

25 Cheshvan, 5777 (26/11/16) **Learning to Use the Weapons of Our Spiritual Warfare** J. M. Terrett

Chayei Sarah **Life of Sarah** **Welcoming the Next Generation**

Torah: Genesis 23:1-25:18

Haftarah: I Kings 1:1-31

Brit Chadashah: Matthew 1:1-17

Reading: Julie p. 135 and Ps. 45. Jewish hero: Moses. Torah carrier: Julie.

L-rd's Table. Quarterly Meeting (Nosh)

This week's Torah portion deals with the transition from the life of Abraham to the life of Isaac, and the next generation in the fulfilment of the promises which G-d made to Abraham. As we walk with the L-rd, we need to see the process as a series of generations where we take the torch from those who have preceded us and we pass it along to those who will succeed us as G-d's promises continue to unfold until His Kingdom is finally established in our midst forever.

We need to realize that, apart from our Messiah and those to whom He gave His promises, this process does not revolve around a single person or around a single generation because He is calling all the nations and generations of mankind to come back to the light and this job will take more than one generation to fulfil.

After the unravelling at Babel, where the families of the earth were initially scattered into at least 70 discernible people groups, the L-rd reached out to one family and began to weave a scarlet thread of redemption through the confusing and complicated history of our lost and dying world. He has always continued to speak to all nations and generations of mankind and to every person who has ever been conceived into our world, but in Abraham, He began a generational outreach to mankind which continues in our world today even as we speak.

There is no record of how many righteous Gentiles have risen up to proclaim faith and obedience towards the only true G-d, but there are indications that this phenomenon has always been active in each generation and nation of mankind from the beginning and this great, irrepressible spiritual urge will continue to surface even as the world winds down towards the final conflict and the arrival of G-d's eternal kingdom.

Abraham has responded to the call to return to the site of the original Garden of Eden and to lay the foundation of a generational homing beacon, where great nation will reach out and bless all nations through the Messiah and the great salvation which He will win by defeating the power of cancelled sin and opening the way home for all the light seekers who are hungry and thirsty for spiritual truth. If Abraham had not responded, G-d would have worked through someone else and John the Baptist said that if needs be, G-d will raise up followers of the father of our faith from the rocks of the ground, if his descendants should not continue to walk in the ways of the L-rd.

In this passage, we see Sarah dying after spending 37 wonderful years watching her miracle baby grow up into a fine young man and his father sets out to find Isaac a suitable wife, so that the promises could enter their third generation as Abraham's time draws to its end.

He does not want his son to assimilate into the Canaanite cultures of the day and Abraham avoids assimilating into the dominant Hittite culture, which was already beginning its slow decline. His son was to found a special people, unlike any which had yet risen up among the nations of the earth. His son was to found a covenant people who were to both teach the way

of the L-rd and produce the blessing to all nations, without becoming part of any of the nations it is supposed to bless.

For this reason, Abraham sends his servant back to his adopted homeland to bring a wife for his son, so that he will neither assimilate into the Canaanite/Hittite culture of the Promised Land, nor return to Abraham's homeland, out of which he is also called. Neither Abraham nor his son go on this mission so that the families cannot pressure either of them to stay among them. It is also a challenge to see if Isaac's future wife will also agree to leave her homeland and be part of the generational building process which would eventually become the great nation which G-d promised to Abraham.

The 24th chapter is one of the longer narratives in the Bible and details the events which lead up to Rebecca's acceptance of a most unusual proposal. The oath which Abraham's servant took is foreign to our cultural understanding of the same process because when we make promises, we no longer do so by clasping anyone's genitals. He made sure that if it was unsuccessful, he was set free from any further obligation and before it is confirmed, he puts a golden pendant in Rebecca's nose and two golden bracelets on her arms. These can be seen as examples of the good things which were to come and as proof that the offer was valid and sincere.

From the contents of the baggage which the ten camels carried for the servant, gifts are made to family members and G-d is still in the business of bestowing gifts on us as guarantees of the glorious riches which await us once the kingdom has come. Rebecca leaves with the servant and becomes the wife of the miracle baby. We are not told why this was not done during the lifetime of Sarah, but it could be that she would have been too protective to accept any women as good enough for her special boy.

