

13 Tishrei 5777 (15/10/16)

Sukkoth: Heavenly Fire Insurance

J. M. Terrett

Ha'azinu Give Ear G-d Has the Final say

Torah: Deuteronomy 32:1-52

Haftarah: 2 Samuel 22:1-51

Brit Chadashah: Romans 10:17-11:12; 12:19; 15:9-10

Readings: ~~Donna~~ pp. 85, 87 and Psalm 71.

Jewish hero: Apollos.

Torah carrier: Marie

Moses has two final messages to deliver to Israel before his death. One is the song we are going to look at today and the other is a blessing we will look at on Simchat Torah. He is trying to tie up loose ends and make sure he has equipped the people sufficiently so that they will be able to settle in the land in their generations and never lose sight of their need to walk with the L-rd. He has led them for forty years and he has no illusions about either their dubious spiritual potential or their tendency to be rebellious and stiff necked.

He wants his words to fall on them like the rain and his instructions like the dew (vs.2). They are to serve the L-RD who is a rock without sin and whose ways are righteous (vs.4). Israel is the L-RD's portion and Jacob is His inheritance (vs.9).

He says one day Israel will abandon this rock and seek new false gods (vss.16, 17) and will suffer the extended consequences of their foolishness (vss. 22-25). In spite of all this, they are reminded that YHWH is G-d and there is no other G-d (vs. 39) and He will avenge His servants and provide atonement for both His people and the land (vs. 43).

Just before he climbs the mountain for a final look at the promised land, he reminds the people that listening to and putting into practice all the words of this law is not something without importance for them – it is their life and the means by which they shall be able to prolong their lives in the land into which they are about to enter (vs. 47).

G-d gives Moses a panoramic view of the entire land which Israel is going to inherit and G-d announces to him that he is about to join his brother Aaron who died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people (vs. 50).

Moses is reminded why he cannot enter the land – he did not sanctify the L-RD in the midst of the people and because of this he will not be allowed to lead them into their inheritance (vs. 52).

The Haftarah portion deals with 2 Samuel 22, which is also Psalm 18 and is David's song about the wonderful deliverances of G-d for those who walk with Him as He blesses David and prepares the way for His Anointed One, David's eternal posterity.

The New Testament portion outlines Israel's dubious destiny as she wanders through the

generations on her way home to her final recognition of our blessed Messiah, who has never stopped loving them or watching over them, because He will have the final say.

Sermon: Heavenly Fire Insurance

Three Reasons (we are to have nothing but joy).

(1) Our wandering days are over.

(2) We are promised Abundant Harvests and His continued presence

(3) As good as it gets, this world is not our final home, we are only pilgrims passing through this world (and are called to be light and salt as we show the nations the way home – and that there is a home).

We have a five part Message to the lost, confused and compromised children of Adam and Eve (of the sons of Noah): (1) Creation (out of nothing was created complete harmony and order [finished, stable not on going or developing/evolving]). (2) the Fall (our own cosmic battle with evil, because our choices have [generational] consequences (3) the Flood (G-d judged our first ancestors and the same darkness is still trying to flood our world for a second time and bring on the final judgment) (4) the Tower of Babel (G-d slowed down the pace of sinfulness and is working in the generations and nations of mankind to bring all the light seekers to Himself) (5) the Final Kingdom (He is not merely restoring the balance between good and evil in an endless cycle with no permanent victory- the Judge is coming to bring in the new creation so we can forever dwell peacefully in an urban garden on the shores of the river of life).

On this intermediate Sabbath between the High Holy Days and Sukkoth, I would like to take a breather and base my sermon on a few related choice sayings: *life goes on* (you cannot stop at one stage) and all of us will miss "*the good old days*" and say "*back in the day*", because "*tomorrow is a new day*" with a whole new set of "*que sera, sera*", because *you never can tell* what's *just around the corner*, because *you only live once* and *you can't take it with you*.

These are grass roots sayings that reflect a home spun wisdom which is found in all cultures and which speaks about the unpredictability of life where time never stands still. Even in our sophisticated internet global village where the pace of change is astoundingly swift life is going on much the way it has always done – we are born, we grow up, we grow old and we die as another generation takes over.

There is an alarming difference in that for the second time in human history, we are once again becoming a single integrated, global family where an international moral and spiritual darkness is also once again poised to daily incline the hearts of all humanity exclusively towards evil.

Around the world in every culture, traditional grass roots wisdom is being replaced with a secular spirituality which is increasingly exalting itself against everything which is called G-d and making that which is despicable seem right and even holy.

