

Vayelech**And He (Moses) Went****Closing Remarks****Torah:** Deuteronomy 31:1-30**Haftarah:** Hosea 14:2-10; Joel 2:15-27; Micah 7:18-20**Brit Chadashah:** Romans 10:1-17

Before I get into today's Torah Portion, I want to make at least three comments, one for each of the three prophetic portions. The prophets fit into one of three categories; pre-exilic, exilic, post exilic. Hosea prophesied during the reign of King Hezekiah, before the destruction of the temple and the waves of people going into captivity. When he says that we will offer YHVH the homage of our lips, instead of the blood of bulls (Hos. 14:2), he is not saying that prayers should replace the sacrifices, as some rabbis feel.

The temple was still standing, but the people were regularly slipping into sin. Their solution appears to have been to get rid of the guilt of their sins by offering sacrifice, without the need or the intention to repent. Hosea is saying the homage of our lips – our prayers asking for forgiveness, need to precede the sacrifices we intend to make. Without repentance, no sacrifice would be considered valid before YHVH.

You have to let go of your sin and repent in order to be in any condition to make a valid sacrifice. The prayers of the people have never replaced the sacrifices. But once both temples were destroyed, the rabbis came up with the idea that prayers replaced sacrifices and they use verses like this to prove their point. They are wrong. We are nowhere given permission to replace sacrifices with prayers.

The Messiah's sacrifice on the cross fulfilled in truth what the sacrifices symbolized. Repentance is needed for any offering or sacrifice to be valid. But the problem of not being able to sacrifice, does not mean we should stop repenting. Sins are forgiven by the great mercy of G-d, whether or not offerings are made. Prayers which repeat the passages where offerings were made are not some special kind of offering.

However, as Messianic believers, Jewish and Gentile, the only sacrifice G-d wants us to make is the sacrifice of praise. Forgiveness is given to us by the shed blood of Calvary (I John 1:9), but even there, where there is no sincere repentance, we are stuck with our sins. Also, in a state of unrepentance, where our lives are filled with the works of the flesh, no praise we can offer will be valid and acceptable by YHVH. It should be repentance and sacrifice, not repentance or sacrifice.

Joel outlines a sad truth (Joel 2:19,26,27) by saying our people never had to ever go into captivity again or be chased off the land. They could have remained in the land, if they had been true to their covenant oath not to rebel against the Romans. Sinfulness of any kind which is not dealt with biblically, places us outside of the protection of G-d and that is what happened to our people. It is in our post war generation that we are seeing our people come home to Israel, we need to keep praying that they would come home to the only Messiah they will ever have. The second dispersion did not have to happen and they could have stayed in the land.

The prophet Micah uses two powerful images to describe how thoroughly YHVH deals with our sins. First, we crush them underfoot because they have lost all power over us. Then YHVH casts them into the depths of the sea, where they are irretrievable. The stains of sin can be washed out and the power of sin can be broken. Are you letting him break the power of sin in your life? Are you letting Him wash away the stain of sin from your life. The rest of these prophetic portions would make good reading on Shabbat Shuvah.

And now to the Torah Portion. Just before Moses hands the reigns over to Joshua, he makes some summary conclusions. First, he is to tell Joshua that even though he would not be allowed to lead the people in Canaan, YHVH will walk before him as YHVH did for Moses. He reminds Joshua to make sure the people treat the defeated people according to the instructions which Moses has already received. They were to be slaughtered and their towns were to be reduced to rubble, so that neither they, nor their idols would infect the people with their defeated paganism. They were told to crucify all 31 kings they were soon to defeat.

A copy of the Law which Moses has given, was to be given to the Levites and kept beside the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Every seven years during the sabbatical year, it was to be read during the festival of Sukkoth. This would give the people the opportunity to see if they had been following YHVH's instructions or not. They were to read, to fear and to observe all the word of the Law as an example to all future generations who were also going to read and to fear and to observe all the words of the Law, for as long as they dwelt in the Promised Land.

