

3 Tishri, 5775 (27/9/14) **Shabbat Shuvah: The Sabbath of Return** J. M. Terrett

Ha'azinu Give Ear Do You Know Who's Got Your Back?

Torah: Deut. 32:1-52

(1) 32:6: ***Is this how you repay the L-RD, by making Him responsible (for your backsliding) O foolish people deprived of wisdom? Is He not your father and your master? Is it not He who formed you and who affirmed you?*** We need to learn to be thankful for His help and not to blame Him when our own foolishness trips us up – this is one of the themes of Shabbat Shuvah – accepting responsibility and seeking to deal with problems instead of denying and blaming.

(2) 32:15: ***Israel has grown fat, and has baulked; you have become fat, bloated and gorged! He has abandoned G-d, his creator, he has despised the Rock of his salvation.*** G-d knew how His people would respond once they entered the land and felt a false sense of “entitlement”, instead of a humble appreciation of the L-rd's blessing.

(3) 32:27: (in speaking of the complete disappearance of Israel) ***But I fear the insults of the enemy, I fear that their adversaries will misunderstand and shall say, our hand has triumphed and the L-RD has not done this.*** When trouble comes on the people of G-d because they have wandered away from G-d, our enemies may feel that they have got us under their thumb, but we remain in the hands of the L-rd, because He always has our back.

(4) 32: 43, 46, 47: ***Nations, sing the praises of His people! For the L-RD avenges the blood of His servants, He will take vengeance on His enemies and make atonement for His land and for His people. And He said to them: take heed to all the words which I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to carefully obey all the words of this Law. They are not just idle words for you – they are your life. By them you shall prolong your life in the land which you are crossing the Jordan to possess.*** The destiny of Israel has always been to be a light to the nations which shows them how to walk with the L-rd according to His Word. He will always have our back, not so we have an easy time of things, but so that we can both learn to walk with Him according to His Word and also shine in a darkening world – He has our back so that we can walk with Him.

Haftarah: Hos. 14:2-10; Micah 7:18-120; Joel 2:15-27

(5) 14:2: ***Bring with you your words and return to YHVH. Ask Him to forgive all the iniquities and to receive us favourably! Instead of bulls, we offer the homage of our lips.*** The whole sacrificial system was given so that we could learn to seek the L-rd and serve Him with ceremonies and symbols. It was only as our heart and life is in our repentance and service that the L-rd is pleased with us. He has our back as long as He also has our heart.

(6) 14:3: ***The Assyrian will not save us, we shall not mount up upon horses, we will not say to the work of our hands: our god! For it is with You that the orphan will find compassion.*** We need to acknowledge that the L-rd is our help and nothing in this life should try and replace Him. He is always a faithful source of help.

Micah (Tashlikh passage). Joel (complete restoration, never to be troubled again [unless you get up to nonsense again])

Brit Chadashah: Rom. 10:17-11:12;12:19; 15: 9,10

11:5: ***So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*** In Israel and in the world there has always been a remnant, a righteous core who become the chosen ones because they have chosen to walk with the L-rd, to the Jew first and also to the gentile. Do you know who has your back?

The other passages in Romans reflect verses found in the Torah portion for today.

(Mike p. 147) **Psalm 139** Jewish Hero: Marie Pasula L-rd's Table **ONEG**

Sermon:

This morning, I put the following post on Facebook:

Today is Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath or Return or of Repentance, where we emphasize that spiritual flaws and sinful habits need to be addressed creatively and aggressively AND repeatedly, because they will not go away on their own and we have to keep on struggling until we find solutions in His amazing grace that work. Psalm 119:71 and Hebrews 12:15 (with I Cor. 10:13 and Phil. 2:13). In Messiah we have soooooo many resources that accomplish soooooo much when we integrate them into our lives. It is a humble privilege to have another year to see what good things the L-rd will again bring our way.

As a messianic Jewish rabbi, one of the greatest challenges I face is to explain to our non Jewish brethren why we do what we do – and to explain to our Jewish friends the same thing. I remember being really daunted and overpowered when I joined the Messianic Movement some 20 years ago. There was so much to learn and to unlearn and the worst time I had every year was the High Holy Days and Sukkoth but for reasons you might find surprising.

You see, I wanted to do a thorough job of designing our celebrations so that they would both reflect our rich Jewish heritage and our commitment to biblical authority. I neither wanted to throw the baby out with the bath water, nor did I want to keep on re-inventing the wheel.

There are so many concepts which we share in common with both the synagogues and the churches and yet with both groups, we are universes apart in some of the things we believe and in the ways we choose to live – who is sufficient for these things?

I am firmly convinced and can demonstrate convincingly that there is no essential contradiction between biblical Judaism and the New Testament, any more than there is between biblical Christianity and the Old Testament. Three concepts to look at: what does biblical mean? What does Judaism mean? What does Christianity mean? Let me briefly answer these three questions and then go on to explain our understanding of authentic biblical Messianic Jewish repentance.

There is a dynamic relationship between the truth of the Bible and the traditions of men which needs to be constantly reexamined and kept in balance. Every community, every culture and every generation will generate its own set of traditions (its own way of doing things), which

should be defined as practical choices through which the unchanging truths of G-d's Holy Word are integrated into our changing lives.

