

Ki Tavo When You Enter In

Torah: Deuteronomy 26:1-29:9

Haftarah: Isaiah 60:1-22

Brit Chadashah: Luke 24:44-52

Reading: Christine p.41; Ps.51. Jewish hero: Mary Magdalene Torah carrier: (Julie)

Introducing the High Holy days and Sukkoth Makzor (Prayer Guide)

This is the fiftieth Torah portion of the annual reading cycle and it is the last regular Torah reading for the year 5776. The remaining four usually form part of the special services for the Fall Feasts, which occupy almost the entire month of October and it is truly the most wonderful time of the year!

Today, I want to take you through the portion and then move into my annual presentation of the High Holy Days and Sukkoth Makzor (Prayer Guide). I will give my third instalment of the identity of the Messiah next Shabbat, October 1st, which is one day before Erev Rosh Hashanah and the beginning of the 13 special services over four weeks.

This portion marks the end of the second giving of the Law on the plains of Moab, and Moses begins to prepare the people for their victorious entrance into the land. They had to wait forty years longer to enter because of the disobedience of the generation of warriors who came out of Egypt and Moses wants to warn the people not to follow their bad example.

He outlines four ceremonies they are to perform, once they are in the land and these are not given in chronological order. The first two are harvest rituals to be performed, first with their first harvest and then with the first three-year harvest, once they are settled in the land. The first harvest ceremony is to be a declaration of all the good things which the L-rd has done for His people and the three-year harvest, which was given to the Levite, the stranger, the orphan and the widow was to be a declaration of their sustained holiness once they settled in the land.

The indication is given that what was said at the first harvest was to be repeated with every subsequent harvest and the same would apply to subsequent third year harvests. This was to be a constant reminder to the people of who they are, why they are in the land and what their obligation to the L-rd was to be from generation to generation.

Next Moses, along with the elders, speaks to the people and requires that they build a monument of unhewn stones, upon which the commandments are to be inscribed. There is a question as to whether this monument was to be the altar which was to be erected on Mount Ebal before the blessing and cursing ceremony was to be performed. If there was only one stone monument, then the offerings would have to be made first and then the stones would be covered with plaster and have the commandments inscribed on them.

The rabbis seem to feel that the commandments were to be inscribed on the plaster, but the text does say they are to be inscribed on the rocks. Some rabbinic authorities also conclude that the commandments were to be inscribed in seventy languages, so all peoples could also read what the L-rd said to His people. I am grateful for the way our people have preserved the

Word unchanged over so many centuries, but I am less impressed with their attempts to add meaning to the text which the text does not support.

I am not sure whether there were to be two monuments, one an altar and another like a cenotaph with the commandments inscribed on them. I lean towards one pile of stones, first used for sacrifice and then covered with plaster to designate it as a very special stone monument. It is interesting that the monument was to be on Mount Ebal, the mount of cursing and is perhaps an indication that there will be no curses upon the people as long as they continue to worship the L-rd and to obey His Word.

I also feel that the commandments which were inscribed upon the stones were the Ten Commandments and would be a copy of these holy words which the people could see, since the second copy of the tablets, inscribed with these same words, was to be kept in the Holy of Holies, out of sight of the people.

Once these formalities were finished, the people were to divide into two groups of six tribes each for the purposes of pronouncing both a blessing and a cursing. Levi is included in the blessing group and Manasseh and Ephraim, also in the first group, unite as the tribe of Joseph. The procedure for the pronouncing of the blessings and cursing is not clearly outlined, but it is interesting to note that twelve formal curses were pronounced by the Levites, either before the people split into two groups or as a prologue to the blessings.

The first fourteen verses of chapter 28 form the core of the blessings and may have been read or chanted as the first group of six tribes stood on the mount of blessing. The remaining 54 verse of chapter 28 outline the curses which will come upon the people if they do not heed the commandments and practice perfect obedience to the L-rd.