Moses then took Joshua into the Holy of Holies where the presence of G-d descended on them. After Moses' death only the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies once a year, at Yom Kippur. Moses is told that the people would backslide once they had finished the conquest of Canaan and they would suffer the dire consequences of such horrible backsliding. To warn them and to encourage them to repent once they had rebelled, Moses taught them a song which they could sing as a testimony against backsliding. Referring back to the idolatry on the Plains of Moab, Moses said that if they rebelled so easily when he was still alive, how much more would they do so after his death.

He gathers the leadership and warns them about the coming rebellion. Backsliding is never the intention of YHVH for His people, but He is aware of what they are capable of. On the plains of Moab, the sinful core was not destroyed, it just went underground. Once the fighting was over, it would rear its ugly head and try and take over the people again.

As a matter of fact, the entire period of the Judges was a generational wrestling match between members of the righteous core and members of the sinful core. This even continued through the period of the kings and though there were times the righteous core directed the people, the sinful core kept on making comebacks. They were never able to have two righteous kings in a row, but under the ministry of the prophets and the righteous king, they kept repenting so as not to let the sinful core go unchallenged.

Moses speaks of this process and his warning to the people should have been heeded more than it was. Under the last king of Judah, the righteous core was just in the process of dissolving, when the people were carried into captivity. It would be a time to regroup and to bring the people back to YHVH through His Word. How is your obedience doing, campers?

Sermon: Shabbat Shuvah: The Mystery of Iniquity

Our world is engaged in a relentless struggle between the forces of evil and their sinful core followers and the forces of good and their righteous core supporters. It is not an easy task to understand some of the dynamics of the struggle because so much of it depends on the choices and consequences of so many people, some in high positions of power and others are just our friends and neighbours.

The list of patriarchs before the flood, actually refers to the sad story of the shrinking of the global righteous core until it was finally reduced to just eight people. In our modern social media world it, is not hard to understand how an entire planet can fill up with darkness and violence. With the flood, G-d drowned the wicked people and cleansed the planet for us. The dynamics of iniquity are still a mystery, but we need to maintain a biblical approach to our enemy, so that we possess the tools to defeat him and prevent him from getting even a little foothold in our lives.

Today, I would like to deal with several aspects of iniquity, beginning with its ultimate source, our enemy, Satan. Where did he come from and what is he capable of? Some people feel that he is a fallen angel, cast out of heaven because of his rebellion. The two most popular passages, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 are referring to actual people who made false claims of divinity. While the enemy may have been an active voice to condemn people before YHVH, after the ascension of our Messiah, even this access was denied. Our planet is his prison and he and his demons roam about as roaring lions, seeking new victims to devour.

The Revelation says that only one third of the angels (symbolically represented by stars) were cast down with the enemy. So that means there are least twice as many angels who serve YHVH than there are who serve the enemy of our souls.

Our Messiah said that our enemy was evil from the beginning (John 8:44) and even though Paul says that he can disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corin11:14), there is nowhere in the Bible where it say he used to be an angel of light.

We know that he is not an eternal being, like YHVH, and that his power is mainly as an influencer for evil. Sometimes he can cause sickness (though all sickness does not come from him), and sometimes he may also possess people and take control of them. He has such a large array of demons, that few believers have ever had direct contact with him. He has no power over the weather, but he is the motivation behind the black arts. Just as most magic is nothing but tricks and deceit, the great liar pretends to do things he is unable to do. The Bible does say that YHVH created the enemy (see: Is. 45:7; Prov. 16:4; Lamen. 3:38 and Deut. 32:39 for starters), but the enemy never successfully rebelled against YHVH and our Eternal G-d puts definite restrictions on what Satan can do and how far he can go.

And while it may not be possible to discern the actual mechanism which G-d used to create the dark one, we know that YHVH actually allowed darkness and evil to come into existence. He wanted us to have a choice between actual darkness and evil and actual light and good. One way to see it is that YHVH created a sealed box and withdrew His presence from it, and out came Satan. This illustration can become problematic if you push it too far. The enemy is not equal to YHVH and even though he has committed horrible things in the past, he is under the control of G-d and the interventions of YHVH are greater than the power of darkness.

He has three main attacks which want us to question what G-d really said about any issue or person. In the process he also wants us to call into question both the dictates of our conscience and the stipulations of moral law.

