



B'NAI CHAYIM

CHILDREN OF LIFE

23 Elul, 5780 (12/09/20) **Last Sabbath of 5780: Where Are You Standing?** J. M. Terrett

Nitzavim/Vayelech

You Are Standing/And He Went

Torah: Deuteronomy 29:10-30:20/31:1-30

Haftarah: Isaiah 61:10-63:9

Brit Chadashah: John 15:1-11/Romans 10:1-17

This is the last Sabbath of 5780 and it is a double portion and it is both the third and second last portion of the Torah. In my meditation, I will only deal with Nitzavim and leave Vayelech to your own study. The Haftarah portion is very tantalizing because when our Messiah began His public ministry he quoted the first few verses of the next chapter in Isaiah, referring to the year of Jubilee.

Leviticus 25 says that the Jubilee year was to be proclaimed on Yom Kippur, so it is possible our Messiah began His public ministry on Yom Kippur. There is not enough biblical evidence to say this with any certainty, but His life, death and resurrection were a literal fulfillment of the Year of Jubilee. He would have followed the annual Festival Cycle and understood how what He was doing, was an extended fulfillment of these days of Awe.

As we come to the end of Deuteronomy, Moses is drawing close to the end of his ministry and wants to leave behind enough information to ensure that the people of Israel would follow the covenant in their generations. I want to deal with three passages in this portion: Deut. 29:14, 15 (It is not only with you that I establish this covenant, a covenant which was established with an oath. But it is with those who are with us, present in this day before the L-RD, our G-d and it is also with those who are not present with us on this day), Deut. 29:29 (The secret things belong to G-d, but the things which He has revealed, belong to us and to our children forever, that we may put them into practice), and Deut. 30:11-14 (This commandment which I prescribe to you this day is certainly not beyond your strength or out of your reach. It is not in heaven so that you could ask who will go up to heaven to get it and allow us to hear it in order that we would put it into practice. It is not on the other side of the sea in order that you would ask who will pass over to get it, so that we may hear it and put it into practice. On the contrary, it is something which is near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, in order that you may put it into practice.).

Each of us are mentioned in the first portion, because Moses says that the covenant is being made with both those who are standing before YHVH on the Plains of Moab and also with those who will stand before YHVH in future generations. You all know that I am praying for a replacement rabbi, so that I can become emeritus and eventually retire.

Before this can happen, I want the shul to become generationally sustainable. The history of our community goes back to the early 80's and I remember when it started out in the basement of Cal Goldberg's house. It grew out the Friends of Israel meetings, but Cal wanted to have a Sabbath meeting community with all the ministries which only a synagogue can offer.

There are any number of outreach ministries which reach out to our Jewish people and which support Israel. Many of them are good and effective, but for believers to actually stabilize and grow, they need to become part of an actual congregation.

Over the years, our community has met in nearly 10 different locations and have even survived a split which the enemy tried to use to shut us down. We recovered and are the only part of the split which is still meeting, not counting various home groups which have come and gone over the years. Our support for Israel and our local Jewish community has never wavered, even as hundreds of people have come through our doors to stay with us for a long time or a short time.

Any of those who have left would be welcome back as long as they agreed both with our statement of faith and our constitution. As a dynamic spiritual community, we will always want to remain a well tended garden where the fruit of the Spirit flourish, as we rigorously weed out any of the works of the which try to take root in our midst. Spiritual gardens of this nature did not just begin in the 80's or even when the Messiah walked among us. A regular covenant community was initiated on the plains of Moab, even though the Patriarchs saw it coming as they wandered as pilgrims the land which would one day become the Promised Land.

As the people stood before Moses, they were actually standing before YHVH as they received His Word. In a very real sense, we were also standing there, along with every future generation of covenant-keepers who would one day receive and guard the Word of G-d.

It was not a mysterious or complicated covenant. It really had just four pillars. First, the people had to realize that they were standing before the only true G-d – and that all the other supposed gods were either just made or were demons, unworthy of any worship. Secondly, they had to agree to receive His Word and to walk in it with complete faith and total obedience. Nothing less than a total commitment was good enough.

Next, they had to agree to become a member of the covenant community and to be accountable to it. Solitary sheep are an easy prey for any predators to devour. Lastly, they had to agree to pass on all aspects of the covenant stipulations to future generations. This passing along has been an unbroken chain for some 4,000 years, even though it has often been a rocky, perilous journey.

How good will we be at passing on the baton when our portion of the race comes to an end? We stood there with Israel on the Plains of Moab as a future covenant generation and it is our prayer and solid commitment that our children were standing there too, right beside us.

My next portion is one of my favorite passages in the Bible, not just because I am endlessly curious and never ever want to stop learning. It is because I know that there will always be a portion of the unknowable that I have to accept along with everything I have discovered and which I believe.

