

Tisha B'Av and the Bigger Picture of G-d's Redemptive Purposes

9 Av 5776 (13/8/16) **Shabbat Chazon (Black Sabbath) Parashat Devarim (Deut. 1:1-3:22)** J. M. Terrett

Tisha B'Av is also called the black fast and it is considered the lowest or darkest moment in Jewish history, not once, but twice, because of the destruction of both temples and the scattering of the Jewish people across the globe, generationally. The Sabbath before this time of mourning is called Shabbat Chazon or Black Sabbath and the scroll of the Book of Lamentations is read to remember how the glory of Israel has fallen.

This coming Yeshiva, on Thursday night, we will take a break from our foray into Luke and examine this document and see what it says about surviving great tragedy without losing our grip on the grace and peace of G-d.

There are now seven weeks until Rosh Hashanah and after the three Sabbaths of Desolation which led up to Tisha B'Av, there are now seven Shabbats of Consolation which will lead up to Rosh Hashanah. In the reading cycle, this shift usually occurs around the same time as the reading of the Book of Deuteronomy, which was first delivered to our people as they camped on the plains of Moab and made their final preparations to enter the Promised Land.

Walking with the L-rd can sometimes be a rocky process because He wants to work on us until there are no remnants of either darkness or spiritual compromise in our hearts and lives. The new generation of Israel had seen the disastrous results which disobedience and moral compromise had brought upon the generation of the Exodus and Moses begins his second presentation of the Law with a review of the circumstances which allowed this new generation to be poised to finally stop wandering and enter the Promised Land.

Today I want use both the beginning of the Book of Deuteronomy and the Fast of Tisha B'Av to make some statements about the bigger picture of G-d's Redemptive purposes in the generational ebb and flow of human affairs. You see, despite the continued rise of a final great global darkness where faith in G-d through His Messiah and His Word appear to be losing ground to both a growing worldwide secularism and to any number of cults and false religions, with radicalized Islam being the most pernicious, G-d's hand is still on the helm of human history. He knows what He is doing and He wants us to walk with Him as He does it.

The nations may rage, the fools may come up with new and ridiculous, baseless challenges to the truth of the Gospel and too many believers may still fail and be choked and wither, but all of this is nothing more than generational birth pangs which can do nothing against the inevitable arrival of our Messiah's eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Let's look first at several features of our Torah portion as we do a combined sermon and Torah meditation as we examine the bigger picture of G-d's Redemptive purposes during the season of Tisha B'Av.

Over the fall and through the winter, I want to encourage several of you to give Torah meditations and participate in more aspects of our synagogue liturgy, so that we can all grow in grace and knowledge in how we handle both His Word and the praise and worship which occurs when we come together every Shabbat. We only have a few more weeks of summer left, but I am excited at all the coming new year has in store for us in 5777, both as a

congregation as individuals and families.

Let's go into the Torah portion. Deuteronomy is unique among the books of the Torah in that it is a commentary which explains the timeless truths of the word of G-d to the next generation who need to see that His power and provision extend beyond deliverance and exodus and will take them firmly and victoriously through the conquest and division of the land.

Throughout the Book, Moses uses a generational perspective and speaks to the new generation as if they were also involved in the failures which caused the 40-year hiatus in the wilderness. We learn that after their initial refusal to let the Children of Israel cross their territory, both Edom and Moab agreed to let this happen (Deut. 2:29). We are told that it was because of their refusal to follow suit that the kingdoms of Sihon and Og are destroyed by being devoted to destruction (Deut. 2:34 and 3:6).

As a side note we learn that Og was one of the last descendants of the giants (Rephaim, Deut. 3:11) who had initially scared ten of the spies who went into the land, but nothing can stand to block or thwart the purposes of G-d.

We are given additional information about the disposition of the lost generation of the Exodus who felt that G-d hated them and had brought them into the wilderness to kill them (Deut 1:27). G-d never hates us, no matter how foolish we are, but we need to understand that while His love remains unconditional, His blessing will always remain conditional on our faith and obedience (repentance being understood as that returning to obedience function which restores the righteousness of which obedience and faith are the cornerstones – see Ezekiel 33:11).

Another side note refers to the destruction of the Avvim, who were the Philistines during the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They are replaced by the Caphtorim, who are the Minoan Greeks and are the Philistines which gave Israel so much trouble until they were absorbed in Israel during the time of the Maccabees (Deut. 2:23).

Further we are told that the people did laps around Mount Seir for 38 years (Deut. 2:1 and 2:38), so we are able to determine that the trip to the plains of Moab and the extermination of Sihon and Og, along with the punishing of the south Moabites (Midianites), took two years. We learn that it was in the 40th year that this Book was given to the people (Deut. 1:3 – in the 11th month on the first day of the month, Moses began his discourse).

Finally, there is an apparent paradox about which we are given very little detail. While the hand of the L-rd was upon the older generation to destroy them from the midst of the camp (Deut. 2:15), the camp lacked nothing during their 40 years in the wilderness (Deut 2:7).