We change and our lives change, but His Word never changes and yet it is our duty to make sure that how we integrate His Word remains dynamic and never replaces that Word.

We do this so that we never fall into the trap of saying that the way we do things in this particular cultural, generational context in which we find ourselves, is the only way of expressing the unchanging truths of G-d's Holy Word. Tradition is not truth and should never replace truth or stop being changed and updated. This is so that the truth is effectively explained and creatively integrated in whatever altered or new situations or contexts it encounters as it travels with believers, Jewish and Gentile in our generational pilgrimage to our Father's home in Glory.

Years ago, I identified three levels of tradition and explained how we should relate to each level.

First there is biblical tradition, which we fully accept and adhere to fully and freely. And here I refer to things like Bible Study, prayer, worship, fellowship and outreach. These are the traditions of radical New Testament discipleship which remain staples for serious, committed believers and their communities, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. However, how we design strategies to implement these essentials into our midst, personally and corporately needs to be constantly updated and revised so that meets our needs in meaningful ways. So we will always be revising the way we do things, but we will always be doing the same things.

Next there are non biblical traditions which are not mentioned in the Bible, but which can be helpful in creating order and meaning in our midst – a pulpit, a kippah a shabbat school and pews are just some examples. We need to establish some organizational parameters, without placing these strategies on the same level as the truth we are endeavouring to practice. We exercise freedom of conscience as well maintaining a gracious level of explained conformity. This is so that what we do and how we do it reflect our commitment to biblical truth.

The next level deals with unbiblical traditions which violate the clear teachings of scripture and we will not engage in any of these. Several years ago someone gave me a kabbalistic emblem – the all seeing eye embedded in a hand. It was kind of a talisman to ward off evil and guide me into truth – sort of like a Jewish rabbit's foot. I thought it was quite decorative and hung it on the wall of my office until someone wondered if I were sending the wrong message about my approach to Cabbalism, so I took it down.

With respect, we would never have holy water, except to throw at vampires! Charms against evil and charms to bring luck are unbiblical attempts to manipulate spiritual power for our own profit and we will not do that.

Whatever flies in the face of the scriptures or directly contradicts them, be they ever so Jewish or ever so churchy will not be allowed to distract us from following the truth clearly, dynamically in both what we do and how we do it- which brings me to defining both Judaism and Christianity before I conclude with a description of authentic, powerful repentance.

Judaism is a belief in the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and in the written word of G-d and all of its promises which were handed down to us over the ages. There are five foundational categories of observance: circumcision, kosher, the sabbath, the Torah and the land, which is understood to be the forerunner of both the eternal kingdom and the eternal King (Messiah). The rich traditions which have grown up around this foundation must never undermine or add

to this foundation, but should always be a dynamic generational, cultural expression of this core – nothing more nothing less.

Christianity is a belief in the Messiah of promise and a commitment to follow Him according to the written Word of G-d and it also has five categories of observance: immersion (baptism by dunking), holiness, the Sabbath imperative, the Bible and the Land (we are waiting daily for the return of our Messiah to set up His eternal kingdom over all the nations and generations of mankind. All that Christians believe and practice should reflect the same level and kind of spirituality as was taught to Israel, without the need of either becoming Jewish or requiring Jews to stop being Jewish.

Relating to these to callings is a big challenge and one we will have to wrestle with until the Kingdom comes and for me the two biggest are the Land (support for Israel and a love for Jewish people) and the Sabbath (churches are still making war on the fourth commandment and are saying they are set free from it instead of understanding that we are set free by it).

There is a lot which can be said and which will continue to be said, to th Jew first and to the Gentile so that both groups of believers have a firm, flexible grip on both the unchanging truth which owns us and on the ever changing traditions we design to keep this eternal staple relevant and meaningful.

Now what about authentic repentance? How we handle tradition is one category of repentance I want to always be engaged in, but I mentioned several verses in the Facebook post I mentioned and I want to use these to articulate what authentic repentance is and to close.

Psalm 119:71 says that G-d through His word will keep on smacking us until we get it right and when our lives fall apart or when we encounter spiritual obstacles, there is only one way to handle them – according to His Word. We may seek medical help, legal help or any other kind of help, but our mandate and greatest source of help remains His Word.

Hebrews 12:15. We have own our wounds and disabilities and learn to walk (limp) straight so that how we relate to our problems makes us better and not worse.

I Corinthians 10:13. We need to make him L-rd of our temptations and let Him coach is so that we recognize His ways of escape and realize that we are never cornered into sinning.

Phil. 2:13 The point of repentance is not to turn us into someone else – we will never be a community of clones or copies, but to find our G-d given desires and abilities and make them the hard drive of our lives.

On shabbat Shuvah how are we doing? Are we getting tangled by our tradition (or by our iconoclasm - adesire to destroy all traditions)? Are we learning how to integrate His power and grace into our lives or are we spirally down into defeat as we wander in meaningless circles of defeat? May 5775 be a year of positive, aggressive biblical repentance where chains are broken, wounds are healed and straight paths are taken, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Shabbat Shalom.