

Netzavim

You Are Standing

Where are You Standing?

Torah: Deuteronomy 29:10-30:20

Haftarah: Isaiah 61:10-63:9

Brit Chadashah: John 15:1-11

There are still three more Torah portions to come before we roll the scroll back to the beginning for another annual Torah reading cycle, but this is always the last Torah portion which is read before Rosh Hashanah. The other three are part of the High Holy days and Sukkoth liturgy.

Here Moses speaks to the people on the verge of their entrance into the Land of Promise, lock, stock and barrel and there is even mention of the strangers in their midst who are also going to enter in. Moses addresses both the generation of all those who entered the Promised Land and all the future generations of Jews (and believing Gentiles) who are called to the same level and kind of spirituality alongside this first generation.

He speaks of the future dispersion of rebellious Israel who would succumb to paganism and who would be delivered from their scattering once they came to their senses. In a very real sense, the lost, wilderness generation experienced a mini dispersion and we are warned that wandering in a wilderness will always occur whenever we walk away from the L-rd.

At the conclusion of these warnings, Moses speaks the words of a verse which explains that the mysteries of G-d are beyond our ability to fathom. While we may not be able to fathom how the L-rd brings things to pass, we will always be able to walk in obedience to the commandments which the L-rd has entrusted us with, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

These commandments are not beyond our ability and are not located out of our reach (30:11-14), but they form the core of our spiritual mandate and will either be a source of life and goodness when we put them into practice or a source of death and evil when we walk away from them. Let's look at 30:19, 20.

***I call as a witness against you today both the heavens and the earth that I have placed before you life and death and blessing and cursing. Choose life in order that you would live, you and your posterity and that you would love YHVH your G-d and that you would obey His voice and become attached to Him. For on this depends your life and the lengthening of your days, and so that you can dwell in the land which YHVH swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.***

The High Holy Days give us the opportunity to examine whether we will walk with the L-rd by keeping our lives focused on His Word or whether we will wander in wildernesses of our own making. Which verge are you standing on and how will you walk during our next annual Torah reading cycle?

We need to realize that the choices we make will always have a greater impact on our lives than the circumstance we encounter in our lives, be they ever so good or ever so bad.

The Haftarah portion speaks of the wonderful sustaining love of our G-d who never loses His

people, even when we wander among the nations. He will always be engaged both to bring us back to the Land of Promise, once we have abandoned our disobedience and to bring about the reign of His eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

***For the love of Sion, I will not be silent, for the love of Jerusalem, I will take not rest until her salvation appears as the dawn and her deliverance as a lighted torch. Then all the nations shall see your salvation and all the kings your glory and you shall be called by a new name which the mouth of YHVH shall determine.*** (Is. 62:1, 2)

The new Testament portion speaks of the Messiah as the true vine of which we are the branches which He prunes so that we can bear more fruit and not be removed. It goes on to say that we are loved by the messiah as He is loved of the father and kept all of the Father's commandments.

Experiencing G-d's love and keeping His commandments are never in competition with each other and we never have to chose between them.

His love motivates us to keep His commandments and our obedience of His commandments is a demonstration of our love for Him. We are always standing in the place where our decisions will impact the direction and the validity of our spiritual lives.

Wherever we are and whatever is happening in our lives needs to be seen as secondary to our calling to make faith based choices based on His Word.

in a very real sense, all of us, Jews and Gentiles, were also present when the Joshua generation was preparing to enter the Promised Land. We are told that the criteria of entrance is the same for every generation of believers. When we walk with Him, we are unstoppable, and we inherit life and goodness, like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

When we succumb to all and any forms of paganism which violate the stipulations of His Word, we make no spiritual progress and inherit death and cursing – and this is not based on the unpredictable and variable circumstances of our lives, but on the choices we make.

Where are you standing? What choices are you making? Darkness may grow and loom all around us and newer and stranger forms of paganism may try to take root in our midst, but as long as long as we choose to walk with YHVH according to His Word (His commandments), we will never lose our way and we experience life and blessing in Him.

May our celebration of the High Holy days and Sukkoth release us from any darkness which may have crept into our lives when we did not make choices based on His Word. This is where we want to be standing.

### **Sermon:**

This week's Torah portion mentions one of my favourite verses in the Scriptures: ***the secret things belong to G-d and the things which He has revealed belong to us and to our children that we may put them into practice*** (Deut. 29:29) As we deal with the third reality as it concerns the identity and ministry of our beloved Messiah, who is both our true King and only Redeemer, we need to talk about His kingship, both as it concerns what He has revealed to us about it and that which concerns the mysteries which have not and may not be revealed

to us about it.