I recommend to you the Haftarah portion (Is. 1:1-27), which while it is severe, does speak of the wonderful potential which repentance has to release us from the grasp of sin and darkness. Here is a thought which goes along with this. He heals the broken hearted, but not the heart breakers. When we are confronted with our folly and shame, may we always have a broken heart and not fall back into the darkness of those heart breakers who will continue to do laps around so many needless mountains until their pride and folly are finally smashed and they are ready to be healed. His healing is the key to righteousness which too many proud and stubborn believers refuse to access. May this never be the case among us.

The New Testament portion mentions the courageous, yet tragic martyrdom of Steven at the hands of those from whose midst, G-d will eventually deliver the apostle Paul, though he would pay for his blindness with life long vision problems (Acts 7:51-8:4 and Gal. 4:15 - the thorn in his side was his eyes).

The tragedy of the lost generation and of the generations which saw the destruction of both temples, was not the loss of any real-estate, but the loss of a relationship of faith and obedience, which is the only way to please our King and walk humbly with Him through our beloved Messiah. According to His word, we are called to righteousness which may be defined as faith in Him through His Word and obedience to what it teaches and the morality which it requires.

When we fall from this righteousness, we need to engage the repentance which will accomplish three necessary steps back to the place from which we have fallen. First we have to stop walking away from His word, then we have to return to what His Word teaches. Finally, we have to seek for the cleansing atonement where all the stains and pain of our folly is erased and removed (I John 1:9 and Ps. 32:5).

This is the double calling of both Israel and of the those from the nations who attach themselves to the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We are to be light and salt as we shine in the dark and bring a strong spiritual flavour to a bland, spiritually tasteless world we live in. If and when we fall from this mandate, our example of repentance and atonement should be a powerful witness to the love and mercy of the compassionate G-d who is so slow to anger that He waits to visit His wrath upon the nations and generations of mankind until He has given each of us and all of us adequate and frequent opportunities to abandon our folly and come to the light of His Son in His Word (see John 3:16-21).

Now let us look at the bigger redemptive purposes of G-d, using Tisha B'Av as a spring board. It still greatly saddens me and troubles me that both Israel and the world and even the church, continue to harden their hearts and not come to faith and allow this faith to be a balm for the healing of the nations (tikkun olam in Hebrew). In fact, none of the problems which our world currently faces, from political corruption and regional violence to pollution and the unequal distribution of the world's riches (along with the myriads of health problems and new diseases which this inequality encourages) are really the root cause of all the woes of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Walking away from G-d and not seeking for the meaning and purpose which His Word outlines through His Son is what is really wrong with our world. Let us look at a verse which outlines the bigger picture as we consider what is actually going on in our world:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is to come and which will be revealed for us. Also creation itself also waits with an ardent desire for the revelation of the sons of G-d. For creation has been submitted to vanity, not willingly, but because of the one who submitted it to it with the hope that it will also be set free from the bondage to decay in order to participate in the liberty of the glory of the children of G-d. For we know that right up until this day, the entire creation sighs and suffers from birth pains. And it is not only creation, but we also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we sigh in ourselves while we wait for the adoption and the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:18-23)

This is a profound passage which deals with more issues than we can address in a single

sermon, but let me launch into it as it applies to our study of the bigger picture of the Redemptive purposes of G-d and Tisha B'Av.

As a student of history and an observer of current events and global trends in every area of human endeavour, I am deeply troubled by the folly and the selfishness which appears to more and more drive the nations and leaders of our technologically interconnected world. As new inventions continue to provide us with incredible wealth and transform our diverse world into what Marshall McLuhan described as a global village, we seem to be creating as many problems as we claim that we want to solve.

Nuclear technology, deforestation and the spread of both GMO's (genetically modified organisms) and super bugs which are increasingly drug resistant mean that we are just as close to a global apocalypse as we were when the nuclear proliferation first started during the Cold War. Changing beliefs and values mean that most health concerns in the developed world are self induced as abortion technology continues to take an incredible toll which is coming close to exceeding the annual global death rate. Through it all, the good life continues to be defined in material terms instead of spiritual realities.

We are on the verge of a return of the days of Noah when worldwide iniquity nearly brought about the total destruction of mankind who dwelt on our planet before the flood. Traditional religious faith is losing ground to both secular humanism and radicalized fundamentalism, to the point that what is right and wrong and what people hope for are making walking the L-rd according to His word in our beloved Messiah increasingly difficult.

I am still saddened when I think of the destruction of both temples, the scattering of our people among the nations and the rise of global antisemitism and the political demonization of Israel and Zionism. However, the real tragedy is that the world continues to turn its back on the truth of G-d's Word and succumb to the seduction of the flesh, the world and the enemy. All of creation from one end of the universe to the other, also feels the impact of this tragedy and many unfortunate natural phenomena are but the physical birth pangs of a coming spiritual reality where we will all be set free from the foolishness of this present age.

