

Torah:	Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25
Haftarah:	Isaiah 49:14-51:3
Brit Chadashah:	Hebrews 11:8-13

The major difference between the giving of the Law in Deuteronomy and the giving of the Law in Exodus is that Moses reminds the people about the mistakes they made in the wilderness and warns the new generation not to follow suit. Whenever people come to the L-rd there will always be a time of testing to see if our commitment will stand the test of time or whether the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life will cause us to move away from faith and obedience and cause us to become part of the lost spiritual generation. This is the group which either returns to Egypt, assimilates into the Canaanite folly or does laps around the mountain because of spiritual disobedience.

The Haftarah portion promises restoration to Israel and reminds them that walking with the L-rd according to His word is the only way for believers to live. The New Testament portion mentions the faithful perseverance of Abraham who knew that He was waiting for a future kingdom in the distant future and who walked with the L-rd in faith and obedience as His connection to that which was promised.

This passage teaches us that there are at least three stages in our walk with the L-rd. There is first His deliverance, based on His mercy and compassion alone and not on any desirable quality which we possessed. Then there is the process where He heals us, cleanses us and meets our needs as we learn to walk in faith according to His Word. Lastly, there are the future we have to cherish and prepare for as we watch His purposes fulfilled generation by generation until the kingdom comes.

The wilderness generation were being prepared to enter the land and in the mist of all the promises and the warnings the L-RD reminds the people that He is neither a local deity nor the best deity among a crowd of other divine beings. He wants to wean them away from polytheism (a belief in many gods) and pantheism (a belief that everything is part of G-d).

In 10:14 Moses says that the highest heavens and the entire earth and everything it contains belongs to G-d. He mentions the divine section of the generations of Israel which will always be a double edged sword. Just as He has chosen us, we have to chose Him and verse 16 makes a surprising statement – we have to circumcise our hearts. This means we have to internalize both our faith and our obedience and own our spirituality totally and voluntarily.

He reminds them that He is the G-d of gods, the L-rd of lords, the great, strong and awesome (terrible, frightening) G-d who is not partial (has no favourites) and who takes no bribe. This means once we get to know Him, His standards are not lowered and we need not think that our relationship with Him exempts us from the need to walk in complete faith and obedience. His deliverance and protection empowers us to walk with Him, nothing more, nothing less.

Israel was reminded that our life needs to be all about His Word and that His word is based on the Ten Holy Words which proclaim His lordship and speak of His coming kingdom. Israel was delivered from Egypt and told to settle on the site of the Garden from which our first ancestors were excluded because of their disobedience. They are told that their tenure in the land and

the blessings which they will abundantly derive from it will depend on their faithful obedience.

The blessings or faithful obedience are repeatedly held up before this generation as they are warned to learn from the mistakes of the lost generation who refused to believe in His promises and did not want to walk according to His Word.

He wants to bless His people with abundant harvests and free them from the diseases they battled with in Egypt. He wants to multiply them and give them possession of an incredibly beautiful, fertile land and the only way to ensure that there will indeed be showers of blessing is for them to adopt and maintain a Bible centred lifestyle. This means a life of study and worship and obedience which refuses to allow anything to dim or distract us from the wonder and glory of the L-rd.

Verse 10:21 actually says that He, YHVH is our glory. This means that He is the only true light, the only true G-d and the only one worthy of our praise and worship and our spiritual loyalty.

There will showers of blessing upon us if we learn the lessons of faithful obedience and make our lives revolve around His Word. The festival cycle was set up with this purpose in mind. His blessing will be showered upon us as we walk in faithful obedience and move from sowing and reaping and let our years revolve around His provision and around our commitment to His Word.

It means that our lives will be a continual series of choices where the deceptive darkness of this life will keep knocking on the door of our hearts and lives, trying to get us to question and even violate His word and move away from the faithful obedience which is our only connection to the King of Glory.

The wilderness generation we promised all that their fathers had been promised and the same conditions applied to them and they still apply today. Walking with the L-rd means believing in His promises and obeying His Word in every area of our lives. He will give us access to all the strength and blessing and protection which we will need as we face whatever enemies or influences come our way to try and get us to abandon our singular calling.

The first generation who saw the awesome power of the L-rd knock Egypt to its knees allowed doubt and temptation to disqualify them from entering in the land which was their intended destiny. They never encountered an enemy which could stand in their way when they walked with the L-rd and they were entering a land which depended on rain - on the showers of blessing He was ready to pour out upon them.

When they walked with Him according to His word, there was abundant rain and the land gave abundant harvests as He promised. They were to be a light to the surrounding nations to show them that the showers of blessing would also be for them if they acknowledged the only true G-d and walked with Him in faithful obedience. Israel was shown that there is only one G-d and only one way to walk with G-d.

The same invitation is extended to us today. We are called to acknowledge that there is no other G-d than the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and that choosing Him is not choosing the best out of any number of gods but choosing the One who alone is G-d.

There may be many mysteries we encounter as we get to know G-d and many of them He will

not elaborate on. As long as we cling to His Word and do not let any other source try to inform us about what He is like and what He wants from us and from the world, we will overcome all and any opposition which comes our way.

We are called to a unique faith which declares all other faiths to be deficient and not worthy of our attention or adherence. This should not make us feel superior or make us arrogant because we did not choose Him, He chose us. Part of this choosing remains a call to faith and to obedience which will never change, but will always change us, renew us and call us back to the only true G-d (more about this in my sermon) and to His Word.

The example of Israel should be both an assurance of His blessing and His ability to deliver us, as well as a warning about what happens when our lives no longer turn around His Word. His Word alone contains the answers to life and His word alone describes the kind of life (the kind of obedience) which he finds acceptable.

