

Chukat	Ordinance of	Making Up for Lost Time: The Lost Years
Torah:	Numbers 19:1-22:1	
Haftarah:	Judges 11:1-33	Reading: Betty p. 177 and Ps. 95
Brit Chadashah:	John 3:10-21	Jewish hero: Lot. Torah carrier: Aaron

Very little detail is given concerning the lost years, where Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years until the unbelieving generation died. This is because nothing happened until it was time for the House of Jacob to come out of the wilderness and enter the land of Canaan. The Talmud speculates that in the fortieth year, those of the lost generation who were still alive, dug their own graves and died, smitten by the L-rd. Always be careful, when detail is added which is not found in the Scriptures.

Well, what did they do for those long lonely years? G-d would not have permitted them to ignore His Word and they would have at least observed Passover annually, as well preparing their children to keep the coming harvest festival cycle. They lost the privilege of entering the Promised Land, but they were still people of the Promises who were fed daily with manna and who always had an adequate water supply for both them and their flocks. Their feet did not swell and their clothes did not wear out, as they dwelt under the cloud every and had the flame to light up their night sky.

This week's portion begins with the ordinance of the red heifer and this messianic ritual is preceded by an explanation of the source of every ordinance the people were to incorporate into their lives. Numbers 19:1 says that this is what is ordained by the Law which YHVH has prescribed. In the Scriptures, the Law of YHVH refers back to the Ten Commandments, because these divine principles are the foundation of everything else G-d had to say to His people. The ordinance of the red heifer (Paran Adamah) was given so that the redeemed people could be cleansed whenever they encountered anything which might defile them or render them unclean.

The heifer had to be spotless and it is a reference to our Messiah who came both as the sacrificial Passover Lamb of G-d and as Adam's cow. He took on Adam's sinful nature, without ever sinning, even once and became the perfect sacrifice for our sins as well as a source of spiritual cleansing to purify us whenever darkness tries to invade our daily lives. The Scriptures say that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is both the Lamb of G-d who's blood delivers us from the Egypt of this world and He is also the red heifer who's blood cleanses us from the stain of sin whenever it tries to take over our lives as we wander through this life on our pilgrimage to our Father's home in glory.

The ritual of the red heifer produced a quantity of cleansing ashes which would be sprinkled on anyone who encountered any kind of impurity and the ritual is almost identical to that which was performed when someone was cleansed from leprosy and who was examined on the third and seventh days. The priest performing the ritual, along with the one who burned the carcass and the one who gathered the ashes were unclean until the evening and this even applied to the one who sprinkled the purifying ash water on the unclean person.

The meaning of the ritual is that we are to maintain good spiritual hygiene and live cleansed lives where the power of darkness is never allowed to regain a foothold in our hearts and lives.

Some people try to attach a special end times meaning to the ritual of the red heifer, saying that it will be revived as part of rebuilding of the final temple, but this extended speculation is not part of what the Bible teaches about the meaning of the ritual. Salvation frees us from the power of sin and regular spiritual cleansing prevents our former darkness from dragging us back down into the darkness we were delivered from.

The passage goes on to record the deaths of both Miriam and Aaron and tells us how Moses disqualified himself by violating the instructions which were given to Him. The New Testament records that our people were followed by a rock which gave them an endless supply of water and though Moses first struck the rock in the early days of our people's wandering, for the new generation, He was to speak to it so that the people would learn to listen to the Word of G-d. In his frustration with the whining of the new generation who should have known better, he violated his instructions and took it out on G-d and disobeyed by striking the rock, losing the privilege of leading the people into the Promised Land.

The rest of the passage deals with the people's detour around Edom and their conquest of the kingdoms of Sihon and Og, who were the toughest enemies they would encounter during the conquest of the Holy Land. These two showed no fear of G-d and even though Israel initially just wanted to pass through their lands, they did what Edom only threatened to do and came out in force to defeat and scatter the House of Jacob.

