

6 Iyyar, 5778 (21/4/18) **Remembering to Sanctify the Day of Rest** J. M. Terrett

Reading: Betty p. 155 and Ps. 106 or 120. Jewish hero: Mary (Martha's sister) Torah carrier: Jack

**Tazria/Metzora**

**She bears seed/infected one**

**Quarantine and Healing**

This week we have a double Torah portion and both portions are very technical because they deal with four concepts: quarantine, healing, purity and exclusion. Briefly, before we look at specific verses, let's examine each concept. Before the advent of modern medicine, the Bible gave some fairly wise and sophisticated advice when it came to infectious skin conditions and sores from which there was an issuing of blood.

To prevent the spread of infection, after a priest identified a possible skin infection, the affected person was kept in a seven day quarantine, both to give their body time to overcome the infection and to prevent the spread of their condition. It was understood that during their isolation, they would be seeking the Lord for their healing and if this occurred, they made special sacrifices of thanksgiving. Their needs were met during this enforced rest period and if they were declared infection free, they were declared pure.

Purity in this case meant infection free and the ability to rejoin community life. If their infection did not go away, they had to live outside the camp and later outside the town or village. This exclusion was not a complete rejection, because they were fed and could request another inspection by a priest, when they noticed an improvement in their condition.

In most Bibles, the word used for infectious skin conditions is usually leprosy, but term was also applied to any number of other infectious skin conditions. There were two concepts which baffled me when I first starting studying the portion and the Talmud was helpful in one case but not in the other.

Chapter twelve deals with how woman was impure after giving birth. It was a total of forty days for a boy and sixty for a girl. Does the Bible consider female babies twice as impure as male babies? Not at all. Because a girl was going to give birth when she grew up, her mother is giving her a double purification, so she starts the process clean and not impure. She will also one day have her monthly periods, so her mother is giving her an advanced purification, so in many ways, girl babies are twice as cherished as the young gentlemen.

Chapter 13 talks about a skin condition which turns someone's skin white. The Talmud says the person was being punished for their sinful pride, but that is not at all what the passage means. If the skin condition turns all of his skin white, he was considered pure, because there were no sores or ulcers anywhere on his body and his body had defeated the infection. If an ulcer appeared, he was considered impure, as long as it persisted.

The closest sense I think we can make of this passage, is that in the case of a leprous skin condition which covered the body with weeping sores, once the sores stopped weeping and all of the person's skin turned completely white, he was declared clean or disease free. But if there were still open sores, mixed with white skin or scabs, the person was not free of their infectious skin condition and was considered impure. Quarantine is a sound medical practice. It was the priest's job to prevent epidemics and to seek healing for the sick.

**Torah:**

Leviticus 12:1-13:59/Leviticus 14:1-15:33

(1). 13:11 - “. . . it is a skin leprosy that has long developed. The priest shall declare the man unclean without quarantining him, since he is certainly unclean,” When the leprosy was obvious the person was excluded and not quarantined. They were only quarantined if there was uncertainty or if there was an improvement that had to be verified.

(2), 13:45, 46 - “***The one who bears the sore of leprosy, shall wear torn garments and keep his head bare and shall cover his beard. He shall cry out, 'unclean, unclean! As long as the sore is on him, he shall declare himself unclean, since he in fact unclean. He shall dwell apart and make his dwelling outside the camp.***” This exclusion was not an exile, but was to protect the camp from infection. He would only cry out when people inadvertently came close and they wore torn clothing and no head covering, so they could be recognized at a distance. They were not left to starve, but the specific details of how they were fed are not given. It is possible that they raised their own food, or were fed, along with the widows and the poor.

(3). 13:58 - “***But if after the washing, the infection has left the garment, or the woven or knitted material, or the leather article, the thing shall be washed a second time and thus it will be clean.***” This is probably some kind of mold and if it has not infected the whole of the garment, but responds to washing, after a second washing, it is declared clean. If the mold will not come out, the garment was to be burned. Drastic measures for drastic problems.

(4).14:14 - “***Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the man's right ear, the thumb of his right hand and the big toe of his right foot.***” Once someone was declared pure or cleansed of an infectious skin condition, part of the ceremony to declare them pure resembled the anointing ceremony of the priests. They were both giving G-d the glory and also dedicating themselves to His service once again. Part of the sacrifice of atonement and guilt involved eating a portion of the meat as a sign that the deal was sealed. This ceremony is a further sign that the healing deal was sealed and the healed person was ready to rejoin the community.

(5) 14: 44, 45 - “***The priest shall visit the house again and if he finds that the infection has spread in the house, it is corrosive leprosy (likely some kind of mold) and the house is unclean. It shall be pulled down, and all of its stones, beams and mortar shall be hauled away to an unclean place outside the city.***” If the dwelling will not come clean, it had to be demolished. You have to deal with your problems and not ignore or conceal them. They even had a concept of a city dump.