Anything less or anything more will effectively stop the showers of blessing and send us either back into a wilderness of our own making or will scatter us and make us wander among the nations. This scattering has happened twice to Israel and should serve as both a warning and as a promise.

He will never leave us nor forsake us and He is still able to deliver us, whatever we encounter and wherever we wander. However, His word will never change and faithful obedience will always remain the only acceptable lifestyle for a believer, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

His showers of blessing are there and ready to fall upon us when we walk with Him according to His Word. as we bid farewell to another year and another cycle, we need to heed the warnings He gave to the wilderness generation and make our lives all about Him and His Word.

This portion is called "As a Result" and our lives will always be measured by the results of the choices we have made. May these choices result in the showers of blessing and motivate to always walk in faithful obedience throughout the "whatevers" of life.

**Sermon:** When we started this congregation, we determined to build a sustainable Messianic Jewish congregation where the spiritual and the practical needs of Jews and Gentiles could be met in a Messianic Jewish context. We knew we were going to be facing unique challenges and that it would take us time to find our feet and build up the momentum and the critical mass we would need to grow into a generationally sustainable community (more about this in my rabbi's report) and we have had an interesting time with lots of ups and downs.

We set up our constitution for openness and accountability and determined to build a safe spiritual haven where people could find their place in the L-rd and deal with all and any baggage that was holding back their spiritual grow and healing. We wanted to be an outreach both to the Jewish community and to the church so that the redemptive purposes of G-d could be help up as the only acceptable model for believers to follow.

Over the years, we have seen people come and go and we have learned some valuable lessons as we have developed our distinct spiritual identity. And we continue to seek the face of the L-rd so that we can remain faithful to His Word and be salt and light as we reach out to our dark,

spiritually confusing world. As we come to our quarterly meeting, one verse comes to mind so that we understand true progress is made when we stubbornly and steadfastly continue to walk in the way of the L-rd (derech Adonai). Let's look at this verse together:

***This is what YHVH says: stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and you shall find rest for your souls. But they said: we will not walk in it.*** Jeremiah 6:16

The history of Israel and of the church has not always been smooth sailing but it has never been because the hand of the L-rd has been prevented from blessing and sustaining by any particular set of circumstances believers have encountered over the generations. In our pilgrimage towards our Father's home in glory, we will always encounter resistance and the flesh, the world and the enemy will always try to stop us or stall us on a scale which will not always be able to fathom. After all, there are spiritual battles occurring all around us, locally and globally, but we understand that for us there will always be just one solution.

The way of the L-RD which Jeremiah calls the ancient paths is a spiritual lifestyle which the Bible describes as a twofold venture and this is not a new concept for us. we are called to have faith in Him through His Word and walk in joyful obedience to that which it teaches. This is not as easy as it sounds because this world is full of crossroads where any number of conflicting and confusing voices stand ready to point us in the way they feel we should go.

Some of these voices are spoken by charlatans who are easily recognizable. Others are spoken by those who wish to infiltrate our ranks and pull us away from the truth of G-d's word, either by adding to it or by taking away from it. The Gospel of Luke says that this path is bordered weeds and rocks and that there are birds ready to eat the seed of the Word before it can sprout in our lives and bring us the rest which only the good way offers.

At the same time, we will all take turns going through things which will challenge our faith and challenge our integrity (obedience), so it is often too easy to lose our way with all the noise which is trying to get us away from the ancient paths and get us lost among the weeds, the rocks and the birds. There will also be floods and wind and rain, along with great joy and incredible heart ache, but as long as we stay in the habit of taking stock of where we are and where we should be, we will never stumble far from the good way and the soul rest which His word promises to those whose faith and obedience refuses to waiver not matter how intense or how daunting the particular crossroads we are standing at becomes.

B'nai Chayim will always be a congregation which seeks use whatever crossroads we come to as a place where we are looking forward towards the next step, whether we are making good progress or whether we are recovering from any of the setbacks which every community must experience from time to time.

I will share more about this in my rabbi's report, but I wanted to let you know that our objectives as a congregation and as a leadership will not be changed, even though we may change the way we meet these objectives. Part of maintaining a firm grasp of faith and obedience, requires a good deal of flexibility and wisdom so that we will always be responding to the challenges we encounter at the crossroads without making our walk with the L-rd only about reacting to the crossroads and not to the principles of His Word.

In other words, the situations we encounter may require us to respond in any number of ways, but these ways will always be based on integrating faith and obedience into our lives as we choose which of the biblical strategies (redemptive solutions) we need to adopt so that our feet do not stray from the good path or lose any soul rest.

Life may get complicated and the choices we have to make, may be difficult and sometimes even heart wrenching, but the only non negotiable in this whole process is the good way which is based on the ancient paths.

The coming year, 5777, will hold its fair share of challenges and blessings and it is not always possible to be prepared for what comes our way. But walking with the L-rd along the ancient paths of His word will give us access to all the spiritual resources we need, both as individuals and as a community, to recover and grow and move ahead as we look forwards to the next step in the life of our community. And in the L-rd, the future is always promising and friendly to give us hope and peace no matter which valleys we wander through and no matter what mountains we have to scale.

Join us as we keep looking forward towards the next step as this little flock with a big heart starts to come into its own and see new people come and old people stay, as all of its ministries grow and deepen and flourish. Remember that it is always worth it to stand in the crossroads and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is because soul rest always waits for those who wait upon the L-rd. Faith in Him and obedience to His Word will keep us Sabbath powered and festival driven, day by day, year by year at through every stage we encounter in our pilgrimage to our Father's home. There is no other life like it!