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GC Session

FIRST PRESIDENTIAL SERMON

On Sabbath 4th of July I attended the first sermon of Ted Wilson as General Conference President. It was interesting and if someone asks me what I remember from his speech, I will say that his illustration of the people of Israel crossing the Red Sea was very interesting, he invited us to "Go Forward". It is very encouraging to see that our President wants us to go forward. We have started a formal Jewish ministry at the level of the GC in 1998 and I take Ted Wilson invitation to "go forward" as an encouragement to continue our ministry with the same spirit in order to achieve our part of God's work in our part of the world.



ADVENTIST MISSION BOOTH

We had a booth within the space of Adventist Mission during the full Session, it was an interesting time and many people

Shabbat Matot-Mass'ei

July 10, 2010
 28 Tamuz 5770

found us even though the ministry was not clearly identified by a sign.

At this booth there was a stage where groups and ministries could express themselves. We were scheduled on Friday at 1:30 pm. I say "we" because in fact we were two delegates from Israel, a young lady, Yulia and myself. Yulia is a wonderful singer, she sings in Israel and give concerts, that is why I ask her to be on the platform with me and to sing a song in Hebrew. She did it and it was beautiful.



After her song, I had 10 minutes to explain our ministry, I did it in front of about 200 people gathered before the platform. I have seen that these people were really interested and some of them came to the booth to ask more questions.





OVERVIEW

MATOT

NUMBERS 30:2-32:42

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. Bnei Israel wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among Bnei Israel. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the Ohel Mo'ed (Tent of Meeting).

The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of Bnei Israel, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

MASS'EI

NUMBERS 33:1-36:13

The Torah names all 42 encampments of Bnei Israel on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into Eretz Israel. G-d commands Bnei Israel to drive out the Canaanites from Eretz Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry.

Bnei Israel are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the Canaanites, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set

aside 48 cities for the levi'im, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land.

Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee there.

The daughters of Tzelofchad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe.

Thus ends the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

A VOW TO G-D

The Torah portion opens with the laws of vows: "When a man makes a vow to God, or swears an oath to prohibit something to his soul, he shall not profane his word; all that his mouth has expressed he must do." (Numbers 30:3) G-d's people are bound by the command not to profane their words.

Rashi, comments: "He shall not profane his word - ... he should not make his words mundane. (Rashi, Numbers 30:3) The Torah here enjoins us not to misuse this power by speaking nonsense or uttering vows that we will later profane.

The power of our speeches is so great that G-d says to his people "This people I have formed for Myself, they shall tell My praise. (Isaiah 43:21) The purpose of G-d's people is defined by this verse: God created us so that we should praise Him. As such, the power of speech is accorded special properties. It is, in some ways, the most Godly and spiritual of our properties.

Rabbi Shim'on Bar Yochai underlined the importance of our speeches and vows saying, "Had I been at Mount Sinai at the moment when the Torah was given to Yisrael, I would have demanded that man should have been created with two mouths—one for Torah and prayer and the other for mundane matters. But then I retracted and exclaimed that if we fail and speak lashon hara (gossip) with only one mouth, how much more so would we fail with two mouths." (Yerushalmi, Berachos 1:2)

GAD, REUBEN, AND MANASSEH

The Torah states, "Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that behold, the place was a place for cattle; the children of Gad and

the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to the princes of the congregation, saying, Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Sebam, and Nebo, and Beon, the land which Yahweh struck before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle; and your servants have cattle. They said, If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; don't bring us over the Jordan." (Numbers 32:1-5) Moshe responds to their request with incredulity:

"Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuben, 'Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here? Why do you dissuade the heart of the Children of Israel from crossing to the Land that God has given them? This is what your fathers did, when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to see the Land: They went up to the valley of Eshkol and saw the Land and they dissuaded the heart of the Children of Israel, not to come to the Land that God has given them.'" (Numbers 32:6-9)

Moshe has two objections to this proposition, first he objects to the idea of separation from the main larger community, and secondly he objects because of the consequences of such a separation.

