

Yitro	Jethro (Abundance)	His Word Stands Alone and Above
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Torah:	Exodus 18:1-20:26 (23)
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Haftarah:	Isaiah 6:1-7:6; 9:6,7 (5,6)
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Brit Chadashah:	Matt. 5:8-20
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Reading: Sharon p. 161. Ps. 19. Jewish hero: Eliezer (Abraham's servant) Torah carrier: Marie

This week's Torah portion covers the most important moment in the life of the newly liberated people of Israel when they received their spiritual mandate, the one which has remained the defining generational call of the Jewish people. It is also the sole foundation of authentic spirituality for all believers and remains the only rock upon which we can build the house which will successfully endure the storms of life as we remain wither proof trees planted by the stream of living water.

The Haftarah portion points to both the reasons for Israel's captivity and also to the arrival of the promised Messiah who will inaugurate G-d's eternal reign over all the nations and generations of mankind. Israel will endure because her trunk and roots are sound, even if the rest of the tree becomes rotten and unsound.

The New Testament portion links the mandate of all believers with the Law which was given to Israel. As the salty light we will often encounter viscous defamation and opposition, but we are never to abandon the Word or endeavour to justify a partial obedience which only observes the portion of the Law and the Prophets which it finds significant and ignores the rest.

In the days of our Messiah, there was a divisive argument raging in Judaism about the place of the Law as a guide for those who wanted to build a more convenient form of partial obedience than the total commitment which the Law requires. This was also the early stages of the development of the Talmud which sought to elevate the traditions of the scribes and scholars to the same level as the received Word of G-d. While it does contain a wealth of insightful information about the meaning of certain texts of the Bible, none of the traditions and teachings it contains should ever be considered of equal authority as the Bible of which it claims to be commentary.

Probably its biggest foray into error is its attempt to dethrone the Ten Commandments and exalt all of the supposed 613 commandments of the Torah as equal and not as applications of the Ten Words, which alone contain the heart of what authentic obedience and observance should look like. In Hebrew, 613 spells Moses our teacher (Moshe rabbenu) and in rabbinic Judaism, faith and obedience has become entwined both with a watered down understanding of the singular place of the Ten Commandments and with a complicated array of tales and traditions. Instead of maintaining a protective wall around the Law of G-d, they have shackled it to so much human tradition that its clear voice is muted and even drowned out by the voices of men falsely claiming to speak on equal terms with the voice of G-d.

When Moses father-in-law brought Moses' wife and children back to him, now that he was safely out of Egypt, he saw that the camp was disorganized and that the people were nowhere near reaching a point where they could hear from G-d. Moses was trying to wean them away from the bad habits and spiritual misunderstandings which they had acquired in Egypt but he was overpowered by the sheer scope of the questions which all the people wanted individual

answers to. It would have taken an entire generation for one man to wade through the immense detail and minutiae and then he would have to repeat the process endlessly with each succeeding generation without being able to get to the meaty core of what the L-rd wanted to say to His people.

Under his father-in-law's supervision, he divided the camp into leaders of a thousand, a hundred and of ten, so that the minor details they were dealing with would not clog the major details they should have been concentrating on. With an organized leadership, the people would be able to integrate G-d's Word into their new found freedom without drowning in minor details and being unable to understand the spiritual principles which their faith and obedience should be based on.

After sealing this new found organizational leadership structure with a ritual meal in the presence of G-d, Moses is called up the mountain and receives the core of every message which the voice of G-d has ever given to mankind – the Ten Commandments. The ten words were given as a nothing more and nothing less covenant commitment to faith and obedience which our Messiah said even modern believers can never abrogate or violate.

The passage ends with the people's startled reaction to the terrifying spectacle of hearing the voice of G-d which was accompanied with lightening thunder and which caused the mountain to shake like jelly. Rather than having to endure this, the people to ask Moses to speak to them on G-d's behalf and not have to sit in terrified silence at the foot of the holy mountain. It should be noted that what G-d said to His people was just as terrifying as the way He said it, because the Ten Commandments leave no room for either a divided loyalty or a partial obedience.

The prophet Isaiah is equally dismayed at the awesome vision of the YHVH which he is given and rightly feels unworthy to behold the heavenly beauty of our G-d. In anticipation of the future sacrifice of our Messiah his sin is dealt with by fire from the heavenly altar and he is ready to be G-d's spokesman to the people whose protracted folly has made their captivity inevitable. The passage is paired with a fivefold declaration about the identity and mission of our beloved Saviour who is indeed Emmanuel – G-d with us and this theme is repeated often throughout the book of Isaiah. G-d continues to speak to unworthy people and removes our sin through our beloved Messiah, so that we can walk with Him in holiness and awe.

The New Testament portion reiterates the impossibility of carving up the Ten Commandments into categories of the least and the greatest, because G-d's Word will always be a package deal with no substitutions or deletions. The phrase, these commandments does not refer to the beatitudes because they are blessings and give no orders.

