

Slow and Steady Wins the Race (Isaiah 28: 9-13)

Vayera	And I appeared
Torah:	Exodus 6:2-9:35
Haftarah:	Ezekiel 28:25-29:21
Brit Chadashah:	Revelations 16:1-21

Reading: Margaret p. 167 and Ps. 46. Jewish Hero: the Levites. Carrier: Jack

Passage: *To whom will He teach knowledge, and to whom will He explain the message? Is it to the children who have just been weaned and have just finished with the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, a little here and a little there. Truly, it is by men with a stammering lip and with alien speech that the L-RD will speak to this people. He said to them: This is the rest, let the weary one rest, behold the place of rest! But they did not wish to hear. And for them, the Word of the L-RD shall be: precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, a little here and a little there, in order that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken and snared and taken.* (Isaiah 28: 9-13)

When I first came to the L-rd, nearly 47 years ago, I was anxious to quickly get my life in order and to repair any damage which my life in the world had generated. I was so excited about the L-rd and His Word, that I had time for pretty well nothing else and I wanted to grow up and become a mature believer, faster than the speed of light.

I had to learn that you cannot become spiritually mature by the strength of your will, or by how hard you wish for it to happen. It will always be a growth process that will see those who are unwilling to undergo spiritual changes, and adopt biblical priorities, fall by the wayside. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul uses this passage to explain why the fulness of the Spirit involved the manifestation of foreign tongues. It was because the House of Israel would not listen to the Word of G-d in order to find peace and wanted to do things their own way and according to their own agenda.

G-d will use a high degree of patience in His dealings with His people, be they Jewish or Gentile, but this patience is no indication that there exists a fast track to spiritual stability and maturity. In Isaiah's time, Judah's approach to spirituality was to try and cover all its bases by worshipping many gods at once. They felt that if there was a lack of dedication towards one god, a devotion to other gods would even things out with what they failed to see as criminal idolatry.

They really did not know the first thing about G-d, when they violated the first commandment and treated the L-rd as one of many options, instead of as the only option.

He wants to become the centre around which our lives revolve and if He has to use strangers who speak a foreign tongue to do so, so be it. He will get His message through no matter how long it takes and no matter what methods He has to use. Is His message getting through to you in your life? Are you learning the difficult lesson that He requires the gradual and complete spiritual integration of His Word into every area of our lives? Is His Word making progress in your life?

As a young believer, I wanted to make up for lost time and was initially unwilling to put in the time that is always necessary in order for His Word to grow and take root in my life. I did not want to go one issue or one area at a time and especially because I understood how short the time really is before the arrival of the Kingdom, I mistook spiritual panic for the peaceful spiritual confidence which a farmer uses as he watches his crop slowly rise out of the earth and grow to maturity.

Spiritual immaturity is really a stage of spiritual growth which either has not come to grips with what His Word teaches, or which refuses to come to grips with what His Word teaches. Which category do you fall into and what solution does His word offer?

Well, first of all, we need to understand that His overall goal for each of us and for all of us is to bring us to the place of spiritual rest which His Word offers to those who fully integrate it into their lives and who make their lives revolve around its teachings. It is not trying to regularly work us into a constant state of spiritual exhaustion, by requiring more from us than we have the time or energy to reasonably offer to Him.

He wants us to grow in our ability to walk with Him and from our passage, we learn that the learning process can be for us as much a place of spiritual rest as the final product, where we reach a place of spiritual maturity. In fact, we learn that when we allow His Word to cycle through our lives, each precept and each line and each little by little, can be a place of rest, so that we never begin to lose a grip on His Word. It is only when we start to lose our grip on His word that we stumble, fall backwards and are broken and snared and taken.

The Apostle John says that His commandments are not grievous and that experiencing the love of G-d consists of keeping His commandments. His desire for us to know peace and find rest is also seen in the commandment which deals with how we are to use our time, and here I am talking about the Sabbath. This growing process which is working towards building a place of rest and a place of peace for us, can be a great source of this peace and this rest, as we learn to make our lives revolve around His Word.

Precept upon precept, could be understood to mean that we are building a home for His Word in our hearts and that He wants us to come to the place where we understand the kind of life, He wants us to build. We need to avoid the divided loyalty which Judah fell prey to and we need to take the time to let our lives integrate the teachings of His Word into our lives, in every area of our lives.

If we get into the habit of learning to see the world from the perspective of His Word and learn to react to the happenstances of our lives according to the principles of His Word, then we are moving on from spiritual immaturity. We are creating space in our hearts and lives for His Word to grow and become that spiritual resting place where authentic spiritual encounters with G-d's Spirit can occur. We are setting ourselves up for renewal and for growth and even for healing and repair.