There are two features of this Kingship and I want to refer to them both briefly, on this the last Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah. He is the King who is both reigning now and who will also reign forever, once all His enemies have been put under His footstool. (I Corin 15:26; Heb. 10:13). It is interesting to note that when the Scriptures say that He is forever at the Right Hand of G-d or is seen in the midst of the throne, it does not mean that He is no longer active or that He is in a form of spiritual stasis.

When He tabernacled among us, He laid aside the prerogatives of His divinity so that He could live, suffer and die in order to win everlasting salvation for all the nations and generations of mankind. He thus becomes the blessing upon all nations which the L-rd promised to Abraham when He first called him to leave his homeland and come to the Promised Land. Our Messiah's victory over sin and death was loudly proclaimed by His resurrection from the dead and Revelation 12 records that His reign began when He ascended back to the Father.

Now here comes the mysterious part of the equation. He is both seated at the right hand of the Father, in the midst of the throne of glory and He is also interceding for us as He rules and reigns until He has put all enemies under His feet (His footstool). This is the first feature of His Kingship which is active among us and which precedes His eternal reign which shall only be inaugurated upon His return at the end of the age.

The spiritual reality which I want to deal with today answers the question: how is He reigning and what is He doing to put all enemies under His feet (footstool)? In a very real sense, the Messiah reigns over all the nations and generations of our world as He has always done, even when the days of Noah darkened the world and caused it to perish beneath the waters of the flood.

In other words, G-d has never lost His grip (control) over the affairs of mankind in that He sets limits based upon sowing and reaping (Prov. 21:1) and upon the voice of His Spirit which calls out to each of us and to all of us (Prov. 1:20-23). There is no language and there are no words where the sound of His voice is not heard (Ps. 19:1-4). So when we look at the folly and the majesty of human history and all that is going on in our sin escalating world, we see a conflict occurring in two of three spirit levels (in three spiritual heavens).

The highest spiritual level (Heaven) is where G-d dwells and there is no conflict there. Our Messiah accomplished His mission and in the long term, the battle has already been won forever and ever. The second spiritual level (heaven) is where the conflict with the powers and principalities and the princes of this world occurs and this filters down to the third spiritual level (heaven), to impact the spiritual affairs of mankind. And this happens while the heathen rage and the planet groans in the kingdom birth pangs which are preceding the final arrival of the final kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind.

It is not always easy to clearly identify precisely the exact nature of the spiritual conflicts which are occurring at the second level and at the third level, but these are spoken about often enough in the Scriptures for us to know that we do not serve a distant, uninvolved G-d who does not participate in the affairs of mankind. It will always remain a mystery in terms of the mechanism of His involvement, given the great diversity of pagan spirituality and carnal immorality which is rampant in our world. And here I include evolutionism as the greatest and most prevalent, evil

form of paganism and immorality which is active in our world today.

Acts 17 joins with the Proverbs and the prophets to testify about the superintendence which G-d has always actively exercised over the affairs of all mankind, both before and after the dispersal at Babel. He placed redemptive analogies into every language and into every religion as homing beacons and divine bobby traps so that no person or no group of people is ever allowed to stray too far from the truth which He has planted in the heart of every person (Romans 2:14-16).

This does not mean that all religions are just different versions of a single truth, but they contain themes or analogies (symbols) which their idolatry and folly can never fully eradicate, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. The hound of Heaven is working in the hearts and lives of all mankind to bring them to faith in our Messiah and how He does this is a mystery beyond even the sharpest mind's ability to fully understand.

As we come to Rosh Hashanah and celebrate both His Kingship and His judgment, we need to understand that we do not have a monopoly on His truth and that it runs to and fro across the world to influence the hearts and minds of all mankind during their brief pilgrimage through this life, generation by generation.

For believers, our Messiah also intercedes with the Father to break the power of cancelled sin in our lives and to teach us the power of forgiveness powered repentance and obedience as we cast down all the carnal fortresses which try to block our way and bring every thought into obedience to Him through His Word.

So you see, our Messiah is juggling quite an active spiritual combat portfolio, both in the second level (second heavens) among the forces of darkness and deception and also in the third level (third heavens) as He reaches out to draw each of us and all of us to Himself and to the truth of His Word.

The story of His redemption is the foundation of this ruling and reigning and He will continue to exercise this active superintendence until all His enemies are finally defeated.