It refers to the Ten commandments and the rest of Matthew chapter five deals with corrections which this flawed approach to spirituality spawned. You can neither add to, nor take away from the Word of G-d and all that His Word teaches is summed up in the Ten Commandments and they should never be diluted or polluted with the traditions or the teachings of men. His Word stands alone and above the teachings of men and while it is our blessed generational privilege and duty to integrate its teachings into our lives and apply its teachings to every circumstance of our lives, we are warned never to add to it or subtract from it. This was the sinful error of the scribes and Pharisees and the reason they lost their kingdom access because of their attempt to disguise disobedience as acceptable option for those who claim to walk with the L-rd and be His disciples.

His Word stands alone and above and we need to stand alone in our grasp of its teachings and above all and any attempts to alter its contents. All traditions are not always wrong, but it is always wrong to elevate them to the status of equality with the Word of G-d. Sacred cows make good hamburger and golden calves will always leave you with a bitter bad taste in your mouth. G-d's Word alone is sacred and no human teaching, no matter how exalted and magnificent sounding can ever come close to that which was thundered on the quaking mountain. This is because though the grass withers and the glory of this world continually fades into dust, the Word of G-d alone endures forever and nothing less is worth our primary devotion.

I want you to stand as I read the Ten commandments and to remain standing as we recite the final Torah blessings and promenade the scroll and refresh our grasp of its teachings in our blessed Messiah.

SERMON: Renewal of Our Kingdom Consciousness

Thus says YHVH: place yourselves in the roads and look and around and ask for the ancient paths, which is the good way; walk in it and you shall find rest for your souls! But they answered, we will not walk in it. (Jeremiah 6:16)

In this series on renewal, I will keep coming back to a core theme which is also the only authentic source of prolonged and sustained renewal – His Word, which I have already said stands alone and above and should never be diluted or polluted with the traditions of men. Probably the biggest and most important feature of renewal is to be coming back to His Word and to always be sifting through the teachings of men to make sure they measure up to His Word, without adding to it or deleting from it and we do not lose our kingdom consciousness.

And while I usually like to speak to you with sermons that expand on three main points, today, briefly, I want to depart from this and give you four main features of what renewal of our kingdom consciousness should look like. I want to talk about a renewed commitment along with a renewed confidence which will translate into a renewed compassion which always strives to remain contemporary and meaningful as we reach out to a lost and dying world which is trivializing itself to death, all the while straining politically correct secular gnats and endlessly swallowing irrelevant and imaginary evolutionary camels.

Let us first deal with renewing our commitment to G-d through our Messiah, according to His Word. You all know that part of my recovery from chemical sensitivity has been a radical purging from my diet of the main allergens which can mess up our metabolism and weaken our resistance to illness and disease. Along with avoidance and detoxification, desensitization prevents the smelly airborne pollution which pervades our modern society from gumming up my system, because in a weakened state my reactions were longer and stronger and that is no way to live if it can be helped. What are you gumming up your spirituality with?

In our modern world, there are so many sources of spiritual allergens and even toxic, sweet smelling spiritual perfumes which will weaken our spirituality and make us spiritually sick and unable to hear and digest the Word of our Saviour. These poisons may leak into your house and into your heart and life through the internet, or cable TV or on any combination of hand held electronic devices full of apps and texts, keeping you so connected to the world, that you end up disconnecting from G-d and His Word.

Now understand that I use the internet as way to stay connected and reach out and my cell phone receives any number of texts every day and means that I can stay in touch with people who might otherwise serially perfume me. But I do not feed my soul with spiritual McJunk food or the traditions and teachings of men which do not measure up to the Word of our resurrected King. Wallowing in deception can make you allergic to biblical truth, mishpocah.

I have been a serious student of the Bible nearly 46 years and when I pick it up and study it, it still has the power to be as fresh and as nourishing, every day, as the manna which fed our people during their wilderness wanderings. It also has the power to hammer at me and burst into flame to guide me out of darkness and to keep me focused and centred as I stumble through the storms of this life and remain bullet proof to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune which persistently do their best to discourage and destroy me.

There are things in the Bible we are not meant to fully understand, just as there are things in life which we will never really fathom, but as long as we are guided by the amazing teachings of this awesome double collection of G-d's Word, we will be renewed and healed over and over again on our pilgrimage through this life to our Father's home in glory.

How is your commitment to His Word doing? Is your heart and life being clogged by various spurious forms of spiritual McJunk food instead of purging these allergens from your spiritual diet? Do you depart from all and any teachings which themselves depart from G-d's Word? Regular devotions and serious regular Bible Study will renew our spiritual health and strengthen our spiritual walk through this life and spare us from any number of the spiritual rabbit trails which prowl through our world, seeking those whom they may devour.

