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Torah:	Numbers 4:21-7:89
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Haftarah:	Judges 13:2-25
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Brit Chadashah:	John 12:20-35
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Reading: Alan p. 149 and ps. 67. Jewish Hero: Jehoshaphat. Carrier: Jack

Torah Portion:

In the Torah, there are two Levitical censuses. The first is to determine how many of the first born of Israel exceeded the total number of Levites, one month old and beyond. The second was to determine how many, from the ages 30 to 50 who were able to fulfill the tabernacle carrying function, both in the dismantling and in the reassembling of it. The holy objects had to be wrapped up by Aaron and his sons, then they were to be carried by the Kohathites, except for the ark, which was to be carried on the shoulders of the Aaronites.

The Gershonites carried the coverings of the tent of meeting, including the tachash rain covering. The clan of the Merariites carried the boards, the bars, the pillars and the sockets of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting.

Once it was all packed up, the people formed into their marching order and walked to their next camp site. Upon arrival, the Holy of holies was set up and the ark was uncovered, then the holy place and the tent of meeting were set up. The tabernacle and the tent of meeting were wrapped up from the inside out and was set up from the outside in.

The portion goes on to discuss the exclusion from the tent of meeting of those who suffered from various skin infections. It also deals with the reparations of theft, where one fifth of the value of the object was added in the reconciliation and restoration process.

It is followed by an intricate ceremony dealing with how to deal with jealousy, when a wife was accused on an infidelity. She was made to swear that she was innocent. If she was guilty, the bitter waters (which were holy waters and the dust of the tabernacle) and the curse written in a book, would cause swelling when she drank them. We are not told whether her husband divorced her, but she would have no children and she would be considered a curse among her people. If she did not react, she was considered innocent and would have children.

Next is a fairly intricate discussion of the nazarite vow, where a person would adopt a temporary separation period where they would not eat or drink anything that may be fermented. Two cases are discussed. First the person would not cut their hair during the period of the vow and not become defiled by the death of anyone close to them. The second deals with the nazarite becoming defiled by contact with a dead person. In this case, they would shave their head on the seventh day of their purification and offer atonement and burnt offerings and start from the beginning as if the time before their defilement did not count.

At the end of their separation time, they would offer six sets of offerings, including a burnt offering, an atonement offering a thanksgiving offering and two unleavened grain offerings along with a drink offering. Then their head would be shaved and the hair was offered as a seventh offering, along with the thanksgiving offering.

The cooked shoulder and the breast of the ram offering and the grain offerings were given to

the priest and then the person could drink wine again. The reason a person took a nazarite vow are not given, but it should be seen as a kind of temporary priesthood where nothing fermented or defiled was accessed. Samson and John the Baptist were lifelong nazarites, permanently set apart for G-d. How much of your life is permanently set aside for G-d?

Right after this, the Aaronic benediction is articulated, as those who were set apart, blessed those who were to set their lives apart in the service of the King.

What follows in the portion is a discussion of both the gifts and the offerings made the princes of the twelve tribes who had supervised the census of the people. Their offerings were six carts, two for Guershom and four for Merari, and twelve oxen, four for Guershom and eight for Merari. None were given to the Kohathites, because the holy things they were assigned had to be carried on their shoulders, including the altar of burnt offerings.

The portion ends with the twelve princely offerings for the dedication of the altar. These are given according to their camping positions, from east, to south to west and to the north. They were to include for each leader, first, a silver plate and a silver basin, filled with flour kneaded with oil and a golden cup. The burnt offering was to consist of a young bull, a young ram and a young lamb, along with a goat for the atonement offering.

The thanksgiving offering was to consist of two oxen, five rams, five goats and five lambs. The total of what was offered by the twelve princes was 288, which was a sign that they gave their best to the L-rd and that even today, He is worthy of our best.