Before this happened, they totally destroyed the Canaanite King Arad and exercised for the first time the oath "dedicated to destruction" where everything and everyone which belonged to this king was completely destroyed. The people also complained about having to wander in the wilderness and said that they were tired of their daily ration of manna. This complaining was inspired by the enemy who first seduced Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent, so the L-rd sent fiery serpents among them. They were not serpents who breathed fire, but those whose bite produced a lethal fever which killed many of those who were bitten.

They were instructed to forge a bronze serpent and place it on a pole so that those who were bitten could look at the snake and be healed of their burning fever. The Haftarah portion deals with Jephthah making a rash "devoted to destruction oath", saying he would offer to the L-rd the first thing that came out of his house to greet him on his victorious return from battling the Ammonites. Instead of one of his animals, his only daughter was the first to come out greet him and he sacrificed her as a burnt offering, in fulfilment of his oath.

The New Testament portion says that our Messiah was going to be hung on the cross, just like the serpent was hung on the pole and salvation would come to all the light seeking darkness dwellers who placed their faith in what the Messiah was about to do on the cross. Those darkness dwellers who did not want to come to the light, would perish because they preferred to cringe and hide in the darkness, rather than submit to the scrutiny of the light.

How about you? As we walk with the L-rd, we have to choose to come to the light, so that we do not remain part of the lost generation which became problem focused instead of promise centered. Come to the light and let it regularly chase all your darkness away again and again.

**Sermon: Messiah is Our Mighty G-d (Isaiah 9:6)**

It is important for believers to know what the Scriptures teach about who our Messiah is, so that we do not develop a deficient view of who G-d says He is. It is one thing to try and understand

the mystery of the trinity and quite another to recognize that the Bible always portrays G-d as the singular three-in-one. He has always been who He is and will never change or evolve over time. Three terms come to mind, before we examine the third of the five declarations which Isaiah makes about our Messiah.

The first of these is the word “echad” which forms a major part of our declaration of faith when we chant the Shema. Echad means a composite, indivisible unity, which is the unique oneness of our G-d. He has always been the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and this “echad” is not a foreign concept which pagan influences imposed on the testimony of the Scriptures. The Scriptures never refer to G-d as “yichad”, which means one and only one and while it will always be impossible in this life to fully understand the reality of the trinity, we need to admit that this is how the Scriptures describe what our G-d is like.

The next term is one which I coined in order to have an adequate description of G-d it is to freely proclaim that our G-d is a plural singularity. He is not three gods in one, He is the three in one G-d who has always been who He is from the beginning and who will always remain the same forever. In other words, there will always be three distinct aspects to the singular character and nature of G-d. He has always been and will always be a tri-unity and to describe Him as anything less does not do justice to what the Scriptures teach about Him.

It baffles my mind because I have always been and will always be a convinced monotheist. There is only one G-d and Isaiah says that there were no gods formed before YHVH and there will be no gods formed after Him. His uniqueness is everlasting and cannot be altered.

Our next term refers to G-d as a composite unity with three distinct natures all rolled up into one. Proverbs chapter eight, refers to the Messiah as the wisdom of G-d through whom the entire cosmos was birthed and Genesis chapter one, describes this process as the Spirit of G-d breathing or moving upon the face of the deep, bringing order out of chaos. The incarnate Messiah walked among us for 33 years in a tabernacle of flesh, both because Solomon said that G-d's fulness is too big to be contained in the entirety of creation and because this same fulness exists at the atomic level and indwells every small molecule of creation.

The Son was given to us and was born among us, but that was not the beginning of His existence – it was merely His entrance into our world to become the Saviour who would deliver us from the power of sin and death. Paul tells us that this entrance was planned before the foundation of time and was always the intention of G-d and not some plan which He came up with at the last minute.

We have already seen that He is wonderful and worthy of worship and that He is also the counsellor who embodies all the creative and redemptive purposes of G-d. Now that we have finished our little review, we are going to look at the third of the five divine characteristics which Isaiah uses to proclaim the wonder of our Messiah's entrance into the world.

