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24 Shvat, 5781

Shabbat Shalom Newsletter

Shabbat Shirah, Yitro

יִתְרוֹ

Exodus 18:1 - 20:23

LET'S PRAY TOGETHER

*We pray every week for the Jewish Friendship Ministry and their partner. I suggest our friends to pray from February 6 through 13, for Alan Reinach, who try to start a Jewish Adventist Friendship Center in Thousand Oaks (CA). Alan is also one of the leaders of the South Pacific Union, leading the Public Affairs and Religious Liberty department. Let's pray for Alan Reinach, his ministry and his family.*

NEWS

### PURIM CELEBRATION

Every Jew knows that when the celebration of *Tu Bishvat* is over, the celebration of *Purim* is near, always coming at the end of winter on the 14 of *Adar*, one month before Passover. This year *Purim* will be on February 26, just three weeks away. Now is the time to prepare a nice online celebration. Since we don't have space here, we will say more about this celebration very soon.

*Purim* is the biblical feast of Esther, set in the country of Persia, now known as Iran. It is a biblical feast because the book of Esther is in the Bible, but it is not a feast established by G-d in the Torah, that is why *Purim* is considered as a minor feast. Let's remember why Jews celebrate *Purim*:

#### Remembering the History

When the Jewish people were deported to Babylon in the 6th century BCE, it was a terrible time for the people of Yisrael as described in the book of Jeremiah. This deportation punished not only those who had acted wickedly. The deportation was a collective deportation of both the unfaithful Yisraelites and the faithful remnant such as the prophets Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Habakkuk and many others who were deported. This Exile would be a very long one, almost 2,600 years. Even though the Jews will receive permission to rebuild their temple in the time of Nehemiah and Ezra, they will never be fully independent again like they were during the kingships of David and Shlomo (Solomon) *Hamlachim* (the kings).

Even after Babylon fell, the Jews continued to be subjugated by other kingdoms such as the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks, and then the Romans. The Romans would eventually destroy Jerusalem for the second time, sending into exile those Jews who were living in Judea. Then the Byzantines took power, followed by the Muslims, the Crusaders, the Ottoman empire and then the British. These dominations ended in 1948 CE, when Israel finally achieved her independence.

#### The Story of Purim

The story of Esther and *Purim* took place in the time of the Persian Empire of the 4th century BCE when the Jews were subjects of King Ahasuerus. After the death of his wife, Queen Vashti (cf. Esther 1), he organized a competition, a beauty pageant of sorts, to select "Miss Persia," to enable King Ahasuerus to marry the most beautiful girl of the empire. Esther, a Jewish girl, won the competition, found favor in the king's eyes and became the new queen. Throughout

this process, Esther refused to divulge her Jewishness (cf. Esther 2). Meanwhile, the prime minister who had been appointed by the king was a Jew-hater named Haman. Esther's cousin, Mordechai, who was of royal ancestry (a descendant of King Shaul), was the leader of the Jews, according to the Jewish tradition. Jews have always learned from the prophets to be respectful of the king of the country, even when it is a pagan country. One day, Mordechai heard about a plot organized against the king and saved his life.

However, since Mordechai was a faithful Jew, he refused to bow to Haman as demanded. Haman was incensed and convinced the king to issue a decree ordering the extermination of all the Jews on the 13th of *Adar*, a date Haman chose by a casting lots.

#### G-d provides Salvation

Mordechai's faith was so great he had no doubt G-d would save His people. He devised a two-pronged plan to save the Jewish people from this genocide. 1) He asked Esther to reveal her identity to the king to thwart the plan of Haman; 2) Mordechai and Esther appealed to all the Jews, convincing them to repent, fast and pray. Meanwhile, Esther asked the king and Haman to join her for a feast. Then at a second feast, Esther revealed to the king her Jewish identity and that Haman's plot would also take the Queen's life. Haman was hanged and Mordechai was appointed prime minister in his stead. Then a new decree was issued, granting the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies.

