosts of Israel.

Reuben and Gad, joined later by half of the tribe of Manasseh, establish themselves in the territory across the Jordan, but also agree to come and fight until their brethren are established

in the land of Canaan. The land was ideal for flocks and herds, but not so good for crops. Sihon and Og may have just taken whatever crops they wanted on annual raids into Moab and Canaan. These tribes had considerable flocks and this was ideal land.

In the next section, the camping sites during the wilderness wandering are listed and there are two things we should notice. First the same places are often given different names, possibly because both the original name and the one which Israel gave later are both given. Next, the people arrive at the same camp they left from 40 years earlier – Kadesh and it is there that Aaron dies and age 123.

A side note – the day they arrive at Kadesh is listed as the first day of the fifth month – or the first of Av. Today is the 2nd of Av. May we be spared any wilderness wanderings in our own lives, but if they come, may we also arrive back at a place where we can rise up out of them and move back into the promises of G-d.

The boundaries of the promised land are given, along with instructions about how to share the land. Those who are to do it are mentioned. Instead of twelve, there are only ten, under the leadership of Joshua and Eleazar. Next, the Levites are scattered into 48 cities among the people, both to teach them the Law and to judge them so that do not wander away from serving the L-rd.

The last detail in the book is setting up the six cities of Refuge which would make sure that capital cases received a fair hearing, but only when it was evident that there was no criminal intent in the accidental death for which a man was being charged with murder. He would be judged and if he was found innocent, he would still have to dwell in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest, to give the family who lost someone, time to cool off.

The Haftarah portions are part of the sequence of readings for the Sabbaths of Affliction, which warn the people not to fall into the same criminal backsliding which brought about the events which led up to the destruction of the first temple. The New Testament portions deal with the reluctant conversion of Saul, who should have known better and with a teaching on prayer and how to resist the pull of the flesh, the world and the enemy.

The finishing touches for the camp meant that they would not allow any more spiritual ambushes to stall their triumphant entrance into the land. May we also put whatever finishing touches we need on how we live our lives, both as individuals and as a community, so that nothing can get in the way of our triumphant pilgrimage through his land, on our way to our Father's House in glory.

Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitchazek

Sermon: Let Your Light Shine Before Men

Passages: *Let your light so shine before men so that they would see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven. But sanctify the L-rd Yeshua in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to whomever asks you for a reason for the hope which is in you. Do this with gentleness and respect.* (Matt. 5:16 and I Peter 3:15)

As we continue examining how to nurture our souls and live lives that are truly Sabbath powered and Festival driven, I wanted to share a meditation with you about how we can share our faith

effectively in our darkening world. We face an increasing level of hostility and antipathy as our world slides further from any kind of faith and into the eventual dictatorship of politically correct secular humanism. However, they should not encounter any kind of hostility from us because our task has never changed.

Right from Abraham, through the Moses and the Prophets and especially into the New Testament, we are called to shine and be salty in every generation, no matter what challenges we encounter and how much resistance we have to repeatedly overcome.

When I came to faith as a young man at university, I was led to the L-rd through an evangelistic student group which advocated a method of sharing your faith which was called cold turkey, in your face evangelism. It was modelled on a military leadership style and looked at the campus as a vast battlefield where souls were either won or lost in constant conflict with the forces of evil. They were very confrontational and expected and even relished in the opposition their methodology caused them. They were not very well thought of.

When we look at how the Bible recommends that we share out faith, we understand that while we will frequently encounter opposition and even suffer for our faith, we are called to be salt and light and to do our sharing with gentleness and respect. Now do not get me wrong, I will share my faith with anyone at any time, anywhere I have the opportunity, but the objective is not a good fight where there is a victorious winner and a devastated loser.

The objective is to lead someone to faith and this rarely occurs in one sitting or in a single encounter. It is more like a process where a relationship is established and where questions are answered and a dialogue is engaged. It does not mean engaging in an argument or in a kamikaze attempt to get them to hear the Gospel at all costs. Tracts can be useful but are rarely effective outside of a redemptive dialogue and should never be distributed intrusively or without an invitation. People may be offended when we share our faith, but offence should not be given as part of how we share our faith. Stuffing mailboxes with tracts is not an effective sharing technique.

Today I would like to share three principles involved in sharing our faith which should form part of a salty, shining lifestyle which builds dialogues as bridges to invite people into the faith and which does not see sharing as a struggle where the most aggressive sales pitch is seen as the most effective approach to the art of winning souls for the kingdom, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The traditional evangelical approach can be summed up as: each one teach one to reach one. It is almost equivalent to the Native American system of counting coups – seeing how many enemies you can touch! Passages like Proverbs 11:30 are misused to promote turning believers in soul winners: The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life and the one who wins souls is wise.

This is actually a hard verse to translate and could be translated that the one who takes away (kills, overcomes) souls is wise and may refer to the need we have to protect our lives from those who want to turn us into victims. Nonetheless, this approach to sharing our faith as an "us" versus "them", hostile encounter should be seen as an exception to the rule and not as the model we should be following.

We are to primarily be salt and light as we become dialogue builders with interested people, even when their interest is disguised as hostility, as it was in the case of the apostle Paul.

This morning, I want to talk about three principles of sharing which should help us nurture our souls as we share our faith in a non intrusive, non aggressive way which looks for signs of the work of G-d's Spirit in the lives of those we are reaching out to.

Several years ago, I got hold of study which analyzed how outsiders became members of a major evangelical denomination in Canada. Outsiders were defined as those who were not raised in the church, but who came in from the outside, with little or no previous faith commitment. It gave the results as a percentage and here are a few of them. Five percent came in because of Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. Five percent came as a result of a pastoral visit, with another five percent coming in because of an evangelistic outreach. Around eighty percent came in because of a friendship with someone in the church.

