



Parsha Re'eh
Isaiah 54:11-55:5
August 23, 2014 / 27 Av 5774

If you wish to study alternative selections from the Prophets and First Kings that have a more direct link to the Torah portion, read the selection from Deuteronomy 11:26 written below and then go to the book of Joshua 1-3.

Last week Zion complained and wallowed in self-pity. This week, the third of seven special haftarot, the unhappy and uncomforted are promised restoration and enduring loyalty. Physical and spiritual transformation will occur; the hungry will have food, the thirsty, water. Our people will become safe and will not fear oppression. All that is necessary is that we “incline our heads and listen and we will be revived.”

How can we do this?

The month of Av is ending. Av is followed by the month of Elul and Elul by Tishrei. It is customary in some congregations to begin to think about the High Holidays, repentance and change in Elul. Actually it should begin in Av.

Consider devoting just a moment prior to each of the haftarot for seven consecutive weeks to think about your behavior and how it needs to be improved. Have I been insensitive? Arrogant? Too aggressive or not appropriately so. Have I been deceitful to others or myself? Just a moment once a week. I think it could work.

The following is a selection from this morning's Torah reading. Notice the connection to the first few chapters in the book of Joshua.

Deuteronomy 11: 26-30

“See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing that I enjoin upon you this day; and curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn away from the path that I enjoin upon you this day and follow other gods, whom you have not experienced. When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and possess, you shall pronounce the blessing at Mount Gerezim and the curse at Mount Ebal. Both are on the other side of the Jordan, beyond the west road that is in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the arabah-near Gilgal, by the terebinths of Moreh.”

Joshua 1:2-1:8 3:14-17

Prepare to cross the Jordan, together with all the people, in the land that I am giving to the Israelites. Your territory shall extend from the wilderness and the Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates -the whole Hittite country-and up to the Mediterranean Sea. I will not forsake you. Be strong and resolute, for you shall apportion to this people the land that I swore to their fathers. But you must observe faithfully all the Teaching that My servant Moses enjoined upon you. Do not deviate from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful, wherever you go.

3:14-17

“When the people set out from their encampment to cross the Jordan, the priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant were at the head of the people. Now the Jordan keeps flowing over its entire bed throughout the harvest season. But as soon as the bearers of the Ark reached the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the Ark dipped into the water at its edge, the waters coming down from upstream piled up in a single heap a great way off, at Adam, the town next to Zarethan; and those flowing away downstream to the Sea of Arabah (Dead Sea) ran out completely. So the people crossed near Jericho. The priests who bore the Ark of the Lord's Covenant stood on dry land exactly in the middle of the Jordan, while all Israel crossed over on dry land, until the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan.”

Comment:

The borders of Israel are virtually the same as in the description of Moses (dt 11:24-24) and just as the waters of the Red Sea part for Moses so too do the waters of the Jordan separate for Joshua. The book of Joshua speaks of the conquest of the land. Historically we tend to understand it as more of a settlement. Archeological finds do not substantiate a military conquest of this magnitude. The book of Joshua was most likely compiled and linked to the book of Deuteronomy as a hexateuch (six book set) and was published around the time of King Josiah in the late 7th century b.c.e. This event is record in the material found in 2 Kings 22-23.

The difference between conquest and settlement could be indicative of the difference between the fulfillment of national myth and the reality of the time. Now that's something which I can think about. Too often we tell stories when we should or could tell the truth.

This week's commentary is a reprint of one originally written for the Unraveller on August 7, 2010 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Understanding the Haftarah. An Everyperson's Guide" and "Engaging The Non-Jewish Spouse: Strategies for Clergy and Lay Leadership".