(6).15:2,11 – “***every man who is afflicted with a chronic flow from his private parts is thereby unclean. . . anyone who is touched by him and has not washed his hands in water, shall wash his clothing and bathe in water and shall be impure until the evening.***” Clean hands prevent the spread of infections. The Greeks thought the Jews were dirty because they did not bathe daily. The Jews thought the Greeks were dirty because they ate their food without washing their hands. We have to be clean, both physically and spiritually. Spiritual and physical hygiene is what the book of Leviticus is all about and both aspects are as important for us today as they were back then.

(7) 15:31 - “***You shall warn the Israelites of their uncleanness, lest by defiling my Dwelling, which is in their midst, their uncleanness be the cause of their death.***” Ritual impurity and physical impurity put the people at risk of violating the terms of the covenant. Sometimes it takes people time to heal, both spiritually and physically and in my experience giving people their space allows them a form of voluntary quarantine until they are healed and have dealt with

their afflictions. G-d wants us to deal with our problems, however long that takes and whatever we have to do for this to occur. This portion shows that G-d wants us to take our physical and spiritual healing and hygiene very seriously. How seriously are you taking yours?

**Haftarah:** 2 Kings 7:3-20

Tells the story of the lepers who found the Syrian camp abandoned and went and told the starving city of Samaria that there was food in the camp.

**Brit Chadashah:** Luke 7:18-35/Matthew 23:16-24:2; 30, 31

Tells the story of John's disciples asking if Yeshua is the Messiah and Yeshua says that His signs and miracles are the affirmative answer which John seeks. In Matthew, Yeshua criticizes the Pharisees who have an outer appearance of holiness, but are inwardly defiled. Holiness is not all about disguising sin, but is all about dealing with it until it is gone. While they may not recognize Messiah until He comes, His coming is certain and He will gather all the scattered righteous from all over the planet.

**Sermon: Remembering to Sanctify the Day of Rest: Exodus 20:8-11**

Passage: ***“Remember the day of rest to sanctify it. You shall labour for six days and do all of your work. But the seventh day is a day of rest in YHVH your G-d. You shall do no work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man servant, nor your maid servant, nor your animals, nor the stranger who dwells in your midst. For in six days the L-rd made the heavens and the earth and all that is in it and He rested on the seventh day. That is why the L-rd blessed the day of rest and sanctified it.”***

The seventh day is both called a day of rest and the stopping day. When we greet one another on the Sabbath we say Shabbat shalom which means have a peaceful stopping day. Shabbat means to stop and part of that stopping is to acknowledge the finished work of creation. This can only happen when we take a break from our work and stop doing what we ordinarily do on the other six days of the week.

The word remember means to acknowledge a very special day of the week. To sanctify it means to stop working and also to contemplate the finished work of the creation in which we live. It is our weekly temporal tithe and resting on the seventh day, fills the rest of week with the holiness which we have acquired by observing the Sabbath.

Traditional Judaism has come up with 37 prohibited activities which Jews are supposed to abstain from in order to truly stop and rest on the Sabbath. These categories are further divided into hundreds of subcategories of forbidden work activities which are called melachot in Hebrew. They are all supposed to be derived from activities around the building of the tabernacle and which work was stopped for the Sabbath.

Some observant Jews go to extremes to avoid what they consider to be forbidden work on the Sabbath and that includes riding in a car, using the telephone and turning on any machines that do not function automatically on their own. One of the strangest Sabbath prohibitions involves not using an elevator because it involves hitting to buttons – one to get it to stop for you and the other to choose which floor you want to get out at. In Israel a solution was found and there are elevators which stop at every floor constantly for as long as the Sabbath lasts.

Another way of looking at Sabbath prohibitions is to abstain from any activity which is

considered to be creative and the list of forbidden creative works (melachot) is extensive and the closer you adhere to the prohibitions, the more you are considered to be actually observing the Sabbath. A lot of observant Jews work harder at not working on the Sabbath than they do at actually getting rest.

Since we are a synagogue of Messianic Jews and Gentiles, we are not bound by the legal rulings and traditions of the Talmud or the Mishnah (writings and rulings) which it contains. This does not mean that we want to violate the Sabbath and not sanctify it, it just means we want to follow the clear teachings of the Scriptures and not be bound by the traditions of men. Sabbath rest is a discipline we need to develop, if we want to walk with the L-rd for the rest of the week and should not be seen as a list of obligations which render the day burdensome.

