

Pinchas	Dark Skinned
Torah:	Numbers 25:10-29:40 (30:1 – different versification, same content)
Haftarah:	Jeremiah 1:1-2:3
Brit Chadashah:	John 2:13-25 (out of chronological sequence)

Today is the first of three Sabbaths of Affliction between the 17th of Tammuz, when the walls of Jerusalem were breached and the 9th of Av, when the first temple was burned. It is customary at this time to also remember the destruction of Jerusalem and of the second temple. The regular prophetic portion is replaced by a quite severe portion from the beginning of the Book of Jeremiah. The prophet explains why this calamity has befallen the people. We should not so much lament what happened, but the national sinfulness which caused both temples to be destroyed.

The last king of Judah swore an oath before G-d to the King of Babylon, promising not to rebel. When he broke his covenant oath and also practiced paganism secretly in tunnels under the temple, calamity struck swiftly. The presence of G-d evacuated the temple and after a long siege, the walls were breached and less than three weeks later, the first temple went up in flames.

When Herod's son, Archalus became king of Judah, he was such a bad ruler that the Sanhedrin pleaded with the Romans to turn Judea into a Roman province. In order to avoid the necessity of practicing emperor worship, they agreed to pray for him every day. They also declared him their sovereign overlord and promised never to rebel.

When an evil governor goaded them into rebellion, they broke their covenant promise and fought for three long years before Jerusalem was finally surrounded. They fought hard, perhaps hoping that the Messiah would intervene to set up His final kingdom. It was not G-d's time for the end of the world and the holy city was again destroyed as our people went into the long captivity among the nations. So we mourn twice for the destruction of both temples and a third time that our people did not recognize the only Messiah which G-d will ever send.

Join me in prayer for the spiritual reintegration of the Jewish people into the Gospel which was preached to them first.

Today's Torah portion is called Phineas, which is the Hebrew equivalent of an Egyptian word which means dark skinned. Either his mother or his grandmother was black, but he was in line to inherit the office of the High Priest, once his father died. He took direct, violent action against the idolaters and their Moabite prostitutes and was rewarded for his zeal with the promise of a perpetual priesthood. G-d never reneges on a promise. This is how it was fulfilled.

Mary, the mother of our Messiah was of the House of David and also of the house of Aaron. Yeshua and John the Baptist were first cousins. As a descendant of Aaron, Yeshua stands before the Father in the perpetual priesthood which was promised to Phineas. However, He performs His Eternal priesthood as David's greater Son. G-d kept His Word to Phineas.

Once the House of Israel settles on the plains of Moab, a census of the new generation is taken.

There are 1,820 fewer fighting men, but the twelve tribes are divided into 58 paternal houses and none of those who were counted in the first census are still alive. The three paternal houses of the Levites are counted and with some 23,000 men capable of ministry, they are the second smallest tribe. Manasseh and Ephraim were counted as separate tribes in the regular census.

Since the House of Levi did not participate in the rebellion, it is likely that some of the older generation were still alive. A case is brought before Moses by some daughters of a man who died without a son to inherit. If there is no close relative to inherit, the inheritance passes to the daughters, with the understanding that they would marry inside their tribe, so that their father's name was not lost.

Next, Joshua is sworn in as the new war leader to succeed Moses. The Priesthood remains with the House of Aaron. Moses was both a war leader and the lawgiver. Under new leadership, the Jews were charged with upholding the Law and following all future directions from G-d.

The rest of the portion gives the most complete description of Jewish time in the Bible and it is clearly divided in four portions: daily, weekly, monthly and annually. Time spent serving G-d is never wasted and we also need to take care that our lives also revolve around G-d and His Word. We are first to seek Him daily so that He remains the center around which our lives revolve. We are also observe the weekly Sabbath and give the whole day over to the L-RD.

From this point on, part of the monthly and annual festival cycle will always include atonement offerings so that our lives do not become clogged with sin and defilement. We need to be involved with the business of living, but never at the expense of our regular devotion to G-d.