The passage ends with a mention that when Moses entered the Holy Place, he heard the voice of G-d, speaking from the mercy seat on top of the ark and between the two cherubim. It does not say that he went behind the veil and into the holy of holies or whether he stood in front of the veil. There is no mention that he needs the protection of incense before G-d.

His status was unique, because after the tabernacle was assembled, the high priest would only go behind the veil once a year and had to be covered in incense in order not to be killed by the lethal presence of the G-d who could not stand the presence of sin. Moses was protected, neither by the veil nor by incense and the people heard the voice of G-d speaking to him.

The whole purpose of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting was not just contact with G-d, as we separate ourselves from the influence of the world. It was principally to hear the voice of G-d, so that we would know how to walk with Him, according to His Word, and not be influenced by the world we are just walking through and never belong to. How is the presence of G-d, the blessing of G-d and the voice of G-d, doing in your life?

Sermon: Courage Under Fire: Perseverance and Patience (I Corinthians 15:58)

Passage: *Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the L-rd, because you know that in the L-rd your labour is not in vain.*

After making a series of practical and doctrinal corrections in how the Corinthian church expressed their faith, Paul deals with one more and we see his Jewish humour as he does so. He wants to affirm that the final resurrection is still to come and has not yet occurred. He affirms first that the final resurrection has not yet occurred, and that it is as real as the

resurrection of our beloved Messiah. He goes on to discuss the mechanism involved in bringing about the end of the age and that the final resurrection is a part of this process.

He adds some humour by saying that there are some pagans who get baptized for the dead, because even they believe in a future resurrection from the dead. Despite what the Mormons say, he does not endorse the practice, but is using it as a slap in the face, so that the Corinthians would realize both that the resurrection is real and that it is a future event which is still to come.

He states that this glorious event will happen at the end of this present age, at the last trumpet and in the blinking of an eye. Then the dead shall rise and the living shall be changed, as both groups are clothed with immortality and have passed beyond the power of sin and death.

And just before the passage I am using, Paul uses a quote from the prophet Hosea about escaping from the sting and the power of death. The prophet says that sin is the sting of death and that the power of sin is the law. In the Bible the word "law" has many meanings. Here it does not refer to either the Ten Commandments or even to any of the teachings of the Torah. It refers to the multitude of traditional teachings, which were developed by the rabbis and which increase our potential to break any one of a number of additional stipulations and thus make it easier to sin. More rules means it is easier to break one or many of them.

Keeping the Commandments of G-d will never lead us into a curse, but victory over death and sin is ours in our beloved Messiah. After affirming our victory, there is a big "therefore", which begins an extended application of the power and love that we have in our blessed Messiah.

First we are called beloved brethren and are told to do and to be two things. We are told to be firm in the Word and to be steadfast (unshakable) in the world.

The best way to understand what steadfast means is to see it as redeemed stubbornness which refuses to budge either from the teachings of the Bible or from its moral stipulations. How steadfast are you? Are there any teachings of the Bible which you have surrendered to the lies of this present age. If any of you are struggling with the folly of evolution in how you view both where we came from and where we are going, I would sincerely like to dialogue with you and show you that the lies of that which is falsely called a science, melt and disappear before the eternal and unchanging truths of G-d's Word.

If you have fallen prey to any of the immoral practices which our darkening society wrongly endorses, I would like to talk to you about the moral and spiritual liberation which is ours in our beloved Messiah. We are walking through this world, but how we live and what we believe should never be influenced by the world to which we should never belong or be influenced by.

Our constant, daily focus needs to be the work of the L-rd which we are called to fulfill. For us this means having faith in what the Bible teaches and exercising obedience to what the Bible requires. We are called to shine as salty light in this darkening world, as we learn to walk Sabbath powered and festival driven, reaching up in praise and reaching out in love, no matter what else is going on in our lives.