First objection: Separating oneself from his spiritual community is spiritually devastating, the result could be an eternal separation from the community. The first and perhaps prototype for such a separation returns us to the days of Avraham, when his nephew whom he treated as a son also has "flock" problems: "And Avram went up from Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, to the Negev. And Avram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the Negev to Bet-El, to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bet-El and Ha'Ai . . . And Lot lifted up his eyes, and saw the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as you come to Zo'ar. Then Lot chose for himself the valley of the Jordan; and Lot journeyed east, and they separated themselves, one from the other." (Genesis 13:1-3; 10-11) After some explanations are offered, a deal is brokered whereby these tribes will aid in the conquest of the Land of Israel, and only then return to their inheritance east of the Jordan."

But there is a curious point. The Torah says, "Moses gave to them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, according to the cities of it with their borders, even the cities of the land round about." (Numbers 32:33). We understand that Moses gave to Gad and Reuben the East bank of the Jordan River, they asked for it, but Why to the half tribe of Manasseh? The text itself is silent; therefore the commentaries feel free to offer different interpretations.

The Ibn Ezra provides a quantitative explanation, theorizing that they did not merit mention until this point because they were so few—even though they were involved in this request from the outset.

Another explanation says that Menasse's inheritance east of the Jordan was not allotted to them in response to their own request. Moshe initiated the move in an attempt to insure the integrity and continuity of the other two tribes. In Moshe's mind, all of Israel are, indeed, brothers. Every tribe should feel brotherhood with every other tribe.

FEEL JOY IN EVERY POSITIVE ACT YOU DO

The Torah states: "And Novach went and captured Kenas and its surrounding villages and he called it Novach after his name" (Numbers 32:42). Why did the Almighty include this verse in the Torah?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch elucidates: Throughout the world, powerful leaders have wanted to leave monuments to themselves through statues and buildings named after them. Kings and conquerors have even named large cities after themselves. However, names can very easily be changed and then nothing is left, as happened to Novach. (Neither Novach nor the city he named after himself are remembered in history.) The good deeds of a person and his spiritual attainments are the only true everlasting monuments.

Rabbi Packouz says, "When you view the good that you do as your eternal monument, you will feel greater motivation to accomplish as much as you can. A life of spiritual attainments is everlasting. Feel joy in every positive act you do, for it gives greater splendor to your monument!"

DO WE SWEAR FALSELY?

King Yannai ruled over two thousand cities. Yet they were all destroyed because they were accustomed to swearing—even in truth!”

“How so? A person would say to his friend, ‘I swear that I will go and eat this and this in such a place; I swear that I will drink this and this in that place.’ Then they performed exactly as they swore. They were still punished although they didn’t swear falsely.”

The Midrash concludes: If for those who swore the truth, the punishment was so severe; how much more so does one have to be careful not to swear falsely.”

PLACE FULL OF OPPORTUNITY

Back in the early 1950’s a large shoe consortium with stores across the United States and Canada, decided to take their business venture into the emerging continent of Africa. They sent two of their salesman to explore the prospects of business in the remote villages across the Dark Continent. After just one week, they received a cable from the first salesman: “I am returning at once. No hope for business. Nobody here wears shoes!” They did not hear from the second salesman for four weeks. Then one day an urgent cable arrived. “Send 15,000 pairs of shoes at once! I have leased space in five locations. Will open chain of stores. This place is filled with opportunity. Nobody has shoes!”

A HANDICAPPED MIND

Rabbi Paysach Krohn loves to tell the beautifully haunting story of the woman who left Rusk Institute with her child who was in a wheelchair. It was a wintry day and the chill that pervaded the young boy’s fragile bones declared its chilling presence with the icy frosting it left on the exposed metal of his wheelchair.

Waiting at the bus stop on the corner of 34th and 2nd Avenue, three large city busses whizzed by, unable to accommodate the mother and the child and his special chair. It was only after a

half-hour wait that the mother flagged down a bus and insisted to the driver that he allow them to board.

As the poor woman struggled to lift the wheelchair into the narrowly impatient doors that waited to slam like the jaws of a tiger, the driver shouted at her, “Lady you’ll have to wait for a bus with a lift! I gotta go!”

Immediately a few passengers jumped to her defense! “It’s freezing out there. We will wait!”

Embarrassed into submission, the driver acquiesced. As the mother and child settled in their place on the bus, one said to her, “Your child is not handicapped. It only seems that way. In truth it is the driver that has a handicapped mind!”