The annual festival cycle begins with the Passover Seder and the seven day festival of unleavened bread, which runs from the 15th of Nissan to the 21st of Nissan. The festival of first fruits starts on the 16th of Nissan and begins the fifty day countdown to Shavuot (Pentecost). Shavuot is often seen as the end of the festival of first fruits.

Next, on the first day of the month of Tishri, comes the festival of trumpets, also known as Rosh Hashanah, one of the five new year's in Judaism. On the tenth of Tishri comes the holiest day in Judaism, Yom Kippur, when the sanctuary was cleansed and made ready for another year of sacrifices. Lastly, comes the seven day festival Sukkoth, which brings the annual festival cycle to a close.

During Sukkoth, 70 bulls were offered over seven days and the Jewish people understood they were making atonement for the nations, until they came to faith in the one true G-d of Abraham, Issac and Jacob. During the winter, the people took a rest until the first spring harvest of the new year. Chanukah and Purim were added later as Jewish festivals, but they are not part of the regular cycle and as such are considered very minor.

Our time belongs to G-d and Shabbat and the festival cycle are our temporal tithe which we owe to G-d, along with ten percent of our financial increase. Is He the L-rd of how you spend your time? All that we are and all that we possess, including our time should belong to the King as the only reasonable worship we can ever offer to Him.

Sermon: Messianic Bible Basics: The Power of Disciplined Prayer.

It may be a strange thing to say, but prayer is often a very controversial topic where too many

believers take an extreme and very warped view of this basic spiritual discipline. Before we launch into a discussion about the power of disciplined prayer, let me make three statements so that you know where I am coming from.

First, let me state that I firmly believe that G-d answers prayer. Not always in the way we may wish, but our prayers are never ignored or filed away for later consideration. I have taught that there are four basic answers to prayer and now I would like to add a fifth. Prayer is a form of supplication where we ask G-d for help, rather than being able to tell Him what to do. So the most common answer to prayer is: "no", which is as valid as any other answer we may receive. Next comes the occasional: "yes" which delights our hearts. This is followed by a very troubling answer: "wait" which not many of us are fond of. There is also: "none of your business" because G-d is never a gossip. I would like to add a fifth answer: "you do not know enough about this yet for me to answer, so learn more and be patient".

We are asking G-d and never commanding Him. And yes, I believe that there is no limit to His power and yet He firmly upholds His kingdom purposes and not any of the agendas we would like to force upon this mighty force. What He can do and what He will do are two separate realities. We need to accept His lordship and stop trying to tell Him what to do.

My third concern deals with what I call the New Age nonsense where we think that by intensity, volume and repetition, we can somehow gain power over G-d and use Him like a force that can be aimed at our discretion. It is into this false category which the "name it and claim it" paganism falls, because some charismatics feel that they can write their own ticket with G-d and get Him to give them everything they want, if they only have enough faith!

They think that their faith puts them in charge of everything in their lives, including G-d, with a special emphasis on increasing their money and their possessions. They try to generate enough faith to get what they want, without realizing that they are actually practicing a form of witchcraft which builds up enough spiritual power and directs it at the desired goal. Without really consciously intending to, they have reduced G-d to an impersonal force over which they have learned to gain control to use it for their own purposes. G-d is sovereign, not us.

The power of disciplined prayer has a different objective and is entirely successful as we learn to walk with our Messiah according to His word and are truly filled with His Spirit. You see, authentic prayer is a process where we struggle with our feelings and our doubts and desires before G-d, until He and His Word win and His Kingdom purposes become more real to us than the fading world we are only wandering through.

Asking for help and for safety and healing are good prayer requests because they teach us to keep G-d first in our lives. This kind of prayer empties our hearts of fears and doubts and even crucifies the flesh which wants us to stray from the straight and narrow. It helps us to lift up our eyes and learn to see things from an eternal, spiritual perspective, and see the spiritual realities of His Word and His Kingdom, which are the only realities which matter. This kind of supplication does not lower our expectations of what G-d can do for us, it puts them into a proper perspective and we learn to no longer see G-d as our great sugar daddy in the sky.

