

27 Shevat, 5779 (02/02/19) **Faithful Obedience is the Only Way** J. M. Terrett

| Mishpatim | Judgments |
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| Torah: | Exodus 21:1-24:18 |
| Haftarah: | Jeremiah 34:8-22; 33:25, 26 |
| Brit Chadashah: | Matthew 17:1-11 |

Reading: Richard p.177 and Ps. 72. Jewish hero: Phineas. Carrier: Andrea.

Today's portion gives us an extensive, practical application of the Ten Commandments into various life situations that the newly freed nation was having to deal with. It is one of the most extensive examples of jurisprudence in the Bible where legal rulings are given that could be used in the future as examples to follow in similar situations.

Any area of our lives which does not come under the direct scrutiny and correction of the principles of G-d's Word, is really an area of paganism which is lurking in the dark corners of our lives. How many are lurking in your life or in the life of our shul? Our faithful obedience is an all or nothing proposition. Our people were not only partially delivered from Egypt, it was a total deliverance. In the same way, our hearts and lives should be totally given over to G-d through His Word.

There are several key passages in this portion. 21:22-25 limits the punishment so that it fits the crime which was committed. It deals with two men who are fighting and who injure a pregnant lady and cause her to give birth prematurely. If no other accident occurs – in other words, if the enfant lives, then the offender pays a fine to the woman's husband. If the baby dies or suffers injury, then the same injury it suffers, is inflicted on the one who caused the injury. A life for a life clearly states that a baby in its mother's womb is a full human being, entitled to full protection.

If the child is killed, then the one who caused the death is considered a murderer and loses their life. Abortion is a form of murder and those who perform it are murderers, no matter how much twisted logic is used to justify this crime as if it were a noble deed. Am I advocating that abortionists be put to death? Certainly not. I am advocating for the preborn, so that these monsters are not allowed to put these little ones to death.

I also support capital punishment for capital offences as long as all procedures follow the rule of law and due process is exercised. The passage is not advocating for punishment to the point that the camp would become filled with one eyed, one legged people, covered with burns and stripes. It is a strong deterrent to stop people from gouging out eyes and cutting off limbs or wounding or burning each other. When the punishment fits the crime, criminals will think twice before committing them. Everyone from the womb to the tomb should be safe from the ravages of crime and perpetrators need to be punished in proportion to the crime they have committed. Nothing more and nothing less.

Chapter 22:22-24 says that if you mistreat widows and orphans, your wife shall become a widow and your children shall become orphans. Chapter 23:20-23 mentions that Israel had a guardian angel which fought for them and also spoke to them. The Bible teaches that we all have personal guardian angels and while they may not always speak to us, we need to know that they protect us so that we can walk with the L-rd according to His Word, how ever long it takes us to learn our lesson.

23:30 mentions that Israel will gradually conquer the land as their strength increases. We need to learn to function within our acquired strength and not stretch ourselves too far.

The covenant was given in three basic stages, while the children of Israel were camped around the mountain. First, they gave the L-rd a blanket submission and agreed to do whatever it was He was going to require of them. Next, they heard the voice of the L-rd pronouncing the Ten Sacred Words and they agreed to abide by these covenant stipulations. Finally, at the end of this portion they agreed to apply G-d's Word into every area of their lives.

Once the agreement was given, sacrifices were made and the people were sprinkled with blood as a sign that the deal was struck.

At the end of the portion, the elders of the people climb up the mountain and have an amazing group epiphany where they eat a ritual meal with G-d, which was also part of the custom of those days when it came to celebrating the sealing of a covenant. They only saw the feet of G-d and the cloud probably covered the rest of G-d. We are not told who supplied the meal or who served it, but it was the closest the leadership got to an actual encounter with G-d. The leadership went down to the camp and Moses stayed on the mountain for a long time (which is what forty days and forty nights means).

In the haftarah portion the people are commanded to observe a sabbatical year where slaves and servants went free. As part of the solemn covenant, a calf was cut in half and the people walked through the middle of the animal, sealing their action with blood. They went back on their solemn oath and re-enslaved the ones who were set free by an oath. Because of this, the L-rd says He is going to deliver them into Babylonian slavery where they are carried away into captivity.

The portion ends with a note from the previous chapter that says that G-d made an oath with day and night and with the heavens and the earth, never to abandon the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. He promised that they would return from their captivity back into their land.

In the New Testament portion, the divinity of Yeshua leaves the tabernacle of His flesh and has a private conversation with Elijah, who came down from Heaven and with Moses who came up from paradise. The apostles are warned to be quiet about their experience until after His resurrection. They are told that Yokhanan HaMatbil (John the Baptist) is the Elijah who was to come.

We are called to faithfully and stringently apply the principles of G-d's Word to our lives because faithful obedience is not optional, but I will tell you more about this in my sermon.