When our passage says that we should always be getting better and better at the work of the L-rd, it is not referring to an obsessive compulsive treadmill, where nothing is ever good enough and where we are stuck forever trying to get better and better, because nothing we do will ever be good enough. Instead we are called to a devotion similar to that which is exercised by a

mechanic, who is always working on his car, making sure that it runs well and that whatever wears out is replaced. It will always need to be oiled, polished and filled with gas, not because it is never good enough, but because its goodness needs constant loving maintenance if it is to function well and be a pleasure and not a problem.

Our faith holds dividends for us, both in this world and in the world which is to come and Paul is encouraging us not to lose sight of either category. There are blessings which are reserved for us in this world and others which will be ours in the world which is to come. The resurrection is a mighty blessing which will benefit us in the world to come, but the anticipation of this future reality can give us hope and confidence in this world.

If ever we lose sight of the fact that this life is only a journey and not a destination, we have stalled on our pilgrimage to our Father's home in glory and will begin to expect things from this life which it is unable to provide. We need to be steadfast in the L-rd and immovable in our commitment to walk according to His Word, both because of what is in store for us in the world to come and because of the dividends He grants us as we learn to overcome the world we are only passing through.

Our spirituality needs constant care, not because it is never good enough, but because the world wants to wear us down and wear us out and this source of spiritual drag should never be allowed to determine either what we believe or how we walk. We need to constantly remind ourselves about what the L-rd did and how He wants us to live, not because the world is somehow bigger or more powerful than our spirituality, but because it will always try to stall us and slow us down. Don't let this world stall you or slow you down.

This world is truly a minefield of possibilities, always spewing new ideas which rise up to challenge our faith and recommending rabbit trails which will lead us off the straight and narrow and back into the darkness we have been released from. We are heaven bound and should never allow ourselves to become earth bound, as if there was nothing for us beyond the limits of this life. Our Messiah overcame this world and rose from the dead to give us victory over sin and death and this is the heritage of those who learn to walk with Him.

This is because we know that our work in Him is never in vain, because the expenditure of spiritual labour is never fruitless or useless and will either bear fruit in this life or in the life which is to come. If we do not receive a reward for our spirituality in this life, we know that it is waiting for us in the life which is to come.

We may be victorious as we face off against challenges in this life and we may suffer defeat at the hands of those who endeavour to do us wrong, but in the L-rd both our victory and our defeat take on a different meaning. We are not trying to get ahead in this life, we are trying to get ahead for the life which is to come. This life is not permanent and this age will keep on passing away, no matter how hard we try to make it last.

If we give our lives for vain things which have no eternal value, we will be disappointed, because the things of this life can never give us any substantial or lasting satisfaction.

But if we learn to live for the kingdom with patience and with perseverance, we will find satisfaction, both what we do in this life and in our hope in the life which is to come.

Our society may try to suck us down into what it believes is real and important and may want

us to forget about the truths which the Bible teaches, but our calling is to overcome the world and not succumb to it. Secular morality promotes disobedience to the truths of G-d's Word and the Corinthian church was quickly sliding back into the darkness it was delivered from. The truths of G-d's Word do not change, they change us and prepare us for the world which is to come. Are you letting them prepare you for the world which is to come?

In this series about courage under fire, we want to look at how we can avoid being sucked back into the world system which our Messiah conquered and this will require both constant maintenance and constant vigilance. We are waiting for that which is perfect and changeless to burst forth upon this darkening world and our hope in the world to come, keeps us focused on what is really important as we wander as pilgrims through this fading world.

We need patience because that which is to come is not here yet and will not be coming any faster no matter how much we fret and worry. Sometimes preaching that the world to come is coming soon can make believers impatient and easily discouraged by having to wait so long.

As a young believer, 47 years ago, people kept on telling me that the world was going to end soon and on Friday we would say we would see each other on Monday, if the L-rd did not come over the weekend. I am not impatient for the coming kingdom as much as I am impatient to live by the righteousness which this coming kingdom promotes.