Some believers love to dramatize their lives and spiritualize everything as if they were on a perpetual spiritual questing adventure with a heightened sense of excitement which never settles down. However, there will always be enough excitement and drama when we walk with

G-d, without trying to turn our lives into a perpetual circus. You see, we always need to be battle ready, but we should not always be living on perpetual red alert, like all those action dramas which flood the internet and cable TV.

You see, in all the opposition and persecution which the apostle Paul encountered, he remained a very peaceful person who did not go looking for trouble – it usually came looking for him. He did not enjoy all the fanfare his ministry put into his life and he let the peace of the L-rd and His love and joy be the place where he lived his life.

Disciplined prayer seeks to maintain a daily link with the purposes of G-d and not let the noise of this life drown out the still small voice, because we want to always be sure that G-d has our attention. Life can sometimes become quite complicated and there are times we have to pray through challenges so that we do not lose our kingdom perspective and act rashly because the enemy, the world and the flesh are laying in wait to ambush us as they try and fill our lives with the useless works of the flesh and also try and uproot any of the fruit of the Spirit which may be growing in our lives.

Disciplined prayer does not have to be long or even emotional to be effective. It should always be a persistent expression of our confidence in G-d where we respond to all and any life situations by boldly proclaiming: “your will be done”. It is true that we are in an intensifying spiritual battle and we are seeing too many spiritual casualties, because some believers lose sight of G-d's kingdom and react in the flesh and not in the Spirit.

I have three final questions for you today: How should we pray? When should we pray? What should we pray about? Let's deal with how we should pray first.

We should not pray by vainly repeating words like we are trying to hypnotize G-d. Instead, we should be fervently expecting an answer (one of the five) and not fall into the trap of carnal prayer where we either try to slip into some kind of trance or experience some kind of ecstasy. Pray is where we reach out and embrace G-d through His promises. We should be asking for His blessing and emptying our heart before Him, as we embrace His promises.

We should always be asking: “your will be done” and “what is your will for me in this situation?” We can pray sitting, standing, kneeling and even walking (or driving, but in this case, with our eyes open). We can bow our heads and close our eyes, or we can leave them open as we draw near to G-d. The L-rd's Prayer is a good model – simple, straight forward and focused on basic needs with a triple focus always going first. (1) Your name be hallowed. (2) Your Kingdom come and (3) your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.

It is never a wish list like the one some little kids are taught to write up for Santa Claus. It is also not a negotiation with G-d where we try to get the best deal for the best price. We should begin with the triple focus, state our case and ask for wisdom how to respond with the answer He will always send. We should never pray saying: “If you give me what I want, I will do this or that for you”. Prayer should be a search for the will of G-d where we ask for the strength to carry it out as best we can. We should pray to discover His will and to carry it out.

Well, when should we pray? Three times a day? Five times a day? Not enough. When we rise, we need to check in with G-d, even before we have had our morning coffee. Then we need to lay out our day before Him and offer back to Him all of our successes and failures.

Setting a regular, specific time may be helpful, but, truly it is always time to pray, so that no one and nothing can distract us or cause us to detour away from the personal straight and narrow which G-d lays out for each of us according to His Word.

We should pray as our first line of defense in what ever comes our way and we should always be on the verge of prayer as we wander through our days, weeks, months and years. We need to make prayer our first knee jerk reaction so that whenever something catches us by surprise, prayer is our first personal responder. We should pray when we are glad, when we are sad, when we are healthy and when we are sick. It is time to pray when we are grieving and when we are rejoicing and when we are troubled and when we are confident.

It is always time to pray and it is a way to always bring G-d into every detail of our lives. There are any number of verses about prayer in the Bible and most of the Psalms are extended prayers where the Psalmist offers his joy and his pain to G-d in gratitude for knowing that He walks with us every step of the way. It is never not time to pray.

Well what should we pray about? Everything, but not all the time, so that we have no more energy or time for the usual business of living. When I walk, when I work and when I wait, I want to pray about what is going on in my life as well as what I want to see going on in my life. When I am in the midst of a conversation, I can pray about my contribution or about the contribution of someone else's that I have to endure and rise above.