His first line of attack is to tempt us to do something which we know is wrong. Our carnal nature is a series of drives or urges which he wants to harness to his purposes. When Eve took the fruit and ate it, she gave some to her husband who was beside her. They knew it was wrong, but the enemy falsely promised that eating the fruit would somehow allow you to possess some form of divinity.

There are many who talk about our fallen, sinful nature, as if Adam and Eve's DNA was somehow infected with the inevitable desire to do evil. This is simply not what the Bible teaches. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of G-d (Rom. 3:23), but it is by our own choosing and not something we are genetically inclined towards. If we were just sinners by nature, it would not be our fault, but sin is something we choose, and we will also be variably impacted by the choices of others.

Before we discuss the enemy's second most common line of attack, I want to deal with the five moral and ethical endowments which YHVH equips every person with. There is first free will, because I am free to choose how to act or how to respond to situations which come into our life. We did not choose our parents and they did not choose us. We were all born with the ability to choose and to refuse evil and too many people have made evil such a habit, that it does not appear that they are making a choice, every time they do something wrong. We were all born with a moral nature which some of us have so violated that it may appear as if we had killed or badly seared our conscience.

Next comes dignity, which means that we all suffer the good or bad consequences of our own choices and those which others made for us. Free will and dignity always go together. Next comes time and energy. As I approach my 70th year, I realize I do not have a long time before I get to sleep in the dust and rest under the altar in the Presence of our Messiah. I have also noticed a steep decline in my energy level. I can still think as well as I ever have, but I find it tiring to climb stairs and to do simple household chores. My eyes and my ears are also starting to fail. I want to make use of all the time YHVH has given me and I want to apply all of my energy to fulfilling His purposes in my life.

The last moral and ethical endowment which YHVH equips us with is gifting. Most of us are pretty good at one or at several things, while we are also not gifted in other areas. Some are gifted musicians and artists. I am not. Some are gifted with a mechanical know how and while some may put together and fix engines, others can build the most amazing buildings. I could do neither. I am a deep thinker who relishes History, Philosophy and Theology.

There are always things we have a real feel for, be it so simple as gardening and cooking, or complex as nuclear physics and astronomy. We need to maximize our giftings and compensate in areas where we are not gifted. We are all born with the ability to resist and even defeat the enemy, but sadly, fewer and fewer people (and societies) are fighting against and resisting his influence.

We are now ready to discuss the second main attack- condemnation. He makes us want to do something badly and then wants us to feel bad because we have done it. "Do it, do it – now look at what you did, loser."

He wants to both overcome our conscience and also use it as a weapon against us to crush us and make us feel worthless. Many alcoholics, sex trade workers and other criminals, feel so bad about themselves and what they have done, that they have given up and feel that they only deserve evil and pain. This is also frequently what they impose on others. It becomes a vicious cycle where people who feel bad do bad.

After his triple denial of the Messiah at the trial, Peter burst into tears because he knew that our Messiah had forgiven him. Judas felt so bad after he betrayed the Messiah to the Romans, that he let his guilt and condemnation cause him to commit suicide, when he could have been forgiven. Depression and other form of mental distress are tools which the enemy uses against believers and against emotionally vulnerable people.

People who cannot forgive themselves, fill up with anger and bitterness, which make our enemy very happy. However, he is not behind every misfortune which overtakes us, because sometimes a flat tire is just a flat tower and so is a fender bender.

Let us move on to his most subtle attack on both what we believe and on how we are called to live: confusion. Versions of "Has G-d really said?" are joined with: "Is there really a G-d?" and: "Everyone should be free to do their own thing".

He has been successful in promoting the lie of evolution and helping it penetrate into almost every area of human endeavour. He has also succeeded in convincing far too many believers, Jew and Gentile, that the Bible should not be taken as any more than a collection of the customs and opinions of men. He has been able to take it one step further and now the dictatorship of political correctness requires that we accept everyone else's beliefs, as we decriminalize various sins and attack the traditional morality which is derived from the Bible.

When the Bible says that the world is darkening, it is referring to the swirling clouds of temptation, condemnation and confusion that are increasingly engulfing our world. What we need is a thorough knowledge of Bible verses which talk about successful spiritual warfare. He does not appear in red long underwear, trying to poke people with his evil pitchfork. And sadly, he is also not in hell, which is the prison house of G-d and is not on fire. After the day of judgment, the devil, the false prophet and the beast will be thrown into the lake of fire, along with hell.