Does this mean that evangelism by friendship got 80% of the efforts and resources of this denomination? Unfortunately, no and many Evangelical denominations are starting to shrink because their members do not concentrate most of their energy on friendship evangelism versus literature and tract outreach and crusades and special meetings which have been shown to be very ineffective at winning souls.

Friendship evangelism is where you take the time to build a rapport with you friends and neighbours and become part of their lives instead of trying to get into their faces and force a decision out of them. Knocking on doors and trying to engage strangers in a religious dialogue is one of the least effective means of outreach and annoys more people than it reaches. It is the principle means of outreach for both the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons and it is not a good way to win friends and influence people.

Most crisis conversions do not last because converts are like little babies who need lots of care and nurture so that they do not fall back into the darkness when the dust settles. Billy Graham admitted once that only ten percent of his converts were still walking with the L-rd after one year had passed. That is a pretty high infant mortality rate!

The more connected we are with the people we share with, the more chance we have of seeing the Good Seed of the Word take root and survive the counter attacks of the flesh, the world and the enemy. Method evangelism hooks people up with a formula whereas friendship evangelism builds a relationship which is more effective because faith in the L-rd is a relationship that impacts every part of our lives. The more of our lives which are impacted by the Gospel of the Torah, the stronger and the longer our reaction will be and we will lower an unacceptable infant mortality rate and not raise people's hostility to the message.

We have to learn to love them into the Kingdom and not try and annoy them into the kingdom. We are not salesmen, we are messengers of the Good News, building communities of believers. We are not spiritual snipers, picking them off one by one.

Related to this principle of friendship evangelism versus confrontational sharing is a triple expression of finding out what G-d is doing in the lives of every human being on the planet. Even the vilest sinner and the most convinced Gospel hating evolutionary humanist is either moving closer to faith in the G-d of the Bible or joining the swelling ranks of those who are trying

to run away from the Creator. False religions form a separate category and the fanaticism of those who have been radicalized is another barrier to sincere faith which our enemy uses to keep people away from a sincere faith in G-d.

The triple expression deals with dialogue evangelism, redemptive analogies and cosmic imperatives which outline the main ways G-d uses to attract people and lead them to Himself as they wander through the stages and circumstances of their lives.

Dialogue evangelism shares the Gospel and answers questions which people have about faith in the G-d of the Bible. These could deal with doctrinal concerns about what the Bible teaches, and those dealing with creation versus evolution are the most common. They could also deal with moral and spiritual issues and sexual misbehaviour is a major area where questions are asked and need to be answered.

Redemptive analogies are heart pictures and life themes in people's lives which G-d is using to call them from the darkness into His light. You see, instead of looking at complications that people encounter as they encounter faith, we need to see them as bridges whose answers and solutions will personalize various aspects of the Gospel and cause people to develop their own personal grass roots response to the faith.

These could involve loss, pain or even great joy and success, but mainly deal with issues and events which cause people to ask questions about meaning and purpose and their place in the grand scheme of things. We are all born with a message we have to unravel and an approach to life we have to develop that will express our personal connection to the Gospel.

Cosmic imperatives deal with questions about the origin, the composition, and the direction of the universe, and we need to see that the world around us, both on earth and to the ends of the universe, are really a witness for the truth of the Gospel which declares the glory of G-d. When we listen to what people believe and why they believe it, we are looking for ways to make the Gospel meaningful to them and if they will not listen or do not wish to engage with us in a spiritual dialogue, then we leave them to the Spirit of G-d (and to the universe of G-d) and stay a part of their lives as salt and light and wait for an opening to develop.

I do not want my sharing to create hostility or to make enemies of people who resist the Gospel because I do not want to give anyone another excuse not to seek G-d through our blessed Messiah. As they get to know us, they will come to know what we believe and where we stand on issues, and instead of always attacking them or trying to engage them in a conversation they are not willing to have, we show by example what we believe and our testimony of love and respect will open up a dialogue in G-d's time.

We do not hide what we believe or where we stand on issues just for the sake of pretending to be friends with them so that we can eventually lead them to faith. We actually become friends with them and let them know that what we believe makes us better, more faithful friends because we have a source of strength and love and truth which the L-rd will eventually use to bring them to faith.

And even if they do not come to faith, we will not give up on them as long as they are willing to be friends with us, knowing what we believe and where we stand on issues.

Lastly, there are those among us who hesitate to share their faith because of extensive personal brokenness and the problem of historical religious failures where wars and persecutions have been used by supposed believers to force their faith on people, rather than using persuasion and honest dialogue.

When I was at Deer Valley Meadows Camp a while ago, a young man said he had not time for religion because it causes wars. I countered by saying that religion may cause wars, but faith changes lives and it radically changed mine, even through my brokenness.

You see, I do not feel that I have to defend the foolishness of previous generations of believers who acted badly. I do not feel like I have to defend or explain away those misbehaving believers who are giving us a bad name in our generation. When people abuse others in the name of faith or start holy wars to kill those who have different beliefs, I strongly point out that this is in direct violation of the Gospel and the Bible and distance myself from these charlatans and phony believers. I try not to be too critical, but let people know that there is a judgment coming and the strictest judgment will be against those who should have known better, because the folly of men does not change or diminish the truth of G-d.

I do not want to treat anyone as my enemy and while the heathen may rage and rape and kill and steal all around us, our calling is to be salt and light and recognize that no one can ever escape the hand or the influence of G-d, no matter how hard they fight or no matter which dark corner of folly they try to hide in. May we continue to be a community of light and salt which builds bridges and dialogues for our faith as we see the hand of G-d hard at work in peoples' lives to bring them to Himself, no matter how long it takes. Shabbat shalom.