Traditional morality in all cultures and traditional spirituality is fighting a losing rear guard action, but as long as we never lose our grip on what the Bible teaches, our faith becomes the ark which will shelter us once the final judgment of G-d is unleashed upon those who have succumbed to the lies and devices of the enemy of our souls.

How then should we live in this growing darkness without becoming discouraged or becoming radicalized (yelling and screaming and losing our spiritual credibility)? Liberal theology has taken a third option and has accepted evolution and the twisted morality which the Bible condemns and sadly, some believers I know are losing their footing down this slippery slope. Instead of being seen as guardians of right standing up against the forces of evil, we are increasingly seen as troublesome primitive bigots who are part of the problem our brave new world is trying to solve.

We have just come through the High Holy days where we have renewed our commitment to His divine truth in our blessed Messiah and have examined our hearts and our lives to make sure that none of the sinfulness and darkness which surrounds us is allowed to seep into our hearts and lives.

We are about to celebrate Sukkoth and because we walk with Him, we can look forward to a year of blessing and protection, even in the midst of the burgeoning darkness which our homeward path is leading us through.

Today I want to examine a familiar passage of Scripture so that we do not allow carnal, combustible things to creep into our lives which will give us nasty surprises on the day of Judgment when His fire will destroy every trace of the sinful folly of this current age.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15:

According to the grace of G-d which was given to me as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation and another is building upon it. But let each one take heed to the manner in which they are building upon it. For no one can lay another foundation, other than the one which is already laid down and which is Yeshua HaMashiach. Therefore if anyone builds upon this foundation with: gold, silver and precious stones, hay, wood or stubble, the work of each shall be shown for what it is. For the Day shall make it known because it will be revealed in the fire and this fire shall put everyone's work on trial. If the work built by someone upon the foundation survives, he shall receive a reward. If the work of anyone is consumed, he shall lose his reward; as for him, he shall be saved as one escaping through the flames.

I have called my meditation Heavenly Fire Insurance because while we cannot control the direction our foolish world is taking, we can control the baggage we are building up into our lives as we are packing for eternity.

Just as all passengers who are boarding an aeroplane have to pass through security to make sure that they are not trying to sneak any contraband on the flight, so each of us will have to pass through Heavenly security for the same reason.

None of the contraband of this world will be allowed to follow us into the world which is to come.

This passage speaks about three things I want to briefly discuss with you this morning as we take a breather before have nothing but joy as we celebrate Sukkoth in this new festival cycle.

Paul is talking about the only spiritual foundation which will is truly fireproof because nothing less will survive the scrutiny of the eternal flames through which we must all pass. He then goes on to discuss acceptable and regrettable building materials, some of which are flammable, while others are fire proof. He finishes up with a frank discussion of our final fiery exam where we will reap what we have sown, either for gain or for terrible loss.

Spirituality is not an easy option to pursue in our modern world, but Paul clearly declares that there is only one, authentic, fire proof foundation and all other choices are eternally null and void. There are two levels of heavenly fire assurance open to believers and as Paul dealt with the fractious Corinthian assembly, he firmly stated that faith in our blessed Messiah was and still is the only safe haven fro our souls on the day when all mankind shall pass through the fire of G-d on Judgment day.

In our politically correct world which falsely proclaims that all roads lead to Heaven, we appear to have any number of equally valid spiritual options and for an increasing number of authorities it is unthinkable for anyone to claim that there is only one acceptable, authentic spiritual option. However, this is the clear teaching of the Scriptures an every other foundation will not survive the final judgment towards which we are all headed, whether we like it, accept it or reject it.

What is the foundation upon which you are building your spiritual life? If it is not built upon the Messiah, Yeshua of Nazareth, your heavenly fire insurance policy is null and void and no matter nice or convincing you make it sound, you are one of the lost heading towards a fire which will not be quenched.

I am glad that I asked the L-rd into my heart and life as a young person and though the heathen rage and though our techno savvy world wallows in foolishness which I find more and more tiresome as the years go by, all the vain darkness of this age will one day forever disappear in an eternal puff of smoke. And I pity them and want to reach out to them without becoming tangled in their folly and their darkness. We will live among them for as long as this world endures, but we should never become part of them or lose our grip on the only authentic spiritual foundation which is fire proof.

Now once we have settled this issue and have taken out our policy, even in the midst of all the opposition of darkness from the world, how then should we live as we build a life for ourselves in the gathering darkness? Do you notice the similarity between the first three building materials and those which went into the construction of the Ark of the Covenant and the tabernacle.