The Feast of *Purim* celebrates this mobilization of the Jewish people on the 13th of *Adar* when they killed many of their enemies who came against them, showing they were also G-d's enemies. On the 14th of *Adar*, the Jews rested and celebrated their victory in the capital city of Shushan.

#### What lessons can we draw from this celebration?

1. It is clear that even though we don't see G-d and He does not speak to us through a prophet, He is still acting to save His people.

2. *Purim* has been established by the Rabbis, who considered this event important enough to establish a feast in order to celebrate it. That means "human beings," particularly the leaders of G-d's people, have the right to establish extra-biblical celebrations to remember how G-d leads His people and the deliverances/miracles G-d has accomplished for His people.

**Next week we will reflect here on how Jews celebrate this feast, what they do for *Purim*, and how to use high technology to celebrate this feast with our Jewish friends in spite of the Covid-19 Pandemic.**

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## SHABBAT SHALOM

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## PARASHA FOR THIS WEEK

Yitro

יתרו

### PARASHA OVERVIEW:

#### Exodus 18:1 - 20:23

**H**earing of the miracles G-d performed for Bnei Yisrael, Moshe's father-in-law Yitro arrives with Moshe's wife and sons, reuniting the family in the wilderness.

Yitro is so impressed by Moshe's detailing of the Exodus from Egypt that he converts to the G-d of Israel.

Seeing that the only judicial authority for the entire Jewish nation is Moshe himself, Yitro suggests that subsidiary judges be appointed to adjudicate smaller matters, leaving Moshe free to attend to larger issues. Moshe accepts his advice.

Bnei Yisrael arrive at Mt. Sinai where G-d offers them the Torah. After they accept, G-d charges Moshe to instruct the people not to approach the mountain and to prepare for three days. On the third day, amidst

thunder and lightning, G-d's voice emanates from the smoke-enshrouded mountain and He speaks to the Jewish People, giving them the Ten Commandments:

1. Believe in G-d
2. Don't worship other "G-ds"
3. Don't use G-d's name in vain
4. Observe the Shabbat
5. Honor your parents
6. Don't murder
7. Don't commit adultery
8. Don't kidnap
9. Don't testify falsely
10. Don't covet.

After receiving the first two commandments, the Jewish People, overwhelmed by this experience of the Divine, request that Moshe relay G-d's word to them.

G-d instructs Moshe to caution the Jewish People regarding their responsibility to be faithful to the One who spoke to them.

### CENTRAL PARASHAH

**A**s we are reading Parashat Yitro, that means they chapters 18 to 20, we come to the heart or climax of the book is Exodus, where for the first and last time in history God speaks not only to a prophet, but to an entire people. We cannot over-emphasize this point. Usually, God has revealed Himself to the prophets one by one. However, at the beginning of the history of the people of Yisrael, Hashem exceptionally chose to speak to the millions of Yisraelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, thus, the revelation of God to Moshe could not be opposed or ridiculed. Hashem's appearances to Moshe were not illusions or psychiatric phenomena but real revelations, as the appearance at Mount Sinai with millions of witnesses attests. This event has so deeply marked the Jewish collective consciousness that even until today Moshe is considered the greatest prophet God has ever raised.

This section start with the chapter 18, which is the junction between two parts. Chapters 1 to 17 describe the raise of Moshe as a prophet and the exodus of Israel from Egypt. This section end on Exodus 18:12, and then starts the last section of Exodus, which is the stay of Israel at the bottom of Mount Sinai. As Carpenter says it: "The first half of the chapter [18] (vv. 1-12) brings the exodus deliverance motif of the preceding chapters to a meaningful conclusion (τέλος), but also addresses the issues raised by the Midianite tradition, both essential and incidental, found in chs. 2-4. The second half of the chapter (vv. 13-27) points forward to the dissemination of *mishpat* (מִשְׁפָּט) and therefore, to Sinai. The second half creates a totally new ambiance appropriate to the ongoing activities of Sinai. (*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 240, 1997, 93*).