Sermon: Faithfull Obedience is the Only Way

Passage: “The angel of YHVH called to Abraham from the heavens, for a second time, and he said: I swear by myself, word of YHVH. Because you have done this and you did not refuse your only begotten son, I will bless you and multiply your posterity as the stars of the sky and as the sand which is on the shore of the sea. Your posterity will possess the gates of their enemies. All the nations of the earth shall be blessed in your posterity, because you have obeyed my voice.” (Genesis 22:15-18).

This oath which the L-RD swore to Abraham came as a response to Abraham's willingness to bind his son and offer him as burnt offering unto the L-rd. Abraham had received the triple promise almost immediately after he set foot in Canaan. He was told he would become a great nation, that all nations would be blessed in him and that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land. Why did G-d have to seal this promise with an oath?

The promise was always conditional upon Abraham's faithful obedience and on his ability to have faith in the promise even in the face of what appeared to be insurmountable odds. He was already a senior citizen and his wife had already gone through her change of life, but rather than doubt the promise, even though he did not know how it would be fulfilled, Abraham believed the promise as if it had already been fulfilled.

There are two aspects of how far the promise extends. It stretches into infinity, with the example of the stars and it descends into the infinitesimal, like the grains of sand, because no part of it will remain unfulfilled. G-d promised to take care of both the bigger picture and also the smallest details. We mustn't forget that it was 25 years after the first promise was given, before Isaac was born. Many things happened in Abraham's life, but he did not grow impatient and let doubt seep into his heart.

He had a substantial camp of followers and he endured two side trips out of the Promised Land, one to Egypt and another to the land of the Philistines. His life did not stand still while he was waiting for the promise to be fulfilled and he had to deal with the kidnapping of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was because he hung on to the promise so firmly, that his unshakeable faith was imputed to him as righteousness.

He and his descendants were given a mission to teach this same kind of faithful obedience as a generational heritage which would also be a witness to the nations among whom they lived. The incident with Hagar and Ishmael was a sidetrack where Sarah wanted to see the promise fulfilled through human effort, rather than by divine intervention. When G-d makes a promise, it is our job to exercise faith and obedience (faithful obedience) and wait and see the promise fulfilled, rather than taking matters into our own hands. However, the descendants of Ishmael never caused a problem for the descendants of Isaac and never opposed the fulfillment of the promises.

Now, no matter what people say, Isaac and Ishmael never became enemies and they buried their father together with no hostility. Because he was also a son of Abraham, Ishmael was also blessed, but it was to be in such a way as not to detract from the promises which were to be fulfilled through Isaac. Historically, the Arab people do not descend directly from Ishmael or from any of the people groups his twelve sons became leaders of. The descendants of Ishmael did not form a distinct nation and long before the Arab tribes came on the scene, they were absorbed into various people groups which were constantly forming and disappearing in the region.

Both the triple blessing and the teaching mandate was to be the heritage of the descendants of Isaac and in light of eternity, 25 years is not a long time to wait. Probably the hardest part of the promises was when Abraham was told to sacrifice his miracle son. G-d wanted to make sure that Abraham's faith remained solid even if he had to give the promise back to G-d. Some have said that he was convinced that G-d would resurrect Isaac after he was slain, but it is also likely that he believed that Sarah would conceive again, because he understood that nothing is impossible with G-d.

Back in our passage, there is a little bit of housekeeping we need to do if we are to understand how G-d spoke to Abraham. He spoke through an angel and it was YHVH speaking and not the angel. Angels are messengers of G-d and we find G-d speaking through them frequently throughout the Scriptures. We are not told whether Abraham saw the angel or just heard him, but after the garden, the first recorded direct speech anyone had with G-d was when Moses climbed the mountain and G-d spoke directly to him and to the people.

Abraham had passed the test and G-d was prepared to solidify the promise into an oath. The promises become a solid reality when we exercise faithful obedience. There are three more chapters in Abraham's life and two of them directly concern the promise which was turned into an oath by the L-rd.

Sarah died and Abraham wanted some land that was his, so he could bury her and have a stake in the land which was promised to him. The Hittites were on the scene and offered to give Abraham some land, but he did not want to have a generational connection to this group whose star was sinking. He paid for the land and the tomb was kind of like an anchor which connected him to the land.

Next, he had to secure a wife for Isaac, but it could not be from among the peoples whose land would one day belong to him. He was 140 years old when he sent his servant to get a wife from among his own people and he was 160 years old when Esau and Jacob were born. He lived another 25 years, during which time he took another wife and had six more sons. He sent them far away from the Promised Land so that they would not interfere with the promises which were to be fulfilled through Isaac and through Isaac alone.

Through Ishmael, Isaac and the six sons of Keturah, Abraham did become the father of many nations, but the promises and the oath were to be fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants and not through the other children.