We cannot fathom how He is active when we see the violence of Islam and the global rise of evolutionary humanism and its politically correct henchmen, but even in the darkest pagan temple and among the most pernicious mind bending cults, His voice is being heard and cannot be completely silenced.

Let me briefly diverge into a discussion of how this superintendence can be misconstrued, so that we do not follow suit and misunderstand our role as servants of His Kingdom and of His reign. Beginning in the early 1800's an approach to the end of the age arose which can be described as millennialism, which takes the symbol of G-d's mercy for a thousand generations or a thousand years and concocts the idea of a literal 1000-year Golden Age under the Messiah before the final judgment.

There are two forms of this misunderstanding which have impacted Christians for two hundred years: premillennialism and postmillennialism. Premillennialism believes that Messiah shall return to earth to give us 1,000 years of peace before a final battle between the forces of good and evil, even though these forces would have already defeated by the return. They believe the Messiah will set up His kingdom on earth and then allow it to be nearly overthrown a second

time by the same forces He has already defeated.

Postmillennialism teaches that it is the church's mandate to gain control over the entire planet and in some shape or form, establish the means whereby the Messiah could step into a ready made kingdom which they have already set up. This position was really popular before WWI, when nearly the entire planet was under the political control of the European Christian nations or their former Christian colonies.

It looked like the reign of Messiah was on the verge of being set up when disaster struck and a shocking worldwide military disaster occurred in two stages (WWI and WWII). The mighty European colonial empires dissolved and this perspective lost most of its popularity.

Premillennials contend that the world is descending into a darkness as complete as it was in the time of Noah, just before believers are removed from harm as a false Messiah (the beast) and his false prophet take temporary control over all mankind. At the beginning, or in the middle or at the end of a seven-year period of worldwide tribulation, believers suddenly disappear and Messiah returns to defeat His enemies and establish a thousand-year Golden Age before the final eternal Golden age is forever inaugurated on a new earth and in a new Heavens.

With this teaching there are two final battles and two returns and Messiah's kingdom is set up twice. All of this hinges on a misunderstanding of the meaning of millennium, which refers to the generational mercy of G-d from the beginning of the age until it finally runs its course.

The Bible does not support millennialism because the Messiah must reign until all enemies are put under His feet and once that occurs the end will come once and not twice. There are not two earthly reigns of the Messiah, because once His reign is established, it is permanent and final and all His enemies have been defeated.

He is active among all the nations and generations to bring all peoples out of their pagan darkness and this battle occurs on the second and third spiritual levels (second and third heavens). He is also active, interceding with the Father for believers so that they can be released from the power of cancelled sin and walk in victory during their brief pilgrimage through this life.

Once and only once, when He has put all of His enemies under His feet, He will turn the reign over to the Father in the eternal kingdom where peace and light and healing shall reign forever.

So what is our Messiah doing today in our crazy world? He is engaging in a spiritual battle on two levels, speaking both to the hearts and minds of all mankind and also setting believers free from the power of cancelled sin as we learn to embrace the power of forgiveness driven obedience and daily seek His Kingdom and his righteousness in every area of our lives.

How this works in our world is a mystery we will never fully understand because it is built into the fabric of both human culture and human language. Counterfeits may come (and Islam is one of the most pernicious) and new forms of old paganism may clone into newer forms of the same old lies until all that which has been prophesied is fulfilled and the kingdom suddenly and finally burst forth upon all the nations and generations of mankind.

Our Messiah is G-d who dwelt among us as a true man in order to win eternal salvation by

defeating sin and death on the cross. His human nature accomplished the task, His divine nature applies it to all the nations and generations of mankind. During this wonderful process, our beloved Messiah is ruling and reigning until all enemies are put under His feet in a spiritual combat which occurs on two levels (in the second and third heavens).

As we come to Rosh Hashanah, we need to make sure that His reign extends to every area of our hearts and lives – and especially to every area of our community. His eternal kingdom is getting closer as we see more and more of His Word fulfilled. We can be comforted by the fact that no matter how weird things get in our world, He has never lost His grip and still superintends all that is occurring in our darkening world.

Do you know who the Messiah is? Do you know what He is doing in the world around us? What is He doing in your heart and life? Join us for the Fall Feasts as we examine our hearts and lives to make sure they reflect our commitment to Him and to His Word in the roller coaster ride which many of our lives are going through.

We may never grasp the secret things which belong to Him, but we can grab a hold of the things which he has revealed and put them into practice under the firm superintendence of His reigning through this age until all His enemies are put under His feet and His everlasting kingdom finally bursts forth and makes His name one, over all the nations and generations of mankind, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Shabbat Shalom.