

Ki Tisa **When You Elevate** **Set back and Recovery**
Torah: Exodus 30:11-34:25
Haftarah: I Kings 18:1-39
Brit Chadashah: 2 Cor. 3:1-18

The passage opens with a discussion of redeeming the people, where each person gave a half shekel that went towards the upkeep of the tent of meeting and the tabernacle. Later this was also done for the upkeep of both temples.

Next is the call to build a bronze wash basin so that the priests could wash their feet and their hands when they came to offer sacrifices to YHVH. This was done so that they would not die, because you are not allowed to bring any defilement into the Tent of Meeting.

Next the recipes for both anointing oil and incense are given. No one was to try and make an imitation of either one, on pain of death. The oil was used to anoint every part of the tabernacle and it may have been seen as a sign that the invisible presence of G-d is really what sanctifies all the furniture used for worship. The priests were also anointed, however, no oil was to touch their skin. It was just their garments which were anointed.

Next comes the incense which was to burn in front of the veil of the Holy of Holies for a sweet smelling odour – just like our prayers are.

Next we are introduced to the artisans chosen by YHVH and filled with the Spirit under the foreman Betsaleel and the assistant foreman, Oholiab. These two did not actually do all the work, as much as they supervised the other gifted people as the holy furniture was made. The priestly garments were likely woven by the woman according to the specifications.

The people are reminded to keep the Sabbath and it is a capital offence to do any servile labour on this special day. This special day is a major covenant sign. In the last verse of chapter 31, we are reminded that it was YHVH who engraved the ten sacred words on the two tablets by His finger.

Next comes one of the darkest moments in the history of Israel – the golden calf. It is because of this that mainline Judaism does not allow shofars to be made from the horns of cattle. Many have tried to explain how newly liberated Israel could slip so quickly into criminal idolatry. The rabbis blame the mixed multitude and even claim that this idol was made by magicians who lived among the people. However, the Bible says that Aaron made it or had it made from gold which the idolatrous people contributed. Two things.

First, the mountain was still shrouded in smoke, but it is unlikely that the ground continued to shake or that there was constant thunder and lightening. There were those among the people who apparently thought that YHVH had killed Moses, because he had not been heard from for so long. Again forty days and forty nights is not a literal reference, as much as it is used to refer to a painfully long time.

Secondly, there was an established spiritual leadership to guide the people, so while they were waiting for Moses, the camp was not functioning in a spiritual vacuum. Somehow a group of idolaters who lived among the people, overthrew the established leadership.

They likely took Aaron and his family hostage. They wanted a new god who would go before them and lead them into the Promised Land. They wanted a different version of YHVH or an entirely new deity. They required that Aaron come up with a golden statue of a calf. We are not told how many of the people embraced this criminal idolatry, but a new group was now in control of the camp. Aaron may have wanted this departure from the teachings of Moses to still be about worshipping YHVH.

Once the golden calf came out of the moulding, Aaron built an altar and offered both burnt offerings and thanksgiving offerings in a modified version of worshipping YHVH. As part of the worship, the people rose up to play and from how it is worded (and later when the severe reaction of Moses is considered), not only did they engage in criminal idolatry, but were now engaging in criminal fornication.

Throughout our early history, the two besetting sins of Israel were idolatry and fornication, whether it was subtle or not. On the mountain YHVH calls the rebels stiff necked and was going to destroy the people and this would have included Aaron and his sons.

Moses interceded for the people and then stormed down the mountain to regain control of the camp. First, he melts down the calf and made the people drink it when it was mixed with water. Then he broke the tablets which G-d had written on. There was no more covenant between G-d and the people.

In his defence, Aaron comes up with a lame excuse and Moses has to deal firmly with the rebellion. He calls upon the people to choose sides and to a man the tribe of Levi answers the call. Some 3,000 leaders of the rebellion are executed as they likely tried to hide among the people. The people were told not to let family ties prevent even a severe police action and it the tribe of Levi which took these words to heart. We are not told whether the idolaters fought back, but their temporary control of the camp was smashed.