### A KINGDOM OF COHANIM

**T**he purpose of God for Israel is given in this section of the Torah: "Now then, if you listen closely to My voice, and keep My covenant, then you will be My own treasure from among all the people, for all the earth is Mine. So as for you, you will be to Me a kingdom of priests [מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים] *mamleket kohanim* and a holy nation [גּוֹי קָדוֹשׁ] *goy qadosh*" (Ex 19:5-6). Here is one of the most fundamental text of the Hebrew Bible, after releasing Israel from the slavery of Egypt, God want to ratify the covenant is to be renew with his people, to renew it, because the covenant with Israel is not a new one, it is the same covenant that God has contracted with Adam, Noah, Avraham, Yitschak and Yaakov. The term of this covenant would be engraved in the tablets of stones to demonstrate the universal and atemporal aspect of this covenant, and will be pronounced by God himself in order to impress permanently the people of Israel on this covenant. In fact the purpose of God is expressed in these verses, as he wants his people to be a royal priesthood. It is a divine declaration, not a simple declaration from Moses. It is God who said to Moses to address these words to the people of Israel.

The question raised by this expression "kingdom of Priest" of Royal priesthood, is



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to know if this text is about the function of God's people as a collective royal priesthood or the individual role of each member of god's people. We don't have time to develop all the argument for one answer or the other, we invite our readers here to consult the work of Davies, but what is interesting is to check how the Apostolic Writings has interpreting this divine declaration. This expression is found in 1 Peter 2:5-9, in the *Hitgalut* (Revelation) 1:6; 5, 10; and 20:6. The Text of Peter says: "you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house—a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua." (1 Peter 2:5). The believers are compared to stones, which put together form a "spiritual house" this house is called "holy priesthood" that seems to indicate in accordance with the text of Exodus, a collective priesthood. The purpose of God is that His people, all together in this world play the collective role of priests, this seems to be confirmed by the verse 9 which says: "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9a), Shim'on Peter speaks to the whole people of God which he calls her with collective expression: "chosen people," a "royal priesthood," a "holy nation," a "people for God's own possession" a Royal priesthood is the exact expression of Shemot 19, βασιλειον ιερατευμα *basileion hierateuma*, "Royal Priesthood," which is also the exact translation of Exodus 19:6 by the LXX (Davies, 64). What is role of this nation of priests, "so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9b), her role is to proclaim His honor, to exalt Him, to glorify Him to adore and worship him, this him is presented in the verse as the "One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." We were living in the dark, and through Yeshua, the light came to this world and enlighten us for salvation. It is a collective function of God's people, that why the time of worship, when all the congregation meet together is important. It is at these collective gathering that proclaim through our worship, and adoration the praise of God for what he has done for us, this is what is called in the verse 5: "to offer up *spiritual sacrifices* acceptable to God through Messiah Yeshua" in this time, after Yeshua offered his life for us, we don't need to go to Jerusalem any more to offer sacrifice in the Temple, our worship and service for Him are our "spiritual sacrifices."

When we read the text of Revelation it is also going in the sense of "nation of priests" when it says: "To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood and made us a kingdom, kohanim [βασιλεις και ιερεις] *basileis kai hiereis*) to His God and Father—to Him be glory and power forever! Amen!" (1:5-6). "a kingdom of priests" this imply