He is also the Mighty G-d. Now we have already established that there can only ever be one G-d and that a belief in the trinity is a unique and dynamic form of biblical monotheism. G-d is three in One but there will always be only one G-d, no more and no less.

When Isaiah says that the Messiah is the mighty G-d, He is really saying that the Messiah is G-d almighty. He is part of the plural singularity of this eternally changeless composite unity which Moses describes as the “echad” who always was and always will be who G-d is. Mighty means

that He is almighty and embodies the fullness of the almighty power of G-d in its fulness and in its totality. All the power and might of G-d is found in our Messiah and apart from Him, there is no power or might. He is it and He is all of it.

When He asks His disciples why they did not recognize Him, when He had walked among them for so long, He is proclaiming His full deity, just as clearly as He did when He said that He existed before Abraham was, and that He and the Father are One. The penny finally drops for Thomas when He sees the resurrected Messiah and calls Him his L-rd and G-d. Has the penny finally dropped for you?

Judaism is so radically monotheistic that the possibility of a mighty G-d who is inferior to G-d almighty is utter and impossible nonsense. The Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, not because the Son is inferior to the Father, but because He came as the Father's emissary to accomplish salvation and to win the right to pour out the Spirit of G-d on all flesh.

There can only be one G-d because, there has always been only one G-d and there will always be only one G-d. This is the bedrock foundation of what the Bible teaches about G-d and a belief in the trinity does not undermine this central truth, it confirms it. How was it possible for the shechinah presence of G-d to have dwelt in the cloud upon the mountain and how was it possible for this same presence to have dwelt in the midst of the camp of the Children of Israel? Isaiah saw this same fulness of G-d and was filled with awe when the mere edges of His robe filled the temple.

Elijah saw the fire, heard the wind and felt the earthquake, but the L-rd came to him as a still, small voice. In the Revelation, John had a vision of the resurrected Messiah which proclaimed that He is the beginning and He is the end and John did not see any other G-d beside Him. When we loudly proclaim that our Messiah is G-d, we are not claiming a plurality of gods and we are not saying that there are degrees of deity, where one part of it is inferior to another part of it. The reality of how G-d is described in the Bible is that He is One and that there is none other. We need to go one step further and proclaim that this oneness exists as three persons who are co-equal and co-eternal. They have always existed as One and the Father did not become the Son, who in turn did not become the Holy Spirit, because our G-d is as changeless as He is almighty.

His shechinah presence did not break into several pieces and He does not need our praise to put Him back together like some celestial Humpty Dumpty. When He came among us as the Incarnate Messiah of promise, His human nature triumphed over sin and brought this perfect sacrifice to the cross. His divine nature brought Him back to life by the power of the Eternal Spirit, and now He is able to apply this same victory to the hearts and lives of all who come to faith in G-d through Him.

The child which was given unto us, wasn't just a good prophet, like His cousin John and He did not lead a perfect life, just to be a good example for us to emulate. He came to carve out for us a new and living way back to the Father and to give us a new heart of flesh as He pours out upon us a new spirit of compassion and supplication. This task is beyond the power of the strongest and best and most intelligent of men and no one singular man could simultaneously indwell the hearts of all believers.

Isaiah is one of the great mystics of the Bible and He gives one of the clearest and most powerful descriptions of Messiah of promise, who is the same one whose garment's edge filled

the temple and who remains encircled by the four living creatures and the twenty four elders. The Messianic reality of who G-d is, is not a recent addition to what the Bible proclaims about the true and changeless nature of G-d. The Son who is our Messiah, has always existed as an integral part of the plural singularity which is the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In the time when our Messiah walked among us, myriads of Jews were expecting the advent of our Saviour and they understood that He would somehow be the incarnation of the Father who would come to herald the final kingdom of G-d over all the nations and generations of mankind. The problem that many of them had was that they were expecting this final kingdom to suddenly spring up in their midst and proceed to the ends of the earth in their lifetime. This flawed understanding contributed to the rebellion which triggered the destruction of the holy temple and to the generational scattering of our people to the ends of the earth. Thankfully, our wandering days are nearly over!

