

2 Adar II, 5779 (09/02/19) **What King of Soil Are You Going to Be?** J. M. Terrett

Pekudei **Accountings Of** **Chazak, Chazak, V'Nitazek**

Torah: Exodus 38:21-40:38

Haftarah: I Kings 7:51-8:21

Brit Chadashah: Hebrews 8:1-12

Reading: Betty pp. 43, 45 and Ps. 45. Jewish Hero: Hannah. Carrier: Jack

At the end of their first year out of Egypt, the people who are camping around the base of Mount Sinai undergo their first census. Only the men are counted, because information about the ladies and the children is considered private information, not for public consumption. There are 603, 550 men and it is likely the members of the mixed multitude of Egyptian converts is part of this number. They did not live among the people as a separate community, but joined the ranks of the tribes they lived amongst. This is a considerable number of people and they are counted for the purpose of paying the first shekel offerings, which would later be made for the upkeep of the tabernacle.

Those administering the census, collected 49,000 kilos of silver. In total, 1400 kilos of gold was used in putting together the tabernacle and the ark and the courtyard, along with slightly over 3,290 kilos of brass. Ithamar, the younger son of Aaron, was in charge of keeping an account of all the materials which went into all aspect of building the tabernacle and in putting together the robes of the priests.

The breastplate of the high priest was decorated with twelve precious gems, encased in gold and the only lesson we should take from these gems is that all twelve tribes were precious in the sight of the L-RD and this imagery is later applied in the New Testament to refer both to individual believers and to the amazing spirituality to which we are called.

On the edges of the High Priest's robes, there were golden bells which the people could hear as he ministered behind the veil. It was said that if the bells ceased to ring, the people knew he was dead and since no one was safe to go in and retrieve his body, they attached a rope around one of his ankles. He could be safely pulled out. However, there is no record of a high priest dying behind the veil.

The people saw all the wonderful elements of the tabernacle and the priestly garments assembled and when everything was ready, Moses blessed all the materials and it was only at this point that these materials became holy and were set apart for their sacred function. How about you? Are you blessed and set apart for your sacred function? Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. What has gone into the building and decorating of your heart and soul? Are you filling your life with spiritual gold, spiritual silver and the precious gems of His Spirit?

When it was time to put the structure up and to anoint the priests, the people must have been wild with excitement because it meant both that the L-rd would dwell in their midst and not outside the camp, and that they could begin their journey to the Promised Land. A careful reading of the text reveals that they placed the ark of the covenant in the centre and erected the holy of holies around it and the people never saw it again.

Then they put the furniture into the holy place and erected the tabernacle over this special space and the only time the people saw the sacred furniture was when it was wrapped up and ready for transport. Many people may have been involved in putting all of this wonderful stuff together, but once it was consecrated to the L-rd, it was only viewed by the people who were also consecrated to the L-rd.

Then they anointed Aaron and his sons and they began their priestly functions to both wait upon the L-rd and to be guardians over the sacred places of the L-rd. As you read the end of the account, the order of how things done was reversed, and you have the tent or the tabernacle put up first and then the holy furniture placed inside the tent. Either way the people who had watched all of these symbolic objects put together, never saw them again, except in their wrapped-up form at the head of the people as they travelled towards the Holy Land.

This all happened on the first day of the first month of their second year out of Egypt and it was a pivotal transition because the disorganized rabble which stumbled out of Egyptian captivity in the middle of the night had spent a year organizing and stabilizing. They were now the hosts of the L-rd, trained and equipped ready to leave behind the shame and shadows of Egypt.

They knew who they were and they knew who the L-rd was. The record of their departure is found in Numbers 10:11, where it says they left the mountain for the first time on the 20th day of the second month of the second year. All that is recorded in Leviticus and in the first chapters of Numbers occurs while they were camped around the mountain. All that happens from Numbers chapter 22 and the whole book of Deuteronomy happens while they are camped on the plains of Moab.

The account in Exodus ends with an amazing event. The glory of G-d enters the newly erected tabernacle and fills it to the place that not even Moses can go in until the L-rd has settled in. YHVH has left the mountain and it went back to being just an ordinary mountain. Now the people can access the L-RD through the tabernacle rituals and as long as the fire and the cloud hovered over the tabernacle they would stay put, but when it lifted, they would form up behind it in their banners and walk until they were told to stop.

How about you? Are you going where the presence of the L-rd is telling you to? Are you following His fire and His cloud? Are you entranced with the wonder of all that He is? Are you making sure that things of this fading age are not distracting you from the wonder of the age which is to come? As we recite the Chazak blessing, may it be a renewal of our commitment to let the Word of the L-rd strengthen and guide us.

Sermon: What Kind of Soil Are You Going to Be?