Line upon line, is kind of like saying that we are programming our hearts and lives so they are built and firmly situated upon what His Word proclaims and we are removing any of the fleshly viruses of the world which the enemy is trying to infect our hearts and lives with. Coming to the L-rd by faith is an act of the will, where we submit all of who we are to the King – you know the good, the bad and the ugly. It is an act of surrender which initiates both a cleaning and a healing so that all the wounds and all the diseases of the world are gradually and fully removed, without leaving even a trace behind.

Israel was taken into the wilderness because they refused to follow the Word of the L-rd into the land of Canaan, which was where all the healing and cleansing was supposed to take place. We will either be healed and grow as we walk with the L-rd, or we will be allowed to fall backwards, stumble and be broken, snared and taken.

In a way, Israel had not been willing to identify all of her forays into idolatry and fornication as the enemies of her soul and all the trials and tribulations this collective spiritual foolishness opened her up to, were designed to teach her the same lesson through the brokenness and pain she had allowed herself to fall into.

She had not fully understood that G-d was looking for an undivided loyalty, so that they could embark upon a learning process which would bring them to the place G-d wanted them to be. Coming to Him by faith is the beginning of a longer process of growth where here a little and there a little, gently, but firmly moves us from our place of encounter with the burning bush and the fiery mountain towards the promised land and restful healing.

All along the way, His Word wants us to learn to discard both all the negative spiritual habits we picked up in Egypt and any Canaanite ones who try hitchhike their way into our lives, during our journey home.

How is your little by little doing? Are you letting Him firmly and gently edge you towards the place you know that you should be? He does not want to bring us kicking and screaming, because one of the major requirements of the spirituality He wants us to learn, is that we must be willing to walk according to His Word and not fight Him every inch of the way. We have to learn to fight the flesh, the world and the enemy, every inch of the way and not let them establish any footholds in our lives as we grow in Him.

If we have not surrendered our will to Him, then He will allow us to stumble and fall backwards and be broken, snared and taken until we are willing to both see things His way and do things His way. This would also apply to any moments or any issues that crop up in our lives, on our journey through this life towards our Father's home in glory.

So, His Word becomes both a gradual process and a definite place of rest for healing and growth, where all and every form of immaturity and carnality can be rooted out and removed from our hearts and lives. I had all the impatience of youth when I came to faith in the L-rd at the age of nineteen and I was anxious to leave the world and all of its influences behind me. But there was at least one piece of solid military strategy I was failing to take into account.

Once a fortress is stormed and once all of its defences are breeched, it is at that moment where what was won at such a great price, is weakest and most prone to counter attack. During the civil war, there were several places that changed hands dozens of times between the forces of the north and those of the south. Why? When all the defences of a place are compromised, there is nothing from stopping an enemy which has been driven out, from regrouping and taking back what was taken from them. How many times has this happened in your life?

In a very real sense, we are weakest and at our most vulnerable, when we first come to faith in the L-rd. The danger of being retaken, diminishes as we grow in the L-rd and learn to integrate His Word into our lives, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little and there a little.

It is like a complete and regular spiritual systems check, where, like King David, we ask the L-rd to search us and to try us and see if there be any wicked way in us, because we want Him to lead us in the way everlasting. Heaven is our eventual home, once the heavenly kingdom is established upon a new earth, in the midst of the new heavens. In the Messiah, this should be our constant vision and our earnest expectation, but at the same time we need to realize that we are not there yet and that there is still work to be done.

Slow and steady wins the race, because a war is really won or lost, one issue and one battle at a time. G-d's Word remains the only spiritual constant we should give heed to and He is not going anywhere, as He refuses to budge from the old paths, where the good way of rest for our souls lies. He is actively working in our lost and dying world to fulfill all of His kingdom purposes, however great and relentless the opposition is which He encounters.

This should also be our firm purpose, but we can only give ourselves over to the coming kingdom, one day at a time and one issue at a time. Once He has conquered our heart and our life, He wants us to take the time to rebuild strong, biblical spiritual fortresses back into our lives. He does not want any counter attack from the world to burst into our lives and return to the darkness from which we have been delivered. However, spiritual counter attacks are inevitable.

He is the Good Shepherd who is also a good general and as he surveys the ruins of our newly conquered lives, He knows when and where the enemy is going to counter attack. Precept by precept, precept by precept, line by line and line by line, here a little and there a little He wants to rebuild the carnal fortresses He has overthrown into stronghold for the L-rd.

We are often at our most vulnerable after a victory, where we have shattered an enemy stronghold and we can be sure that a counter attack is coming. Are you ready to face yours? Are you keeping His Word as the centre around which your life revolves? It can either be a slow and steady, restful process, where we grow in grace and knowledge, day by day and issue by issue or it can a falling backwards to be snared and taken. The old paths are not going anywhere. How about you? Where is your spirituality going? Shabbat shalom and shavua tov. Lets pray.