We need to identify spiritual attacks, which usually come to us in one or a combination of the three attacks. We need to see and to take the way(s) of escape YHVH will always provide for us (I Cor. 10:13). If we fail and are tripped up, when we confess our sin, He not only forgives us, but also cleanses us from all (the stains) of wickedness (I John 1:9)

We need to set straight paths for our wounded feet, so that we would be made better and not worse (Heb. 12:13). We need to realize that no temptation comes from G-d (James 1:13-15) and that there is a big difference between a trial and a temptation. He may put our loyalty and faith to the test, but He would never intervene in any way to cause us to sin (Phil. 1:20, 21 and 4:13). We need to acknowledge the gifting of G-d in our lives (Phil. 2:13) and understand that we are His creation, created to fulfill all the good things He wants us to do (Eph.2:10). During the Days of Awe, we do a lot of introspection, both to seek forgiveness and to be better equipped to resist the devil, as we heal and learn to live peaceful lives, full of all the fruit of the Spirit and none of the works of the flesh.

Another important feature of understanding the mystery of iniquity, is learning of its complete, temporary victory over the whole world, just before Messiah's return to set up His everlasting Kingdom over all the nations and generation of mankind, and that on a new Earth and beneath a new Heavens.

Under the direct control of Satan, three individuals will be instrumental in this temporary victory of the forces of evil at the end of time: the final worldwide Antichrist (a false Messiah), the beast (an imitation of the Lamb) and the false prophet, who will claim to speak for G-d, even as he deviates from the teachings of the Bible.

There have already been many false prophets and Antichrists, but none of them has so far been able to achieve world domination. The spirit of empire and colonial conquest is the spirit of Antichrist, for no nation has the right to conquer another nation and impose their beliefs and values on it. The Persian emperors were Antichrist, as was Alexander the Great and the Caesars. There were several Antichrists that came close to global domination: Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Stalin, Mao and Hitler. I am proud of most of my British heritage, but honesty requires that I describe the British Empire as the spirit of Antichrist.

Most of these people and most of the horror that has tried to destroy a portion of or all of humanity, have been practice runs where the enemy is undermining his enemies so that he can once again achieve the same level of world dominance, which he achieved just before the flood undid his handy work. The final Antichrist may already be lurking somewhere in the world, but he or she has not revealed themselves yet. Justin Trudeau is not the Antichrist. Donald Trump is not the Antichrist. Neither is Vladimir Putin. To quote the Lord of the Rings definition of a servant of the enemy: he would seem fairer and feel fouler.

The world is being primed for his manifestation and Bible believers will be increasingly targeted to undermine the greatest obstacle to his final, temporary victory, which is us. 2 Thess. 2:7, 8 describes the one who holds him back and must be removed. We can still resist him and overcome him, so he wants to destroy or to neutralize as many of us as he can. People are still coming to faith across the globe, which is a good thing. But they are vastly outnumbered by those who are leaving the faith. The worldwide crowd of atheists and agnostics is growing by leaps and bounds. Many people are leaving most traditional religions and faith in the supernatural Creator of the Universe is on a steep decline.

Now as our world fill up with darkness, believers will not escape in what some call the rapture. When the Messiah comes and only when He comes, those of us who are still alive, will be snatched out of bodies (rapture, which is Latin for snatched), after all the dead are resurrected. There will not be a literal thousand year reign of peace on Earth set up by the Messiah. The moment Messiah leaves the true Heavenly Holy of Holies, the entire cosmos will explode with great noise and melt away into nothingness. The Bible does not go into many specifics about the lead up to the end of the world, because we should already be living every day as if He were crucified yesterday, risen today and returning tomorrow.

Take the time and make the effort to practice true biblical repentance. The mystery of iniquity will continue to snowball until it once again dominates the entire globe and those of us who survive the coming persecution, will either be in jail or in hiding – or in prison camps where they will try and reeducate us away from our faith and into their stupidity. Walking with the Messiah is way better than rolling around in the mud with the enemy. Shabbat Shalom.