Passage: ***“Behold the significance of this Parable. The seed is the Word of G-d. Those who are by the way side are those who hear (the Word) and then the devil comes and removes the Word from their heart, for fear that they would believe and be saved. Those who are on the rock are those who, when they hear the Word, receive it with joy, but they have no roots. They believe for a while and fall away in a time of temptation. That which is fallen among the weeds, are those who hear the Word and go forth and allow it to be choked by the worries, the riches and the pleasures of life and bring forth no fruit to maturity. That which is fallen in good soil are those who have heart the Word with a good and an honest heart, retain it and bring forth fruit with perseverance.”*** (Luke 8:11-15).

First of all, we need to understand what a Parable is. It does not refer to an actual series of events or even to actual people. It is a story which illustrates spiritual truth through a series of literary illustrations which should not be taken literally. This parable would appeal to a community which was still largely agricultural and it contains four major images: the Word, the sower, deficient reactions, and the reaction of the good soil.

The first thing we need to say is that it is our reaction which determines what kind of soil we are. The same level and kind of seed is sown in each case and there is only one satisfactory kind of reaction which the L-rd is looking for. The crowd was confused at first about the meaning of the Parable and yet it could not be just dismissed as a commentary on good and poor farming techniques. There was something more to be learned.

His disciples understood that He was teaching spiritual principles and wanted to be sure that they understood what He was talking about. How hard do you try to actually understand what the Bible is talking about? What kind of soil do your reactions allow into your life? How well is the Word growing in your heart and life?

The identity of the sower is not given, but in context he is one who is spreading the Word of G-d. In this case, it is the Messiah who is sharing and He receives variety of different reactions. A lot of the crowd was just there to witness miracles and to be fed. Some of them were checking the Messiah out from a variety of agendas. Many were hoping that He would reveal Himself, take possession of the temple, equip them with miracle weapons and proceed to drive out the Romans and then proceed to conquer the world by force.

Others were just curious spiritual tourists, checking out preachers to see who sounded the most interesting and which group offered the best fringe benefits. They are still with us today – spiritual tourists and camp followers looking for frills and spills and not really looking to settle down and send roots deeply into the Word of G-d. In many large congregations, attendance may vary as much as a third to a half, depending who has the most interesting spiritual entertainment to offer. They are spiritual Goldilocks, tasting the porridge bowls to get the right temperature. They are looking for a good time and are not interested in growing spirituality and digging into the Word.

In the midst of all this spiritual turmoil, there is a core of sincere seekers who want to understand both what the Bible says and what it means. These are the ones who asked for a fuller explanation of the Parable and the Sower speaks to them about how people respond to the Word of G-d when it is sown into their hearts and lives.

The first group allow the enemy to fill them with doubt as they come up with various versions of: "Has the L-rd really said" They are under the insidious spell of evolutionary humanism and materialistic relativism. They wrongly discount the biblical record and put their faith in the fables and myths of so-called science and never really come to faith because of the size of their blinders. Some people I talk to consider the Bible to be a book of myths and ridicule the idea of a supernatural Creator.

When I talk to them, I realize that they are really living on the other side of the Looking Glass and join with the Queen of Hearts who tries to believe in any number of impossible things every day before breakfast. I mean really, Big Bang? Slime based evolution? Mankind as the centre of the universe? Pseudo scientific theories about the origin and demise of dinosaurs, whose fossils are all water formed? Life on other planets?

In order for life to exist as we know it, a planet would have to have at least several hundred characteristics which are unique to our planet. There are none within range of our telescopes or probes, yet people still cling to this impossibility to explain the origin and meaning of life. They swing back and forth between that which might be and that which must be, all with out a shred of objective evidence. They people the cosmos with unlikely, extravagant aliens and yet they doubt the existence of angels and demons.

This sad, motley crew comes under the spell of the enemy who hooks their souls with a lie and tries to render them immune to the truth of G-d. We have to be careful that we do not give an inch or a centimetre, so that our children do not get caught in the web of his lies. Lies and ludicrous immorality pave the way to perdition and the rapidly expanding crowd of his spiritual victims are the true zombie apocalypse and they fill our schools and universities and sit in the legislatures and seats of government across the globe.

The next group of deficient responses are those who believe for a while and get really excited, but when they have to make actual changes and send down roots into the Word of Truth, they refuse. Just like plants with no root access to underground moisture, they wither when the sun of temptation puts them to the test.

Some people learn enough spiritual sounding vocabulary and express their various carnal psychoses in language which sounds only vaguely spiritual, but has got very little to do with the teachings of the Word. They fall away because they are not prepared for the changes which G-d's Word requires. They want to use their faith as a means to a carnal end, and not as a means of discovering what the true spiritual meaning of life is all about.

The next group presents the Gospel with such a potentially bad reputation because they are all about the pleasures, the worries and the riches of this life. They want to name it and claim it and get rich and live lives of carnal ease in the name of the L-rd.