G-d's kingdom in our blessed Messiah will one day burst forth upon all the generations and nations of mankind, because our Messiah is indeed the mighty G-d and nothing and no one can prevent His kingdom's inevitable arrival. Isaiah saw this coming from what the book of Hebrews calls a great distance and all the prophets and sages of antiquity have died without seeing the final arrival of this magnificent event. And yet they all believed in the coming kingdom, even more than they believed in the daily rising and setting of the sun.

Knowing that our Messiah is an integral part of this plural singularity, allows us to access all of the resources which His divinity puts at our disposal. Because He overcame the forces of evil and triumphed over the grave, He is able to enter our hearts and begin to build a house of faith for us upon the foundation of the prophets and the apostles. As we learn to let Him build us up according to the truths of His Word, nothing which the world throws at us can shake our house of faith off its biblical foundations.

As well, none of the birds of doubt, nor the rocks of temptation, nor yet the choking weeds of this life, will be able to prevent the healthy growth of His Kingdom in our hearts and lives. Isaiah uses five descriptions of the divinity of our Messiah so that we may be able to know who it is that we serve and that we may be fully convinced that He is able to keep that which we have committed to Him and not lose it or lose us along the way.

The deity of our Messiah is at the core of what the Bible teaches about the composite unity of G-d and as we place our faith in the plural singularity of the G-d who is echad, we can participate in His victory as we wait for the day when His kingdom shall indeed come.

Many attacks on the deity of the Messiah have been launched over the centuries and many believers have come up with deficient understandings of this central biblical truth. I know of no one however brilliant they may be, who claims to be able to fully understand the nature of G-d. There are four truths about G-d which we should fully embrace if we want to know the G-d of the Bible and walk with Him. Here they are. G-d is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and immutable.

This means He knows everything, that He has all power and he is everywhere. It also means that He is changeless and has always been the same, yesterday, today and forever. When someone challenges your faith in the trinity of the only true G-d and calls it a later hellenistic addition to the ancient Jewish understanding of One G-d and only one G-d, passages like the one we are studying testify to the reality of a truly biblical understanding of the G-d who called

the Jewish people out of Egyptian captivity to become His unique possession.

He has always been a plural singularity and a composite unity which the Bible calls “echad”. There are not three gods, nor a modality of gods where the Father morphs into the Son and the Son morphs into the Holy Spirit. The ancient world is full of a plurality of gods, but none of them ever understood that there is only one G-d who eternally exists as three-in-one. Our plural singularity is eternally changeless and has always been an indivisible echad, nothing more and certainly nothing less. This is who G-d says He is.

When it comes down to the nitty-gritty of how the only true G-d can be eternally existent as three persons, we will all eventually reach a wall which our feeble human understanding can neither see over, nor scale in this life. The apostle Paul said that one day we will understand as fully as we are understood and rather than trying to delve into mysteries that no one can yet solve, Moses said that we should focus on those things which He has revealed, so that we and our children can put them into practice generationally.

There is a big difference between understanding that there is only one G-d and being able to explain how this one G-d has been eternally existent in three persons. The consistent testimony of the Scriptures is a threefold mystery and I am going to close with this. The first is that there always has been only one G-d and the second is that this one G-d is a plural singularity of three persons united in an indivisible echad. The third is that this same G-d became incarnate and walked among us and died on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of the world.

When He arose, He promised to send the third person of this composite unity, so that all three persons of this plural singularity could dwell in our hearts by faith until that glorious day when His eternal Kingdom finally bursts forth over all the nations and generations of mankind.

Unto us a child is born and unto us a son is given. Does this child dwell in your heart and have you given your heart unto Him? May you grow up richly into the Son who is G-d and may your life be filled with the treasures of His Word, daily and constantly as you let Him build up the house of your faith on the immovable rock of His Word. May His composite oneness meet you where you are and bring you to the place where He wants you to be, walking with Him daily, from glory to glory, through all the ups and downs of this transient life. Shabbat Shalom and Shavua Tov.