After this, Moses goes back up the mountain to plead with G-d to forgive the people and is told that only those who have sinned will have their names erased from YHVH's book. YHVH struck down an unspecified number of people, beyond those whom the Levites had killed and it is more than likely that few, if any, of the fornicating idolaters survived. Punishment was meted out and now the people were ready to do whatever it took to become the covenant people of YHVH again.

Moses sets up a tent outside the camp that he is going to use to store the holy things. YHVH was not willing to come back into the camp until the ceremonial tent and tabernacle were completed and the people were no longer in any danger from His presence. When Moses went into the tent, the column of cloud would hover over it and the chastised people came to the entrance of Moses' tent to worship.

At one point, Moses goes back up the mountain, but he is still quite shaken by the attempted coup. For reassurance, he asks to see the glory of G-d in its fullness. Instead, he is placed in a cleft of a rock and is only allowed to see YHVH from behind – YHVH's face remained lethal to anyone who saw it. Moses made two new tablets of stone and two marvellous things happened. First the glory of G-d passed by as he was hidden in the cleft and then YHVH proclaimed His full name for the very first time

In Judaism this proclamation is called the thirteen attributes of YHVH. Eleven of them are positive and only two of them speak of the wrath which will come upon those who rebel against YHVH. The covenant is renewed and the people are forgiven, after the guilty ones are executed. They are warned not engage in any future idolatry and once they are in the land, they are commanded to smash all the Canaanite idols. They are never again to make idols that are cast from melted gold (or any other precious metal).

As this portion is brought to a close, several more points of order are given, including the call to observe the three annual pilgrimage harvest festivals, when all the people were to gather around the tabernacle, as they bring their tithes and offerings to YHVH. Further, two pagan religious practises are forbidden. They are not to mix blood with any bread they offer and they are never to boil a kid in its mother's milk. Moses again spends a long time with YHVH on the mountain, but the people seemed to have learned their lesson. It was a very close call for the entire camp.

Moses receives two replacement stone tablets which are also inscribed with the ten sacred words by YHVH Himself. Whenever Moses came out from spending time with YHVH in the tent, his face shone and in various stages, he began to teach the people more of the orders which he had received from YHVH.

When Moses spoke with the people, he wore a veil, likely because his shining face either scared or blinded the people. But when he went into the presence of YHVH, he removed it. We are not told whether Moses face continued to shine for the duration of the wilderness wanderings, but it is likely that it shone until the tabernacle was put together and the presence of YHVH took up residence in the holy of holies, behind the veil.

Sermon: Ephesians 6:10-24 Fight to Keep on Winning

As Paul brings his epistle to a close, he reminds the people of two things. First, we are in a battle which we can win and secondly, we need to be fully armed in order for this winning to occur. Our real enemy is the forces of spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places and their earthly attempts to defeat us, need to be countered with heavenly weapons.

Some believers seem to live their lives perpetually on the verge of collapse and seem to feel that they are under relentless attacks from the enemy at all times. Spiritual attacks are real and they can be severe, but if we learn how to fight with the appropriate spiritual weapons, even when we have troubles on the outside, we will have peace on the inside. To be able to do this, we have to be fortified in the Messiah and in the weapons He will provide for us.

The Romans once said that if you want peace, you should prepare for war because, if you know an attack is coming, you should be adequately prepared before it happens. The situation with the truckers blockade is a case in point. First of all, they should not be considered terrorists or even criminals. Citizens of our fair country have the right to protest and part of that process needs to be a willingness to negotiate. They are protesting a federal masking mandate and someone from the federal government should have agreed to meet with them. Also, since their destination was declared a long time beforehand, preparations should have been taken by law enforcement, to prevent the situation from getting out of control. To my knowledge, neither the government, nor the police did anything to prepare for the situation and it quickly escalated. You cannot develop a plan after you are attacked.

During an attack, plans could be modified, but the central objective of both the protesters and the government, needed to be in place before the forty mile long convey reached Ottawa. Emergency measures would not have been invoked if an overall plan had been prepared. From doing nothing and hoping the problem would go away, to overreacting is not a good precedent to set. An old advertising slogan illustrates the point: "Plan ahead, reserve a bed".