There are a lot of things in life which even believers intend to do when they get around to it, but which remain forever on the back burner of the best made plans of mice and men. They never to be able to rise above just being those good intentions which pave the way to that horrible place called hell – that eternal junk yard of failed, choked and withered spirituality, overcome by the flesh, the devil and the world in the oblivion of endless darkness.

Repentance is a discipline which only works in this life and it alone opens us up to the forgiveness of G-d and helps us escape from the grasp of needless futility and spiritual insignificance. Are you regularly renewing your commitment to the Word of G-d or is your spiritual vitality slipping away because your spiritual diet lacks a healthy dose of the divine truth which His Word alone provides? What spiritual allergens are you allowing to needlessly weaken your heart and life?

As we renew our commitment to His Word, we will also grow in another aspect of Kingdom consciousness and that is confidence in G-d's ability to both provide for our needs and protect us from all harm. Even though the Bible warns us that our entrance into the Kingdom will be through great tribulation, as we renew our commitment to Him through His Word, we will experience His sustaining power as we pass through these difficult times and are not destroyed or overcome by them.

Paul said that he knew the One whom he believed in and was confident that He was able to keep that which Paul and all believers are called to commit unto Him – our souls and the ultimate direction of our lives towards our ultimate destination. Renewing kingdom consciousness means both that we have tasted and seen that the L-rd is good and also that

we have found that He will never leave us nor forsake us – or ever allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to successfully resist the sin which so easily tries to beset us.

How confident are you in His provision? How confident are you in His protection? Now, I have been abused, deceived, betrayed and have had pernicious lies told about me and my family by believers who should have known better. However, He has helped to remain more than a conqueror and also firmly convinced that the light affliction of this present time is never worthy to be compared to the eternal weight of glory which is waiting for me when His eternal kingdom finally bursts forth and consumes all the pain and folly of this worthless age we are only wandering through.

How about you? I know that our hearts will sometimes sing: nobody know the trouble I've seen, but as we turn things over to Him and learn to view them from the perspective of Kingdom consciousness, our song changes to: Great is Thy Faithfulness and It is well, it is well with my soul.

A lack of confidence in Him through His Word is a colossal waste of time for believers and diminishes the positive impact we can have on this lost and dying world. When we have confidence in Him, He knows that He can have confidence in us and we can renew another aspect of Kingdom consciousness – compassion. This is where instead of judging and condemning we show mercy and love and want to help the lonely wounded souls we live amongst.

Now this doesn't mean we succumb to the perverted demon of political correctness which accepts everything and anyone, even those who voted liberal – it means that we relate to everyone with meekness and gentleness and even when we have to lay down the law, we do so full of the love of the Gospel and the compassion which G-d showed to each one of us.

I may sometimes become your enemy because I tell you the truth and the way I wound you may often be more faithful the kisses of an enemy, but I will never be your enemy and will never wish you harm or pain – even if I have to turn you in and have you arrested or ask you to either tone down your silliness or find somewhere else to worship (and find other victims to disturb and disrupt). Discipline always needs to be redemptive and never willingly destructive.

we see this in Israel, which remains the safest place for Muslims to live in the Middle East, and whose armed forces show incredible restraint, even with the terrorists and agitators who continue to wish for and work towards her destruction. I feel compassion for the gay community because they are broken and twisted and have given up on being sexually whole. I even feel compassion for those mothers who criminally end the lives of their unborn children and while I believe that all lawbreakers should be locked up and am also a firm believer in capital punishment, I feel compassion for those who lives are full of the rage and darkness which drives the criminal mind.

Instead of changing the law to decriminalize more and more offences, we need to show support for those who protect our country, and who enforce our laws and keep us safe as we sleep in our beds at night. This leads me to my final point in our discussion of renewing our Kingdom consciousness – being contemporary.

Each time our world clones another spiritual lie and develops a new cultural twist and develops

new jargon will even an old hippy finds hard to understand, I want to express my faith in ways which will always be meaningful and which will always make our eternal message, accessible to the light seekers among whom we dwell. While His Word stands and should never be changed and while we should always be developing new ways to express and uphold our faith and obedience, we should never turn our back on outreach and we should always be involved in sharing our faith with our lost and dying world.

I find so much of what the world believes and how the world lives to be so exceedingly repugnant and repulsive that I can hardly wait for our Messiah to smash through time and space and silence our idolatrous, fornicating world which is so full of fanatics and liars and cruelty and corruption. But despite all of this, I do not hate sinners and perverts or those whose political agenda is to overthrow and destroy my faith in the Word of our Messiah. Rather I feel sorry for them and want them to find the spiritual release and freedom which a personal relationship with our resurrected Messiah offers.

Renewing our Kingdom consciousness means renewing our commitment to His Word, our confidence in His provision and protection. It also means having compassion on the lost and hurting ones, both within our faith community and out in the darkening world, because being contemporary also means learning to express our message meaningfully and powerfully so that it is easily grasped by the lost and by those sinners who fight against it.

May your Kingdom consciousness grow and prosper, joyfully and powerfully. Let's pray.