They want to practice immorality and fill their lives with all the carnal stimulation this world has to offer. They worry so much about the wrong things and want to get all they can, and can all they get and sit on the lid. They are shallow with no spiritual depth and really have no measurable signs of spiritual life. They are just as noisy as the first set of zombies, but they want to take up residence in our midst and claim biblical authority for their carnal sins. They are wolves who want to tear down the sheepfold. They are dogs who want to bite and devour the sheepfold into oblivion. They are pigs who want to pollute the sheepfold and turn into a dark place, far from the light of G-d's Word.

They are the yes, but, people who want to connect the Bible and the world, so that they can live in the world, even while they claim to be following the Bible. I would add another group with a negative reaction to the Word and here I would speak about all the sects and cults and world religions which are not based on the written Scriptures which G-d has revealed to His people so that they could escape from the folly and lies of the world.

My heart breaks for all those caught up in cults like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. It also breaks for the Muslims who follow such a twisted perversion of what the Bible actually teaches. Don't get me started about the Hindus and the Buddhists and the animistic religions of so many indigenous peoples. They are weeds which want to choke the Word and instead of trying to learn to live at peace with them and believe we are all following our own versions of the same truth, we need to speak the truth that they are worshipping sticks and stones and following demons.

We should show them respect as human beings, but we should never give them the impression that we consider what they believe to be anything but twisted nonsense. They are Word chokers and even though their faith may contain possible inroads for the Gospel to penetrate, they do not speak the truth of G-d and are lost in pagan darkness, even if to say so is so politically incorrect! Look up Galatians 4:16. I am friendly with them, like Paul was on Mars Hill, and want to lead them into the truth and not leave them alone to practice their false version of the truth.

The world has always been filled with virulent paganism that declares war on G-d's Word and stands ready to infect and poison believers with all kinds of nonsense. In a sense they are the worst kind of weed and they are fifth column agents to bring the folly of the world into our midst.

The next category of reaction is the desired one and the only one which will provide authentic spiritual dividends. There is nothing wrong or deficient about the seed which fell on the first three soils, but those soils were seed resistant and did not want the seed to grow in their lives and bring about the life changes which G-d's Word is all about. Too many want to doubt, or discount the Word and either refuse to let it say what it wants to say or try and twist it into saying something which is does not say.

There are three characteristics of this good soil and the potential to be good soil is something which exists in all of us. We still have to wrestle with our doubts and answer the questions which the world tries to sink us with.

However, even when we have given a reason of the hope which is in us and have deflated and debunked their flawed argumentation, we still arrive at the place where no further answers are possible. We have to do our homework and declare Deuteronomy 29:29 and say this. While our faith must be reasonable, it is reasonable to have faith when we deal with things which we cannot know. Our faith is connected both to intrinsic logic and to the testimony of the world within which we live, but it extends beyond these limits and propels our souls into the presence of the G-d we serve when we encounter the unanswerables which are really none of our business. They are mysteries and in Greek the word “mysterion” refers to a concept or an idea so beyond our ability to receive, that our brains would explode if we tried to understand it.

We still have to face down temptation and learn the difference between healing our wounds and crucifying our flesh. We will never be free from the presence of sin in our world, but we do not have to live under its power as we wander through this life towards our Father’s Home in glory. Temptation, condemnation and confusion are the enemy’s henchmen who set out to stifle the Word in our hearts and lives so that it does not take root and start producing the good fruit of His Spirit.

We also have to wrestle with the distractions of this present on-line age where so many voices are screaming for our attention and where so many detours and dead ends open up in front of us. Too many believers become sidetracked and slip into spiritual comas, never doing anything for the L-rd and never growing in His Word.

The first characteristic of the good soil is an honest heart. It is a heart without an agenda which wants to learn the Word and absorb it rather than mess with it. An honest heart is not a sinless heart, but it is one which is prepared to acknowledge the spiritual realities which the Word proclaims as the necessary building blocks which the life of faith needs to be built on. It has a high regard for the truth and a high regard for telling the truth.

Next it has a good heart. The simplest and most complete understanding of what a good heart looks like is that it is dedicated to both being good and doing good, free of malice, hypocrisy, with an allergy to the works of the flesh and an addiction to the fruit of the spirit. What is growing in your heart as you wander through the stages of this life and respond to all that life has thrown at you?

Finally, this soil retains the Word, and brings forth spiritual fruit with perseverance. It is not an overnight reality, it is a line by line, word by word building process that takes blood sweat and tears. It is a determined rising up over all the attacks of the enemy, the world and the flesh. It accepts the reality that spirituality in this world is a relentless conflict between the things of the L-rd and the things of the world, with no sidetracks or fast tracks. It requires both time and energy. There are no quick fixes in the L-rd and it is a lifelong growing process which requires weeding and feeding and replenishing so that our life revolves around the Messiah according to His Word. What kind of soil are you prepared to be? May He never give up on us, until we are in the place where He wants us to, doing the things which He Wants us to be doing, as we grow and deepen our walk with Him.