If the government had agreed to meet with the protesters, a dialogue could have been started and common ground could have been established that both sides helped to formulate. It is now evident that anarchists were among the truckers and they were preparing for violence and even for the overthrow of the government. The truckers did not want lawlessness to be one of their goals and the Coutts crossing blockade was dismantled when guns were found.

I am proud that so far no riots have occurred and I remain critical of the federal government for not at least agreeing to meet with the truckers. Covid restrictions have caused many people to experience severe hardships, but again, truckers, negotiating by issuing ultimatums is not a good strategy. Implementing emergency measures may cause this government to fall, let us hope and pray that it does not cause violence to escalate.

In our own lives, we are told to expect hardship and spiritual battles, so what can we do to prepare for them? Should we hide in the wilderness or in monasteries, as far away from potential troubles as we can? While we should never go looking for trouble, we should not be surprised when it comes looking for us. We are called to stand and not to hide.

Our real enemy is not the truckers or the government (federal or provincial), but is the spiritual wickedness which the evil spiritual princes of this world want to use to both overthrow our spirituality and cause darkness to totally cover our world, as it did in the days of Noah. Noah was ready when the end came and he spent 120 years building the ark, as a warning to his neighbours about what was going to happen. They did not listen and probably spent considerable time mocking him, but both by speech and his continuing to build the ark, meant that the message was never fully silenced.

The secular world we live in is moving farther and farther away from any spirituality that once existed and those of us who hold the line, will be especially targeted and vigorously defamed because the enemy of our souls wants to shut us down and even break us.

In the past, I have said that the enemy generally uses a three pronged assault on believers. First, he wants us to doubt the message as well as the Bible and our faith in G-d. Next, he wants to confuse us by asking various versions of: "Has G-d really said?" If that does not work, he will try and bombard us with guilt (look at how horrible the crusaders were and all the other horrible wars which religion has caused). Are you prepared to deal with any doubts which come your way? Are you prepared to work through any confusion you are targeted with? Is he trying to sink you with guilt because of all the horrible things other believers have done? We are called to overcome when we fight and not succumb when it comes our way.

There are any number of voices screaming for our attention, but it is our duty and privilege to let G-d have our full spiritual attention through His Word. Lets look at the eight pieces of spiritual armour the Messiah has prepared for us. First is the truth and this has a double meaning. Yes, we have to have the truth of G-d's Word and wear it like a belt, but we also have to be those who tell the truth, or else people will rightly not have confidence in us.

Lying is never a positive spiritual strategy and having a firm grip on the truths of G-d's Word should be part of our first line of defence. The way this piece of equipment is presented, points to how ancient warriors used to prepare for battle. They would lift up their long garments and secure them with a belt, so their legs could fully function and not let the garments get in the way during a battle.

Next comes the breastplate of righteousness which protects your heart from being pierced, especially when you are being falsely condemned. If they find no immorality in us, even when we stumble, they will have nothing to condemn us with. As long as we deal with our sin and set straight paths for our wounded feet and as long as we remember to get back up when we are knocked down – and as long as we practice forgiveness 490 times a day, the breastplate of our heart will remain safe and not be overcome.

Next come the sandals of the Gospel. Going barefoot into battle is not a wise strategy, especially if your enemy spreads broken glass or nails in your way. The Gospel and the Torah are a journey we are on through this world to our Father's home in glory. Making sure we are not sidetracked and protecting our feet are important if we want to have a successful journey. How well is your spiritual footwear doing?

We move on to the shield of faith which is able to extinguish the darts or arrows of the enemy. Flaming arrows were in frequent use in ancient warfare, so soldiers would soak their shields in water so the fire arrows would go out and not set them on fire. Faith is both a specific set of beliefs which we recognize as the truth of G-d, and it is also a confidence in G-d when things do not go our way or when we encounter things that we cannot make sense of. If you find yourself cowering in a trench under heavy enemy fire, or you find yourself about to be stuffed in the furnaces of Auschwitz, it may be hard to understand how this horror fits into the marvellous plans G-d has for you and your life. Faith stubbornly focuses on our final destination, even when it appears that everything in our lives is going wrong.