I want to seek wisdom when I shop, when I counsel and even when I rest. I am always checking in with G-d so that I learn to see things His way, according to His Word and do not stumble through life, dodging from one rabbit trail to another, confused and compromised like a serial disaster.

Pray for Israel to be protected as more Jews are coming home. Pray for an increased openness to the Gospel among our Jewish people. Pray for the progress of the Gospel around the world and for the protection of all who share the message of our Messiah in whatever situation they find themselves in. Pray for persecuted believers and for Jews trapped in dangerous lands. Pray that adequate steps are taken to combat antisemitism and racism of any kind.

Pray for all levels of government in our country and in countries around the world that we may live peaceful lives, free of worry and violence. Pray for friends and family, neighbours and colleagues that they would be open to the Torah and the Gospel and learn to walk in His glorious light in this darkening world. Pray for especially stubborn and hard hearted family members who are determined that we are crazy and who have no time for G-d or His Word. Whenever you are concerned about someone, pray for them and let the Spirit of G-d wear them down and bring them to faith, even if they come kicking and screaming!

Never give up praying for someone until G-d tells you to stop. But whenever someone comes to mind, pray for them and do not let them disturb the peace of your heart and life. Lift them up to G-d and let His peace and joy uphold you, because in Him, no situation is impossible until someone draws their last breath. Who knows, they may find G-d with their dying breath.

Pray for strength and wisdom in every situation of your life. Pray for forgiveness and repentance when you blow it. Pray for strength and wisdom to deal with the difficult people in your life and especially pray that you are not the difficult person some one else is praying about. Pray for humility and for peacefulness. Pray for perseverance and pray for perspective so that you

always learn to see things G-d's way.

Invite the L-rd into every aspect of your life. I have heard that there are nuns and priests who spend up to 10 – 12 hours a day in solid prayer and you can pay for them to pray for you. I actually met a catholic nun who did this and she said it was a special calling. It may be a special calling, but prayer should not isolate us from the business of life, though sometimes we may need to take time apart to regain our Kingdom focus and recharge our spiritual batteries.

Prayer should enrich how we live and fill us with strength and joy so that we can get more done, better than we would without prayer. What ever is bothering us, we need to pray about it and we need to pray for the grace and strength to live with the answers to prayer G-d sends our way. We should pray and ask the L-rd to help us to always do our best and to avoid the pitfalls and sin that too many people have fallen into and continue to fall into.

Pray that we do not fall into the sin of Cain and wish harm on our brothers and sisters, murdering them in our hearts. Pray that we do not fall short and wrongly take things into our own hands like Saul did. Pray that we do not let anyone wear us down and turn our hearts away from G-d, like Solomon did. Pray that we do not let people cause us to break commitments we have made to G-d, like Samson did.

We need to pray that we do not follow the evil examples of the bad kings of Judah and of Israel and fall into functional, criminal idolatry and bring great shame to the name of the King we are supposed to be serving. Pray that we do not let the devil enter our hearts like he did with Judas and turn an apostle into a traitor. Peter also betrayed the L-rd and wept and repented, Judas took his own life because he could not forgive himself. Pay that we never stop forgiving ourselves and never stop putting our lives back together through sincere repentance and sustained obedience.

Pray that we never succumb to the lying and cheating ways of Ananias and Sapphira and also that we do not fall into the sin of Simon the sorcerer, who thought that the power of G-d could be bought. There are so many other negative and positive examples in the Scriptures and we should always pray for wisdom to follow the good examples and wisdom to avoid the bad examples. We should also pray that we remain a good example and are never a bad one.

Spiritual darkness is a festering disease that is once again poised to plunge all of humanity into another universal darkness. We need to pray not to get sucked in and also not to get paranoid like so many spiritual chicken little's. We need to pray that we understand G-d's agenda and that we learn to keep His perspective in our tumultuous, unreliable, fickle fading world. We also need to pray about learning how to pray, as we stay in constant personal contact with G-d. The power of disciplined pray is one of the most powerful weapons in our spiritual arsenal. May we always use it constantly and wisely.

Shabbat shalom and have a good week (Shavua tov).