The passage ends with Abraham's death and burial by Isaac and Ishmael, who have no hostility towards each other and it also gives a brief account is given of the posterity of Ishmael, which does not include any mention of Arabs as his supposed descendants. He lives to a ripe old age and his sons becomes leaders among their peoples because they too are blessed as descendants of Abraham, even if they are not the ones to bear the covenant and fulfil the promises.

New people groups have always formed and old people groups have always melted throughout human history and we see the fulfilment of one of the promise given to Abraham because through his sons and his nephew, he did indeed become the father of many nations. However he is not the father of all nations, even though through his faith and obedience he did become the spiritual father of all believers, as we continue to welcome new generations and see the promises move irrevocably towards their fulfilment in the fullness of time.

The Haftarah passage deals with the transition from David's reign to Solomon's, despite the attempted putsch (rebellious takeover) by Adonijah. He is the oldest surviving son of David and according to all the normal rights of succession, he should have been the one to become the next king, so even though he was aware of the promise which king David had made to Bath-Sheba, he tries to take things into his own hands because he knows his father is dying and would no longer be able to stop him.

The promises of G-d are not dependant on our own strength, but only upon our cooperation

and G-d will make sure that the next generation receives them intact, even if there is a lot of resistance by those who would usurp them or turn us aside from the path of faith and righteousness, which is the only grip we will ever be able to have in this generational promise.

The Brit Chadashah portion deals with Matthew's genealogy of the royal line from Abraham to David and it is the lineage of Joseph and not that of our Messiah who descends from Mary and the line of Nathan, Solomon's younger brother. The line of Solomon came under a curse because of Jeconiah who rebelled against Babylon despite the oath of submission which he swore to the King of Babylon.

It is presented because of the four Gentile women it lists: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bath-Sheba. Our messiah is indeed both the son of Abraham and the son of David and He is the means whereby the great nation will become a blessing to all nations hence the mention of these special ladies.

Abraham was the first generation and Isaac was a fulfilment of the promises made to him. Succeeding generations have passed the promises along and have seen them fulfilled in their time and at G-d's appointed times. Each of us is a member of a generation and if we do not see His Kingdom coming in our days, we need to prepare to welcome the next generation and wait patiently for the city which we see coming, even if it remains far off and does not burst forth on our generation. Our faith in its eventuality should keep us walking by faith and obedience as we pass on this heritage of faithful obedience to the generation which will succeed us in the great task of the ages.

Abraham made sure the promises would be passed on to the next generation, even if he only saw his special son married without being able to welcome his grandsons. He knew that just as G-d took care of him, G-d would also take care of the promises in their generations and the same is true for us today. Are we ready to welcome the next generation or do we insist that everything should happen in our generation, even if the timing is not right? That is not how it works and we should know better and keep on welcoming the new generations until the fullness of time arrives according to G-d's timetable and not ours.

Sermon: Learning to Use the Spiritual Weapons of our warfare

The Bible enjoins us to take on the whole armour of G-d and to cast down every fortress which rise up against the truth of G-d in our lives. It also requires that we learn to rightly discern and teach the Word of Truth, without useless disputations and endless arguments.

This is not an easy task because so many voices claim to be teaching the truth and there are so many activities which are calling for our participation as we move through the cycles and the stages of our lives. When I came to faith, so many years ago, I knew that unless I become grounded in the truth learned to use the spiritual weapons of our warfare, I would end up being just another casualty, succumbing to the birds of doubt, the rocks of temptation and the weeds of life.

The group which lead me to faith taught us basic spiritual disciplines which have served me well in the many campaigns of spiritual warfare I have engaged in as I have learned to walk with the Lord over the last 45 years. Many of the ones who started to run the race with me have fallen by the wayside, not because of the power of any temptation or trial to overcome their faith, but because they did not successfully engage the spiritual weapons of our warfare and I

do not want the same to happen in our midst.

Basically spiritual attacks on our faith fall into two broad categories: attacks on the truth of what we believe and attacks on the spiritual morality which the truth of what we believe requires us to follow. Evolutionism is at the core of these attacks on our faith and humanistic relativism is at the core of the attacks on our spiritual morality. Both of these two categories are founded on the single thrust which the enemy of our souls has always used to try and derail believers from the very beginning: has G-d really said?