Gold, silver and precious jewels are symbols of heavenly choices and heavenly priorities in our lives and as long as we fill our lives with these, our heavenly fire insurance policy will not

just cover our souls, but also all the heavenly things which we have given our lives to.

There is nothing wrong with living full lives in the world as we make our pilgrimage through it towards our heavenly home, as long as we see that it is our faith and our obedience which are the treasures we should be filling our lives with, nothing more, nothing less.

Wood, hay and stubble are temporary building materials which we must never confuse with those which will be called to build into our lives. Having a good home, a good career, going on nice vacations, wearing nice clothes and saving up for our kid's education and for our own comfortable retirement are acceptable goals for us here as we pass through this world, but they should not be our primary goals. The practice of holiness and the spiritual disciplines which the Bible calls us to should be the lifetime non negotiables which we give our primary time and energy to and they will be our only legacies which survive the fire of the coming judgment.

Now, I do not want to frighten you into a state of perpetual panic, but you see, we need to make sure that the contents of our hearts and lives are fire proof according to the stipulations of our heavenly fire insurance policy (and which is what the Gospel is all about). We also need to look at our lives as packing for eternity with baggage which we will either be allowed to take with us through by the fire of Heaven's security check or which we will be confiscated as we pass through into the wonder and glory of eternity.

There will really be no time to scramble at the last minute unless we want to enter eternity as foolish refugees who have barely escaped the fiery security check with just their souls and nothing more. I know that in the final analysis, it is always better to be an amoeba in Heaven than a whale in Hell, but our spiritual calling in the Messiah should never be that we made it by the skin of our teeth.

There are both rewards and punishments waiting for all of us once this life is over. How we respond to the ups and downs and influences of this life will determine into which category we fall when we pass through the fiery security check on that final day. The Lord issues us a heavenly fire insurance policy which stipulates what kind of baggage is fire proof and which is flammable. We have just been through ten days of our annual spiritual life inventory and in this passage Paul reminds us that there is one final inventory check which is coming.

Roman Catholics feel that this passage is referring to a time of spiritual purging where believers suffer in the flames for sins which they have not dealt with in this life. The passage does not speak about believers suffering in the flames, but passing through them, to suffer loss because they ignored the stipulations of their heavenly fire insurance policy and tried to pass through the fiery security check with worthless and flammable baggage. On the other hand, those believers who have built upon their foundation with fire proof materials, will pass through the fiery security check unscathed and be rewarded for the positive spiritual choices they made as part of a biblical lifestyle.

Life goes one and you only live once, because you never know what is just around the corner and we are all aging at the same rate as we move from conception through life towards the

grave and beyond, but believers have a distinct advantage and I want to close with this.

Though we can never be certain how our lives will turn out in this world or what surprises are waiting for us just around the corner, we can be certain of both the guidance and the protection/provision of G-d as we fire proof our lives and get ready to pass through the fiery security check which is waiting for us as we pass from this world into the world which is to come.

Nothing which does not conform to the stipulations of our heavenly fire insurance policy should be allowed to be built into our lives so that we receive a reward for our biblical spirituality and do not suffer loss for allowing our lives to be cluttered with the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Sukkoth begins tomorrow night and we are to have nothing but joy because: our wandering is over, we are promised abundant harvests and His continued presence and most importantly because as good as it gets, this world is not our home and we are only passing through it to the next life which is filled with joyful glory and eternal peace as we sit down in an urban garden on the shores of the river of life.

Therefore, let us never let go of the Gospel message of which we are guardians and let us shine and be salty as the final global darkness undermines traditional grass roots spirituality. All mankind shall appear before the judgment of G-d in our beloved Messiah, but believers are given a solid fireproof foundation which they can build upon according to the stipulations of their heavenly fire insurance policy.

If they build with unworthy, flammable materials, these will be destroyed as they pass through the fiery security check, because nothing of the flesh, the world or the enemy will be allowed through to pollute the wonder and glory of the life which is to come.

Have you taken out your Heavenly Fire Insurance Policy? What kind of materials are you building into your life? How much of how you have lived your life and what you have given your time and energy to will survive the fiery security check as you enter the life which is to come? The longer we live, the more our lives are impacted by the choices we make and not by the circumstances we are passing through.

All of this will come to light and be revealed as our King peels away the folly of this creation and burns it all up to make room for the wonder and the glory of His eternal Kingdom. All darkness will be forever banished, all tears will be wiped dry and the weight of the eternal glory which is waiting for us remains unworthy to be compared to the light sufferings of this temporary age, no matter how dark and evil it becomes.

See you tomorrow at the Sukkah!

Shabbat shalom. Lets pray.