The Torah is telling us an important foundation in negativity. When one seemingly has a blemish or sees a blemish in his own home, he has no right to declare it as such. He may have a problem but should never declare it until seeking spiritual confirmation. One may think it is a blemish, it may even appear as a blemish yet until confirmed by the compassionate kohen, it is only like a blemish. However, until confirmed with counsel, it is not.

If one goes to the kohen and learns to utilize the impairing experience to grow, to become more patient, more understanding, and perhaps more sensitive to others, then the hindrances that he or she experience may be troublesome, they may even be disheartening, they may even be like a handicap—but they are truly not. Because the handicap is only in the mind; and what is on the body is only like a blemish that can fade away like the whiz of a speeding bus on 34th Street.

EDITOR

A newsletter published by the
World Jewish Adventist Friendship Center
Under the umbrella of the
General Conference —Global Mission Office

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HAFTARA

Jeremiah 1:1 - 3:4

We are in the Jewish month of Tamuz and very soon we will start the month of Av, which includes the fast of Tish'a Be'av. Not a very joyful month for the Jewish people because many disasters just happened on the month of Av.

HAFTARA: It seems that the parasha is in connection with the disaster of the destruction of Jerusalem. First the haftarah is about the calling of Jeremiah, a priest from Anathoth "of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin" (Jer 1:1) who had no function in the temple and suddenly is called to be a prophet "I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (Jer 1:5). He does not like that, he refuses first "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." (Jer. 1:6), but when G-d is calling who can really refuse?

Then Jeremiah began to receive visions from G-d

1. "I see a branch of an almond tree." The L-rd explains: "You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it." (Jer 1:11-12).

2. "I see a boiling pot, tilted away from the north." (Jer 1:13). G-d explains again, "Out of the north disaster shall break out on all the inhabitants of the land." (Jer 1:14) The message is clear, great disasters will happen if nothing changes. What the L-rd is waiting for is the coming back of His people: repentance, that's why He calls them to come to the gates of Jerusalem (place of judgment) "For now I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, says the LORD; and they shall come and all of them shall set their thrones at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its surrounding walls and against all the cities of Judah." (Jer 1:15). However it is not a popular message. People like to hear good news, not bad news. That is why G-d says to Jeremiah that his message will not be popular, he will have difficult times and will not be listened to. "They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the LORD, to deliver you" (Jer 1:19).

In the chapter 2, God announces the destruction of the holy city of Jerusalem "disaster came upon them, says the LORD." (Jer 2:3) It is not the city, the stones who are important but the people who are living there: I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, . . . Israel was holy to the L-rd" (Jer 2:2-3). Israel is loved by G-d who see her as "holy."

BESORAT YESHUA

Mark 6:14 - 27

HAFTARA: The destruction of Jerusalem is coming soon, why? because the people of G-d is not listening to G-d and His prophet. Jeremiah will be in jail and persecuted as many other prophets.

BESORAH: The time of Yeshua was not different, our text of the besorah describes the death of one of the greatest prophets after Moshe. This prophet is Yochanan Ha Matbil (John the Baptist). Yeshua, speaking about Yochanan said one day to his talmidim "What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. (Matt 11:9). He was more than a prophet. Why? we discover it in Matatyahu where yeshua speaking once more to his talmidim says, "but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but they did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man is about to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them about John the Baptist." (Matt. 17:12-13) Elijah (Eliyahu HaNavi) should come before the coming of the Messiah, every rabbi will confirm this truth, and right now Yeshua reveals to us that the Elijah who has to come, came, he was this John the Baptist who prepared the way for yeshua.

BESORAH: In the text of our Besorah the king of the Jewish people, Herod, was so perverted that he did not recognize that Yochanan was a prophet sent by G-d, even more than a prophet, he was the Elijah who had to come. Herod played with his daughter, "When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." (Mark 6:22). This word was risky, she could ask half of the kingdom or of king's richness, but she was perverse, she was not happy that the prophet of G-d says to her what was wrong in her life, then she asks, "She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." (Mark 6:24). one of the greatest prophets sent to Israel was killed for one dance, by sensuality and depravation. What a pity for God's people!