How do we successfully respond to this double pronged attack and not join the victims who have succumbed to the enemy and lie floundering on the spiritual junk heap of our world? There are five categories of spiritual activity which we need to be engaging in which will make sure that we do not fall into the clutches of the flesh, the world or the enemy and they all deal with how well we integrate the truths of G-d's word into our lives.

I am amazed and impressed by the internet and by all the various ministries who use various sophisticated means to ensure that the truth of G-d's word is proclaimed amidst all the noise and darkness of our fading world. There are so many good internet sites we can access and I receive ministry updates from a broad variety of outreach and ministry groups. But let me use a grass roots proverb as an introduction to what may be the greatest task which a believer can ever undertake.

All the glitters is not gold and alongside the good sites and sources of information, there are those which are deceptive and are really ugly and bad, even though they appear not to be. Unless we are in regular study of the Bible and unless we become familiar with its teachings, the enemy of our souls will take it out of our hearts and lives and replace with any number of counterfeits that we should learn to avoid. It is claimed that the greatest growth where Mormons get most of their converts is Baptists who do not really know their Bibles well.

Could the same be said about any of us in our community? How about our children as they are exposed to evolutionary propaganda at school and the immorality which our politically correct society wants us to accept and even adopt? How well do you know your Bible?

There are at least two kinds of Bible knowledge, personal devotional knowledge and serious academic knowledge. All believers are called to have a dynamic, personal devotional knowledge of the Bible and over the centuries, this personal devotional knowledge has been protected and enriched by generations of serious academics. Unless we are engaged in three essential sources of Bible knowledge our watered down, second hand knowledge of the Word will not protect us from either the ravages of the world or of the false teachers who wander the world seeking for new victims to devour.

Personal devotions keep our souls cycling through G-d's truths and make sure that our hearts and lives are fed and challenged by the changeless truths of His Word. There are many ways to engage in this soul feeding discipline and for years I have selected a book of the Bible and read it slowly over several weeks or even several months, often rereading the same passage until what it says revitalizes my heart and life once more.

We have the advantage of the weekly Torah portions, but even though these are rich sources of truth and inspiration, I find I need to also do my own digging in other equally enriching portions

of the Bible, so that my faith does not grow stale and lack the essential faith nutrients which believers need to maintain balanced spiritual health and growth.

Are regular devotions a part of your daily routine or are you suffering from spiritual malnutrition – the Proverbs warn that while the full soul loathes a honeycomb, to the hungry soul every bitter thing tastes sweet. May His Word always be for us sweeter than honey and the honey comb.

The second source of Bible knowledge is Bible Study, both the kind which occurs at our Yeshiva and also the kind where we seek for personal answers for our individual questions. The Bible is the greatest spiritual supermarket on the planet and unless you know your way around it you will miss out on the nourishment and the healing it provides. How are you dealing with your own spiritual questions and with the ones which people bring to you in your daily lives and especially those you encounter in your forays through the information jungle we call the internet?

The last category is formal Bible teaching which you encounter at shul and at special meetings and Yeshiva (Bible) courses you attend, either in person or on line. If you are already engaging in personal devotions and regular Bible Study, then you are ready to determine whether the formal Bible teaching you are receiving will increase and enrich your knowledge of the Bible or will lead you away from it.

Without a regular intake of the Bible, authentic and dynamic spiritual growth is not possible.

Next to our grasp of the Bible, our ability to engage in regular focused prayer will determine the level of spiritual health we are able to maintain in our pilgrimage through this life. This is not prayer where we seek to name it and claim it and get the best deal and are exempt from the battles and trials which no believe can avoid in our spiritual warfare in this life.

Daily prayer and weekly prayer, both that which we engage in during our weekly prayer meeting and during our prayer times during our Sabbath services, will keep our focus sharp and our hearts warm and receptive so that the wiles of the enemy do not find an easy access to our house, which is not only cleansed, but is also filled with spiritual treasures. We need to learn to work through life issues in prayer and also to make sure that our heart is in good shape and does not harbour anger, bitterness or unconfessed sin of any kind.