The portion ends with a reminder that the land they are standing on was given to them by the L-rd and even though it was to be inhabited by the two and a half tribes, both they and all the people of Israel would be blessed in all they undertook as long as they walked according to the words of the covenant which the L-rd made with them.

I have selected four verse from chapter 28 which outline what will happen to the people if they depart from the Word:

Among the nations, you shall not be at peace and you shall not find a place of rest for the sole of your feet. The L-rd shall render your heart agitated, your eyes shall languish and your soul shall suffer. Your life will be suspended before you and you shall tremble night and day and you shall no guarantee for your life. In the terror which shall fill your heart at the sight of all you shall see, in the morning you shall ask for it to be nighttime and at night you shall ask for it to be daytime.

And the L-rd shall bring you back to Egypt in ships and you shall make the same trip which the L-rd said you will not see again. There you shall offer yourselves to your enemies as male servants and female servants, but there will be no one to purchase you.
(Deut. 28:65-68)

The L-rd wanted His people to know how serious a thing walking with G-d needs to be. Before we come to faith, our life may be full of ups and downs, but as believers our lives will either be

filled with great hope and abundance, no matter where we wander, or they will be full of such intense depression and abandonment if we do not take our faith seriously and walk with Him according to His Word.

As we come to the High Holy Days, we are not just spending ten days in repentance in order to guarantee good fortune and blessing in the coming year. This kind of behaviour is more superstitious than it is spiritual. We are going to begin the New Year by taking inventory so that there is no baggage which would cause us to stumble and move our lives out from under the blessing of the L-rd – and that there are no cracks in our obedience through which the darkness of this age can seep or creep. It is our annual spiritual inventory where we renew our commitment to faith and obedience (repentance) as the only lifestyle which is worth living.

This is what the people were to do, once they entered the land so they could understand both the amazing potential which they would have as they walked in the land with the L-rd and the horrifying discipline to which they would be subject if ever they did not take their faith and obedience seriously. It was to be a two-sided coin which we are also presented with, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

The passage in Isaiah deals with the wonder of the return when G-d's final kingdom is set up and all sorrow and sadness is forever banished. The passage in Luke reminds the Apostles that the all which our Messiah did and said was in fulfilment to the Word and that, beginning at Jerusalem, this message of repentance and forgiveness of sins was to be preached to all the nations under the powerful guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are still to be involved in this generational proclamation and we will only succeed if we walk with the resurrected L-rd in the same faith and obedience He has always called His people to.

The Makzor and the Schedule

First of all, let me tell you why we call the Fall Feasts the High Holy Days and Sukkoth. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are the High Holy Days and they deal with judgment, accountability and atonement. There are ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and they are called both the Ten Days of Repentance and the Days of Awe. It is to be a time of deep soul searching so that we can see what spiritual condition our condition is in. One day we will all appear before the King and be judged so that none of our folly or pain can accompany us into the new creation. The Days of Awe give us the chance to make sure that our lives are on track and that no unfortunate surprises will come unravelled when we stand before His Awesome presence.

Sukkoth is a time of rejoicing, both in the great provision of G-d at the end of the harvest cycle and also in our hope that one day the impermanence of this life will one day be swallowed up by our Messiah's glorious return. During Sukkoth, we are to having nothing but joy because our eternal destiny is secure in the hands of our blessed Redeemer.

There are 13 special services which will, this year, take us through the month of October. whenever a festival falls on a week day, it is considered to be a Sabbath, so in October, we will have eight Sabbaths and it will be a solemn, joyful (busy) month.

Please take note of the two Onegs and the one Nosh and start collecting your individually wrapped chocolate for our Simchat Torah service. Also we will be having the Dugit team visit

us between Yom Kippur and Sukkoth and I look forward to hearing about their ministry in Israel's sin city (Tel Aviv).