As children of Abraham, they would be blessed, but the blessings of Abraham were to be transmitted and fulfilled through Isaac and his descendants. Many myths and legends have grown up around the other children of Abraham, but we would do well to restrict ourselves to the biblical record and not get deceived by the traditions of men.

We can be heirs to the kind of faith Abraham exercised and when we do, the Gentiles in our midst become children of his faith, and the Jews in our midst remain children of his flesh, as well as becoming children of his faith. This faith he exercised was not trying hard to believe, like the children who were called on to rescue Tinkerbell by clapping their hands, as if it were the strength of their faith that saved the little fairy.

Faith is the conviction that G-d will always fulfill His Word and it becomes active in our lives when we order our lives according to the stipulations of His Word. Faith is not an exercise in believing what we know is impossible, it is an exercise in believing that with G-d, nothing is impossible. He will always remain true to His Word.

When the impossible happened and Sarah gave birth to the miracle baby and when Abraham expressed his willingness to sacrifice this child back to G-d, we understand that it was his faithful obedience which the L-rd was blessing and using as a means to make Abraham the vehicle through which G-d's Word would be fulfilled.

Receiving the promises and believing in them is still a challenge for us today in our darkening, secular world. Our global society has rejected the biblical creation account and has enshrined forbidden sexual practices as privileges protected by law. The horrendous murder of babies in the womb is still on the rise, as women are told it is their right to do whatever they want with their bodies. But upon conception, there is another body being cradled in their womb and this new life should have the same rights as are claimed for mother and her body.

Conception is the beginning of the life which we all share and willingly ending this life after conception, is a form of murder, even if people refuse to see this and consider that the beginning of life happens at some other arbitrary point of human development. Even with the startling number of new discoveries which science and technology endlessly present us with, there is nothing new under the sun and we need to retain our faith in the changeless Word of G-d.

This is the challenge which faces each new generation, whether you belong to generation which gave us hippies and yuppies or you are part of generation x or are a millennial. The universe, in both its infinity and in the infinitesimal, continues to function according to the laws of nature which our Creator decreed and this will not change until the kingdom of our Messiah comes. In the interim, it is our job to walk in the foot steps of father Abraham and believe in the promises as if they were already fulfilled, even if we can only see them far off with the eyes of faith. It is also our job to organize our lives according to the stipulations of G-d's Word, even when the world does not understand why we believe what we do and why we live the way in which we do and they call us dirty names.

In the past I have said that an atheist is someone with no invisible means of support, who is a spiritual vagabond, and suffers from a cosmic insanity which refuses to see the truths which are right before their eyes. These are the foolish zombies who are trying to suck the spiritual truth and the spiritual life out of the children of G-d and infect us with the death that is gradually consuming our global society.

They may be in possession of most of the toys and their voices may be getting louder and their attacks on biblical spirituality may be escalating, but the eternal truth of G-d's Word is unwavering and it will never fade nor disappear. Faith in G-d and obedience to G-d's Word is still our calling and our rock bottom basic spiritual duty.

Through it all, it is not our calling to gather together as many impossible things as we can and believe them like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland. It is our calling to discern what the Bible teaches and believe in the promises it makes as if we were already in possession of them. This is what it means to seek first the kingdom of G-d and His righteousness, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Surrendering our hopes and fears to G-d through His Word and through our Messiah, His Son, is the key to the only acceptable form of spirituality this life has to offer on our pilgrimage to our Father's House in glory.

Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin and without both of them, it is impossible to please G-d. Faith without works is dead and works should always be practical expressions of our faith and never a substitute for it. For it is by faith that we are saved and not by works. In fact, by faith we become His workmanship, created for the good works which He has prepared for us to perform (Eph. 2:8-10).

Our Messiah upheld the commandments of G-d and calls us to do the same. Faith by itself, without obedience to His Word is insufficient and unacceptable before G-d. Faith in a vacuum without life giving works is sterile, unfruitful and unbiblical.

Faithful obedience is the only way. Abraham saw it and lived it for 25 years before he began to see what was promised. I can imagine him wandering through Canaan, looking around in awe because one day all of this would belong to his descendants. In a similar way, we need to have our eyes fixed on the kingdom which is to come as if it were already here. Its arrival is inevitable and let me say again, I believe more in the coming kingdom than I do in the daily rising and setting of the sun.

One day all the darkness of this age shall fade and wither and the renewing light of the Messiah shall usher in the eternal kingdom of G-d on a new earth and in a new heavens. One day the nightmare of our politically correct immoral world will dissolve like the morning mist and every eye shall see our Saviour and every tongue will confess that He indeed is L-rd.

To believe anything less would truly be a form of spiritual bigotry which we need to avoid, even when we are falsely accused of believing a lie and of upholding beliefs which are said to no longer apply. How is your faithful obedience doing? Shalom.