We follow the annual Torah reading cycle as we strive to remain Sabbath powered and festival driven and continue to nurture our souls and enrich our lives even though our pilgrimage through this life may take us through many valleys and much darkness. There are so many voices trying to get our attention away from the word of G-d and to pull us into the noisy, spiritually bankrupt modern society. Our challenge is not just to mourn previous loses, but also to make sure that we do not follow in the footsteps of those whose folly caused them in the first place.

Worldwide we face an incredible number of spiritual challenges which have as their goal to distract us away from the truths of G-d's Word and to make us focus our primary attention on things which should only occupy a small portion of our time and energy. We need to follow the example of creation and focus on the only solution big enough to fully and permanently deal with all the problems which our complicated world is troubled by.

When the sons of G-d are revealed and when the children of G-d are set free, global warming, international intrigue and the looming threat of the rise in global terrorism from radicalized Muslims will have no meaning and will no longer pose any kind of threat to humanity. The sons of G-d being revealed refers to the resurrection of all true believers from every nation and

generation of mankind from Adam and Eve to the last baby which is conceived. This glorious event will also set us and creation free from the bondage to decay which surrounds us in a world which produces more garbage and waste annually than used to be produced generationally before the modern era. We are drowning in junk and while more of us are living longer, our health and the quality of our lives continue to decline because our world is filling up with poisons we continue to pump into our environment.

The lesson of Tisha B'Av and Black Sabbath should be that tragedy will always occur whenever G-d's people lose their grip on His agenda for the ages. Israel is still called to be a great nation and be a blessing to all nations through our beloved Messiah. This is the message from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Samuel and David and all the prophets. The entire creation in which we live knows this and yearns for the inevitable arrival of the Kingdom of G-d and remains unshakably focused on this glorious event.

How many of our hopes and aspirations are also unshakably focused on this eventuality? Do not become distracted by the myriad tragedies which our foolish world brings upon itself. Do not be overwhelmed by the incredible number of innocent victims who are suffering under oppression, sickness and poverty across our hedonistic, fun seeking globe.

Learn to let the L-rd turn your groaning and sighing into faithful obedience to His Messiah through His Word as we study and pray and worship and fellowship and reach out, even when we encounter opposition and are misunderstood and misrepresented.

I want to be a believer who is radicalized by the Gospel of the Torah, not so that I can build bombs and spread terror among unbelievers. I want to shine light and spread salt and love and joy so that unbelievers can either become believers or move away from the world to become pre-believers.

I never want the world to determine my spiritual agenda and yet I want my spiritual outreach to be relevant to this world and so much of this means explaining the Gospel and pointing out the folly and the bankruptcy of our global village which is sinking faster and faster into another global darkness. I do not want to be a covenant breaker who exchanges the power and wonder of the Gospel for a potage of secular folly, no matter how much political correctness makes this tragedy seem.

I want to remember that He heals the broken hearted and I want to do one of three things. First I want to experience this healing. Second, if my heart needs to be broken to set me free from the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life, I want it to be broken. Lastly, I want to avoid being a heart breaker, like those who were so taken up with their own agenda, that their folly and their needless hatred caused the loss of the two temples which stood on the holiest spot on earth.

When and if the L-rd wants to remove the Mosque which covers this site, He will take care of it in His own time and in His own way - without violating His Word or His righteousness. An earthquake maybe or a cave in. That is His concern not mine.

I need to have my eyes opened to understand that the real tragedy of Tisha B'Av was never the loss of prime real-estate when both temples were destroyed. The real tragedy of Tisha B'Av was the loss of relationship with the King who will most certainly one day set up the reign of His

everlasting Kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind, no matter who stands in His way and what obstacles appear to be blocking its arrival.

Our part is to cling to righteousness so that our world can see our light shining and taste the salt we are offering in the Gospel of the Torah when we walk in faith and obedience before our beloved Messiah according to His Word. We also may frequently need to cling to repentance so this same world can see us stop moving away from G-d and watch us return to our King and be washed and cleansed as we encourage them to follow suit.

We need to really be in tune with all of creation and not succumb to the lies and false theories which evolution continues to generate and vomit forth globally. We need to groan and sigh and not be seduced by the modern women of Moab or by the golden calves which the mixed multitude of partial believers want to build in our midst when they call light dark and bitterness sweet (as they murder our babies and promote sexual perversion).

His love remains unconditional and this is what drives His intervention in human history to prevent the arrival of the second global darkness before all the children of light have come to His light. Are there any seeds of this darkness in your life? There are too many in the life of our foolish nation and in our foolish world.

His blessing and entrance into the freedom of the children of G-d are conditional upon not being overcome by the suffering and the folly of this current age, even if there are heart breaks and sorrows which it may take your whole life to resolve. This is the message of Tisha B'Av and Black Sabbath. Lets head forwards and upwards for another Torah cycle.

Shalom.