The basic Bible principle is to remember to rest in the finished work of creation. This involves abstaining from the work which we do on the six other days of the week and giving our time over the worship and study as part of the rest we are taking. It also means not getting others to do the work which we are taking a break from.

Our passage says that everyone in our household must stop working including our children, servants and animals. Many synagogues hire a Gentile to be a Shabbat Goy (Sabbath Gentile) who will perform work in the synagogue which Jews are forbidden to perform. Our passage forbids us from making non Jews do work for us which are forbidden to us.

I know it may seem silly, but for some even flushing the toilet is considered work which a Jew is forbidden to perform on the Sabbath. And for others, pushing a baby carriage is forbidden on the Sabbath and yet changing a dirty diaper and breast feeding are permitted.

Focusing on what work is prohibited can easily take our attention away from the rest and the contemplation we are supposed to be enjoying on the Sabbath. This morning I would like to briefly contemplate four principles which I believe our passage teaches us about what it means to observe the Sabbath: remembering, stopping, resting and contemplating.

The Sabbath is the only day of the week which the L-rd declared to be holy and we need to remember that the Sabbath should be a day totally dedicated to the L-rd as a break from what we would ordinarily do for the other six days of the week. Taking this kind of break is not as easy as it seems, because there is so much going on in our lives which needs our immediate attention.

Over the years Jewish people have come up with some creative solutions when it comes to taming the tyranny of the urgent and actually taking a break.

In times of war, Jewish soldiers were allowed to fight a defensive battle, but not to initiate an attack on the Sabbath. Doctors were allowed to treat the sick, but not to see new patients who did not require immediate medical attention. It was permitted to feed animals on the Sabbath, but not to prepare food for them. And when it came to preparing food for themselves a special kind of low, simmering stew called a cholent is what many Jews eat for lunch on the Sabbath, because, for them cooking is forbidden on the Sabbath.

Remembering means that we take the Sabbath as a special day for us to seek G-d through contemplation, worship and study. It should be seen as a special day with a very focused

agenda. On the other days of the week, we can go about our business and try to get our chores done, but remembering the Sabbath means that we focus on G-d and rest in His completed work.

As believers in Yeshua we also need to remember what He did for us on the cross and that one day, He will return and set up His everlasting kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. It is a day when we can study His Word and not worry about the things we usually give our attention to for the rest of the week.

How you remember the Sabbath should be a matter of personal conviction where G-d has our complete attention and we are focused on seeking first His righteousness and His kingdom. It is not that we ignore G-d and His Word for six days and play Sabbath catch up for 24 hours. Remembering the Sabbath means that we fill our hearts and minds with the things of G-d and feast on them during the six days which follow the Sabbath.

One of the biggest features of this remembering is stopping and not doing what you usually do during the six days which precede the Sabbath. In our home, no housework or yard work is performed on the Sabbath. We will put food away and clear the dinner table, but no dishes are done from sunset to sunset. We may go for a walk, but our favorite Sabbath activity is our Shabbat snooze. I do not set up counselling or tutoring sessions on Saturday, because we are supposed to be stopping and not working on this special day.

Now, I will respond to crises and lend a hand to people who are in distress, but my catch up day for all that remains unfinished is Sunday. It is usually given over to cleaning up after the Sabbath and running errands we purposely avoided doing during the Sabbath. There are two extremes to stopping which we need to avoid. The first is to refuse to do anything on the Sabbath which looks like work, even when there is a great need or an emergency which suddenly crops up. The second is to make so many exceptions, that we end up working as hard on the Sabbath as we do during the other six days of the week.

Stopping for the Sabbath is a discipline we need to develop and it will take all of our creativity to be both firm and flexible on this special day. Ideas about what stopping means may vary, but we need to do whatever we have to do, in order to give G-d our complete attention and devotion on the day which He sanctified.

However, the point of stopping for the Sabbath is to give our engines time to cool off so that we can rest and recharge. Resting is not always as simple as it seems because there is an endless list of just one more thing to do before we feel we can stop and rest.

Rest can be vigorous as well as passive, depending on what you find restful. I find riding my bike restful, as well as going for long walks. I find going to the gym restful and I enjoy dancing on the Sabbath. Others find going on Facebook restful, but some Jewish websites shut down for the Sabbath. I try to post something new on our Facebook page at least once a week, but I do not do it on the Sabbath. I do not like to answer emails on the Sabbath, but I will answer the phone, but I will not listen to sales pitches or take part in surveys until the Sabbath is over.

Instead of sleeping in on the Sabbath, I usually go to bed early on Friday night and take my Shabbat snooze on Saturday afternoon. I do not consider setting up for service and putting things away after service as work – it is a mitzvah or a good deed. We should do our best not to concentrate on the grey areas to the point that our attempt to rest on the Sabbath becomes exhausting and incredibly complicated.

