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Shabbat Ki Tavo

September 5, 2009

16 Ellul 5769

News

INSTALLATION OF A NEW PASTOR IN ISRAEL

It was with a great pleasure that I dedicated Sabbath August 29 to the presentation of a new pastor to his congregations. I am sure that if you read our newsletters carefully you will have heard or read about Shalom David and his family. Shalom is a "sabrá" that means a Jew born in Israel. Shalom discovered Jesus thanks to his wife Paola and the ministry of Paul Lippi when he was working in Israel.

After accepting Yeshua, Shalom decided to go to Newbold College in England to study theology and to return as a pastor.

It was a big decision for him and his family (five children) because Shalom is not what we call today a young man. He is in his 40's and has a big family to care for and to feed.

The Executive Committee gave Shalom two congregations to pastor and he is to plant a new one. The first is the Ethiopian congregation we have in Rehovot. Our choice of Shalom is because this congregation is composed of Jews who have emigrated from Ethiopia in the 90's. It will not be easy. These people do not speak English. They speak Amharic and only some of them speak Hebrew, so it is important for this congregation to be served by a Hebrew speaking pastor, especially because their children attend public Israeli schools and they speak only Hebrew; they don't even learn Amharic.

We visited this community on Shabbat morning. After introducing the congregation and the David family to each other, I preached. Just before leaving, Shalom and Paola addressed a few words to the congregation. The members were happy to see this family ready to come to pastor them.

The second congregation the Executive Committee assigned to Shalom is the Hebrew congregation in Tel Aviv. It is a small

congregation of Hebrew speaking people who are willing to worship G-d in Hebrew and to witness to the Israelis living in Tel Aviv. We went to this congregation right after our visit in Rehovot.

The third assignment given to Shalom will not be the easiest one, because it is the task of planting a new Hebrew speaking congregation in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the Jewish city "par excellence", the capital of the Jewish people since King David, 3,000 years ago. We are happy with our Hebrew speaking congregation in Tel Aviv and in Haifa, and we really feel that there is a need for a Hebrew speaking congregation in Jerusalem. We asked Shalom to live in Jerusalem. We hope that he will be able to plant this congregation and to share Yeshua with many people.

JEWISH WORK IN CHICAGO

Two years ago a Jewish Adventist team had a specific prayer. We looked at the largest metropolitan areas in North America that have a Jewish population and asked God to lead us in establishing the work there. Chicago was on our list but nobody from the team had any connection with this city, neither among the churches nor among the conference administrators. Four months after this prayer a group of lay members from the personal ministry team of North Shore approached Shalom Learning Center requesting help in reaching the Jewish community of the north side of Chicago where the church itself was located. This was the beginning of the Shalom Learning Center's work in the third largest Jewish populated area of North America. Today a Jewish Adventist Russian speaking congregation meets there. Sadly, Sergei and Svetlana, the leaders of this group, lost their baby—only three weeks old. They need our prayers. Thank you for presenting this couple to the Lord for his comfort and blessing upon them. I am sure that we will see this baby in heaven.

OVERVIEW



KI TAVO

DEUTERONOMY 26:1-29:8

When Bnei Yisrael dwell in the Land of Israel, its first fruits are to be taken to the Temple and given to the kohen in a ceremony expressing recognition that it is G-d who guides the history of the Jewish People throughout all ages.

This passage forms one of the central parts of the Haggadah that we read at the Passover Seder. On the last day of Pesach of the fourth and seventh years of the seven-year shemitta cycle, a person must recite a disclosure stating that he has indeed distributed the tithes to the appropriate people in the prescribed manner.

With this mitzvah Moshe concludes the commandments that G-d has told him to give to the Jewish People. Moshe exhorts them to walk in G-d's ways, because they are set aside as a treasured people to G-d.

When Bnei Yisrael cross the Jordan River they are to make a new commitment to the Torah.

Huge stones are to be erected and the Torah is to be written on them in the world's seventy primary languages, after which they are to be covered over with a thin layer of plaster.

Half the tribes will stand on Mount Gerizim, and half on Mount Eval, and the levi'im will stand in a valley between the two mountains. There the levi'im will recite 12 commandments and all the people will answer "amen" to the blessings and the curses.

Moshe then details the blessings that will be bestowed upon Bnei Yisrael. These blessings are both physical and spiritual. However if the Jewish People do not keep

the Torah, Moshe details a chilling picture of destruction, resulting in exile and wandering among the nations.

EVERYTHING IS FOR THE ULTIMATE GOOD

This week's Parsha Ki Tavo begins with the mitzvah of "Bikurim"—bringing the first fruits to the Kohen (priest) in the Holy Temple. This mitzvah is an expression of appreciation by the owner of the land for the good and blessings which G-d gave him. The Torah says, **"And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given to you..."**

The Talmud relates that Rabbi Akiva would always say, "Whatever G-d does is for the good!" Once on a journey, Rabbi Akiva and his students were refused hospitality at a certain town and had to spend the night in a field. Yet, instead of being upset, Rabbi Akiva said: "Whatever G-d does is for the good!"