The third day arrived. There was thunder and lightning in the morning, with a heavy cloud on the mountain, and an extremely loud blast of a ram's horn. The people in the camp trembled. (Exodus 19:16)

in fact that the priesthood is not reserved to a class of people within God's people, but each member of this kingdom is a priest. This is implied also in the letter written to the Hebrews, when the service of the sanctuary are explained in detail, and where Yeshua is presented as our high priest. One verse is interesting, where it is written: "Therefore let us draw near to the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). While this letter explains the sanctuary of the wilderness, designating Yeshua as the *Cohen Gadol* who enter the heavens which is the real sanctuary, "Therefore, since we have a great *Cohen Gadol* who has passed through the heavens, Yeshua Ben-Elohim, let us hold firmly to our confessed allegiance." (Hebrews 4:14) the people of God is invited to come near to the "throne of Grace." Where was this throne of grace? In the Most Holy Place of the sanctuary, the throne of grace, was the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. We know that nobody but only the *Cohanim* and the *Cohen Gadol* were allowed to enter the tabernacle. Thus is the letter to the Hebrews invite us to come near the throne of Grace, it is because we have been made a nation of cohanim, each one of us is a cohen. We don't have enough space here to develop all the implication of this Apostolic Writings interpretation, but it is clear that the first intention of God was that his people would be a kingdom of priests, however the experience of the Golden Calf has revealed that only one tribe was able to defend the honor of God "to proclaim the praise of the "One who called you out of darkness [Egyptian Slavery] into His marvelous light [at the Mount Sinai], where was revealed the 10 commandments to the whole nation. Thus, consequently to the experience of the Golden Calf, God choose one tribe among the thirteen, the tribe of Levi to the priests of God among Israel. But God has never given up His first intention, and realized it through the Great priesthood of Yeshua who call his people to be priests under his role as *Cohen Gadol*, it is in fact an universal priesthood, to which we are all called in order to achieve our goal on the earth in prepare the Coming of Mashiach. The book of Revelation teaches us that this status of priesthood is not only for this life on earth, but a status we will enjoy in

G-d said to Moses: 'You have seen that I spoke to you from heaven. Do not make a representation of anything that is with Me. Do not make silver or gold gods for yourselves.' (Exodus 20:22,23)

heaven too, after the coming of coming of Mashiach and the resurrection: "How fortunate and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection! Over such the second death has no authority, but they shall be *kohanim* of God and the Messiah, and they shall reign with Him for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:6). The first resurrection is the one of righteous, that is why it is written "Fortunate and holy is the one who has a share in the first resurrection!" the second death is the last definitive punishment of the wicked, that is why those who participate to the first resurrection will not experience the second death. And it is written about those who participate to the first resurrection that "they shall be *kohanim* of God and the Messiah" here is it is not a collective expression, but each one, everyone who will be resurrected at the first resurrection will be a priest of God. What function do these people will have after the resurrection? to answer this question, we have to differentiate between the first millennium (one thousand years) after the coming of Yeshua and the rest of eternity, as we have already seen, after the coming of Mashiach the earth would need one millennium to be restored to its original state, the state of Genesis 1 and 2, when it came out from the hand of the creator, to welcome the righteous who will come down from heaven with the heavenly Jerusalem, "I also saw the holy city—the New Jerusalem—coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Revelation 21:2), The Jewish tradition too agree on this need of a millennium to restore the earth in that tractate *Avodah Zarah* it is written, "In relation to the discussion on the calculation of years, the *Gemara* states that one of the Sages of the school of Eliyahu taught: The world is destined to exist for six thousand years. For two thousand years the world was waste, as the Torah had not yet been given. The next set of two thousand years are the time period of the Torah. The last set of two thousand years are the period designated for the days of the Messiah" (9a). and Chaim Luzzatto said: "The world will [exist] for six thousand years, and be destroyed for one [thousand]; but at the end of a thousand years, the Holy One, blessed be He, returns and renews the world (Derech Hashem, part one on Mankind). The next question is what will be the function of these Cohanim or "Priests of God" they will judges as it is written: "Then I saw thrones, and people sat upon them—those to whom authority to judge was given." (Revelation 20:4), which is confirmed by Rabbi Shaul: "Don't you know that the *kedoshim* will judge the world?" (1 Corinthians 6:2).



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