Job said that he would still trust in G-d, even if G-d killed him (Job 13:15) and that even if he were killed and his body decayed, he would one day see YHVH when he gets a new body at the resurrection (Job 19:26). Paul had a life full of troubles. David also spent a long time being chased by his enemies, but David declared that YHVH was his shepherd. Paul said that light afflictions of this present age are not worthy to be compared with the massive weight of glory waiting for us in the life which is to come. We need to have complete faith in G-d, no matter what the enemy and this old world throw at us.

Next comes the helmet of salvation, so that nothing that comes at us can knock us out or cause us to be gravely wounded spiritually. To effectively walk with the Messiah, you have to have a soft heart and a thick skull. Once, when I was thrown off my bike into a mesh fence, I had my helmet on and though the helmet was damaged, my head was not. While I was waiting to be seen in the emergency, another man who was knocked off his bike was brought in. He was not wearing a helmet and he suffered incredible trauma to his head.

Personal attacks and even attacks which you do not see coming, cannot harm you if the helmet of your salvation is intact. You might experience some trauma, but you will never experience great trauma. We wear this helmet as we continually remind ourselves that we are heaven-bound pilgrims which nothing in this world can really touch or demolish.

But we don't just keep on letting the enemy beat us up – we can fight back with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of our G-d. As a young believer, I memorized hundreds of verses and always dug into the Bible to make sense of my life. These verses come to mind when I am under attack and they reach out and slash the enemy and his futile attacks. This does not mean that I have to always have every answer, but it means that I am aware of both how the L-rd wants to protect me and what I need to do when I come under fire.

How adept are you at handling your Bible? It can be both a defensive and an offensive weapon as you give an answer to those who ask you a reason for your faith. When I was in a French Immersion summer course in Banff, my teacher would always take digs at my faith, hoping to silence me or even humiliate me in front of the other students. It didn't work and once when he said in frustration that I had an answer for everything, I fired back that it was really G-d, not me who always had an answer.

The Bible is a guide, not only on what to believe, but also on how to live, no matter what life circumstances you find yourself in. When someone tells me that something is in the Bible I want to always check it out so that I do not get led astray. We will soon set up Bible studies again so that our grasp of this wonderful book is strengthened, even during our Covid isolation.

Lastly, Paul talks about prayer, without referring to a specific weapon, but I like to think of it as spiritual artillery which we can use in our lives to decimate the spiritual enemies who are attacking us. It is also a lifeline where we are in constant contact with G-d and it becomes a supply line that the enemy cannot cut off. How is your prayer life? What do you pray about? I pray about everything and am constantly asking for the Messiah's blessing and protection.

I do not think of Messiah as my great sugar daddy in the sky and I do not whine at him to always try to get my own way. I ask for wisdom so that I can be wise and not foolish and so that He can give me the necessary words as I am presenting my faith or as I am defending it.

Paul says that we should pray by the Spirit and this is a reference to using the gift of tongues as we pray and do not know what to say or what to pray for. Tongues is not a loud display which can be used to disrupt services. Ancient Greek priests and priestesses used to go into a kind of seizure where they would make loud, weird noises as they rolled around on the ground. It is intended to be the Spirit of G-d praying through us when we do not know what to pray. I have a specific set of people I pray for regularly and frequently I do not know what to pray about for them, so I use my prayer language. I often do this during our Sabbath service, peacefully and powerfully as G-d intended (see Romans 8:26, 27). I have been in services which seemed to be a yelling contest with people dancing and even writhing, as if they had been bitten by a dozen snakes. Volume should not be confused with quality.

Paul says that everything must be done decently and in order. We can sing loud and shout as we do the final Torah blessings, but the volume of our prayers has little or nothing to do with their effectiveness. I often pray around the world for people whom I know, so they can be effective in their presentation of the Gospel and be given the necessary words as they build an outreach dialogue when they present and defend the mystery of the Gospel. Prayer should be our first and our last line of defensive and attack in our high speed, ever changing social media driven world. How is your armour doing? Are you learning how to use it effectively to both defeat the enemy and stay standing when you are attacked?