Rabbi Akiva had a donkey, a rooster to awaken him early, and a lamp for studying Torah. That evening, as he was studying, a wind blew out his lamp. Then a cat pounced on his rooster and ate it. Finally, a prowling lion ate his donkey. Again Rabbi Akiva said: "Whatever G-d does is for the good!"

Late that night, marauding troops raided the town and took all its inhabitants captive. The next morning, Rabbi Akiva and his students discovered what happened. He said to his students: "Didn't I tell you—whatever G-d does is for the good! If the lamp would have been burning or the rooster would have crowed, or the donkey would have brayed, we too, would have been taken captive."

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov gives us a lesson when he affirms that at times G-d's actions don't reveal any good at all. In situations like these one has to believe and trust in G-d that everything is for the ultimate good.

APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE

The Torah states: “And you shall rejoice with all the good that the Almighty has given you” (Deut. 26:11). Why do we need a directive to rejoice when we should automatically be happy when we have good things?

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, former Rosh HaYeshiva of Telse Yeshiva in Cleveland, clarifies with an insight into human nature: “Man’s nature is to constantly want more than he presently has. ‘He who has one hundred wants two hundred.’ Our moments of joy are mixed with sadness over what we lack—and this is destructive both physically and spiritually. Therefore, the Torah commands us to feel a joy that is complete—to focus on and rejoice with what we have.” The mitzvah of Bikurim also teaches us to be happy and rejoice with whatever G-d has given us. A person who believes that whatever he or she has is a gift from G-d, will not be jealous of others and thus truly rejoice and be satisfied and happy in life.

If you think that you will be happy only when you have more, then you will never be happy. When you finally get what you were hoping for, you will once again focus on getting more and will again feel unhappy. Happiness is dependent upon your state of mind. You can only be happy if you appreciate what you have and what you are presently doing.

Adding to Rabbi Pliskin’s message, Pirkei Avos (chapter 4, the first mishna or “teaching”) states, “Who is the rich person? He who is happy with his portion.” Regardless of what you have, you are only wealthy if you have mastered the ability to appreciate what you have. According to Torah, true wealth is measured in terms of happiness!

The mitzvah of Bikurim teaches us that before we enjoy the bounty and blessings which G-d gives us, we must give back some. There are many believers with regards to their faith who are like multi-millionaires who don’t know that they are rich because all of their money is sewn

into the mattress and they don’t know that it is there. Instead, they complain about sleeping on a lumpy mattress!

One can have eyes, hands, feet, a mind to think with and be depressed –unless he focuses on taking pleasure in these gifts. Imagine if you were blind and suddenly were given the gift of sight. Would you be “flying high”? You would be beyond yourself in happiness! Why wait to appreciate what you have? Make a list of your gifts and what you are grateful for. It is good preparation for Rosh Hashana! And so is reading.

BIKURIM, AN EXPRESSION OF JOY

The mitzvah of Bikurim didn’t apply immediately upon entering into Israel, but 14 years later after they conquered the land and gave everyone their assigned land. Why did the person who got his parcel of land earlier have to wait with this mitzvah until everyone got their land? Our sages explain it this way: The mitzvah of Bikurim was an expression of joy; “And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you and to your household.” However, in the spirit of the mitzvah of “Ahavat Yisrael,” one cannot have complete joy, even when they have everything they need, knowing that one of his brethren is still lacking, because they don’t have their land yet. Thus, the mitzvah applied only 14 year after coming into the Promised Land.

HILLEL TAUGHT

“Do not say, ‘when I have time I will learn,’ for perhaps you will never have time.” There are those who feel that communal responsibilities infringe too greatly on their time and potential for personal development. They therefore conclude that disassociating themselves from communal involvement will give them more time to learn. Never reckon that time can be generated by avoiding a mitzvah. That time might never materialize. God will not permit one to benefit by neglecting his communal responsibilities.

GIVING CHARITY

Rabbi Meir of Premishlan explains the beauty of the mitzvah of giving charity and how charity differs from other mitzvot: "I had a dream," said Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, "in which I ascended to Gan Eden (paradise) and sat down near its gates. I saw a very respectable Jew coming to the gate asking to be let in." "Who are you? What merits do you have to deserve entry into paradise?" the angel in charge demanded.

"I was a Rabbi. All my life I studied Torah. Sure I deserve to enter Gan Eden," he replied. "You will have to wait," replied the angel. "We have to check if your studying was truly for G-d's sake or for ulterior motives."

Then another distinguished looking Jew arrives at the gates of Gan Eden and wants to go straight in. "Who are you? And why do you deserve entry to Gan Eden?" questioned the angel.

"My entire life I devoted to G-d. I spent my days in prayer and study of Torah. Sure I deserve Gan Eden, for whom else was the Gan Eden created?" he replied. "Not so fast," replied the angel. "Although you may have done everything you claim you did, we have to be sure that it was done with purity and sincerity. You will have to wait until we check it out thoroughly."