We need to come up with our own version of 39 melachot (forbidden work), whether our list is longer or shorter than somebody else's. We need this personal list because resting is an important feature of walking with the L-rd and there is one day of the week which should be entirely devoted to this sacred activity. Have you come to terms with what it means for you to rest on this special day?

Another thing which our busy schedules prevents us from doing much of is contemplating, which is a restful way of studying and tasting to see how good the L-rd is. It is almost like dreaming or day dreaming where we wander mentally through green pastures and let our cup overflow. I rarely purposely cover new ground on the Sabbath and I refrain from consciously sowing or reaping new ideas. But just as it is permitted to harvest what grows on its own during a sabbatical year, I welcome any new ideas or insights which pop up on their own.

Reading the Bible and doing Bible Study is not a violation of the Sabbath as long as we are just grazing and not trying to figure out difficult passages or difficult concepts. We need to reserve our skull sweat for the other days of the week and not go around storming fortresses and fighting the good fight, vigorously correcting any error which crops up.

There is a difference between enjoying the beauty of nature as a spectator and not as a professional who is trying to analyze environmental concerns. There is also a difference between singing songs on the Sabbath and composing new songs or making new arrangements for old songs on this special day.

There are so many things about G-d and His creation which we should contemplate on the Sabbath, but we need to avoid wandering into trying to figure out things which we do not understand. New ideas and new concepts might hit us as we go over familiar ground, but we are contemplating familiar ground on the Sabbath rather than looking for new worlds to conquer.

Remember the day of rest and sanctify it by stopping and not performing work tasks on this special day, be they mental or manual. We all need to develop our own clear understanding of what we consider to be prohibited work (melachot) that we will not do on the Sabbath. We all need to take a Sabbath break far from the maddening crowd and the tyranny of the urgent.

Once we light the Sabbath candles, our busy lives need to come to a halt as we pause to contemplate the finished work of our Creator. Even in the depth of our awesome, long Canadian winter, once a week, on the seventh day, we need to stop and smell the roses, if we want to be truly Sabbath powered and festival driven.

If we do not learn the art of intentional rest, we will wear ourselves out. As we age, all of us will slow down, but if we want to age gracefully and not let the cares of this life run our lives, we need to learn to stop and have our weekly heaven break. There is a big difference between being good and tired and constantly being exhausted because we do not have the discipline to take a weekly Sabbath break.

Today we will be introducing a booklet entitled *Delighting in the Sabbath*. It is a guide to Sabbath observance in the home and it is not being presented so that you do everything which the booklet talks about on the Sabbath. Sabbath observance is a very personal set of decisions which we make so that this special day is kept in our own special way, using the Scriptures as

our only guide. The booklet give us ideas, but we need to personalize them.

The Sabbath needs to be cherished and guarded as a personal and a community work free zone. We need to take a complete break and not play catch up with things we did not get around to during the week. I would like to finish by quoting the first two verses of Psalm 127:

***“Unless the L-rd builds the house, those who labour, labour in vain. Unless the L-rd guards the city, those who guard it, do so in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early and go to bed late, eating the bread of anxious concern; because the L-rd provides for the ones He loves while they sleep”.***

Are you letting the L-rd build your house and watch over your city? Are you on a strict diet, vigorously eating the bread of anxious concern? Are you driven by worry and compulsion? There is a big difference between a solid, dedicated worker who is enthusiastic about what he is doing and one who is determined that everything would fall apart if does not give it 110%

The Sabbath is a needed lesson on resting in the L-rd and we cannot really be effective and grow in Him until we have learned this essential lesson. What are you going to be doing for the rest of the day? How good are you at resting on the Sabbath? Do you really understand that you have to rest on the Sabbath in order to keep it holy? Do you understand that the day belongs to the L-rd and to the things of the L-rd?

How good are you at stopping and ceasing to work on the Sabbath? Are you going to spend the rest of today, peacefully contemplating the completed work of the L-rd? Are you going to take a Shabbat snooze? Are you going to take a restful walk? Are you going to play with your children and your grandchildren? Spiritual maturity and Sabbath rest go hand in hand.

The fourth commandment shows us that in order to serve the L-rd, we have to rest in the L-rd and He has set aside one day in which to do so. It is our weekly shutdown and is a non negotiable stipulation which the L-rd requires of us. It is a holy day and you keep it holy by remembering to rest as you stop all work and toil from sunset to sunset. It is a requirement and not an option. Some have wrapped it up in complicated, arbitrary legalism which makes it a burden and not a privilege. This was never the intention of our G-d and His Messiah. How well are you exercising your privilege? Shabbat shalom and Shavua tov.