If you would take your copies of the table of contents of the Makzor, I would like to introduce it to you. It is a guide for both shul and home observance which I first put together in 1996 and have been revising ever since. It contains Messianic versions of two traditional HHD prayers (Avinu Malkeinu and Al Hayt), along with other prayers which are recited at this season. I went through many rabbinic and Messianic sources and came up with a guide which both reflects the original, traditional intentions of this special time of the year and also gives our Messiah His rightful place as the true reason for the season.

The Makzor has 43 pages and is divided evenly between the Liturgy service guides (pages 1-20) and the special prayers and other documents we will go through as we celebrate the majesty of our King (pages 21-43).

In the introduction, I make a clear distinction between contextualizing our faith so that it remains meaningful and relevant and syncretizing our faith, where pagan elements are allowed to creep in and displace the clear truths of G-d's Word.

In the liturgies (services), I include both the traditional prayers, found in the second part of the Makzor and passages of Scripture which are used in most synagogues around the world. I do not include any traditional observances or traditional prayers which either add to what the Bible teaches or take away from our only source for faith and obedience.

I did not make the document as long as most Makzors, which can run anywhere from a few hundred pagers to a thousand pages. I did this so that we could flexibly mold the intentions and purposes of the services and make our community celebration of them to be both meaningful and solemnly joyful.

The two main prayers are quite similar, but the Avinu Malkeinu expresses our submission to the L-rd's kingship, while the Al Hayt expresses our commitment to take responsibility for our spiritual health and always seek forgiveness and healing. I usually give a sermon on Kohelet on Shabbat Sukkoth so that we would temper our joy with wisdom and not forget that we still have a long way to travel before we are finally home forever.

My version of Unetane Tokef prayer speaks to the sovereignty and majesty of G-d and the wonder of both His forgiveness and His judgment. Unless we take Him seriously, we are in serious trouble, not just at this season, but all year long.

Kol Nidre is a prayer which secret Jews could recite so that while they spent the rest of the year pretending to be Catholics, for one day, they could come to synagogue and seek for the forgiveness and blessing of G-d. we chant it in solidarity with them and ask G-d to help us to be courageous for Him and ask for His forgiveness when we fail to do so in our lives.

The Hineni is a solemn surrender to the complete scrutiny of G-d, where nothing is held back and no excuses are made as we ask for complete forgiveness and cleansing, both at this season and all year long.

Blowing the ram's horn 100 times twice is both a privilege and a commitment. It is a privilege

because we are aware of G-d's coming judgment and can seek His face and not live our lives in ignorance of awaits all mankind. It is a commitment to live lives set free from sin and folly by always listening to His Word and by building our lives upon this singular, solid foundation.

I developed a blessing over our children which can be used for adults too, because our L-rd wants so much to bless us and to separate us from everything and anything which diminishes or compromises our spirituality and our spiritual potential. It can be used year-round and especially at our Erev shabbat meals.

I have included the transliteration for Kol Nidre so we can follow it as it is being chanted. I also put in our vision statement so people who come will know what we are all about and so that our community never forgets what our spiritual priorities and objectives are.

Grace after meals usually takes several minutes to chant in its traditional format, so I composed a shorter, Messianic version for which can be used regularly or on special occasions. I am not a fan of endlessly repeating blessings and prayers which we have not taken the time to understand and apply to our lives.

Tashlikh is a sales receipt where we sign over our sins to the L-rd and cast them away during our Yom Kippur service. This does not mean that we only do this once a year or that we need to sign subsequent documents for the reality of our forgiveness to be real. It is just an annual reminder that once we surrender our sins to Him, they are no longer ours and we can't take them back.

Finally, the Hatarat Nedarim is a document of spiritual closure for Rosh Hashanah, where we leave unfinished business with the L-rd and do not allow it to crowd out His blessing or our faithful obedience as we face the new year.

Join us as we welcome in another year in the L-rd and learn all the wonder and joy which is ours when we walk with Him according to His Word. We may not get it right every time, but as we go through these services, we are reminding ourselves that we are on the right path as we place ourselves under His protection and blessing for another year. Shalom.