As the angel is still arguing with this man, another Jew, very plain and simple-looking appears at the gates. "I would like to go into Gan Eden," he declares. "Who are you? What did you accomplish during your lifetime to be worthy to enter Gan Eden?" asks the angel.

"Perhaps I do not deserve Gan Eden," answered the man, trembling. "I was a very simple person and earned my living from an inn at the roadside. Whenever a traveler came by hungry and tired, I made sure to give them food and lodging. If the person was poor I charged him less or didn't charge him at all. I tried my best to accommodate my guests. Perhaps I'm not worthy of entering Gan Eden, especially seeing these rabbis and scholars waiting?"

"Come right in!" exclaimed the angel. "All others we have to check if their deeds were purely for G-d's sake. However, your actions in helping people in need does not need any checking. It

doesn't matter why you did it, as long as the other person was helped!" "Every other mitzvah," concluded Rabbi Meir of Premishlan, "is lacking if not done with the purest and holiest of intent. With charity, however, it doesn't matter what the reason or motive is, as long as the other person was helped!" In fact, even if one loses money and is upset about it, yet, if a poor person finds it they have performed the mitzvah of giving Tzedakah.

G-D DOES IT FOR GOOD

Rabbi Akiva was one of the Ten Martyrs who were killed by the Romans in the years following the destruction of the Second Holy Temple. Rabbi Akiva suffered a very painful and torturous death. The Romans tore his flesh with iron combs.

The Talmud relates that in the midst of this pain, Rabbi Akiva began reciting the "Shma" with great devotion and with a smile on his face. The Roman general present said to Rabbi Akiva, "Are you a magician? How can you smile while suffering so?"

Rabbi Akiva replied, "No, I am not a magician. But all my life I proclaimed in the Shma that I love G-d with all my soul. All my life I was hoping to be able to fulfill this mitzvah to the fullest. Now that my soul is being taken because I am a Jew and I'm truly fulfilling the mitzvah of loving G-d with all my soul, should I not be happy?"

As Rabbi Akiva uttered the last word "Echad" - "G-d is One," he died. "Bechol Meodecha" - "with all your might." Our sages explain that although we may not see the good in certain situations, it is only because we have limited vision. From G-d's perspective there is a reason for everything. In the end, whatever G-d does is for the good.

EDITOR

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HAFTARA

Isaiah 60:1-22

This Shabbat is the fifth Shabbat after Tisha B'Av. We are in a period called *Shiva D'nechemta*— "Seven weeks of comfort." The seven Haftaras of the weeks between Tish'a B'av and Rosh Hashana are prophesies of comfort and hope for Israel and God's people at large.

HAFTARA: This text of comfort reminds us the mission of Israel. "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the L-RD has risen upon you." (Is. 60:1). G-d's people has to shine and to reflect the glory of the L-rd, which is His character. Her testimony will bring nations and kings to her and through her to G-d. "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn" (Is. 60:3). However, to see people coming to her she must lift up her eyes and accepts evidences given by the L-rd "Lift up your eyes and look around; they all gather together, they come to you;" (Is 60:4). She will shine even more to be "radiant" "Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice, because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you." (Is 60:5) Even the Arabic world will come to Israel: "A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come." (Is 60:6a) It will bring wealth to her "They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD." (Is 60:6b). To comfort Israel, G-d promises to her that she will see her children who are in exile come back home, "For the coastlands shall wait for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from far away, their silver and gold with them" (Is 60:9a). That will come from the L-rd "for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has glorified you." (Is 60:9b). Israel will live in peace without fearing the nations and invaders "Your gates shall always be open; day and night they shall not be shut, so that nations shall bring you their wealth, with their kings led in procession." (Is 60:11). Blessings will be always there for her "Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended. Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever. . . the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the LORD; in its time I will accomplish it quickly. (Is. 60:20-22).

BESORAT YESHUA

Mark 8:1-13

One of the themes of the parasha is the joy of bringing to the L-rd the first fruits of the harvest "And you shall rejoice in all the good which the L-rd your G-d has given you and to your household." (Deuteronomy 26:11)

BESORAH: In the text of the besorah, Yeshua wants to give joy to people who have no joy. In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, "I have compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat." (Mark 8:1-2). Yeshua is the one who has compassion for the crowd who is thirsty and hungry.

Yeshua asks his disciples to give food to the crowd, but they don't know how to do it. "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" (Mark 8:4). Yeshua knows exactly how to do it. He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." " (5). It is important for the disciples to discover their own incapacities to feed the crowd, that's why Yeshua asks them to be aware of what they have of their asset, "7 loaves". For Yeshua it is enough, he gives them an order. "Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground" (6). Obedience is important, if the crowd or the disciples did not accept full obedience, the miracle could not be done. "he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute; and they distributed them to the crowd" (7). The crowd was a big crowd, "They ate and were filled; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away" (8-9). For the pharisees it was not enough, Yeshua fed 4,000 people with 7 loaves and a few fishes, but they want more signs "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, asking him for a sign from heaven, to test him" (11). Yeshua did not satisfy their curiosity, they had more than enough signs. "And he left them, and getting into the boat again, he went across to the other side" (13).