Is prayer something you usually only do before a meal or as you begin a car journey? There are depths to prayer which can only be explored as we bring all of our hopes and fears for the years and learn to work things out according to His Word. Prayer turns everything over to the L-rd and seeks to walk with Him both in how we live outside and in what is going on in our hearts where the inner man is undressing the old man and becoming clothed in the new man, daily and constantly.

Too many believers do not have a prayer when it comes to dealing with the issues in their life and they only pray to get what they want or when they are in trouble and have not discovered the freedom and the power which prayer brings to those who actively engage with the L-rd as they wrestle with the world, the flesh and the enemy and bring every thought and adversary captive and submitted to the Word of the L-rd. Is this your experience? Whether it is or not, it remains our calling and without it, we will not make any spiritual progress in our pilgrimage through this life.

Next to Prayer and our life in the Bible, having an active and engaged flock life will mean that the wolves and dogs cannot ravage us or drag us away to assimilate us into the world we are called to reach out to and never become a part of. We should never abandon the assembling of ourselves together because, unless we are mutually accountable to a group who knows us and looks out for us there will be nobody to pick us up when we fall and lead us back to the right path when we have begun to wander. Fellowship fosters good spiritual health and hygiene.

Our discipleship function encourages two more spiritual disciplines and they are related forms of proclamation: worship and outreach. Worship keeps us in touch with the corporate presence of the L-rd and reminds us that He is active in all of our lives and keeps us looking upwards towards our final home. Individual worship is important but several logs give off more heat than a single one and unites us to celebrate the truth we proclaim so it remains a vital and relevant part of our daily lives.

Learning to share our faith is also a form of proclamation where we win a hearing for the truth of the Gospel and learn to respectfully and firmly explain a reason for the hope which is in us and engage in a dialogue to give others reasons to adopt this same hope. It does not have to be intrusive or confrontational. It should be a recognition that G-d brings people across our path who are light seekers and it is also a discipline where we learnt o avoid the time wasters who are really not interested in spiritual things. Along the way, we will also encounter disciples of other faiths and we also need to learn to respectfully dialogue with them to lead them out of folly and into the truth.

Our discipleship function is a call to actively engage in the transforming power of the Gospel and to allow the truths of the Torah to shape both the way we think and the way we live in our lost and dying world. Discipleship is a commitment to engage in spiritual growth and to learn how to apply the truths of G-d to every area of our lives. It is also a commitment to allow the L-rd to prune away the dead wood which could so easily clog up our lives with hay, wood and stubble, so we have no room for the gold, silver and precious jewels He wants to fill our lives with.

Discipleship is a conscious commitment to learn the necessary spiritual disciplines we will need to have in our lives in order to successfully engage in the spiritual warfare from which no believer is exempt.

Too many believers do not learn how to walk with the L-rd until they get tired of feeding pigs or of walking alone in the dark wilderness of this life. They succumb to one or many of the spiritual childhood diseases which are designed to make us stronger and not weaker.

If we want to live comfortable lives away from conflict, we had better find a place that is totally isolated, but in our worldwide web world, this is increasingly impossible and impractical.

Our world is full of influences we cannot avoid, but which we can definitely overcome with perseverance and a good heart as we engage on a lifelong pilgrimage of learning where we become proficient in handling the weapons of our spiritual warfare as we avoid the double pronged attack of the enemy - upon of faith and upon our spiritual morality.

Israel struggled with two categories of besetting sin: idolatry and fornication. These two enemies have cloned in every generation and nation of our world and our discipleship function

offers a dynamic solution to the spiritual defeat and darkness which is beginning to cover our world again.

Are you a disciple? How well do you handle the spiritual weapons or our warfare?

do you have firm grip on your Bible? Are you a prayer warrior who has learned to discern the voice of the L-rd? Are you a dynamic, vital member of a flock where everybody knows your name? How vital a part of your life is corporate worship where we unite our voices in praise?

Do you share your faith, both by the way you live and by the dialogues you have with people in your life?

What is the L-rd pruning out of your life? What is He building or growing in your life? Is your spirituality the most vital part of your identity and is it a dynamic lifestyle which you embrace in every part of your life?

Join with us, grow with us, walk with us and worship with us and discover you place in the purposes of G-d for this generation and this context through which we are all moving towards our Father's home in glory. Shabbat Shalom.