Walking with the L-rd according to His Word as we travel through this life, offers us a satisfaction which greatly surpasses anything which the pleasures, the riches and the cares of life have to offer. We know where we come from, why we are here and where we are going and this special knowledge can give us both patience and perseverance.

We may get discouraged as we look at what we consider to be government mismanagement and how much violence and corruption is rampant across the globe. We may worry about pollution and the negative impact our industries are having on our planet. Genetically modified food and toxins which are released into our water supply are a real concern which may threaten our health and well being, but there is a deeper and a higher concern which we must never lose sight of. We need to be getting ready for the coming kingdom.

I am a fan of recycling and the responsible use of our dwindling energy resources, but these are not the biggest issues we should be worrying about. No matter how long it takes for our Messiah's kingdom to finally arrive, it is on the way and if we do not live daily for this inevitability, we are truly wasting our time and our energy on things which really do not matter.

I will not ignore the major issues of this life and will take a stand against homelessness and poverty and the plight of those who are economically and sexually exploited. Issues that affect the rights of women and of the children we bring into this world need to be addressed, but this should always be just a reflection of our faith and an application of its principles to other areas of our lives. We need to be those who are focused on the over and above and who give their best effort to the world which is to come. What is your focus and what do you give your best to? Are you living for the over and above?

I want to be stubbornly steadfast for the coming kingdom and never allow myself to become distracted by the vain things of this world. What I acknowledge to be true and what I believe to be important in this life should never be determined by what is currently popular. The speed at which this world is passing away is a constant that many people ignore because of the number

of new gadgets and new perspectives which are constantly being marketed.

People tweet and twitter and use social media more than ever and take exotic vacations to exotic locations. And they both want to you to believe that we live in the best of all possible worlds and that the one we live in is falling apart and needs our immediate attention before things get completely out of hand. There is so much which is screaming for our attention and so many contradictory voices want to lead us in so many different directions that the calm and peaceful voice of G-d's Word can be drowned out if we let it. Is it drowned out in your life?

Paul's world was also full of so many voices and the Corinthians were being distracted from the Word by so many pagan influences. Being patient as we wait for the coming kingdom will teach us to focus on what is really important in the eternal long run. Exercising perseverance and refusing to give in to immorality and the tyranny of political correctness, will free us up and give us all the time and energy we need to serve the L-rd and walk with Him according to His Word. I want to be eternally correct and never just politically correct.

Nothing you do in the L-rd is vain or worthless. Everything you do outside of the L-rd is as vain as building sand castles on the shores of the sea as the tide is coming in.

Are you abounding in the work of the L-rd? Do you even understand what this means? It is not complicated. No matter what else is going on in our lives, the L-rd wants us to believe in His Word and to walk in obedience to what it teaches. This needs to be true, no matter how young or how old we are and no matter what joys or trials we are experiencing.

As we slide through our short Canadian summer and make whatever plans we can to get the most out of the good weather, we should first be walking with the L-rd so that we can get the most out of our short lives. We do not want to labour in vain or plan in vain and we certainly should not want to give our lives to vain things which have no real meaning or serve no real purpose. It is eternal dividends which should matter the most to us.

You can have the best food and wear the best clothes and fill your home with the best appliances and yet live a life that is vain and without purpose. You can struggle to get enough to eat and wear thrift store clothing, without any fancy appliances to make your life easier and yet live a satisfying, meaningful life full of purpose. Coming to faith in our Messiah and applying the teachings of His Word into every area of our lives will make all that we do and all that we miss out on, more satisfying and more meaningful than anything you can win in a lottery or get in dividends from a good stock portfolio.

Courage under fire understands that this world is not our home and will never be friendly to the biblical spirituality we are called to live by. Patience and perseverance in the L-rd will make sure that we do not pursue vain things or waste our time seeking for things which cannot satisfy. This is how we are called to live. Is this how you are living? Join us in our pursuit of biblical spirituality from a messianic Jewish perspective, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. Shabbat shalom and Shavua Tov.