I am talking about Deut. 29:29. It also have four sections which we need to heed. You see, the secret things belong to G-d because whatever He has not revealed cannot be poached or discovered. Solomon unsuccessfully to decipher all the mysteries of life and could not do it. Job tried unsuccessfully to unravel the mystery of suffering when the righteous suffer without ever having committed any sin. It remains a mystery and I have several things to say about how we should relate to the secret things because we should never let them trouble us.

First, through it all, G-d is always in final, total control and all of His promises will one day be fulfilled. Next, we will often suffer the consequences of other people's actions, even when we have had no part in sowing them. Instead of becoming bitter or angry, our first reaction should always be sowing good actions in the light as we never let ourselves wander back into the dark. We can only become effective servants of the light when we keep our own noses clean, whether or not we are treated well or are unjustly persecuted and even tormented.

Finally, I firmly believe that one day, we shall all stand individually before G-d and be judged, whether or not we have lived a good life of faith or not. You see, nobody gets away with anything forever and I am coming more and more to pity evil doers who are building up a massive weight of judgment when everything they have committed is revealed. Soldiers of the light will live forever, even if they are slaughtered by the forces of evil. Eternal judgment for everything awaits everyone. What we have not dealt with in this life will torment us in the life to come.

Repentance, atonement and forgiveness set believers free from every sin which they have sincerely repented of. It is the ones we refuse to let go of and hide which should keep us afraid, and sleepless. The things which G-d reveals, should become the solid foundation upon which we build our house of faith and they should also be our pilgrimage mandate as we wander through this life. These things are ours and should be the spiritual legacy which we pass on to our children and they to theirs in perpetuity, until the kingdom comes. We may not get all the answers we want, but in the Word and in the Messiah we have the One who is the answer. Are you standing firm in Him through His Word?

My last passage, Deut. 30:11-14 deals with the nearness and accessibility of G-d's commandment in His Word. We follow a completely accessible faith and obedience when we walk with the G-d of the Bible. It is not hidden and stored away up in Heaven, nor does it reside across the sea beyond our reach. Let me say clearly that the commandment (or stipulations) of G-d is not beyond our ability to obey and put into practice because of the safeguards which are built into it when we fail. There is always the call to repent and let go of both our sins and our mistakes. Then comes atonement where our breach is both repaired and restored. There is also forgiveness where the stain and the penalty of our sin are done with firmly and permanently. These safeguards should be active regularly in our lives.

Now, let's talk about the Word, which is within our reach. The Bible teaches that there are four editions of G-d's Word. The complete and entirely unabridged version remains with G-d in the true Holy of Holies. It can never be stolen or sullied – G-d's master blue print is safe and secure. The second edition exists in the physical heavens which firmly and loudly proclaim the glory of

G-d and declare His holiness.

There is a third double edition, because His word is both engraved on the souls of all mankind and also elements of G-d's Word are to be found in all the cultures and languages of our world. There is also much darkness and folly to be found in this double edition. Which set of contents are you accessing, the implanted light or the encroaching darkness?

The final edition is the written testimony which we possess in 66 books. We may have received the canon of the Scriptures over an extended period of time, but as a whole, it is without error or omission in all that G-d has chosen to reveal to us. He said all that He needed so say for us to successfully and abundantly steer our way through this life on our way to His home in Glory. In both the Old and the New Testament, books are mentioned which did not make it into the canon, but there is so much overlap in the Bible that we have a complete record of all the truth which G-d wanted to gift us with. The Bible is not deficient in any way about either the things of G-d or about the wonder of His coming Kingdom.

Well, we have successfully navigated our way through another annual Torah reading cycle and we can look forward to another amazing year in the L-rd as we slowly draw ever closer to the coming Kingdom of our blessed Messiah. I am midway through my 48th year in our Messiah. During all the years I have walked with Him, He has never let me down or abandoned me, even though I have all too frequently given Him just cause to do so.

After our fairly grainy summer, the High Holy Days and Sukkoth are upon us once again and we need to be exercising the following spiritual disciplines in our lives. We need to explore the nature of the baggage we are storing up in our heart/soul/spirit. We need to digest all the good, the bad, and the ugly, which we have encountered on our journey through this life, until all of our attitudes and our habits reflect the salt and the light we are called to be full of. This is so that our hearts remain a well watered garden, full of the marvelous fruit of the Spirit and are totally devoid of the works of the flesh, which we are constantly weeded out of our lives whenever they make their unwanted appearance.

Along with this, at this time of the year, we need to be on guard so that we can make sure that nothing of the flesh, the world or the enemy are getting even the slightest foothold in any part of our hearts and lives. Part of this also entails setting straight paths for our wounded feet so that they may be healed and made better and that all of our "owies" can be treated. This is so that they are not left to fester, or to cause our souls to bleed out spiritually (until we die spiritually).

Where are you standing? Where were you standing last year? Where will you be standing in the new year?

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How are you walking? Is it helping you to heal or making it worse? How were you walking last year and did it help you to heal or did it make you worse? How will you be walking in the new year and will it help you to heal and be made better or will you continue to bleed out and fester spiritually?

Shabbat shalom and shavua tov.